

# The Bone Dogs

Conceived, constructed and written by Per Jorner in September 2009  
Game system adapted from the Virtual Reality series by Dave Morris and Mark Smith

---

## How to Play This Adventure

To start your adventure simply choose your character from the list below. Each character has a unique selection of two skills; these skills will decide which options are open to you. Make a note of the skills of your chosen character. Also note your Life Points and your possessions.

Life Points are lost each time you are wounded. If you are ever reduced to zero Life Points, you have been killed and the adventure ends. Sometimes you can recover Life Points during the adventure, but you can never have more Life Points than you started with.

You can carry up to four possessions at a time. If you are at this limit and find something else you want, drop one of your possessions (by crossing it off your list of items) to make room for the new item.

Consider your selection of skills. They establish your special strengths, and will help you to role-play your choices during the adventure. If you arrive at an entry which lists options for more than one of your skills, you can choose which skill to use in that situation.

## Choose One of These Characters

### The Gunfighter

**Skills:** Fast Draw, Delinquency

**Profile:** Your reputation as a stone-cold gunslinger precedes you - unfortunately. Common folks shy away in awe and fear, lawmen distrust you, and nameless scum keep thinking they can take you down a peg. So far, no one has.

**Life Points:** 5

**Possessions:** Revolver

**Money:** 10 dollars

### The Injun

**Skills:** Outdoorsman, Trickery

**Profile:** Your totem is none other than the rabbit, that trickster of the forest, and your exploits have taken you far and wide outside the ancestral lands of your people.

**Life Points:** 5

**Money:** 10 dollars

### The Frontiersman

**Skills:** Fisticuffs, Outdoorsman

**Profile:** You've been there on the high trails with just a mule and a pickaxe for company, and you've trapped everything with four feet and a tail. Sometimes you find yourself back in civilization, sampling its relative comforts among a different brand of predators.

**Life Points:** 6

**Money:** 5 dollars

### The Detective

**Skills:** Deduction, Delinquency

**Profile:** The Grey Pinkertons, of course, do not exist. You've never worked for them, and it didn't leave any mental scarring at all.

**Life Points:** 5

**Possessions:** Pipe

**Money:** 12 dollars

Alternatively design your own character, taking any two skills of your choice from the Glossary of Skills. Your character will also have any possessions needed for the skills chosen (e.g. a revolver if you choose Fast Draw) and will start with 10 dollars. Your initial Life Points score will be 5.

## **Glossary of Skills**

### **Deduction**

The art of reconstructing a man's life from observation of his gait, or, failing that, from his penny dreadfuls. This covers inspection, logic, lore, and any other necessary trivia. You must possess a pipe to use this skill.

### **Delinquency**

A knack for all things sneaky and illicit, including the ability to catch whiff of the misdeeds of others.

### **Fast Draw**

How to sling guns with the best of them. You must possess a revolver to use this skill.

### **Fisticuffs**

The use of rocks, bottles, bar stools and especially your own fists to pummel sense into people. Not as effective as Fast Draw, but you don't need a weapon - not when all these things are just lying around!

### **Outdoorsman**

The knowledge gained from blazing the trails, finding the paths and roving the ranges. With this skill the wild is your big, rainy home.

### **Trickery**

The ability to quickly come up with a ruse or scheme to help with the most varied situations.

## Prologue

They're shining one of those electric lights in your face. Every now and then, a mite flutters from the surrounding blackness to sizzle itself to death on the blistering bulb, adding to the faint smell of burned mite that lingers in the stale air. It is slightly too warm and dry for comfort, but you're used to worse.

"You know, of course, of the so-called Bone War," says a voice of flat, dutiful authority.

"Of course," you echo drily, wiping a single bead of sweat off your eyebrow with your finger.

"It's not really something that passes you by in political and academic circles these days. Been building for more than a decade now. At first, mostly just some scholars trying to outdo each other, backed by colleges and philanthropists. Here."

A hand pushes a small stack of photographs into view on the table before you, an impeccably white cuff glaring brightly for a second. Picking up the photographs, you can make out men standing proudly with picks in front of a skeletal shape embedded in the side of a mountain; then large crates being hauled onto a train car; then men in suits lined up beneath a tall, imposing specimen assembled from fossil bones; then the same men in disarray with the specimen gone and a huge hole in the posterior wall.

"Of course, the proceedings rather predictably went from suspect to alarming to quite unacceptable. As the front lines of the war moved from New Jersey to Illinois and further out west, things got uglier. Back east, you'd have the occasional bribery, fraud, theft, spot of ungentlemanly behaviour, some fellow losing face here, some other fellow getting walloped there. It adds up, but people can cope. Out on the frontier, you'd have entire shipments seized, workforces driven off or attacked, wholesale bullying of locals, people ending up dead or missing. And now the matter's on our desk."

"I know your desk isn't for the odd spell of racketeering," you say, turning a photograph the right way up to show some scholar drawing a phylogenetic tree on a blackboard. In the next picture, there is a huge hole in the blackboard and the scholar is nowhere to be seen.

"No. It's for things like Morning, Dakota Territory. See that there?"

You do see, but you're not sure at first what to make of the light sepia hues. A deserted city street; white bundles lined up; a close-up of a woman who could possibly have been mauled by an animal; and a blurry image of something resembling a giant parrot's skull, fused with random knuckles and bones into a chubby grotesque and discarded in the dust.

"That's a primitive bone golem. Some workman at the railway station went prying where he shouldn't have, setting roughly three dozen of those free to run amuck. At this time we're assuming it wasn't meant to happen; of course, that just means it was meant to happen somewhere else. Get the picture? When you've got the Secret Society of Goat-headed Hellfire Worshippers handing out the banknotes instead of *The American Naturalist*, whatever those notes are for, our table is pretty much where it's headed."

You check another couple of pictures, vaguely hoping for more instances of holes in walls. A suicide mite spirals down to the lamp as if desperately helping to fill out the pause.

"These are the two principal players. The balding gentleman is Frederick Stanhope Marsten, the inheritor of a Boston family fortune and influence to go with it. Rumour has it he became a naturalist purely in order to destroy an academic who had slighted him; the story is as likely as any other. His rival: Nathaniel Cort, a self-made man who rose to prominence in the Survey and made a fortune from land purchases when they laid down rails out in Kansas. They're both men of many vices - besides Marsten's patrician arrogance and Cort's general depravity, each of them is vain, ruthless, and capable of holding a grudge to the limit of human capacity. None of them thinks highly of the well-being of others. These are men who exist only to make the world acknowledge their superiority."

As the voice goes on, you flip through a few photographs of glowering, whiskered gentlemen in heavy coats, puzzling for a moment over something that looks like a giant skeletal biped poised to stomp a log cabin.

"So, you want me to sort of pacify these people, is that it?"

"The possibility has been debated. It's not quite our style, though. Our *usual* style. No, we think

you'd be more useful out west. We've been trying to get a few of our own people out there, but we've had scant luck in that department. There's been news that Marsten, Cort, or more likely both, have been signing on some pretty bad sorts. You'll recognize a few names, might even have had dealings with a couple: Izzy Childs, Lucky Joe Jackson, Polecat Mason, Stewart Gotthand, Buck Morris, Crazy Man Smith..."

"A rough crew," you have to agree.

"Well, the worst ones are the kind who don't waste their time holding up stagecoaches and running from posses. You've got one of them on picture there, from his army days. Sinnawah, Cherokee tracker, served on a special task force for the Union in the war, when the rest of his people was rooting for the other side. Word is, not many years afterwards several of his close kin were hunted down by scalpers that were being paid off by the army. Apparently he figured this put his allegiance to the nation at an end."

"They choose the oddest things to get upset about, don't they."

"The man's a peerless hunter and killer, and should not be underestimated. I wouldn't put any stock in the whispers that he owes his prowess to a mystic shapeshifting talent, but it is likely he does possess a sixth sense, possibly a seventh."

"And he's their leader?"

"Dangerous as he is, he's not. That would be a body they call Snake - we don't know much about that one. One of the downsides to having your people disappear out in the field. Some may have been killed, some may have gone over to the other side."

"What makes you think I wouldn't follow suit?"

"Oh, come now. We've been here in the dark before."

"We have."

"You like the lamp? It's new."

"Keeps the air clean, I guess."

"You know how this thing works. Do us a good turn, you don't have to be afraid of shadows any more. Clean slate."

"You said that *last* time."

"It was just as true. We are, of course, well aware of your latest escapades..."

"You've got the wrong person, then. I don't do 'escapades'."

"... and, hard as it is to get a firm grasp of your overarching moral principles, we are in the position to channel your talents to where they should serve both our nebulous standards. All we're asking is that you go out there, scout around, see what they're up to, figure out what the latest deal is. Put a few Xs on the map for us. Fill out a couple of blank lines in our books. That's it."

"What about the enforcers?"

"Oh, as long as you get the rest of the job done we're pretty much expecting that to sort itself out to our liking."

"It's a pretty tall order. Do I get a deputy commission?"

"That's funny."

"You know, after I weigh up my chances, I might just decide to make myself scarce."

"Well, yes, we thought of that. It's why we're sending along a monitor."

A mite flutters from the darkness. There is a slithering motion, and a slender lizard appears on the table before you to snatch the mite clean out of the air. Its scales are the colour of sand, or just a shade darker; its slitted pupils regard you with inscrutable lizard gravity.

"Meet Gilda," says the voice.

"Oh, that's nice," you say, "a mascot. You people don't think I've got what it takes to do this?"

"They don't think you've got what it takes to do it *alone*," says the lizard.

Now turn to 1.

1

A train is chugging its way towards the hazy blue peaks of the Front Range, working its way up a long incline. The sky is a clear sapphire blue, towering white clouds casting their shadows across the High Plains and its endless sea of low grass.

In your passenger car, you put down the Kansas City Star editorial that desperation has driven you to reading, rubbing your eyes as if to wash away the expansionist rhetoric. You glance out of the window but find only monotony. This far out, there are no homesteads springing up yet, no roads or fences to mar the grassy expanse.

"Know what I think?" you muse out loud to no one in particular, spinning a silver dollar between your fingers. "I think this train'll continue on to Denver. From there a person could go to Cheyenne. There's a whole lot of fortune to be made in the northwest, I hear. Gold in them mountains. A person could get rich and all."

Gilda's little wedge-shaped head appears over the back of the seat in front of you. "Yeah," she says, "a person could. Of course, long before that, they'd hunt down you and all your kin."

"For all you know, I could consider that an excellent way of getting back at all my kin for past grievances."

"Well, we both know that isn't true. Also, we both know this mission is something that suits you like a glove. You don't like bullies and bigwigs. Shielding the decent, hard-working, God-fearing folks from the greed and spite of naturalist tycoons is just the sort of thing you'd be doing anyway."

"There's a whole lot of bigger bullies in this country than a bunch of stuck-up bone diggers. For instance, what makes *you* so qualified to run a shadow outfit and boss around innocent citizens like myself?"

"What, a lizard running a shadow outfit? What makes you think they didn't draft me just as they did you?"

"Your cloven tongue, mostly."

"That's a despicable display of abject prejudice, and I won't have it." The lizard disappears for a moment, only to pop up again a little bit further to the right. "Of course, if I *wasn't* with them, I would have no way of knowing that this whole deal is just a prelude to Mission 99."

"What's that? What's Mission 99? Speak up, you horrible lizard!"

"Talk to you later!"

You leap up and look behind the seats, but Gilda is nowhere to be seen. A few other passengers are looking at you stiffly. You peer defiantly at them, then sit back down. Before you can get properly relaxed, there's a shout of alarm and your attention is directed outside. Some way from the rails, a number of riders have appeared from behind a butte. So far they do not approach, content to keep pace with the train.

There is the sound of a gunshot from the observation car in the back of the train; perhaps a guard has fired a warning shot. There are various startled cries of fear and excitement.

"An odd way to conduct a robbery," you note. "One way or another you'd expect them to stop the train before making their move." Still, it makes sense in case these are no ordinary robbers: Marsten and Cort both depend on the railroad to carry their supplies one way and their finds the other, and presumably neither side would want to disrupt it.

"I don't know if this makes it odder or not," says Gilda, "but there's an assistant conductor lying cold outside."

If you want to tackle the situation using Fast Draw and a revolver, turn to **51**. If you want to use Trickery, turn to **20**. If you don't possess any of these skills but still want to investigate, turn to **43**. If you feel this is not really any of your business, turn to **94**.

2

By keeping you awake with their scratching and scuttling, the night animals might just have saved your life. About an hour after nightfall there is the sound of a heavier tread, and a shadow rises up to

block out the stars. You roll out of the way just before a rusty old pick digs into the sandy ground. It is the hermit bone digger who has come to pay you back for robbing him of his only comfort and defence: he roars and comes at you again in the dark. If you have neither Fast Draw (and a revolver) nor Fisticuffs, lose 2 Life Points. If you have only Fisticuffs, lose 1 Life Point.

If you survive, you are left standing by the still body of your attacker as he draws his last rasping breaths and the distant melancholy stars reflected in his eyes wink out for a final time. Turn to **91**.

3

"Fetch this," you mutter, lobbing the bottle at the prehistoric horror. The flask shatters against the monster's skull, and at first the liquid seems to have no effect. But as it runs and drips down the bone to touch the mechanical skeleton, there is a clear reaction: the metal fumes and dissolves, visibly evaporating at contact with the strange solvent.

"No!" screams Ralston, running towards the creature. "You can't do this! My beautiful! My lovely! Murderer!"

The construct of steel and bone buckles and sags, joints sliding out of position, vertebrae scraping and dropping. The powerful legs try to straighten up, but to no avail; the metal framework is running like quicksilver. Saurophaganax raises its head high towards the sky, jaws parting in a silent roar, then the beast trembles, falters, and swivels towards its master for a final time as it collapses. Its supporting structure completely vanished, the skull falls forward and snaps its dagger-blade teeth shut around the man who granted it a second life. There seems to be little you can say or do to add to the finality of this gesture. Turn to **74**.

4

Without wasting another breath, you leap up and jump from the wagon over the edge of the ravine. Angry cries echo between the cliffs as you slide rapidly down a steep gravelly incline towards the chasm. As you go over the rim, you grasp at a slim, dead branch. It breaks in your hand, but it has served to halt your outward motion, and you drop some forty feet down onto a sandy slope. The impact jars your brain and crushes your bones. Lose 4 Life Points. (Exception: if you have Fisticuffs, you need only lose 3 Life Points because you can roll to distribute the force of the blow around your hardy frame.)

If you are still alive, you bite your teeth against the taste of blood and crawl beneath a rocky overhang, trying to draw some air back into your lungs. You can't make out the words in the voices from above, but you gather they believe you couldn't have survived the fall. Indeed, you shouldn't have. Dragging yourself along the side of the ravine as fast as you can manage, you realize that your luck had better pick up, or this mission of yours isn't going to last for much longer. Turn to **36**.

5

Predictably, Snake shoots you dead before you have any idea what's going on.

6

As you follow a southwesterly trail you come across a small stream running down from the hills along the bottom of a V-shaped cleft. The water of the stream is remarkably clear, even in the still pools and hollows, with little vegetation to either side. You recognize this as a telltale sign of acidic drainage from an active quarry. Turn to **48**.

7

The ruffians below appear rather too beefy for you to take on, and besides, the riders are drawing too close for comfort. You decide to keep a low profile as the two unseated horses are held level with the platform and the brown-suited men mount them along with their apprehensive companion. Once this is accomplished, the attackers all disengage from the tentative firefight and melt away among the low

grassy hills.

You lower yourself down onto the observation platform, ascertain that there is nothing you can do for the guard, then stoop to pick up a book that's been dropped just inside the doorway. Its title is somewhat curious: *Chronal Physics*.

"Belonged to the man they just took off with," a portly lady passenger informs you. "A scholar, he was. Spoke about it all the way from Pond City, I heard them. Those two others didn't seem too interested, but they sure wanted him to come work for them. He didn't seem all too unwilling to go, either, if you ask me. Mostly upset that he couldn't carry all his books with him. Oh, I heard them."

As you return to your own car, Gilda sticks her head out to look down on you from a luggage rack. "As uncle Bob used to say, 'Call me yellow if you like, but someone's got to stay up top and watch for eagles.' Quite a rough one, my uncle Bob. Died at Shiloh. You might have liked him."

"Your uncle, huh? He a lizard too?"

Gilda shoots you a look that you can imagine lizards reserve for people who have just asked them quite the dumbest question they have ever heard.

She draws it out for another couple of moments, then replies, "Yes." Still, you have a feeling that could have gone either way. Note the codeword *Sabine* and turn to **75**.

8

The canyon brightens and widens slightly, its walls a progression of oblique bands with ridged boundaries whose irregularities are painted in perfect detail by sharp light from overhead. As you are admiring the rock above, something stirs in the sand below. Suddenly a skeletal hand breaks the surface and grasps your ankle. You watch aghast as mummified braves of ancient years rise up to challenge you with clubs and daggers. You kick away the dry corpse that holds you, steeling yourself to fight your way through the enemies ahead.

They claw at you with brittle nails and revile you with reedy curses in their dead language. Unless you have Fisticuffs, mark a cross among your notes. Finally you fight your way past and leave them to crumble under their own hatred. Turn to **98**.

9

You puff on your pipe and size the man up at a glance. First of all, he is wearing a vest with a low collar, but the way his skin has tanned around his neck suggests he has been for some time wearing the round collar of a priest. This means either he's been pretending to be a minister, or he's a minister pretending he's not. Furthermore, you note that he's got a long scar on his left forearm, half-hidden under his rolled-up shirt, and his right leg seems to have a certain stiffness. Taking his age into consideration, you surmise he was injured in the war and the scar is the mark of a bayonet, a conclusion supported by the fact that his grey cotton and wool shirt looks like wartime army issue. Having survived multiple wounds under battlefield conditions means he's very strong or very lucky, and battle-hardened either way. Which side did he fight for? The Union, judging from the way he keeps his tobacco on his person, but his coffee in his pack - the Confederates received tobacco in their rations and wanted for coffee, while Union soldiers had coffee but learned to treasure any tobacco they could get their hands on. Finally, the fact that he retains the rough, unpopular army shirt suggests he has a streak of asceticism or penitence. This man could very well be conflicted, but you sense nothing deranged or malevolent in his demeanour. If you agree to share a camp, turn to **69**. If you decline and press on, turn to **46**.

10

You wake up with sand pressed against your face. You expect pain to come but it doesn't, only an indistinct ache that fades like a dream. The things that have happened to you seem equally unreal: you can recall some images and emotions, others are not so clear... You remember the lizards, though - the large one, and the small.

You raise yourself up. You are in the sandstone canyon, on the ruddy sand. Reaching for your hip,



you can feel it is sore but no worse, and your lungs aren't aching. You can't see the Indian, but there's a thick trail of blood leading away along the sand, much as if a body had been ripped in two and then dragged off. Judging by the way the light falls on the canyon wall above you, it is the direction from which you came.

And then there's another thing. A small lizard is lying motionless beside you.

You scoop up her little body. "Time to get up," you say. "There's no need for smoked lizard jerky just yet."

Just when you begin to think she might not move, she turns her head just a little towards you. "Heh, did you see that?" she breathes faintly. "It's what you might call using your animal magnetism."

"Yes, do tell me all about it later." You don't know exactly what a healthy lizard is supposed to look like, but you could very well believe that you're not holding one in your hands right now.

Her voice becomes weaker with every word. "See, we did some good after all... You might almost say we... broke the fossil record..."

You prod her with your finger. "Hey. You can't go, you little creature of prevarication! Who will be there and not watch my back?"

Gilda is still for a while, then lifts her head to look you straight in the eyes. "If you think I'm taking one more step, you've got a display one femur short of a camarasaurus." And then she goes limp.

You sit numbly for a time. Come on, you think. It's just a lizard. Yes, you reply to yourself. A good lizard.

You take what stones you can find among the sand and stack them on top of her vacated shell, then look grimly towards the end of the canyon. "Now it's time for some other people to be overtaken and attained."

You step out into daylight. The crack has led you to a depression in the sandstone plateau, a water-carved valley similar to the one you left behind but considerably smaller. Sandy slopes harbouring green shrubs rim the valley beneath sheer faces of red and grey rock. You blink at the clear sky as if it were something unfamiliar.

On your left, a high roof has been erected over the mouth of a cavern. Outside and inside this space you see boxes and barrels, implements, cases bursting with artefacts, workbenches lined with bottles and equipment, unnamed devices of several sorts, and crates of bones labelled "Incertae sedis". If you have the codeword *Sabine*, turn to **96**. If not, turn to **52**.

## 11

There is nothing going on at the cargo depot except that a dry wind is blowing dust in your face and a thin fellow is sitting in front of the train station with a small bundle and some loud hiccups. One of the men in tan dusters, a rather young, scowling long-haired fellow, notices you sneaking a peek, fingers his rifle and says something out of the corner of his mouth to his colleague resting in the shade. You figure it might not be prudent to remain in town any longer. Turn to **56**.

## 12

You leave the mist behind you and come to a split. Ancient daubings on the walls may tell you something of what lies ahead, or they may not. If you go left into a bright passage where the paint depicts spears and feathers, turn to **72**. If you go right down a reddish crack where the pictures represent vines and flowing water, turn to **82**.

## 13

There's a kerosene lamp with a battered brass mirror hanging on a nail just by the entrance to the roofed walkway. You unhook it, strike a match and find there's still some oil remaining.

"The Swedes are a funny people," observes Gilda, perched on a knotted willow branch. "First they give us matches that don't catch fire in your pocket, then they give us nitroglycerin that doesn't explode in your hands. Perhaps next they will invent safety guns that don't kill people when you shoot them, unless you really mean to."

"Perhaps they will give us the lizard muzzle," you speculate as you raise the lantern and make to step into the rough, gloomy passage. Just then, the whistling of the wind changes pitch from a high desolate fluting to a low, mournful wail. It is chilly in the shade of the gully, and you feel a passing shiver. If you proceed into the darkness, turn to **79**. Otherwise, if you have not already done so you can conduct your investigation in the open providing you have a geologist's hammer (turn to **67**), go look in the shacks (turn to **58**), or leave this place behind entirely (turn to **40**).

**14**

Stepping over a passed-out old cowhand and narrowly avoiding a vicious tumbleweed, you walk into the general store, which is surveyed by a short, bald man who has a round face, round glasses, and little round peppercorn eyes that instill in you a quiet fear.

"I had expected somewhat more of an inventory," you say as you look over the goods and rations on sale. "Isn't it true that you're experiencing a boom period on account of the bone trade?"

"Business has been down from last year. Couple of quarries near town got closed and a lot of the workers drifted on west. Not so many people coming through looking to make the big find, either."

"That only adds to my puzzlement. If this were an off season, I would expect your prices to be more conducive to sales instead of maintaining an inflated level."

He shrugs. "Prices don't ever go down. It is the basic law of supply and demand. In good times, there is much demand and prices go up. In lean times, there is little supply and prices go up."

You are somewhat discomfited by his reasoning, but then who are you to lecture a businessman about the in and outs of his trade? If you have both Trickery and a watch, turn to **71**. If you don't have Trickery but you do have a watch, the man will offer a paltry 3 dollars for it, explaining that it is a poor example of workmanship that is ever in low demand. Sell it to him if you wish, then turn to **97**.

**15**

Everything is quiet by the corrals, but as you sneak past the donkey pen a disgruntled burro sticks its head out and bites you in the rear. Although you escape serious injury, you have to wrestle with the beast for a few intense moments, fearing that someone will come and investigate. Once you manage to free your legwear from the teeth of the rebellious animal you look around, but the tumult doesn't seem to have aroused interest; perhaps it is a common occurrence. You put your dignity back in working order and continue. Turn to **65**.

**16**

The sound of running water increases in clarity as you stumble dizzily onwards. You arrive in a cavernous space bordering on a great, dark, flowing body of water, its expanse obscured by a wall of leaden mist. Between the margin and the canyon wall there is an area of shingle and sparse tufted grasses. After a few moments you also discover, as if they had just appeared out of the air, three figures sitting huddled by the water's edge, their backs to you. They look to be women, dressed in rent and blotched buckskin, with hair held back by frayed and faded ribbons. Spindly wrists and knotty fingers seem to be busy slowly rubbing and wringing cloth, over and over again. The light from overhead is a deathly grey. If you announce your presence to these women, turn to **35**. If you would prefer to make your way past them unnoticed, turn to **63**.

**17**

The track leads you onto a broad anticline that rises majestically towards the south, a gigantic prow breaking through a sea of sandy hills mottled with dark green shrubs. A warm wind is blowing from the mountains to shake the tufts and bushes, like a great mother tousling the hair of all her children in turn.

The dig, when you reach it, is a horizontal dark grey scar across the hillside, resembling a gash in the belly of a stranded whale. A small wooden shelter is the only human structure that remains, with a

few weathered boards lying further down the slope to indicate it may once have been a proper shack. Beyond the dig, the trail splits to run down either side of the furrowed ridge. A couple of hours still remain until nightfall.

If you have a geologist's hammer and want to look for bones, turn to **88**. If you make a careful search of the area, turn to **64**. If you want to keep moving, then decide whether to head southwest (turn to **36**) or to travel southeast (turn to **46**).

18

The clinging mist rises to the level of your chest, obscuring the ground and the path ahead. As you step cautiously forward, you happen to glance up and see a log wedged across the canyon, just a couple of feet over your head. The Indian may be playing some sort of hunter's game on you, but with a little daring you might be able to turn the tables on him. If you want to climb up onto the log and wait, turn to **47**. If you instead press on forward, turn to **12**.

19

"Look!" you cry. "It's Mathew B. Brady, taking your picture!"

As the guard turns his head (who wouldn't?) you rush forth and tackle him, sending both of you tumbling into the gloomy crack. As the two of you roll, slip and wrestle on the sandy ground, you soon learn this is indeed a bear of a man. In the end you get lucky, cracking his head against the stone wall and knocking him out, but in the meantime he's been doing some serious compression of your ribs. If you have Fisticuffs, lose 2 Life Points; otherwise lose 3 Life Points.

If you survive, you hold your aching sides and stand up to examine your surroundings. Turn to **37**.

20

In the lounge-like observation car, two of the passengers are hustling a third towards the back. The man in a dark suit and spectacles who is being pushed around is fussing over some books and papers, while the others, in brown suits and bowler hats, are curt and urgent.

"Well, then!" you exclaim, making your entry in a blue conductor's jacket and brandishing a ticket clipper. "We'll have none of this jostling; will everyone please remain seated during the hold-up attempt and we'll have things sorted out in no time."

"Keep your nose out of our business," snaps one of the men, whom you recognize from the wanted posters as bull-necked Ox Gustafson. "We paid our fare, we've got a right to look after our own."

"All right," you continue. "If you are passengers, where are your tickets? Let's see them."

"Tickets, to goddamned hell with tickets! We have no tickets. In fact, we don't need tickets. I don't have to show you any stinking tickets, you goddamned prairie dog and - aaagh!"

You clip his nose with the ticket clipper. He screams and reaches for a gun under his jacket, but you grab his arm and put your shoulder to his chest, sending him stumbling backwards into his fellow thug.

"Good citizens," you shout, "I hereby deputize you all as Special Agents of the Union Pacific!"

The man in the dark suit seems to waver for a moment, then slams a book across the back of Gustafson's head. All of a sudden, several passengers are pitching in, grabbing and pushing, eventually conveying the two brutes out on, and off of, the observation platform. The mounted attackers turn their horses to tend to the fallen men and are left behind as the train steams on.

Your bespectacled helper introduces himself as Glauber and shakes your hand gratefully. Picking up one of his books from the floor, you find it has an interesting title: *Chronal Physics*.

"You got anything to do with these so-called dinosaur hunters, by any chance?" you ask as you hand him the book.

"Oh, no, not really, I'm not a naturalist," he assures you. "I'm just going to join some family across the mountains. I was thinking I could take up teaching, maybe. The frontier is growing so quickly, they're going to need all sorts out there, men of science and culture. I even heard they're building an opera house in Denver! Imagine that ten years ago, ha! No, no, I wouldn't know much about bones

and such things."

Yeah, you think. And I'm a prickly jackrabbit looking to sell grubstakes in a carrot claim.

A stout lady passenger tugs at your sleeve eagerly. "Are we still deputies?" she asks. Turn to **90**.

**21**

You make a leap of misplaced faith. The ground gives way under your boots, and before you can reach for something solid the sand has swallowed up your legs, leaving you no way of pushing forward. You flail helplessly and with increasing desperation as you sink into the treacherous ground. At the last, only one arm remains aloft, clawing and grabbing as if hoping to the end for some invisible support.

When all seems lost in darkness, you sense something moving beneath you. Bracing your legs with the last of your strength, you feel something strong and unyielding pushing from below. It is as if the bedrock is rising up through the sand, carrying you with it. You are shoved back up into the air and can finally scramble onto firmer ground, grains of sand running from every wrinkle in your clothes. Looking back, you momentarily see the agate-plated shield and expressionless visage of a giant turtle, then it silently sinks back down. Grateful and relieved as you are for the delivery, the experience has left you shaken. Mark down a cross in your notes and turn to **89**.

**22**

The huge chef guffaws at you as he slips a string of lean chops into a boiling brass cauldron suspended over an open fire. "You want to know what's for eating, soldier? It's the bones you dig out of the hill, with a side of dry dust scrapings! A-haw-haw-haw-haw!"

You cross this man off your mental list of possible criminal masterminds. Now choose which way to proceed: past the animal pens (turn to **15**), under the water cistern (turn to **95**), or past the storage sheds (turn to **54**).

**23**

Later, when you're sitting down outside the shelter listening to the wind whistling through its cracks, the man seems a great deal more collected, even lucid. He tells you of how Cort's men were forced to abandon the dig in the winter due to lack of food and commodities. "We were reduced to eating our horses, and that's a bad thing. We kept hoping help would come, but it never did."

"It's possible Cort had written you off as a failure," you suggest. "Or just forgotten about you entirely. I hear charity isn't on the top of these people's list of priorities."

The supposition is clearly uncomfortable to him. "Maybe. A few got sick with the fever and died, most of the others left. But I stayed on. I couldn't go. You see, I was the one who found the place, years back. I kept thinking with just a little more digging, it'd be the next big thing, the mother lode. Here or somewhere close. I never stopped thinking that..."

He gives a shivering sigh as he looks out over the long slopes and the hills and gorges beyond. "Look, I know they call me crazy. But this is a dangerous place, these days. You meet up with some of Marsten's men and they think you're working for Cort, they're as likely to put a bullet in your gut as to shake your hand. Same thing with any agent of Cort's if you're taking money from Marsten. Marsten's definitely got the upper hand in these parts, though, ever since he ran off the diggers here. But not all of the time. There's this crazy preacher moving around the hills, see? Name of Culligan. He's got a bone to pick with all these people, if you catch my meaning. Doesn't like 'em pulling the fossils out of the ground, coming up with new theories of life and all that. Just this spring, there were some people looking to stake out a new site, he found 'em and sent 'em packing all over. But a couple of 'em were city gents, see - one a schoolteacher - and they got lost in the canyons. So he came upon 'em again, warmed their bones with a fire, set 'em up with food and water, gave 'em directions and everything. But then a fortnight later when he finds they're back to picking rocks, he gives 'em all such a beating you've never seen!"

This bone business certainly seems to bring out some heated emotions in people. "Couldn't they just

set up a quarry anywhere, though?" you ask. "Seems to me it's the same rock pretty much all over."

"Oh, no. It's no good just setting up a dig in any old place. You got to find the right formation - those are the layers with bones in 'em, the bone beds - and then you got to find the proper spot where you'll get the most bones for your work, and the best. You could dig forever and not find anything but clams, see? It's the giant beasties they're really after, new ones they can put names to. Get you a bonus for those - may even name 'em after you, if you're lucky enough. Used to think I'd be naming dozens of dinosaurs myself, once..."

You ask him where Marsten's collectors are working at the moment, but all he can tell you is that they're somewhere to the southwest - he never goes in that direction. By now the man is constantly eyeing the stick of dynamite you're still holding on to, as well as your other possessions, then clumsily glancing at your face to see if you've noticed. If you want to keep the dynamite, record it in your inventory and note the codeword *Eagle*; otherwise you return it to him.

Harmless as he may seem now, you don't trust the man enough to stay with him for the night. If you want to take the southwestern trail, turn to 36. If you want to leave and travel southeast, turn to 46.

24

A darkness closes over your soul. If in the future someone is to venture through the spirit world and come upon you, perhaps they will consider you a tawdry, even superficial feature of this shadow realm. You would disagree: your tragedy is your own. It just seems unlikely that you will be able to properly impart it to anyone, what with the disconsolate wail that ever issues from your fleshless mouth. Your adventure ends here.

25

"It's not as busy here as it was," the old man tells you as you stand in the shade of a barn. "You see, there were two of them digs just outside of town, but they dried up or so it's said. One was run by Cort's men, but they took off this winter after Marsten's folks burned down a store of blankets and firewood. It gets pretty darn cold out here that time of year except when the chinook is blowing off the mountains. I think there's one crazy coot holding out still, I wouldn't trust that one if I were you. And then there's Marsten's old dig in the southeast, but I reckon that's all used up too. They say something bad happened there." He hawks and spits. "To hear people tell it, they use dynamite to cover up an old dig out of pure cussedness, just so the other side won't get at the leftovers. Could be they're *all* crazy coots, I won't tell you different."

"They're still operating somewhere around here, though, aren't they?"

"Marsten's got another dig, yup, had that one for a little over a year. In the canyons further south and west. When you're following the trail in the foothills, look for the V-shaped pass lined with prickly pears."

"I'll keep it in mind. Know what kind of people they bring in there?"

"Not too many, just as the need arises. Some people who know their bones and some people who know their digging, and the occasional able body that steps off the train or gets left behind by a cattle drive." He squints at the shadow of a nearby cactus, telling the time. "I wouldn't go there now, but you might try it tomorrow after the train comes in. If you have a wish to throw your lot in with those people, that is. Oh, and one more thing: Marsten's got a couple of roughnecks looking to beat up anyone who goes around asking questions."

You regard him with suspicion. "You haven't been setting me up, have you?"

"Oh, no. I'm not taking dimes out of Marsten's pocket."

"Good."

"Those two are, though."

You turn around. The aforementioned ruffians, two large fellows with bovine expressions and heavy fists, are closing in on you meaning to do more than pat you on the back. Unless you have Fisticuffs, lose 1 Life Point.

You stumble back out on the main street a few minutes later, sending a little pink spittle to the ground and tenderly feeling a rising lump on your cheek. Record the codeword *Atlas*, then if you haven't already done so you could check out the station after all (turn to 38), pay a visit to the general store (turn to 14), or set out on the road before someone else takes a swing at you (turn to 56).

26

"But I'm a collector," you assert, displaying your pick as proof. "They brought me in today for a special case of emergency collecting, you know, down there."

"I bet they did."

"I have three diplomas, ask me anything."

"All right. What's the fossil collecting code?"

"Going for a tough one, eh? Well, obviously first you have to find a fossil."

"Obviously. Next?"

"You dig it out."

"Then?"

"To tell the truth, I'm not entirely clear on the third part."

"Uh, right. And the rest of it?"

"That would be profit. The easy bit, eh?"

"Heh, yeah. Well, sorry I doubted you, I guess. You go in." He glances around, then he leans forward and confides to you, "Listen, between you and me, I never did a lot of progress on the third part, either." Turn to 37.

27

Water soon splashes under your boots with every step. Fiery lights are moving around in the darkness ahead. As the water rises and you are wading slowly forward, you see flaming water spiders walking around upside-down beneath the shimmering surface. A few of them leave behind their reeds and nests and approach you; they do not harm you, but instead seem to whisper of helpful things. However, you are not able to understand or make use of their wisdom. After a while the water drops off again and your clothes shed their ghostly wetness as you tread down the interminable crack. If you now decide to go left into a darkening passage, turn to 68. If you choose to proceed into the light, turn to 72.

28

You turn your head, looking out across the sandstone cliffs and gullies that are painted in a thousand darkening shades of red, brown and tan. "It seems to me that this land is filled to bursting with news of the past, with memories of the Earth of old. They say this world could be millions of years in the making. To be honest, those numbers don't mean a lot to me. But if we can imagine a strange hand, uncounted years from now, cutting from the rock a human skull and holding it up... what would they see in those empty sockets? What stories would be told? Let the scientists count their bones, let them draw up their diagrams and name their names. Let men dig out the old epitaphs before they're worn down by the winds and the rains and washed away forever. It's how we honour this world and all its life. Yesterday, these terrible and marvellous things. Today, us and all that we take for granted. The future... who can ever tell?"

Culligan draws on his cigarette and squints against the last rays of the sun over the mountains. It seems to you there's something sullen in his face, like a man surveying the rich pastures of a hated neighbour. Note the codeword *Argos*, then turn to 91.

29

The potent grey smoke stings your eyes and makes you cough, but it's not particularly harmful - that is, not more than any other tobacco smoke. (If you have Deduction, you figure out several clever

things while crossing the room, but you will forget all about them later.) The small grotto is quickly traversed and you soon resume your walk down the endless canyon. Turn to 98.

30

Walking past the bunkhouses, you overhear two of the workers talking over a cigarette.

"So, you heard Bert's crazy ramblings lately?"

"Him and his damn death lizard! That's just crazy talk."

"Everyone knows it was a tick that got to Ray Stiles down in the gulch."

"Yeah, a tick. It bit him clean through, it did."

"Big tick."

"Biggest, probably. Bert's talking crazy."

"Damn crazy."

It is possible the life of a bone miner holds danger and excitement that the likes of you will never know. Now choose which way to proceed: on to the animal pens (turn to 15), across to the water cistern (turn to 95), or over to the storage sheds (turn to 54).

31

"Izzy Childs!" you cry, standing up and shaking your fist. "You two-faced whore-bait thief! You took the money and ran out on us, didn't you, you low-down turncoat traitor! You fight me here and now, I'll slug your ugly face so hard it'll take them a thousand years to dig that one out!"

As Izzy's face turns from smugness to perplexity, you know that your gambit is paying off. From his early days as a Confederate partisan he's had a thing for hero-worship, a habit of following passion and fighting it, but not of questioning it.

"Hey! Hey!" he cries back at you as his horse shifts nervously. "I never betrayed anybody! You're the one who did it - with me and Groves on the run, him taking a bullet from the lawmen and you the only one unaccounted for!"

"Me unaccounted for? I was three years in Jefferson City with young Zeph Cantrell, you bastard! He died inside those walls - I swore to sweet Martha Bass I'd get your lick-finger hide back for that. And here you are saying you'd nothing to do with it? Bull! Way I see it, could only have been you - or the Beeson kid."

"Beeson was raw," Childs retorts with a sneer. "Anyone was to crack and spill to the Marshals, it'd be him." You seem to be on the home stretch, getting him to rationalize the details of your own fiction.

One of the other riders leans in and whispers something to Childs, who nods. "We've got something more important to pick up, so this'll have to wait, this thing between you and me. Yeah, you wait, we'll be talking it over. You'd better be there in camp when I get back!"

They ride on, and the wagon gets to rolling again. You make a show of sending Childs a long parting glare, but at the same time you can't help but wonder if you lay it on a bit thick. Whoever is running this thing might be more cynical, and less inclined to take chances. Once you get to your destination you had better figure out pretty quick what it is you want to do there. Turn to 70.

32

You are walking north along a steep, narrow gorge when there is a faint vibration in the ground. You stop. All seems quiet. You take a few tentative steps, then there it is again. You scan the cliffs for signs of a landslide.

"Dinoceras," says Gilda, sitting on top of a big round boulder.

"Bless you," you reply.

"No, behind you."

You turn. From down the gorge, several large animals are approaching, with rough, grey hairless skin, horns and tusks. The ground shakes with the weight of their footfalls, dislodging dust and small rocks from the cliffsides.

"I thought they didn't know yet how to recreate these things from the bones they dig out," you say,

first picking up your pace, then breaking into a run as the huge, snorting mammals draw unnervingly close and catch your smell.

"They don't," says Gilda, keeping pace. "These have never been extinct, you just don't usually see them so far south from Canada. Don't you people have schools?"

"Tarnation and bellfire! How far does this ravine stretch, anyway?"

"I don't know... Canada maybe?"

"I absolutely did not expect thiiiiis," you cry, running wildly from the trampling beasts and disappearing around a bend in the gorge. And interesting as Canada may be, this adventure ends here.

33

"I fear and expect," says Snake solemnly, "that the two of us shall not see eye to eye on these matters."

"I do fear and expect the same," you reply with similar gravity.

"Then, friend, we shoot it out and you die. Whenever you are ready!"

Very well. You draw and put a bullet in his central regions. He spins around once, twice, three times, drawing his body into a scaly spiral, then topples stiffly, his hat tumbling into the dust. You're not exactly sure what he thought was going to happen there. Turn to **100**.

34

You spare a long glance for the ridges and valleys, increasingly lost in the pooling twilight shadows. "It may be that the land itself has a story to tell, and each thing has its part in the world's glory - even the strange beasts that walked this world before the Flood. But all in Creation has its given place. We don't seek the truth on the lonely mountain, and we don't shout to the roaring rapids for answers. We don't make casts of the peaks or cut out the jagged cliffs to put on display, we don't pack up the canyons and creeks and ship them back east. Coal, iron and gold - these are things in the ground that serve us. But this desire to crack open the caskets of Earth itself, to weigh and measure every tiniest part of its crust, to boast our mastery over the grand design, to put meaningless dates and numbers to objects of the broken past, to wage fierce and proud competition - it is a fool's path. It is a path that makes small minds out of great ones."

Culligan taps his cigarette, looks out over the weathered landscape and nods slowly, and it seems to you as if there's something profoundly determined in his eyes, like a shepherd who means to protect even the least of his flock. Turn to **91**.

35

As soon as you step on out the shingle, it shifts under your boot with a scraping noise that echoes between the mist and the rock. Immediately, the three women jerk into motion and leap up, turning towards you. Your breath catches in your throat and you shrink from their grotesque appearance, skeletal features draped in gauzy skin of dark grey, with wisps of old cobwebs covering their mouths and eye sockets. A dreadful red glow shines from somewhere inside their skulls and chests, and their hands and wrists are flecked with crimson.

Then they fling their arms towards you and set up a piercing shriek as one single tormented soul, but you are already rushing away in mindless terror, stumbling and wheezing long after you have left the cursed river far in the distance. If you survive your ordeal, this is a fear you will never quite be able to push out of your mind. Record two crosses in your notes and turn to **98**.

36

You move out onto a flat, gravelly expanse between hills, covered with cactuses and scraggly bushes. The sky is high and clear, the sun insistent. Lose 1 Life Point unless you have Outdoorsman or a flask of water. When evening comes, the cactuses cast long, broken shadows across the uneven sand. Once the sun has sunk beneath the mountains and the reds and purples of the sunset give way to a starry



black, the temperature drops considerably, leaving you to chatter your teeth under a rocky outcrop curled up against the cold. Lose another 1 Life Point unless you have Outdoorsman or a blanket. Then if you have Outdoorsman, turn to **41**; otherwise turn to **99**.

37

Moving deeper into the crack you realize it is in fact a narrow slot canyon, just a few feet wide, its walls an undulating frozen wavescape. The canyon floor is covered in light brown sand showing many boot prints and scuff marks, including some long, unbroken lines, perhaps the mark of a pole or handle dragged along.

There is no telling how far this passage goes. Maybe it is the coolness of the canyon that's making you feel strange as you walk on. You wipe cold sweat from your brow and blink up towards the thin curving slit of daylight. You feel as if you are underwater, immersed in a soft red tranquillizing light, with a stark white glare filtering down from somewhere far above. Waves of dizziness come and go. You think you hear strange susurrations like the murmur of distant water. These sounds form into layered whispers, which finally coalesce into an intelligible singsong voice:

Not so long and wide the world is,  
Not so rude and rough the way is,  
But my wrath shall overtake you,  
And my vengeance shall attain you.

For each word, the chant loses some of its distant, echoey quality, until you hear the final syllables spoken in a rough, quite human voice just behind you...

You whip your head around. You glimpse a scarred face framed by black hair, and dark rueful eyes over a heap of powder resting on an open palm. Then the man blows, and you go blind.

That stings! And then it gets worse. The pain is almost unbearable as you drop to the ground, pressing your forehead to the sand as if you could force your agony into the earth. You begin to cough uncontrollably. It feels as if your nose and throat are being sealed up, and each burst of air forced up or down your windpipe tears into you with razor claws. At least this distracts you from the fact that your head is about to explode...

You don't know how long it is before you can open your eyes again. They still burn and run as you pick yourself up, your lungs rasping in short fits. Where is that blamed lizard every time someone sneaks up on me from behind? you wonder.

For that matter, where are *you*? Instead of a single, straight ravine there seems to be several intersecting passages, each leading away into some ghostly canyon half-light. A lightly swirling mist billows past your feet, like the phantom remainder of the streaming water that once cut a pathway in this ageless rock.

The man must have drugged you in some manner... but for what purpose? He would have been able to easily kill you. Of course, maybe he did...

Whatever is going on, you must continue forward. A little further ahead, the canyon splits. If you go left towards a wet tunnel, turn to **27**. If you go right towards a misty passage, turn to **18**.

38

If you have the codeword *Possum*, turn to **11**. Otherwise turn to **53**.

39

You don't sense anything sinister about the corn, but you distrust that light; perhaps the ground below or around the corn has been rigged with a trap, or maybe the beam itself is somehow harmful. Removing your belt, you flip the buckle over the ear and eventually manage to hook it around the far tip, dragging the corn carefully straight towards you. However, once it is out of the light and you can look at it more closely, you see the leaves are discoloured and the grains are spoiled. When you

experimentally push the corn back into the golden circle, the sunlight reveals it to be rotten to the cob, infested with mildew and hatching insects. The putrid smell makes you feel sick as you hurry away from this blighted thing. Put a cross among your notes and turn to **93**.

**40**

You spend the rest of the day on the southern plains, aiming for the mountains in the west that seem to be ever receding before you. A scatter of smudged grey clouds drifting under a higher layer of wispy white protect you from the worst of the sun's heat, and a buzzard that soars on the wind pays you little attention. Come nightfall, the world turns slowly under the cold stars, having quickly shed its reserves of daytime warmth. Lose 1 Life Point unless you have Outdoorsman or a blanket. In the morning you rub your stiff limbs, chew a frugal breakfast of beef jerky, then set off again towards those elusive heights. Turn to **99**.

**41**

As you set out next day, you notice some broc flower growing in a hollow. Gathering these bright yellow, orchid-like blossoms, you also locate and dig up some greenish-grey, hairy xander root in the shade of a dense cluster of shrubs. Although these ingredients are at their most potent when dried and ground into a fine powder for inhalation, you should be able to prepare a paste with invigorating qualities. Applying this mixture to your injuries will also lead to some blurriness of vision and a moderate risk of shamanistic ramblings, but that's nothing you can't walk off. If wounded, recover 1 Life Point.

If you are not injured, you can carry the healing paste with you, noting it among your items. It can be used *once* at any point in your adventure to restore 1 Life Point, after which you must cross the paste off your list of items. When you use it in this fashion you must also lose the Fast Draw skill if you have it, since for a time afterwards you will not be able to shoot straight. Turn to **99**.

**42**

Drawing on all your experience and willpower, you make your way silently through the misty cavern. When you are halfway across, one of the women jerks her head up. She turns it slightly from side to side, up and down, as if sniffing the air. You can hear your own heartbeats thumping over the murmur of the river as the seconds go past. Then the phantom woman lowers her neck and resumes her endless washing. Downriver, you see, the unfathomed water is tinged with a grisly red. You have hardly dared to draw one more breath before you have left it far behind. Turn to **98**.

**43**

The quickest way to the back of the train is on top of it. You go out on the end platform, pull yourself up on the roof, then walk with the wind at your back towards the observation car. Gunsmoke blossoms briefly as the riders exchange a few shots with the guards and passengers, but under these conditions you are more likely to catch a cold than a bullet. Jumping between cars, you reach the end of the train and crouch above the semicircular observation platform, the carriage rocking beneath you. Something is clearly amiss; a guard lies sprawled with a gunshot wound in his back.

Suddenly three men appear from out of the coach. Two of them are wearing brown suits and bowler hats, and are urging on an older man in a dark suit and glasses. They look expectantly back along the rails, and you soon see a couple of riders approaching, holding the reins of spare horses. If you're going to act, it will have to be now. If you leap down and engage the thugs, turn to **62**. If you are content to lie prone and observe, turn to **7**.

**44**

Even a modern Yale padlock is no match for your perfected lockpicking skills. After a furtive bout of poking and jiggling you yank out the shackle, pull open the door to one of the sheds and slip inside.

There you discover several straw-lined boxes holding sticks of dynamite, a number of geological picks, and plentiful bottles of whiskey. No wonder they keep this stuff locked up. If you want to take any of these things, modify your inventory accordingly, keeping in mind your limit of four items. Then you wait for an opportune moment to leave, blending into the background expertly as you traverse the final stretch to the guarded crack. Turn to **65**.

45

You've taken the precaution of packing your pipe beforehand, and now light it up with unprecedented speed, puffing hurriedly as you assess the situation. As far as you can observe, the metal framework that seemingly keeps the creature aloft carries no system of impulsion or propulsion. Clearly there is some driving spectral energy involved, but the reinforcement must logically serve a purpose, as either inductor or conductor of a motive force. If this ethereal transfer is electrostatic in nature, perhaps it could be disrupted by application of distilled water; if on the other hand it is micromechanic, a concentrated acid might serve to impede its function; and again if it is chemodynamic, an inert chemical agent would be likely to arrest the critical reactions. It is fortunate that there is a well-stocked laboratory at hand. Less fortunately, the animated dinosaur blocks your access to it.

But that can be rectified. You find it hard to believe that the creature was very intelligent when alive; probably it is even less so now. Quickly you remove your jacket and swing it over your head as the beast approaches, then fling it to one side. The predatory beast swings its head in the direction of the moving object, leaving you an opportunity to dash around on the other side.

"Not this again!" you hear Ralston shouting in annoyance. You have no idea what he means by that. "Over there, you stupid thing!" he screams as you reach the long workbench with its shelf of chemicals and solutions, running your eyes across the labels. The shrieking of metal is just behind you... yes, that one: "Dr Ralston's Most Magnificent All-Purpose Solvent No. 4". Bottle in hand, you turn around resolutely to face your antediluvian foe. Turn to **3**.

46

Night closes in on the red sunset as you walk along an escarpment of darkly layered shale. You find a place to sleep among the shrubs and grasses, then lie down and listen to the noises of the night. Are those just prairie dogs scurrying around out there? Or is it something more sinister? A cougar on the prowl? The soft persistent chirp of a rattlesnake? The vampiric caracara? As you lie sleepless, the night chill of the region seeps into your body. Lose 1 Life Point unless you have *Outdoorsman* or a blanket, then turn to **2** if you have the codeword *Eagle* or to **91** if you don't.

47

You find some footholds in the curving sandstone and haul yourself up onto the log. Satisfied that it will hold your weight, you crouch and wait.

The mist swirls beneath you. Indeed it seems to be rising still. The waiting is a strain on both your mind and your legs. Again you hear a raspy background murmur; as you listen to it, you realize it is a slow breathing, magnified by the strange mist. Struck by a flash of intuition, you look up. There, on a second log you are sure was not there before, the hunter sits silently perched, looking down with eyes both hard and melancholy. Before you can move he drops down upon you, knocking you to the ground.

When you get to your feet, the vapour is already dispersing, and not log or man is to be seen. Make a cross among your notes and turn to **12**.

48

You have a pretty good idea which way to go to find the place you seek. You move cautiously up a gulch lined with prickly pear cactuses, keeping in the shade whenever possible, sometimes wading

through the chill water of the shallow stream or hauling yourself up a steep drop-off as the walls of the ravine begin to press in. When it seems you are nearing the top, you pick a spot to ascend the cliffs and reach a safe vantage; for all you know there are guards posted around the entry points to the quarry, and with good reason.

Some minutes later, you poke your head out from behind a sandstone formation of grey and brown, trying to get a good view of the camp. You can make out a water cistern over on the far side, and a few animal pens...

"Hey, you," someone says behind you and taps your shoulder.

You jump, spin around and stare at a scrawny old digger in a chequered shirt and bright red suspenders.

"You're out here hiding, too, aren't you?" he asks.

"Er, yes," you say.

"Damn right you are! *It's down there*, I tell you!"

"Of course it is. Er, what is?"

"Don't you know!?" He seems incredulous and waves his arms expansively. "The great lizard beast! The scaly horror of the deep! They've all seen it, they just won't call it as it is! It's there! Watching us all!"

"The rumours have been indistinct," you suggest.

"Don't I know it! One said it was a blind mincrawler, a few thought it was a rubble fanger, another swore on his father's bones it's the shaft slider. Jumping belladonna! That ain't no shaft slider! You ask me, everyone's just too darn scared to call it like it is: the shadowclaw. The *dread* shadowclaw. That's where it gets you, see? In the shadows, with the claws." He makes little hooks out of his index and middle fingers, clawing the air with them, somewhat resembling a bug-eyed bunny burrowing into a hill. You look on. Eventually he stops. This man may be crazy.

"It is a bit safe out here though," you say comfortingly.

"You're darn right it is! It'll get the others first. I'll go down there for supper, though. I figure if it hasn't already taken someone before then, it's safe for the night."

"Tell you what. That pick you've got there, I'll borrow it from you. Go down and scout around, check for lizard tracks. I'll tell you what I found later."

"I'm not gonna let you take my pick! They'll say I lost it, dock my pay."

"Well, you're not using it up here."

"Right. I'll let you have it for a deposit. Three bucks, you get two of them back for the pick, and the third for your whiskey ration. Heck, you've got something to drink, I'll just take that now instead."

If you have some moonshine or at least 3 dollars, decide whether to part with this item or amount in return for the man's geological pick. Then turn to **59** to go into the camp.

## 49

You figure you might as well try one of the local saloons: Bear and Burro, a badly-timbered, single-storied building with a faded sign. Stepping into the shadowy interior, you opt for root beer over the local rotgut. The proprietor quickly clams up when you angle for information on what draws legal tender to town, referring you to the guards at the cargo depot if you're looking to deal with the bone miners. You notice there's a poker game on; perhaps the players are or have been involved in the digging business. If you have a watch or at least 5 dollars and want to test your luck at the poker table, turn to **60**. Otherwise, if you have not already done so, you'll have to visit the cargo depot as instructed (turn to **38**), walk over to the general store (turn to **14**), or leave town before you draw too much attention to yourself (turn to **56**).

## 50

Up ahead, in a small round grotto harbouring a few grasses and creepers, you see a hummingbird drawing nectar from a tobacco plant. As it withdraws from the flower, it pulls with it a billowing plume of smoke which quickly obscures both bird and flower. This smoke is going to fill the entire

grotto. If you run as quickly as you can through it, holding your breath, turn to 78. If you inhale the smoke while walking forward, turn to 29.

51

You step out on the end platform and draw your gun. The riders seem reluctant to engage, exchanging a few tentative shots with a rifleman in the express car and the occasional overeager passenger, none of them in any great danger of hitting anything. You wait until the attackers close in, calmly firing on and wounding two of them as they draw near.

Suddenly there is a blurry spiralling motion next to you as Gilda streaks up the roof support and presents her impassive reptile stare. "Are you sure these are people you should be shooting up?" she asks. "For all you know, they could be on our side."

You wince as a sudden wayward bullet tears a splinter out of the carriage frame beside you. "You crazy lizard!" you howl. "They show up in the middle of nowhere and fire on our train, of course I'm going to shoot back at them!"

"Oh well. Just making sure you've thought about these things."

In any case, whatever those people were after, it seems they've lost their appetite for it. One by one they pull away and are lost among the low grassy ridges, leaving the train to steam on across the open prairie.

You replace the spent cartridges in your revolver. "You're going to complain about everything I do, aren't you?"

Gilda is unperturbed. "You should be glad they didn't team you up with Mahng, the loon or Shushugah, the heron. There's nothing *but* complaining with those people." Turn to 75.

52

You hear someone talking quietly to himself: "... Amphicoelias of formidable size would be perfect for trying out my new formula... Yes, what is it?"

An elderly man with a scholarly appearance steps out from the mouth of the cavern as you approach. He's dressed in dark trousers and a fine flannel shirt, both of which have been compromised by quantities of dust and grime, and peers at you over a pair of spectacles. "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"I'm the bane of your existence," you tell him.

"What are you talking about? Mercy, you look horrible! Are you hurt?"

"Not as hurt as you'll be if you try anything. What are you cooking up here?" You nod at the equipment in the cave.

"Well, if you don't know, I'm Dr Randolph Glauber and I'm working for Mr Marsten's excavation enterprise in a scientific capacity. I specialize in chronal variance theory, but I am versed in various other fields as well."

"Aha! Chronal variance, eh? So you're looking for ways to reverse the flow of time for these bones, reanimating the long-dead monsters of the past and inflicting them on the current-day populace. Or maybe you are trying to go back in time yourself, to harvest what you need in a world where no inconvenient public interests can oppose you."

"Oh, heavens, no. Those sound like terrible ideas. At the moment I'm applying my knowledge to the perfection of a chemical fossil preservation agent. I assure you, it is nothing untoward. See here on my workbench - I apologize, it is dreadfully messy but I have just now begun to get my things unpacked. Here is my latest experimental batch. You probably know that many fossils found in soft claystones or siltstones are excessively porous and it can be very hard to stop them from disintegrating. In the past, attempts have been made to reinforce such remains with varnish, but this is ultimately damaging to the fossil as the consolidant itself becomes warped and discoloured over time. My goal is a non-acidic compound that halts deterioration without obscuring any fine features and that can be removed if need be with no damage to the object. You can verify this in my notes!"

"Well, then, what is that menacing piece of wiry engineering over there, for instance? Does it project

a revitalizing magnetic field, or does it simply blast your opponents with electric rays?"

"Goodness, neither! My Marvellous Synchrotronic Tomographer is merely a device for scanning the internal structure of a rock matrix, so that the shape and extent of an embedded fossil can be determined with high precision before it is cut out with fine instruments."

You give the machine another, mildly disappointed glance. "How appallingly mundane."

"Mundane or not, it is highly progressive scientific work!"

"Well, even if your intentions are all good, I can't leave you here working for Marsten. If it were up to him, that thing *would* shoot electric rays."

"Good heavens! Do you know the man?"

"Not personally. But from what I've been told, these two bone lords are like Michael and the Serpent fighting in the Last Days, except Michael's been exchanged for another Serpent and both are twice as ugly."

"Well, now. I don't know if Mr Marsten's business practices are consistently scrupulous, but even if the man is not irreproachable, he is doing valuable work. Without the sponsorship of him and his opposite numbers we would know considerably less of these extinct animals and the world of yesterday!"

"Then I can't convince you to walk away from this?"

"If you consider yourself an agent of virtue you should not ask that of me. If I didn't do it, someone else would; they might look at your concerns in a harsher light."

You sigh. "Very well. I haven't been charged with the kidnapping of upright citizens or things that largely resemble such. I just hope that all my kin won't have cause to regret this."

"Your kin, I am confident, will one day be able to look at some rather fascinating beasts on vivid display."

You shake the man's hand and watch for a few moments as he walks back into the shadow of the recess to unpack more of his paraphernalia. With any luck, this could even be the right thing to do. Turn to **74**.

**53**

You have a spot of luck. Before long, a horse-drawn wagon trundles up and stops by the cargo depot. A few cases and casks are hoisted onto the wagon along with a bundle of rock picks, and then the wagon comes rolling along the dusty road towards you. The driver, a man with a thin moustache and a slouching hat, squints with disdain at the small group loosely assembled outside the station building, but still gestures at you to come closer.

"I need a few strong hands," he says, "people not afraid to work. There's fair money in it, food and shelter. You wanna come, just jump right up." There's no need for persuasion; the others all climb up in the wagon.

If you go with them, turn to **80**. Otherwise, if you have not done so already, decide whether to ask around for information (turn to **85** if you have Delinquency or to **49** if you don't), visit a store (turn to **14**), or leave town on your own (turn to **56**).

**54**

No one seems to look your way as you make towards the row of low, rough-timbered storage buildings. The doors, you discover, are all sealed with tumbler padlocks. If you have Delinquency, turn to **44**. Otherwise, you continue to your destination: turn to **65**.

**55**

You confidently grasp the sacred corn, its leaves vibrantly green in your hand. A little of its primal energy seems to seep into you, instilling some hope even in this shadow domain. Sensing that it is the proper thing to do, you put the corn back in its place before resuming your walk. Put a heart among your notes and turn to **93**.

## 56

Meeting up with Gilda on the windy dirt road south of town, you pool your information and weigh up your options. There is a smaller dig south of town, run by Cort but reputedly abandoned, that you should be able to reach by nightfall. Then there is a quarry further to the southeast worked by Marsten's collectors, although there as well there's been little activity, if any. Either place seems like a good enough first stop in your further investigations. If you set out on the south trail, turn to 17. If you pick a southeasterly course, turn 83.

## 57

Snake does go on for a while with his philosophical observations of the modern era, his eyes tending to drift upwards as if only the sky were roomy enough to contain his exalted concepts. "... It is the hunger of the Old World, remade in its own image and dressed up in feathers of rebirth, then betrayed in deed and demeanour by its own worse nature. An ass may wear the golden skin of a lion, but its ears will forever give it away; the steel of ambition and the flint of a virgin land in their meeting shall always send off a treacherous spark to reveal their tryst..."

Will that thing ever stop? It's like he's forgotten about you completely. In order to test this theory, you slip the stick of dynamite from the back of your belt.

"... singularity and multiplicity combined, and the coming of a dawn both fearful and fearless. Yes," Snake eventually concludes, "I think that shall do for a précis of this our age. Now to address - hunnghh."

Your thrown dynamite hits the right spot, lodging between his jaws like a chubby beige stick in the gap of a crocodile.

"Except a chubby beige stick doesn't usually blow your head off," you remark, providing some last-moment confusion for Snake while you throw yourself down in a depression behind a tuft of grass. There is a concussive blast between the canyon walls; the white cowboy hat comes sailing to roll over once in the sand and then be still.

You stand up, coughing a little as the dust settles. Turn to 100.

## 58

In the deserted shacks, the wind whines through cracks in the papered walls with the pitch of a beetle trying to escape a spider's web. The first building is stripped bare, showing only a few outlines of rock dust on the floor. The other holds at least a few broken crates and empty shelves, perhaps reflecting a second, more hurried or less well organized stage of evacuation. Kicking through the debris, you catch a faint gleam from under a frayed burlap sack. It turns out to come from a dust-covered bottle with a glass stopper and a straw wrapping. Wiping off the label with the ball of your hand, you read: "Dr Ralston's Somewhat Excellent Solvent Fluid No. 2".

There is a bang from outside, like someone rapping on the wooden screen along the quarry, or maybe just the door to the other shed swinging in the wind. Cautiously looking out, you see nothing. Probably just a stone rolling down from the hillside. If you take the solvent with you, note it among your items. Then if you haven't already done so, decide whether to search for fossils if you have a geologist's hammer (turn to 67), investigate the covered section of the quarry (turn to 13), or return to the trail (turn to 40).

## 59

The mining camp is set up in a roughly triangular valley, a place where two streambeds have crossed paths and the run-off from the plateau has carved a sort of open delta. Presently, only one of the upstream gulches carries a small streamlet across the valley floor to disappear down a cleft opposite.

Looking out over the camp, you see it consists of two bunkhouses with black stove chimneys; a few small buildings that you figure might hold a cookhouse, a smokehouse and a smithy; and a row of

storage shacks for supplies and bones ready to be shipped off. In the back you can make out a cistern and a number of small corrals in the shadow of the sheer cliffside.

You notice a team of workmen is taking off up the path along the ravine, presumably going to do a spot of collecting upstream; at the same time, another group is heading back into camp for their noontide meal, a line of donkeys bearing a fresh yield of fossil-bearing rock.

The feature that catches and holds your interest, however, is a dark crack in the hill across the camp from your position. In front of this opening a man is standing guard, burly arms crossed over a tartan shirt. As you watch, one of the work hands sidles up to him and attempts some wheedling, only to receive a clip on his cheek for his troubles. Perhaps the payroll is being kept in there; either way it is something you are keen to investigate.

You judge that an attempt at a stealthy approach would only risk giving you away; it might just attract the least attention if you simply stroll across the camp like any other worker. You wait until things are relatively quiet and most have withdrawn from the heat of the midday sun, then pick your path. If you go straight through the middle, where the returning group of diggers have seated themselves under a white canvas, turn to **87**. If you prefer to keep to the left side, passing along the bunkhouses, turn to **30**. If you go around the right flank, where a cook is busy preparing a meal, turn to **22**.

## 60

Note the codeword *Possum*. The poker players are willing to let you join in their game as long as you can put something up for stakes. After you've played a few hands and taken their measure, you're fairly sure you could pick them clean in time, but this would not be in your interest. Not only are you not looking to rile anyone, but your goal is to get them in a good mood and talking. To this end, you fold a flush and buy everyone a couple of drinks, saying you have to help your luck along. To your dismay, however, an hour passes and you fail to get much of interest out of these people. One of them earned a few dimes loading crates, another as a carter. Only one of them actually worked in one of the local quarries, and he doesn't like to talk about it - apparently some of Cort's men were driven off last winter and it does no good to bring up the matter. You do find out that one man supposedly remains at the quarry, and believing him crazy, people leave him alone out there. Deciding that you've learned what you can, you turn the game around and recoup the worst of your losses, but eventually you have to make time.

Deduct 3 dollars from your money, or if you bought yourself into the game using a watch, cross it off your list of items. Then if you haven't already done so you will have to go to the cargo depot as the proprietor told you (turn to **38**), cross the street to the general store (turn to **14**), or decide that you're done with this town (turn to **56**).

## 61

In the future, there are many spectacular remains being pulled out of the immemorial rock. Yours is particularly bizarre. A young xenopalaeontologist is chipping away at a layer of shale when -

## 62

Jumping down from the roof you plant your feet in the back of one of the brown-suited men, making him topple headlong from the platform. As you recover from your fall, his wide-shouldered accomplice shoves the bespectacled man aside and snorts like an angry bull. You recognize that broad face and pudgy nose from the wanted posters: Ox Gustafson, a brute and a killer. There is no time for second thoughts as he bull-rushes you, then proceeds to jab at you while you do your best to fend him off. If you have Fisticuffs, lose 1 Life Point; otherwise lose 2 Life Points.

After what seems like an endless series of blows and dodges, help arrives in the form of a thick book to the back of Gustafson's head. You seize the opportunity and put your boot to his stomach, pushing him clear across the platform to stumble over the dead guard's body. Gustafson's heavy frame splinters the railing and disappears over the side. Seeing this, the riders slow down and fall behind the



train; apparently whatever they were after is not worth a boarding attempt.

While you are trying to regain your breath, the man in the dark suit introduces himself as Glauber and thanks you for your intervention. You shake his hand and watch as he collects a few books and notebooks that had been dropped during the commotion.

You are still recovering when Gilda pokes her head down from the roof. "As uncle Bob used to say, 'I never met a crooked man who couldn't be straightened out with a strong drink or a good boot.' Quite a rough one, my uncle Bob. Died at Shiloh. You might have liked him."

"Your uncle, huh? He a lizard too?"

Gilda shoots you a look that you can imagine lizards reserve for people who have just asked them quite the dumbest question they have ever heard.

She draws it out for another couple of moments, then replies, "No." Still, you have a feeling that could have gone either way. Turn to **90**.

**63**

If you have either Delinquency or Outdoorsman, turn to **42**. Otherwise, turn to **35**.

**64**

You circle the place warily, looking around for any spots where someone might lie in ambush. The shelter consists of one wall leaning sharply against what remains of another, with the ends covered up using twigs and debris. If someone lives here still, they don't have very high standards.

You are walking onto the stony slope above the pit when a man hobbles out from behind an outcrop. He has a long twisty beard, tattered clothes, and is holding a stick of dynamite high in one emaciated hand. In the other he has a match with which he makes small striking motions towards the rough cliff.

"Don't come closer!" he yells. "I'll blow you up! If you come near, I'll blow us both up!"

The man looks to be in a sorry shape, but even so, there would be little sense in trying to rush him; that boomstick seems to be for real. If you use Fast Draw and a revolver, turn to **81**. If you use Trickery, turn to **73**. If you have neither of those skills, you must back slowly down the slope and move away along the trail: turn to **36**.

**65**

The guard has a bushy black beard and rock-steady eyes that form the basis of a formidable scowl. "This place isn't for you, newcomer," he growls. "Collectors will tell you if you're ever needed down here. Now scam." If you have a geologist's pick *and* either Trickery or the codeword *Schema*, turn to **26**. If you use Deduction and a pipe, turn to **84**. If you have any money and use it to bribe the man to look the other way, turn to **76**. Failing either of these options, turn to **19**.

**66**

Unfortunately, the mercy of Izzy Childs is no mercy at all. At his command, the other hirelings grab your arms, then heave you over the side of the gorge like a sack of bad flour. With arms flailing in vain for support you tumble head over heels to the bottom of the ravine. Your body strikes a tall fleshy cactus which breaks under your weight. If you don't have a blanket, the cactus pokes holes in you and your adventure comes to a luckless end. If you do have a blanket, it miraculously helps cushion your fall, but this leaves you little better off. Lose 4 Life Points. If you survive, you are only half aware of fading laughter from the top of the cliff as the men leave you for dead. It seems like hours before you can pick yourself up out of the sand and limp away along the ravine. Turn to **36**.

**67**

You go to work, humming to yourself, carefully using taps from the broad chisel head of your hammer to separate a lump of hardened sediment from the layered rock.

"What are you doing?" asks Gilda, clinging to the rocky hillside above you, her tone suggesting that your behaviour is in fact in need of justification.

"This is dark oil shale," you explain. "Can be harder to work than sandstone or mudstone, but it tends to preserve soft tissue better, and it doesn't crumble as easily. Look at this. If you squint at it from exactly the right angle, it looks like some sort of crayfish. Hello there, little old crayfish."

"It's a random texture on a piece of rock you just chipped out of the ground."

"What's that, crayfish? You used to fight a bitter war against the salamanders? Those are your relatives, aren't they, Gilda?"

"Please. Calling a lizard a salamander is like calling one of your sort an echidna."

"Yes, little crayfish. They are still a vain and pompous people."

Although your scientific investigation yields little, you do spot among the scree a worn silver coin. Perhaps it has been used as a scale marker in photographic documentation. If you take it, add 1 dollar to your money.

If you haven't already done so, you may now check out the long wooden structure (turn to **13**), make a search of the buildings (turn to **58**), or leave the quarry altogether (turn to **40**).

68

Bats, my dear Bone Investigator! Zillions of them, nesting in the nooks and narrows, clinging to the sides of the canyon and dreaming of the days before the birds gave them their wings. A couple flutter past your head as you walk beneath the rustling multitudes. In the sand before you, you see some splayed five-pronged tracks as if from some sort of lizard - but these are enormous! You come to another junction; the prints vaguely turn right before disappearing. If you go left towards a rippling murmur, turn to **16**. If you veer to the right, following a soft humming, turn to **50**.

69

True to his words, Culligan shares his beans with you, but not his tobacco. Your small fire of dry branches crackles and pops as the temperature drops sharply from the heat of day towards the chill of night. If wounded, recover 1 Life Point.

When you are done eating, with the sun setting behind the distant swell of tall peaks, Culligan rolls a cigarette and lights it up, calmly drawing smoke, then asks your opinion on the great dinosaur rush and patiently waits for an answer. Will you reply that you are in favour of it (turn to **28**), or will you say it is a vain enterprise (turn to **34**), or will you express no particular opinion on the subject (turn to **77**)?

70

Arriving at your destination by noon the next day, you discover the bone diggers' camp is located in one of the many hidden gulches that score these hills. You are told to help unload the cases in the wagon, some of which hold provisions and some of which are sealed and marked with symbols of danger.

"Where in blazes is that lousy Bert Driscoll?" shouts the foreman, stomping up dust as he turns around angrily. "He had better not be shirking again on account of that phantom lizard of his! You see him, you tell him to get these new people settled in!"

"What's that about a ghost lizard?" you ask one of the diggers as you help carry a heavy sack of cornmeal to the cookhouse.

"Faugh! Don't talk about it! Old Bert's telling stories of some gila monster out to eat us all, getting people strung up for no good reason. We keep telling him, the only giant lizards around here are dead ones!"

"What is the good reason to be strung up?"

"Why, the Doctor, who else!" He casts a narrow glance at a thin black crack in the rock-face at the back of the camp. "I reckon if you see those moving bones by moonlight, it's enough to keep you

shivering for the rest of your days..." Then he notices you eyeing the crack and snaps, "Hey, why don't you just keep that sort of question to yourself!" Turn to **59**.

71

"Of course," you say and pull out the watch, "I *have* been saving this little treasure for just such a tight spot as this."

The man barely glances at it. "I'll give you two dollars. Chipped, tarnished. No one will take it off my hands."

"What item are you referring to? Not this one, surely! A marvellous piece of work, handcrafted and with the distinguishing finish that time lends to sterling silver."

"Silver? A thin plating, nothing more, scratched and dented."

"Carried in the breast pocket of General MacReedy, struck three times by a bullet. The fourth found his throat, bless his memory. See: the face of his lovely daughter, who broke the hearts of two divisions of fine cavalrymen."

"That face will only make it harder to sell! I'll give you four."

You eventually settle for a price of 6 dollars. Decide if you want to sell the watch, making the necessary adjustments to your inventory if so, then turn to **97**.

72

The bright colours in the sunlit walls above you attract your attention, so that you are taken by surprise when you feel the sand shifting under your foot, sucking at it. You brace yourself against the canyon wall, pulling back from the soft spot. Dry quicksand! There is no telling how far it extends, and here the walls are too far apart for you to wedge yourself between them. You manage to proceed a little further by carefully testing the ground before each step, but there comes a point where you must rely on knowledge and instinct to make it across safely. If you have *Outdoorsman*, turn to **89**. If not, turn to **21**.

73

"Look," you say, "that's not going to work. That's a safety match you've got there."

"No it's not!" he protests, then glances at the match. "You couldn't know that!"

"Oh, believe me, I do. I was born in a match factory. They say I developed a kind of rapport with matches as I grew up, and that one you've got there is safe as a pillow."

"Don't come any nearer! I'll take my chances!"

"But that wouldn't work out for you either way. If I'm right, nothing happens, and if I'm wrong, you've just lost your only bargaining chip. Soon as you light that up, the only thing we can do is run around like chickens off the chopping block until it blows."

"I... I could have a spare."

"I don't think you do, but even if you did, I'm sure it's a safety as well. I'd sense it otherwise. But tell you what, here, I'll trade you a match." You produce your own box, taking a few cautious steps closer and holding a match out to the man.

He hesitates, but leans forward and takes it in exchange for his own. Then he stands there again holding up the dynamite and a harmless safety match. "Now you be gone -"

"That's a safety fuse you've got there as well, isn't it? Oh, it is. I'll trade you a real one - look, wouldn't it save a lot of time if you just handed that thing over?"

He looks at his stick of dynamite, then lowers it sheepishly and surrenders it to you.

"You don't really want to blow up anyone, do you? Let's just sit down somewhere comfortable and talk things through." Turn to **23**.

"It is said," declares a voice that is sibilant and yet somehow sonorous, "that the day does not hide us from the stars, but it mercifully hides them from us, so we will not see them crying over our endless miseries."

You turn around. There is a shadowy figure in the dark passage that leads down out of the valley. A long, slim, serpentine figure...

The speaker slithers out in the sunlight to face you. He is a magnificent giant snake holding his head upright like a cobra to a height of five feet, his curving body covered in bright yellow scales that shift in tones of dark amber. His large black eyes appear both attentive and sympathetic; his red tongue flicks rapidly across his smoothly rounded snout. On his head he carries a shining white cowboy hat. Around his body, some three feet off the ground, he wears a gun belt with two holstered revolvers.

"I greet you," he says, "who has come for the reckoning as someone must. Already I sense you have vanquished my Cherokee friend, my scout, my follower, my guilty conscience. I shall miss him for a time. I grant that his spiritual sight was afflicted with a sanguine mist, although in this he was paying for ill deeds inflicted long years ago by ourselves as well as these other agents of eternal Providence that form the weft of our enduring nation. Truly, I never knew if his blindness served to illuminate or becloud his path, which now stretches where we cannot walk. But what of you and I?"

You make a wild guess. "You would be Snake? Leader of this outfit? Killer of plentiful people? Seldom-seen instigator of unlawful conduct?"

"Yes, I suppose I am that archistrateger you seek. A slayer also, if the stony shore is said to slay the waves that fall upon it."

"At least you've got the pretty words to dress it up in."

Snake shifts, waving slightly from side to side with cool elegance, yet it is his voice, warm like sun-kissed sand, that foremost lends him his hypnotizing aspect. "What artful enterprise could ever be summed up in simple terms, added up to a single unequivocal entity? In accepting the patronage of Mr Marsten, my associates and I have embarked on a journey that exceeds its original crass occasions. All work is, in the end, life, and the concordance of life is a book with no fewer words than the actual thing."

"Still makes you little else than bone dogs, in my view."

"Ah, dogs we may be, but are you of any higher standing? Is he a slave who serves while moving ever nearer to his destiny? The lowliest dog who stands guard in the rainy night is closer to God than the mightiest king who was put on the throne against his nature."

You wonder just how much he knows about your nature. In any case, this is pretty much it. If you have Fast Draw and a revolver, turn to 33. If not but you have a stick of dynamite, turn to 57. If you have neither of these but you do have the codeword *Argos*, turn to 86. Failing all other options, turn to 5.

In the town of Fairfield, Nebraska, women walk gracefully and unafraid along the shaded boardwalks, gentlemen tip their hats and smile, children gambol in the street, and the only thing to disturb the peaceful atmosphere is the clanging of the smith's hammer or the loud snort of a strong horse.

Unfortunately, you are nowhere near Fairfield, or Nebraska for that matter. The town of Packer's Bluff, Colorado is a dreary, shot-up, paranoid mass of dry grey shacks that's grown like a cancer from the ramshackle fuel station and slightly more well-tended cargo depot. There are no gentlemen, no children to be seen. The crash of a bottle stands in for the ringing hammer as another miserable old miner is murdered for the sake of a gold tooth.

"So," you mutter, pausing in the shade by the station building, "where do we go to exchange codenames and secret handshakes? Who's going to set us up with guns, horses, bags of coin?"

"It is possible our local contact has become a victim of deplorable lawlessness," suggests Gilda from the cover of a few old planks. "As far as I can tell, there's no agent nearby."

"Hopefully a case of desertion rather than one of conversion, or we could be in deep trouble. Well, deeper."

"In any case, I expect you to proceed according to the best of your ability. Trusting in your own resources should never be a cause for despair," says Gilda and withdraws.

Idling by the station for a while, you observe a few crates of supplies being hauled into the cargo depot under the watchful eyes of grim men in tan dusters. You figure each of those heads carries a \$100 bounty or thereabouts. A few scruffy hopefuls, at least one of whom you recognize from the train, are standing around nearby, perhaps waiting for a work assignment. If you were to hook up with this crew, it might just lead you directly to where you want to be. On the other hand, that might also be somewhat like sticking your hand blindly into the viper's hollow.

If you want to hang around and wait for someone to pick up those supplies, turn to **38**. If you would prefer to gather information in town, turn to **85** if you have Delinquency or to **49** if you don't. If you want to shop for needful things, turn to **14**. If you think it's a good idea to get out of town as quickly as possible, turn to **56**.

76

You produce a number of silver dollars and indicate to the guard that they could be his if he'd just admire the sandstone formations overhead while you step inside the crack. He smiles broadly, motions for you to lean in closer, then clips you hard. Lose 1 Life Point.

"You," he growls, "are a fool and a snooper. I don't know who you are, but I'm betting Snake will. That's if I leave anything of you behind for him to inspect!"

There's no time to recover your spilled coin: cross off your remaining money, then turn to **19**.

77

You claim to have no involvement with fossil affairs, saying that you're scouting a cattle trail through the foothills. "I just hope they clean up after themselves, those bone diggers, pack up what they cut out of the mountains, you know? Can't have claws and skulls sticking out of the rock, scaring the cows or taking a swipe at them as they pass by!"

Culligan doesn't seem amused; if anything, he seems disappointed. Man, what a grim customer. You try to turn the question back on him, but he grunts, smokes the last of his cigarette, then grabs a blanket and wraps himself up as the sun disappears and leaves the sky a dark blue and purple pall over the western mountains. Record the codeword *Argos*, then turn to **91**.

78

As you rush into the grotto, you skip slightly to the left to avoid the blossoming cloud. It is then that you feel something snapping underfoot, and in a blink, a mighty force is tugging at your leg and sweeping you into the air. With the heavy fumes all around and your head dangling close to the ground, you fumble for your pocket knife, pull yourself up and cut at the creeper that's been used to snare you. Eventually it snaps, and you fall on your back in the sand, panting. Presently the smoke clears. There is no sign of plants, or of the trap you just fell victim to. What does remain as you shamble on ahead is an uneasy feeling that you are being toyed with. Note a cross among your notes and turn to **98**.

79

Some sunlight seeps in through cracks in the wooden structure, and your lantern sheds a little additional radiance, but it is still a rather murky place. Would bone hunters be expected to work their trade under such circumstances? There is little enough rain in the region to endanger the surfaces exposed by the workmen's picks.

You step over some boulders, moving further along the shadowy passage. The light of your lantern falls on a curious part of the rock-face. It looks as if a large droplet had fallen from above, melting the

rocky surface like butter and producing a steep, smooth semicircular slope down into a shallow bowl.

"Who's there?" someone shouts. It is an eerie, faintly echoing cry from further in, sounding as if it came from a great distance.

You quickly abandon your inspection of the wall, raising your lantern and peering into the dark. You can't see anything or anyone, only faint sloping stripes of daylight.

"Hello?" comes the voice again. "Are you here to help?"

You take a few steps forward, turning the beam of your lantern warily from side to side. "Who are you?" you call back.

"I was the one who carried the bottles. They were going to test some new solution to help with the digging. It was supposed to melt away everything, leaving the bones, and it did. They said they'd come back and help me, but it's been a long time."

You now see that ahead there's a deeper cut into the mountain. Boulders and protrusions make it difficult to see far into this part of the excavation, and you have to walk up to the dark mouth of the pocket. "I'll help if I can," you say. "What's wrong with you?"

"Didn't you hear? It was supposed to dissolve everything but the bones... *and it did.*"

Turning your lantern you catch a glimpse of white, and steady your hand. To your disgust, you see a human skeleton sitting propped up against the back wall, hands resting on the ground in front of it.

And then the skeleton raises its arms towards you...

You don't remember dropping the lamp, but you remember scrambling through the darkness, banging your knees and your elbows, daylight an irregular growing shape before you as you kicked and grasped desperately for freedom. It is only later, when you're far from the blighted quarry, that you discover you left something behind in your mad rush. Cross any one item off your inventory, then turn to **40**.

80

Following the example of your fellow recruits you board the wagon, and your little outfit sets out from town in a southwesterly direction. You spend a couple of hours in the shaky cart, with few words exchanged. On the way you pass gullies and cliffsides of banded sandstone, with level stripes of red, white, grey and greenish-grey curving and rippling like curtains of frozen aurora from ancient times.

The wagon is just making its way between a tall cliff and a rocky gorge when a few horses come thundering in the other direction. Your heart sinks when you recognize the leader - it's Izzy Childs, big and ugly as the day you sent him running from the U.S. Marshals! You curse your luck under your breath and try to shade your face, but it's too late. Childs grins widely as he and his companions rein in their horses.

"Why, Bob," he says, "it's a fine bunch of new hands you've got there - and an old acquaintance to boot!"

If you have Delinquency, turn to **31**. Otherwise, your only option is to throw yourself over the side of the gorge in an act of desperation (turn to **4**), or to surrender yourself to the mercy of the bandits (turn to **66**).

81

"You know," you say, squinting up at the man, "there's a certain flaw in this bold plan of yours."

"You won't be saying that after I blow you up!" he yells back.

"Look, it's this" - you draw your gun and point it at him in the space of a heartbeat - "the fact that I can shoot that match out of your hand before you can even think of putting it to the fuse. Or I can put my bullet through your hand if I feel that's safer. Or your head." You flip your revolver back into its holster before you go on. "But I'm not saying I'm the kind of person who'd do that. I'm more the kind of person who'd like to sit down and share a strip of bacon and talk, one decent fellow to another. So why don't you let me hold on to that stick you've got there for a while?"

The man may be deranged, but he's not suicidal. He sags his shoulders in resignation and hands you

the dynamite. "I haven't seen any bacon in a long time, though," he complains. "Sometimes I catch me a lizard, but those things are mighty small and quick, they are."

"They can be highly annoying little creatures," you concur. Turn to **23**.

82

The canyon is suffused in a yellowish light, with clinging shadows in hues of gold and amber. Up ahead there is a brilliance. You see a nearly vertical shaft of sunlight falling on the sand in the middle of the passage, radiant dust moving slowly through the beam. Right in the middle of the illuminated patch, an ear of corn lies on the sand, its image rippling faintly as if seen through a screen of heat.

If you stoop to pick it up, turn to **55**. If you remove the corn from the beam before taking it, turn to **39**. If you skirt the brightness and continue forward, turn to **93**.

83

A warm wind blows steadily from the west to make the roadside dust dance around your boots as you walk through a scenic landscape of broken ridges, winding gullies and striped buttes with tabular tops. All over you can see the layered sandstones of the region, bands of blood red, ash grey, bone white and bruise purple. Deep in those rocks, the fossils are waiting to feel the tap of a hammer, the cut of a chisel, to be brought out into this bright and busy new world. If they could, would they thank the men who are doing it?

As you trudge on, lost in your musings, the sun draws close to the western horizon. You are pondering where to set up camp when a man comes into view on the trail, riding on one of a pair of donkeys. He nods a greeting as you come within speaking distance, gets off his animal, introduces himself as Culligan and offers to share a fire and a few beans. The man has a stolid, weathered face, with a slight waviness to his short sideburns.

If you have Deduction and a pipe, turn to **9**. Otherwise, decide whether to accept his invitation (turn to **69**) or to find somewhere to pass the night in solitude (turn to **46**).

84

You smoke your pipe pensively and take in the entirety of this man's appearance. One thing about it stands out to you like a sauropod in a rice paddy.

"Your boots are unbuttoned," you tell him.

He looks at his feet, puckers his lips, then bends down. As he does, you smack a plank across the back of his head, whistle and drag his unconscious body into the shadows. Good job, Sherlock. Turn to **37**.

85

Note the codeword *Possum*. After an hour of poking around, snatching up a word here and asking an innocent question there, you've located a wrinkled burro dealer whose eyes have picked up a good lot more than his perpetual squint would have you believe. He also knows better than to share his knowledge and ask nothing in return. To get him to talk you must be willing to part with 3 dollars, a watch, or a bottle of moonshine. If you can and want to do this, adjust your inventory accordingly and turn to **25**. Otherwise, if you have not already done so you could try going back to the railway station (turn to **38**), picking up a few supplies (turn to **14**), or skipping town entirely before you attract unwanted attention (turn to **56**).

86

A sudden loud bang behind you throws you off your feet. When you look back, you see debris falling from the sky and a large cloud of lead-grey smoke billowing from the cavern. Even as you try to get up, the world is rocked by two more explosions separated by half a heartbeat. The concussion slams you to the ground. Your entire body is numbed, your ears go silent. You feel a scorching wind passing

over. Fiery fragments drop down around you. Then all is smoke and dust and floating, glowing flecks of ash. Lose 2 Life Points.

If you survive, you finally dare to raise your head. Out of the silence grows a ringing noise. Someone is moving in the smoke; you see him first here and then there between drifting screens of dust. Then the swirling curtains part and you see him more clearly. It is a man with wavy sideburns making the sign of the cross over a still, sinuous body; a man with a priest's collar around his neck. You see tears ploughing slowly down his ash-covered cheeks...

He looks at you, and nods once in recognition. Then he is gone.

The ringing subsides. Your arms and legs will obey you once again. You rise up, wiping soot from your eyes, surveying the utter annihilation of the apparatus in the cavern. Turn to **100**.

87

The smell of a fire drifts from the cookhouse as you walk across the dusty, well-trodden valley bottom. Indistinctly behind the fluttering canvas you see the animated compound silhouette of a heated argument.

"No, that's all wrong!" you hear one of the diggers saying. "Look, the fossil collecting code is simple. There's just four parts. The first thing you do is find it. The next thing you do is dig it out. No one's quite got the hang of the third part, but the last one is profit. Can't go far wrong with profit, way as I see it."

"I just don't see why we have a third part at all," someone else chips in. "Stands in the way of a lot of profit, doesn't it?"

"I hear they have a seven-part code up in Wyoming," offers another. "They don't know the third, the fifth *or* the sixth part."

"Seventh is profit, though, isn't it?"

"Aye."

Very edifying. Acquire the codeword *Schema*, then choose which way to proceed: left to the animal pens (turn to **15**), straight on to the water cistern (turn to **95**), or right to the storage sheds (turn to **54**).

88

You take out your pick, slide down a sandy slope from the trail to the quarry, and get to chipping. This is essentially a waste of time since you are, let's face it, not very skilled at this. Gilda appears on the rocky overhang to observe you silently, as if expecting some sort of explanation.

"I'd say we're clearly looking at brecciated deposits of micaceous sandstone," you say, turning over a rough piece of rock in your hand. "Very interesting."

"You have no idea what you just said."

"Well, you're a lizard and you know nothing."

Suddenly, gravel shifts somewhere behind you. You hold still and strain your senses. Is someone trying to sneak up on you from the shelter?

Feigning unawareness, you sift a crumbling lump out of the sand and tap it lightly with the pick head of your hammer. "Look, a prehistoric borogrove, ever mimsy in the olden days." Then you spin around in a flash, throwing a handful of gravel towards the face of your stalker. You rush him, and you both tumble down the slope, smashing with a clatter into the dry boards at the bottom. Lose 1 Life Point.

If you survive, you are the first to get up. Grabbing a stick of dynamite that your opponent must have dropped, you raise it over your head as if intending to use it as a club. When he sees this, he cowers and whines, "Please! Don't blow me up!" In fact, he's just a starved, shaggy wretch in dirty torn clothes.

"Don't worry," you say, lowering your arm, "I won't blow you up. Why don't we take it easy, catch our breath and talk for a bit?" Turn to **23**.



89

You make it to the end of the dangerous patch and continue down the mysterious canyon, which again closes in around you with its pattern of reds and yellows. See how many dollars you now possess. If this is an odd number, turn to 50. If it is an even number, turn to 8.

90

Noticing a gleam of silver, you bend down and pick up a watch that's been dropped on the floor. Flipping the case open, you espy the broad face and pudgy nose of Ox's long-time paramour, Bella Longtree. Touching. If you want to keep the watch, note it among your items before turning to 75.

91

The next day sees you alone in the hills, following a trail that curves towards the southwest onto the rocky slope of a saddleback ridge. Looking to the east, you see the wide, windy prairie. To the west, there are the distant highlands that form the threshold to the great plateau, shrouded in a white haze. Green bushes and grasses grow in clumps all around you.

You find Marsten's old quarry some way off the trail, situated along the edge of a wide gully, its sides made up of a darker variety of rock than the amber and yellow sandstones. One excavated area lies bare to the elements, while another stretch of the hillside has been protected against dust-storms by a slanting wooden structure, its shadowy entrance sheltered under a lone gnarly willow. At the bottom of the gully there are a couple of wooden structures, a door swinging lightly in the wind to the tune of an eerie whistle. Clearly the place is abandoned, but perhaps there is some trace or remnant left behind that might prove helpful.

If you have a geologist's hammer and want to hunt for fossils in the gully, turn to 67. If you decide to explore the covered part of the dig, turn to 13. If you search the houses, turn to 58. If you feel this is a waste of time and would rather continue over the ridge to the plains beyond, turn to 40.

92

After wandering around aimlessly for a day, you have the good fortune of crossing paths with a canny, good-humoured old miner who recognizes you as a decent fellow and shares some buffalo pemmican over a warm fire. As you wolf down the much-needed nutriment, the miner relates some of his wilder adventurous episodes out in the Rockies.

"And then there was the time when the chinook started to blow just as I was fending off a circle of wolves with just the stock of my rifle! The snow all melted so fast, those wolves fell down a hundred feet to the ground and died! You're wondering why I didn't fall with them? Turns out I was standing on a needle of rock, going all the way up to my boots! Of course, then I had to wait until the chinook had stopped blowing and the snow had piled up again to a height of a hundred feet before I could go anywhere. And that took ten minutes!"

That is amazing. Much as you'd like to hear more of his stories, you need to learn what he knows about these mountains and the whereabouts of the bone diggers. Yes, he could tell you where they're camped. No, he's not particularly keen to - he can sense you don't belong with their crew and he'd be taking a risk directing any old stranger their way. He already helped you; it's only fair that you offer him something of value in return for further aid.

You can offer him one of these things: a revolver, a stick of dynamite, or 8 dollars. If you do, adjust your inventory accordingly, after which he points the way out to you (turn to 48). If not, you must find your own path after you bid him farewell in the morning (turn to 32).

93

The light from above wanes and eventually fades altogether. You are standing in a nightly hollow, with the full moon, larger than you have ever seen it or will see it again, shining down alone from a

black heaven. There is a stillness as if the whole world is holding its breath, and each of the two paths facing you fills you with unease. If you go left towards a gasping grey radiance, turn to 8. If you go right towards a ruddy gloom, turn to 16.

## 94

"I do believe this is a job for the fine expressmen of the Union Pacific," you say, tipping your hat forward and slumping down in your seat. "Wake me up if anything happens, such as me getting paid a lot of money to deal with this sort of thing."

Gilda makes a derisive snort, probably no mean feat for a lizard, and zips off. You hear the other passengers talk and shout excitedly as the riders draw nearer. The banging of rails and the thundering of hooves form a river of sound that rocks you into a doze. It seems to you that you are looking down upon a man by a dying fire, his hunched back towards you. He is taking handfuls of ashes and scattering them, tossing them into heaps that shift and swirl into images of hunters and hunted. You are very close to the man now. Slowly he turns his head, and you hear words spoken as if by a giant:

Not so long and wide the world is,  
Not so rude and rough the way is,  
But my wrath shall overtake you,  
And my vengeance shall attain you.

He lifts his finger and draws a sharp line across his furrowed cheek -

You are rudely jerked back to wakefulness as a bullet shatters the window beside you, a flying shard cutting your face. Disoriented, you drop down on the floor, looking this way and that and listening to the receding noise of galloping horses and a final couple of gunshots.

Gilda appears on the seat next to yours, looking down on you. "I'm happy to see someone is back here holding down the fort," she proclaims.

"I'll have you know I was busy gathering vital intelligence," you say, getting up and brushing yourself off. "What news from the rest of the set?"

"Well. Seems this hold-up-alike was a diversion in order to abduct a passenger from the lounge car. The details are not known to me, but perhaps your own intelligence is of higher quality."

As you see yourself reflected in what remains of your window, you can't help but notice that the red streak across your face exactly mimics the gesture made by the figure in your dream. Note the codeword *Sabine* and turn to 75.

## 95

The cistern is a large, circular structure of tarred wood from which water can be tapped for any number of purposes. Walking up a couple of wooden steps and sticking your head in under the tin roof, you momentarily think you see a vaguely reptilian head reflected in the dark ripples, but when you look up, there's nothing. You hop down and leave the tank behind. Turn to 65.

## 96

As you shuffle closer to the cavern, a man comes into view from within. He is clad in a light grey chemist's coat with many sooty smudges, wears a pair of goggles shoved unevenly up on his high furrowed brow, and has clear grey eyes to go with his bristling hair. His expression could convey anything from astonishment to annoyance to fluster. "Who are you?" he croaks. "You couldn't possibly be my replacement! You've got dust all over you."

"I'm your worst fear," you declare flatly.

"What? Are you a lunatic? To tell the truth, I don't care whether you are my replacement or not. If Marsten didn't make sure to have his gun-toting reptile come along and protect you, he'll learn that accidents can and do happen in a busy workplace. He'll learn that Dr Hannibal Ralston is not so easily thrown aside! Saurophaganax!"

There is a loud and horrible creaking of metal joints. As Ralston turns and walks back into the cavern, something else is coming out. You shiver as a gigantic skull appears, followed by a body of metal and petrified bone that straightens itself to a height of fifteen feet. You are looking at the fossilized skeleton of a large predatory dinosaur, each bone moving as if attached to a still living body. Affixed to these remains are a number of interconnected metallic rods that grate and whine with every little motion. Parts of the skeleton are missing or crumbled, and the metal structure is itself not actually supported by anything, but these circumstances evidently do not stop the thing from moving around. You have no idea how this has been accomplished, but one thing is for sure: you don't especially feel like the man's worst fear any longer.

"Fetch that one for me," Ralston says, waving his hand in your direction. "I have several interesting experiments I need to carry out, and I was just about to send for a volunteer anyway."

The skeletal jaws part with a grinding screech, making their knife-sized teeth stand out in vicious detail. The invisible body defined by the large bones seems to flex and shift, the beast turning and taking a springy step towards you. It doesn't appear that a revolver will be of any help here. Is there anything that will? If you have a bottle of solvent, turn to **3**. If not but you have Deduction and a pipe, turn to **45**. Failing both of these options, you whip around and run: turn to **61**.

## 97

You consider your potential needs. These articles might all come in handy:

Stick of dynamite	10 dollars
Geologist's hammer	4 dollars
Blanket	1 dollar
Flask of water	1 dollar
Flask of moonshine	2 dollars
Junior Woodchucks Guidebook	6 dollars

Moonshine can be used to dull pain and clean wounds. You can use it *once* at any point in the adventure; this will let you regain 1 Life Point, after which you must cross the flask off your list of items.

The Junior Woodchucks Guidebook is full of information on wilderness conduct, the natural sciences, public records, and just about anything else you may come across (including, as Gilda will point out approvingly, a lizard phrasebook). It is sure to suggest a solution to some problem you will encounter, and so it can be used *once* when you are presented with a chance to use the Deduction, Delinquency, Outdoorsman or Trickery skills. You may then select such an option even if you do not possess the necessary skill (or a pipe in the case of Deduction), but you must also immediately cross the Guidebook off your list of items, as it is unlikely to be of such use again. There is only one such book on sale.

Decide on your purchases then adjust your inventory accordingly, remembering that you cannot carry more than four items. Then, if you have not done so already, you may decide to stalk the cargo depot (turn to **38**), ask around for information (turn to **85** if you have Delinquency or to **49** if you don't), or leave town (turn to **56**).

## 98

Shaken by your experiences, you walk numbly down the confining crack. At this point, banded protrusions obstruct your path on alternate sides and at different heights, forming a strange blockade through which you navigate with difficulty.

The first sign that something is wrong is a low, distant rumble. It is impossible to tell from where it is coming, so you continue apprehensively. A rushing, roaring sound rises, and you realize its implication just before you turn your head around to see the approaching darkness behind you: a

flash flood!

There's nothing you can do as the foaming, whipping waters bear down on you, sweeping you with them, tossing you helplessly past untold rocky bulges that could crack your skull open in an instant. You are lost in black currents that tug you which way they will.

Miraculously, the water subsides and you are deposited in a wet, gloomy cavern, lying on your hands and knees, alternately coughing and spewing up searing spirit-water. More than ever you feel that this place is sapping your strength, blow by blow; how can you hope to escape it?

You hear a soft tread on the wet sand. Looking up, you see the hunter has caught up to you at last. He is walking towards you, untouched by the passing flood, unmoved by your condition, and unafraid of any resistance you might put up.

You begin to scramble away, seeking a way out. He casually throws his war club; it smashes into your hip, breaking it. You scream out in pain, stumble and slump down in the sand. Unhurriedly, he walks up to you, slams your shoulders against the cave wall and begins squeezing your neck with strong, rough hands. There is nothing triumphant or spiteful in his eyes as he looks steadily into yours. He is taking your life because he can do no other thing.

Your vision begins to flicker and fade. All you see is the hunter, staring at you as if trying to catch your soul at the moment of death.

Then he releases his grip. You gasp violently. Through a distorting haze you see the man stepping back. As you turn your spinning head to follow his gaze, something massive comes into view. It seems as if a lizard is running towards you, but you're seeing it split up impossibly into two images: one small, leading the way across the cave floor, and a second, larger - much, *much* larger - storming behind. The hunter whirls to face them, flinging up an arm with his club at the ready, and the small lizard darts between his legs, but the large one barges straight on, claws flashing...

There is a loud scream and a crash, and everything seems to shake and fall in a torrent of dust.

The din recedes. Only swirling wisps of twinkling dust remain, curling and flashing, winking, fading, going out. If you have been instructed to mark any crosses among your notes, count them up. If you have also marked any hearts, reduce the number of crosses by that amount. Now if you have two or more crosses, turn to **24**; otherwise turn to **10**.

99

The foothills are a place of desolation, of winding ravines, jagged outcrops, dried-up streams in shrubby hollows, and tapering red-brown peaks. You could spend forever searching for human activity in this range, unless you knew exactly what you were looking for, or else you were to become a victim of the harsh elements. If you have Deduction (and a pipe) or Outdoorsman, turn to **6**. If not but you have the codeword *Atlas*, turn to **48**. Otherwise, turn to **92**.

100

"You know," says a small voice near your feet, "I'd be lying if I said that one was entirely irrelevant to my interests."

You look down. Beside you is a small lizard the colour of sand, or just a shade darker. "Hey. I thought you were dead."

"So I noticed! It took me quite a while to squeeze out between all those boulders you managed to pile on top of my mangled body. Just imagine - all this time, the preferred method of burial for lizards has been the cairn, and I never knew!"

"It was an honest mistake. You were limp, lifeless and cold to the bone."

"Aha. Could that have anything to do with my blood, I wonder?"

You remove your hat and dust it off. "Tell you what. Word is there's a new opera house in Denver. A person could go there. A lizard could go with them. And if these people were to do so, do you think there'd be time for a full performance before they'd be hunted down along with all their kin?"

"Well," says Gilda. "They'd probably have to start looking over their shoulders somewhere around the third act. An aunt or two might get snatched off in the second, depending on luck."

"Seems good enough. I have an aunt who could stand to have an adventure. Are you coming?"  
And you put your hat back on your head, adjust it to your satisfaction and walk out of the canyon, leaving behind the bone dogs of Colorado.