

WINDHAMMER PRIZE
FOR SHORT GAMEBOOK FICTION

SABRAGE

AN ENTRY IN THE 2015 WINDHAMMER PRIZE FOR
SHORT GAMEBOOK FICTION

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Sabrage

By Philip Armstrong

You feel the touch of a living creature for the first time in... what? Decades at least. You always knew this day would come, you only had to be patient. You offer a silent prayer that this is an intelligent creature, something that can carry you out of The Spence, and not just the clumsy tread of an animal across your pommel. You thrill as a hand tightens around your grip. Then a sensation that you haven't felt in a long time: a wild dizzying as you're lifted from the remains of your last Bearer. You get a good view of the creature as it holds you up to inspect your blade. Human, dressed in leather armor, with long wild hair braided into loose strands. A large pack sits on his back, probably filled with all sorts of trinkets and trash he's come across. You know the type.

The adventurer gives you a few hearty swings, testing your weight. Nodding to himself, he pulls a battered blade from his scabbard and throws it down amongst the bones that have been your home for these past years. He slides you into the scabbard and turns to climb through one of the many holes that line the chamber walls.

"Not that way, you'll get lost. Take the third hole to your left, second up." you say.

The adventurer freezes in place and slowly looks down at you. The skull adorning your cross-guard grins up at him. Slowly, he pulls you from the scabbard and moves to place you back on the ground.

"Wait!" you say desperately "Wait just a moment. Don't put me back. See all those holes? I bet you're well acquainted with them. Been wandering in here a while. Lost in the maze, am I right?" The adventurer gives you a weary glance, then nods. "I know the way out. I can lead you! Those bones over there? He didn't listen and look what happened. I'm not going to hurt you, okay?"

The adventurer considers you for a long moment. "Your name?" he asks.

"Don't got one," you reply cheerily.

"Hrm. Magic?"

"As the day I was born, er... forged."

"Figures... I am Qorc. Lead the way."

Health	<u>QORC</u>	Hunger / Damage
Vigorous	Trust	Starved -2
Fit	_____	Hungry -1
Sturdy		Content +0
Sore		Satiated +1
Wounded	Coins	Stuffed +2
Maimed	_____	
	Items	

You		
	<u>YOU</u>	
1.	_____	
2.	_____	
3.	_____	

How To Play

Your chance to escape The Spence is finally here. Not that it's a bad place, but you've been cooped up for far too long. But to get out you're going to have to rely on Qorc, and unlike you he's made of flesh and bone. Therefore you have some considerations to keep in mind.

Health

Qorc is an experienced fighter and can more than hold his own in battle. However, he's not invulnerable like you. As he takes damage, his health drops from Vigorous to Fit to Sturdy and so on. If he takes damage while Maimed, he will be too injured to carry on. And who knows how long it will be until another Bearer comes along?

Likewise, if Qorc comes across any methods to treat his wounds, his Health will climb back towards Vigorous.

Currently Qorc is feeling *Fit*.

Hunger

Likewise, Qorc needs sustenance to act. Qorc's Hunger also rises and falls along a scale. His Hunger moves towards Stuffed when he eats and Starved if he doesn't. Hunger doesn't affect

Qorc's Health as there's always something to nibble on in The Spence, but it does alter his fighting prowess. A well-fed fighter is better than a starving one. Qorc does extra damage with his attacks when full, and less when hungry.

At the moment, Qorc is *Content*.

Trust

Qorc is an individual with his own thoughts and opinions. The degree that he listens to your advice is determined by how much he trusts you. At times, you will be asked to check Qorc's Trust against a given amount. Qorc agrees with your decision and play continues if his Trust is equal to or above this amount. If it isn't, Qorc distrusts you and acts on his own. Trust cannot be lower than 0.

At the moment Qorc has just met you and so has a Trust of 1.

Red Choices

Sometimes you will encounter a choice in **Red Text**. These represent a section that can only be visited once. If you find yourself revisiting a section with red text you've already selected, you can not make that choice again.

Battle

The Spence is a place of wild magic and unknown danger. It's likely you'll run into a hostile creature or two. Luckily, Qorc is an experienced fighter, and you have some say in battles as well. Generally, you can influence how you are swung in three broad categories (Qorc will handle the details): *Slash*, *Thrust*, and *Parry*.

A *Slash* is a quick weak attack. It deals 3 damage to a foe but opens Qorc to a counterattack. A *Thrust* is a strong forward jab. It deals 5 damage but can easily miss, and like a *Slash* it can leave Qorc vulnerable. A *Parry* does no damage whatsoever but keeps Qorc safe by deflecting any incoming attacks.

An enemy is defeated once you've dealt damage equal to its Health. In the event you and an enemy trade blows, your damage is dealt first, then the enemy's.

Sword and Bearer working together are a formidable fighting force, but if great foes are to be bested the two must trust each other..

Turn to 1.

1

Qorc climbs into the hole you indicated and crawls down the low circular tunnel. Before long, it splits into two directions.

“Alright, sword, which is it?”

“To the Left.” Turn to 5.

(Lie) “To the Right.” Turn to 8.

2

Qorc approaches a giant wheel of Camembert laying on its side. A wedge cut into the cheese provides entrance into a hollowed out cavity where a jovial clerk stands behind a counter. Jars filled with fuzzy plants of red, green, and white clutter the shelves, and there’s a pungent odor distinct from the city’s usually cheesy stench.

“How can I help you?” pipes the clerk as Qorc enters the wheel. “I’ve got samples from all over Formaticorum. Everything a body might need, whether it’s for a head cold, a sore back, or even an infected wound. I even have something for the bedroom.” This last part he adds with a sly wink.

“Samples?” Oorc asks.

“Ah, new to the cheeses are you? Samples of mold! We harvest them from all about th’ Corum. Only the very best. Fix what ails ya, and don’t you worry about the poisonous kind. Got a team of grubs on the job. Best noses about, can smell the bad stuff a mile away so don’t you worry a bit. So what can I get’ cha?”

Qorc can regain Health here for 2 Coins per step. When finished, Turn to 4.

3

After a few minutes of crawling you turn a corner to find light streaming in from a tunnel opening.

“Ha. I almost didn’t believe you,” says Qorc as he proceeds to the exit.

Gain 1 Trust, and Turn to 6.

4

You explain a bit of Formaticorum history as Qorc wanders the various pathways and alleys between the stacks.

“There’s not much to tell, really. It’s unclear if Ihsa purposely stockpiled and enlarged the cheese, or if it’s a result of the underlying magic that sustains the place. I suspect the later, considering the state of some of the other corners of The Spence. When people first started wandering in they found Formaticorum a bit more hospitable than other regions. It’s near the exit, the cheese (already decades old at this point) was well hardened and made for good shelters, and the spiders and maggots are good people once you get to know them. All in all, it’s not a bad place.”

Qorc steps into a large square surrounded by hollowed out blocks and wheels. People of all shapes and species are bustling about, hawking wares, haggling, and hustling. In the center is grand fountain overflowing with a viscous orange liquid.

“This is Formaticorum Square, should find everything you need to get in tip-top shape here.”

Head to a wheel of Camembert with a sign that reads “Molds.” Turn to 2.

Investigate a stack of Essex Comté with several tables out front. Turn to 7.

Take a closer look at the fountain. Turn to 11.

Travel to the regional gates. Turn to 10.

5

Qorc continues down the path you indicated. Nestled against him, you feel his stomach rumble. He tries picking some of the tunnel wall, but it's far too old and hard to be edible anymore. *Increase Qorc's Hunger by one step.* He sighs and moves on. After a few minutes you find yourself at another split.

"Which way now?" Qorc asks.

You know that both paths lead to the exit, but the one on the left is winding and will take much longer than the one on the right.

"To the Left." Turn to 9.

"To the Right." Turn to 3.

6

You feel a great sense of relief as Qorc emerges from the maze. Now you just have to convince him to take you to The Spence's exit and you'll be free forever.

Glancing about, it appears little has changed in Formaticorum since you last set eyes on its blocky heights. All about, towering mounds of ancient cheese rise towards a formless sky, while behind you lies the great mass of Swiss that makes up the maze. You can see that Formaticorum's famous scent has brought a tear to Qorc's eye.

"Find what you were seeking, friend?" You recognize that voice. An iron box with eight hairy legs emerging from holes in its sides scuttles around a rise of Asiago. Mounted in the front of the box is a small, barred window from which eight inhuman eyes shine.

"Is this it?" asks Qorc, pulling you from the scabbard.

"Ah, yes. That little beauty can show you where to find the Château d'Jquam. I hope it was worth the coin. Of course, if you'd like your money back, I'd happily buy it off you for a fair price."

"Hello, Roplunde," you say, "I see you're still in jail. I would have thought you'd have schemed your way out by now."

"Quiet, sword!" hisses the spider. "Now," he says addressing Qorc, "how about twenty five coins, hmmm?"

"If this sword can truly lead me to the d'Jquam then I will not give it up for any price," says Qorc, "But you should have told me the guide was an enchanted sword. If it hadn't spoken I might have ignored it. In fact, if I hadn't picked it up I might have been lost in there forever."

Roplunde scrambles back. "You knew the risks of entering the maze! I gave you the location of the guide, as per our agreement! I was under no obligation to expound on its nature! Besides, it's of no consequence now. You found the sword. No harm done, I say."

"I should take my money back. But, as you say, I have the sword. And once I have the d'Jquam a few coins will be nothing."

"Look, Qorc," you say, "those bottles were some of Ihisa's most prized treasures, and he hid them very well. Plus The Spence has grown wild since his death. It's dangerous in here. I say we go to the exit. I can help! It's easy, just turn down that path there, then--"

"I am not leaving without the d'Jquam."

"Come now, they're really not worth it. Look, if you--"

"If you won't help me, sword, then I might as well sell you to the spider here and find some other way to locate the d'Jquam."

"Okay, okay. Let's not be hasty." You sigh. "Alright. I'll lead you to the bottles, but you promise to you take me with you when you leave. No abandoning me when you've got your treasure. Deal?"

Qorc nods. "Where do we start?"

"They're hidden in three regions of The Spence. We'll have to use the gates to get there. But you might want to prepare here in Formaticorum first, if you have any coin left."

Qorc rummages in his pack and shows you two mismatched coins.

Add 2 Coins to the Character Sheet.

Explore Formaticorum. Turn to 4.

Head to the gates. Turn to 10.

7

One corner of the Square is taken up by immense slabs of Essex Comté stacked several stories high. A wide door has been cut into the side where a maggot the size of a horse bustles in and out, serving customers seated at outdoor tables. Qorc sits at one and in a moment the maggot squelches over.

"Good day to you, sir. Welcome to my humble cafe," it says from somewhere among the pale folds of fat that compose its face. "we pride ourselves on selling the very best actual food. No centuries old dust and dander here, but genuine nourishment with no magical influence. Well... maybe just a little." The maggot slams its body down on the table with a slick thud, leaving a small plate of sliced, slightly slimy bread when it pulls away. "To whet your appetite. Delivered fresh from The Basket just this morning."

"That's The Spence's farmlands," you whisper.

"Now then," continues the maggot, sliding a damp menu into Qorc's hand, "what will you have?"

Qorc can reduce Hunger here for 1 Coin per step. When finished, Turn to 4.

8

Qorc crawls down the tunnel to the right. After several twists and turns, it opens up to a large chamber where you find the remains of some other poor adventure who got lost in here. Qorc investigates the bones, discovering his own discarded sword.

"Hey, this is where we started!" he says pulling you from the scabbard. "You said you knew the way out."

"Sorry, I'm still getting my bearings." you say, suppressing a snicker. "Don't worry, got it all sorted out now. I'll have you out of here in no time at all."

Qorc slides you back into the scabbard. "You have one more chance, sword."

Lose 1 Trust, then Turn to 6.

9

Qorc makes his way through the tunnel. It winds around so many times he asks if you're sure you know the way. Before you can assure him that this is the correct path, you come to the bones of some unlucky explorer. The small handful of coins Qorc finds among the remains does little to lift his mood, but eventually you come around a turn to see light shining in from a tunnel opening.

"Hmph. I guess you did know the way after all." Qorc secures you in his scabbard and proceeds to the exit.

Add 4 Coins and 1 Trust, then Turn to 6.

10

You enter a domed building constructed of Red Windsor. Inside, pale columns marbled with delicate pink veins stretch overhead to meet a gracefully curved ceiling. In the center of the chamber, a dozen arches form a circle. Crowds of people make their way to and from the arches, vanishing when they step through one or appearing in an instant.

"When Ihisa made his bottomless pantry," you say, "he really did make it bottomless. There's an infinite amount of space in here. You know what happens when you divide up infinity?"

"Uh...?"

"You still have an infinite amount left over. If you were to walk out of Formaticorum, you would never reach a different part of The Spence. But there are other parts! Each one infinitely large. These gates are like shortcuts between them."

Qorc studies the crowd for a few minutes.

"The people only use a few of them," he says.

"Only a handful of places in The Spence are safe. The magic that upholds it has gone wild and most regions are overgrown. Who knows what has spawned in them? I'll give you one guess as to where the Château d'Jquam are hid."

"Hm. Most people I have asked say they are but a legend."

"If you believed that, you wouldn't be here. Now, I've heard many rumors in my day. Most of it was gossip, but some of it had the ring of truth, and one juicy tid-bit was said to have come from the lips of Ihisa himself."

"Do you really know where to find the d'Jquam?"

"Not the exact locations, but I do know in which regions Ihisa hid them. Head to the gates and I will show you."

"Pssst!" a harsh whisper calls from behind a nearby column. A boxy shadow beckons you over with an arachnid arm.

Travel through an arch to The Locker. Turn to 20.

Travel through an arch to Crisp Quag. Turn to 40.

Travel through an arch to the Frozen Wastes. Turn to 70.

See what Roplunde wants. Turn to 13.

Return to Formaticorum Square. Turn to 4.

11

"This is one of Formaticorum's treasures," you tell Qorc. "Actual edible cheese. There's a spring of Cheddar underground. Watch out-" before you can finish, Qorc plunges his hand into the fountain.

"Argh!" he yelps, pulling back.

"...it's very hot." you finish. Qorc shakes hot cheese off his arm, then opens his fist to reveal three coins. "I hope it was worth it."

Add 3 Coins and reduce Health by 1, then:

*Head to a wheel of Camembert with a sign that reads "Molds." **Turn to 2.***

*Investigate a stack of Essex Comté with several tables out front. **Turn to 7.***

*Travel to the regional gates. **Turn to 10.***

12

*If you have all three jeroboams of Château d'Jquam, **Turn to 97.***

Qorc steps out from under the Red Windsor arch into the marbled dome of Formaticorum's gates. The cool air and hushed murmur of the crowd is a welcome relief after the wild regions. Even the smell is like an old friend met after a long absence. You take a deep whiff, relishing its unique fragrance.

Visit the mold shop to restore Health for 2 Coins per step.

Visit the maggot's restaurant to reduce Hunger for 1 Coin per step.

*Talk to Roplunde. **Turn to 17.***

*Travel through an arch to The Locker. **Turn to 20.***

*Travel through an arch to Crisp Quag. **Turn to 40.***

*Travel through an arch to the Frozen Wastes. **Turn to 70.***

13

"So you're heading out to the wilds, eh?" Roplunde says from inside his metal prison. "Very dangerous places, if the sword didn't warn ya. How fortunate for you that I've just come into the possession of some rare products which are sure to be of some help. And since you are such a dear friend, I will part with them for only the smallest of service fees."

A worn woolen cloak is laid out on the ground with several trinkets displayed on it.

"Here we have a kerchief, owned by the Duchess of Llyons. You can still smell her sweet bouquet on it. Divine! Only four coins. Next, a charmed bracelet. Indescribably rare, I assure you. Said to increase trust between friends by one (and minimum Trust cannot drop below zero while worn). Wouldn't think of parting with it for less than six coins. Here, a small tin of crackers, specially baked to last for years. Perfect for long trips. It may be only enough for a single meal, but you'll be able to eat whenever you wish. Two coins, couldn't ask for less. Lastly, a vial of salve made from Formaticorum's own healing mold. It will heal you by one step, but alas I was only able to acquire a single use's worth. Three coins."

"I suppose the cloak is for sale too," you scoff.

"Interested? I guess I could part with it for two... no, four coins. You have a discerning eye. Very fine material!"

You can buy as many items as you can afford, but each can only be purchased once. When you are done shopping you can:

Travel through an arch to The Locker. Turn to 20.
Travel through an arch to Crisp Quag. Turn to 40.
Travel through an arch to the Frozen Wastes. Turn to 70.
Return to Formaticorum Square. Turn to 4.

14

You're assaulted by a wave of searing heat as Qorc steps through the arch. He staggers from the blinding sunlight and gags from a pervasive rotten stench. After a moment of retching, he picks himself up from the sandy ground and shields his eyes. You're in the middle of a circle of arches. Each is made from tusks thrusting up from the sand to meet at the points, with a desert stretching to the horizon beyond them. It's hard to discern their exact size from your current position, but the bleached bones that break up the barren landscape must be huge. Far in the distance you see what appears to be a ridge of stone, but it's hard to make out details through the waves of heat dancing in the air.

Qorc examines flakes of white sand stuck to his hands from the fall.

"This is... salt?"

"Welcome to The Locker," you say. "This was where Ihisa stored meat and game. As you can see, it's all gone now. Devoured ages ago."

"And the smell?" asks Qorc, holding his arm over his nose.

"Well... I guess not all of it."

"Alright, sword, which way to the d'Jquam?"

"I think we should head..."

North, towards that stone ridge. Turn to 27.

West, towards that bleached skull. Turn to 22.

East, towards that pile of femurs. Turn to 18.

South, into the featureless desert. Turn to 30.

Back through an arch. (Formaticorum: 12, Crisp Quag: 40, Frozen Wastes: 70)

15

You pull against the direction of Qorc's swing. The sudden resistance throws him off balance, allowing the Ham Hound to slam into his chest and knock him to the ground. At first, he struggles under the Hound's weight, then laughs as the Hound licks at his face with wanton abandon.

"Okay, okay," he says, gently pushing the Hound off. "So you are friendly, eh?" The Hound gives a joyous bark, then runs back into the clearing. It sniffs around for a bit then digs in the salt. Searching about, Qorc finds previous spots the Hound dug up. In one shallow hole he finds some bleached remains—normal sized—and a handful of coins.

The Hound pulls something out of its newly-dug hole and gobbles it down. Observing this, Qorc digs as well, using you as a makeshift spade. Before long, he unearths a pair of desert yams. The Hound dives at them greedily, but Qorc manages to save one of them from being devoured. Satisfied, the Ham gives Qorc a friendly lick and bounds out of the clearing.

Qorc tastes the yam, but it's inedible unless cooked. He slips the yam into his pack, and you into the scabbard.

Gain 1 Trust and 4 Coins. Add the Desert Yam to Qorc's items. Gain 1 Hunger. Turn to 20.

16

You propel forward, snapping Qorc's arm towards the Carrion Scavenger. The bird leaps from its perch, easily dodges the attack, and dives towards Qorc. He wrenches you up in a desperate attempt to deflect the savage attack, but the Scavenger's beak cuts into Qorc's shoulder. He falls back in pain, landing in a splattering of droppings. Before the Scavenger can attack again, he scrambles through the opening.

Back in the burning sun, he jumps to his feet and brings you to bear on the crack. After it becomes clear the bird isn't going to surface, Qorc wipes grime and feathers from his face and examines his shoulder. The wound is long, but shallow. He does his best to bandage it and heads back to the gates.

Lower Health by 1 step. Qorc has acquired a Carrion Feather and adds it to his Items. Turn to 20.

17

"So you made it back," says the spider, rising to its feet as Qorc approaches. "Can't say I'm not impressed. Now, tell old Roplunde if you found any nice trinkets out there in the wilds. I'd be happy to lighten your load. And of course, my wares are still looking for a home."

Any trinkets Qorc owns can be sold for 1 Coin apiece. Any items previously not purchased are still available:

A sweetly perfumed kerchief for 4 Coins.

A charmed bracelet (increase Trust by 1/Trust cannot drop below 0) for 6 Coins.

A single use of mold salve (restores Health by one step) for 3 Coins.

A single meals worth of tough crackers (lose one step of Hunger) for 2 Coins.

A woolen cloak for 4 Coins.

When finished, you can:

Visit the mold shop to restore Health for 2 Coins per step.

Visit the maggot's restaurant to reduce Hunger for 1 Coin per step.

Travel through an arch to The Locker. Turn to 20.

Travel through an arch to Crisp Quag. Turn to 40.

Travel through an arch to the Frozen Wastes. Turn to 70.

18

Qorc makes his way through a scattered jumble of gigantic femurs, half-buried vertebrae, and salt-blasted knuckle bones. Occasionally, a sharp bark can be heard echoing among the remains.

Ducking under a rib, Qorc enters a clearing within the scattering of bones. There, you see a Ham Hound bounding about and barking to itself. It looks like a baked ham—complete with honey glaze—on four stubby legs. A large red tongue lolls out of its fang-filled mouth. Seeing Qorc, it charges at him, pineapple rings flying off its back.

Qorc's warrior-trained reflexes react quickly to the attack. He snaps you from the scabbard and swings you up towards the on-rushing roast.

Resist. Turn to 15.

Do nothing. Turn to 23.

19

Qorc crawls down the left tunnel, but the way is soon blocked by what seems to be a solid wall of ground beef. Qorc stabs and scrapes at the blockage, but no matter how much he digs more beef slides into the opening he's made.

"It's no use," you say. "Besides, I'm getting all covered with meat juice. Maybe if we had a way to freeze it, we could make some progress..."

*If Qorc has a substantial amount of ice, **Turn to 21**. Otherwise there's no other choice but to return to the chamber. **Turn to 24**.*

20

*If this is your first visit, **Turn to 14**.*

The heat envelops you like a desperate lover. Qorc gags and slaps his hand over his nose. The empty sky wheels overhead and the horizons mock you with their distance. Where will you go?

*North, towards the stone ridge. **Turn to 27**.*

*West, towards the bleached skull. **Turn to 22**.*

*East, towards the pile of femurs. **Turn to 18**.*

*South, into the featureless desert. **Turn to 30**.*

*Or retreat through an arch. (Formaticorum: **12**, Crisp Quag: **40**, Frozen Wastes: **70**)*

21

Qorc packs the ice against the blockage, and, after giving it a few minutes to cool, begins chipping away again. Progress is much better this time, and soon he's opened a passage through.

Climbing through, you find yourself in a small chamber open to the sky. Above, you can see tiny specks of Scavengers in the vast blue. In the center of the chamber is a small pool. There are no other exits.

"There," you say. "That's where the energy is coming from."

Qorc slides down to the pool for a closer look. Up close, you can see that it's filled with blood instead of water."

"It is magic, you say?"

"Yeah, but I have no idea what it might-wait! Wait!"

Without hesitating, Qorc plunges you into the pool all the way up to your hilt. You feel a surge of power run through your blade. When he pulls you out, it's dyed a deep crimson.

"That was," you gasp, "very reckless of you."

"Seems to have worked."

"So it does..."

*Add Sharpening Spell to one of your three spots on the Character Sheet. This magic doubles the damage dealt by your next attack, and can be used any time during a fight, once per each battle. **Turn to 24**.*

22

Qorc slides down the steep incline towards a massive skull. You can't tell what animal it came from... a giant bovine or perhaps something draconic? Whichever it was, the long years have caused parts of it to crack and dissolve into dust. An echoing rasping can be heard through a hole

where the cheekbone has crumbled away.

“Do you think we should go in?” Qorc asks. “I doubt the bottle is hidden in there.”

*Enter the skull, **Turn to 25.***

*Return to the arches, **Turn to 20.***

23

You offer no resistance, letting Qorc swing you up and into the Ham Hound’s muzzle. It leaps back with a yelp of pain.

The Hound watches Qorc cautiously. Qorc doesn’t drop from his fighting stance, and he swings you forward when the Hound starts to make another charge. The Hound immediately backs down. It whines softly and runs off into the scattered bones.

Searching the clearing, you find spots where the Hound dug into the salt. In one shallow hole you find some bleached remains—normal sized—and a handful of coins.

*Gain 1 Trust, 4 Coins. **Turn to 20.***

24

*The stench within the mound is so overpowering that Qorc fights at a disadvantage. He does **-1 damage** unless he has something to mask the smell.*

Qorc climbs through the opening into a low tunnel that travels deep into the meat.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” you ask.

“It’s just meat. I eat meat for breakfast.”

Qorc crawls along the soft pliant tunnel until it opens up into a small chamber. Several more vein-like tunnels branch out from it.

“Which way from here, sword?”

“I sense a sort of magical energy emanating from the left vein, but I’m not sure what it could be. There’s a very, very slight vibration coming from the right one. Your guess is as good as mine.”

*Head towards the magical energy, **Turn to 19.***

*Head towards the vibration, **turn to 28.***

*Or leave the mound and make the long trip back to the gates. **Turn to 20.***

25

*Check Trust: 4. If less, Qorc declines to enter the skull and heads back towards the arches. **Turn to 20.***

*If you’ve already been inside before, Qorc refuses to enter again. **Turn to 20.***

The rasping stops when Qorc enters the skull. The inside is a shadowy cathedral with ancient eyeholes far above as its sacred windows. The filthy floor is covered with mangy feathers and crusted bird droppings.

“What could have caused-” Qorc begins to ask when a deafening croak interrupts him. He turns

slowly to find a Carrion Scavenger clinging on a ridge of bone above the entrance. It is easily the size of Qorc, with oily black feathers and a jagged, razor-sharp beak. It turns a beady eye on Qorc.

Qorc slowly draws you from the scabbard.

Strike out. Turn to 16.

Do nothing. Turn to 29.

26

Check Trust: 2. If less, Qorc attempts a thrust instead. Turn to 34.

Qorc pulls into a defensive stance just as the hot dog tiger leaps at him. You barely manage to knock away an incoming swipe. Undeterred, the tiger rises up on its hind legs and swings again.

Slash! Turn to 31.

Thrust! Turn to 35.

Parry! Turn to 38

27

The ridge is far on the horizon and it seems only a few feet closer after an hour's march. The stench, on the other hand, is noticeably stronger. Undeterred, Qorc eventually comes across a single, massive bone sticking up out of the salt. He takes the opportunity to rest in its shade.

"Hungry..." he mumbles to himself.

Gain 1 Hunger.

Rested, Qorc continues north. As the stench grows unbearable, you realize what you previously thought was a ridge of stone is actually a massive slab of meat. It reaches hundreds of feet into the sky and stretches across the desert for miles. You see Carrion Scavengers circling and diving at the mass high above.

After a few minutes of walking down the length of the meat, you spot an opening about thirty feet up its side. It appears to be an open vein or orifice of some kind. Qorc tries to scramble up, but the slick surface provides no purchase.

If Qorc has something to help him climb up, Turn to 24. Otherwise, you have no choice but to return to the gates. Turn to 20.

28

Qorc climbs through the tunnel and emerges in a large expanse open to the sky. The whole thing is about five hundred feet across, and the sides slope down to a small hill in the center. There, sunlight glints off something made of glass.

"That is it!" Qorc exclaims as he begins running down the slope.

"Wait, wait! What about the vibration? Something must be causing it!"

Qorc pays no attention to your warnings and sprints to the hill. Embedded in it is a wine bottle four sizes larger than normal.

"A Jeroboam! We found one!" He begins frantically tugging on the bottle to free it from the meat.

As soon as he lays his hands on the bottle the vibration, which had been growing louder as you approached the center, suddenly stops. You hear an animalistic yawn, and from around the hill pads a sleepy-looking tiger. Its body is longer and plumper than the ones from outside The Spence, and its legs poke out from a bun that envelopes its sides and belly. Shallow, horizontal slices line its back from head to tail, mimicking the stripes you'd normally expect. When it sees Qorc, it starts and drops into a crouch, growling fiercely.

The **Hot Dog Tiger** has a **Health of 12**. When you've dealt enough damage to kill it, **Turn to 39**. Remember, unless you've found a way to block the smell, you do one less damage during this fight.

Quickly slash. (Deal 3 damage, plus any modifications from Hunger) Turn to 32.

Trust with all your power. (Deal 5 damage, plus any modifications from Hunger) Turn to 34.

Parry any potential attacks. Turn to 26.

29

The Scavenger watches you with a red-ringed eye but makes no move. Slowly, Qorc edges towards the opening. Never taking his eyes off the bird, he inadvertently steps into a large pile of droppings. His foot slips from under him with a squelch and he falls flat on his back. Startled, the bird leaps off its perch and dives at Qorc. He scrambles through the mess, narrowly dodges a blow from the Scavenger's beak, and rolls out of the crack.

Back in the burning sun, he jumps to his feet and points you at the opening. After it becomes clear the bird isn't going to pursue him, Qorc wipes grime and feathers from his face and starts the trek back to the gates.

Gain 1 Trust. Qorc has found a Carrion Feather and adds it to his Items. Turn to 20.

30

Check Trust: 1. If less, Qorc is baffled by your suggestion to trudge into empty desert and turns his attention to one of the landmarks instead. Turn to 20.

Qorc marches into the desert. The salt is treacherous footing and the going is slow. In an hour's time, the arches are still visible on the horizon.

"This isn't getting us anywhere," he says. "Let's head back." You're about to agree when you notice something shine in the salt. Investigating, Qorc discovers a nugget of petrified gristle. It is the same translucent, murky yellow as a goat's eye. Pocketing it, Qorc makes the long trek back to the arches.

Add gristle to Qorc's items. Note that it is a trinket.

Head north towards the stone ridge. Turn to 27.

Head west towards the bleached skull. Turn to 22.

Head east towards the pile of femurs. Turn to 18.

Or travel through an arch. (Formaticorum: 12, Crisp Quag: 40, Frozen Wastes: 70)

31

You feel the wind slide past your blade as Qorc whips you around into the tiger, scoring a shallow hit. The tiger responds with a swipe of its heavy paw. Qorc takes a nasty slash as he rolls out of the way.

Reduce Health by 1.

He quickly rises to his feet just as the tiger swings again.

Snap around and slash. Turn to 37.

Engage and thrust. Turn to 34.

Defend and parry. Turn to 38.

32

The tiger suddenly leaps forward, claws outstretched. Qorc slashes wildly at the animal and scores a hit, but not before the tiger is able to rake its claws across his chest.

Reduce Health by 2.

Wounded, the tiger warily circles around Qorc, its padded feet moving noiselessly over the slimy ground.

Take the initiative and slash again, Turn to 37.

Jab forward with a strong thrust. Turn to 35.

Watch for an attack and parry. Turn to 33.

33

The hot dog tiger and Qorc circle, each waiting for the other to make a move. Growing impatient, the tiger crouches back, ready to spring.

Act fast and slash. Turn to 32.

Lunge and thrust. Turn to 34.

Dodge and parry. Turn to 26.

34

Qorc thrusts wildly at the tiger, striking a long blow along its flank. However, this brings him close to those fangs and claws. The tiger lashes out. Qorc stumbles back with several new cuts and puncture wounds.

Reduce Health by 2.

The tiger eyes Qorc warily, waiting for him to make his move.

Regroup and slash, Turn to 37.

Regroup and thrust, Turn to 35.

Take the prudent course and parry. Turn to 33.

35

Qorc leaps forward with a fierce thrust, but he is far too slow and the tiger sees him coming well in advance. It easily leaps out of the way of the attack.

The thrust missed. No damage is dealt.

The tiger responds with a quick hop forward and tries to bat Qorc with its paw.

Quickly respond with a slash. Turn to 31.

Attempt to catch the tiger with a thrust. Turn to 34.

Parry the swipe. Turn to 38.

36

Qorc steps through the arch and almost loses his balance when he plunges a foot deep into murky green water. He splashes forward into a marshy bog amidst thick leafy vegetation. Here, wildly overgrown leeks, broccoli, and spinach—hundreds of times larger than normal—are intertwined with vines and creepers. In the distance, the cries of jungle birds mix with stranger hootings. Angled roots rise from the water and form arches behind you. In the distance, you can see a small line of smoke rising above the line of vegetation.

Head in the direction of the smoke, Turn to 44.

Explore the jungle, Turn to 49.

Or travel through an arch. (Formaticorum: 12, The Locker: 20, Frozen Wastes: 70)

37

Check Trust: 3. If less, Qorc reacts defensively and parries. Turn to 33.

Qorc slashes at the tiger. It tries to leap back but isn't quick enough. You slice across the bridge of its face. It's a shallow hit, but a hit nonetheless. Angry now, the tiger rears back on its haunches.

Quickly follow up with another slash. Turn to 31.

Leap in with a thrusting attack. Turn to 34.

Retreat and parry. Turn to 26.

38

You easily knock away the tiger's swipe. Not expecting such resistance, it falls back. It paces slowly and watches Qorc's every move.

Slash with speed. Turn to 37.

Take the opportunity to thrust. Turn to 35.

Fight cautiously and parry. Turn to 33.

39

Panting, Qorc strikes the final blow and the tiger falls. The mound is silent except for the sound of wind over the lip of the clearing.

If Qorc took damage during the battle, he finds one of the tiger's claws broke off in his shoulder. Add Hot Dog Claw to his items. Note this is a trinket.

Qorc steps up to the hill and jams you into the meat next to the jeroboam. With a pull and a pry, the bottle pops free. Qorc wipes off the meat juice and slides it into his pack. The bottle is so large that the neck of it extends up past the back of his head. He sheathes you without a word and heads back to the tunnel.

Gain 1 Trust.

*You've found a jeroboam of Château d'Iquam. Mark it on Qorc's items. **Turn to 12.***

40

*If this is your first visit, **Turn to 36.***

Qorc wades into the swamp, sending startled birds flapping into the air. Distant hoots speak of wilder things. The jungle presses in from all sides. A thin line of smoke rises above the vegetation not far off.

*Head in the direction of the smoke, **Turn to 44.***

*Explore the jungle, **Turn to 49.***

Or travel through an arch. (Formaticorum: 12, The Locker: 20, Frozen Wastes: 70)

41

Qorc takes a deep breath and readjusts his hold on your grip. He bursts into the clearing, yelling and swinging you above his head. The Gr'olives drop his pack and scatter. Laughing, Qorc chases them around the clearing until they disappear into the jungle.

"Ha! They are not so tough when you get the drop on them." He gathers up his pack and checks it for damage. Aside from an easily-repaired torn strap, it is undamaged and its contents seem intact.

"Did you notice how they all fled in the same direction?" you ask. "Maybe they know a way through the jungle." Qorc agrees. Shouldering his pack, he sets off after the Gr'olives.

*Gain 1 Trust and **Turn to 50.***

42

You urge Qorc further into the foliage. He pushes through the thick leaves and listens for the strange noises through the bird cries and insect chirps. Slipping around a celery stalk the size of a tree, he comes to a small clearing where you find a plant with a luscious, red strawberry as large as Qorc's head. From a gap in the canopy, you see that the thin line of smoke is not far from here.

Add the strawberry to Qorc's items. It can only be gathered once, but is large enough for 2 meals.

*Continue to follow the hooting sounds. **Turn to 47.***

*Head for the smoke instead. **Turn to 44.***

43

Qorc hands the Mache to the horticulturist. "Wonderful!" he exclaims. "I do hope it wasn't too difficult to find. Here, for your trouble. No, no. I insist." He pushes a coin into Qorc's hand.

"Now then, I do believe I promised you a map." The horticulturist tears a page from his sketchbook and starts scribbling frantically. "Left at the chayote... past the tomatillos... if you hit the asparagus you've gone too far. There! And I must thank you again, you've been a great help to science."

If Qorc is Starved, the Horticulturist offers to share his soup. Lose 1 Hunger.

Gain 1 Coin. Add Quag Map to Qorc's items. *You can follow it to the temple at any time by **Turning to 55.***

*Head into the depths of the jungle, **Turn to 51.***

*Return to the gates. **Turn to 40.***

44

*If this is your first visit to the camp, **Turn to 48.***

The Horticulturist looks up as you emerge from the jungle. "Ah, still exploring, I see. Any luck finding the temple, hmm? The offer is still on the table if you'd rather not traipse about all willy-nilly."

*If you haven't already, you can exchange Winter Mache for a map. **Turn to 43.***

If Qorc is Starved, the Horticulturist offers to share his soup. Lose 1 Hunger.

*Head into the depths of the jungle, **Turn to 51.***

*Return to the gates. **Turn to 40.***

45

You urge Qorc to wait and see what the Gr'olives are up to. They pull Qorc's stuff from the pack, examining it curiously and scattering it around. When they find the strawberry they tear into it with abandon.

"Wait, no!" yells Qorc, launching himself forward into the clearing. Startled, the Gr'olives drop the pack and scamper off into the jungle. "Ah, no..." says Qorc seeing the ruins of the strawberry spread about. "It didn't even have a chance." He gathers up his pack, which, aside from a torn strap, is unharmed.

"So... did you notice how they all fled in the same direction?" you ask. "Maybe they know a way through the jungle." Reluctantly Qorc agrees. Shouldering his pack, he sets off after the Gr'olives.

*Lose 1 Trust and gain 1 Hunger. **Turn to 50.***

46

You lead Qorc further through the swamp. You do eventually find a way out of the jungle and back to the arches, but not before sending Qorc stumbling through a bramble of particularly thorny

vines.

Reduce Health by 1. Turn to 40.

47

You head deeper and deeper into the jungle. Eventually, you realize you haven't heard any hoots for a while. In fact, the whole jungle seems to have gone silent. You're about to point this out to Qorc when something heavy lands on his back. He whips about, trying to dislodge his attacker, but it hangs on fiercely. Qorc is thrashing too wildly for you to get a good look at the creature. The most you can make out is that it's vibrant green and oval-shaped.

With a rip, the creature pulls the pack off Qorc's back and disappears into the vegetation.

"After it!" hisses Qorc.

He rushes into the foliage after the creature, but it is so quick and nimble that he's soon lost any trace of it. He searches frantically, slashing his way through leaves and vines, but to no avail. Finally, panting and sweaty, he collapses onto a boulder-sized Brussel sprout and buries his head in his hands.

You hear the hooting resume from close by. In fact, it's louder than before and sounds more excited.

"Hey, hear that?"

Qorc lifts his head, listening. "You think it is whatever stole my pack?"

"Only one way to find out."

Qorc follows the sound, more cautiously this time, and within a few minutes he is spying on a clearing where a half-dozen of the oval creatures pick through the pack's contents. They're about a foot tall with green, semi-translucent bodies. They hop around on thin little legs and arms. Their excited hooting reminds you of chimps, but their protruding eyes and wide mouths have a frog-like nature.

"Grapes?" whispers Qorc. Then he notices a bright red pimento sticking out of the top of one. "Or olives? Either way, I say we burst in there and teach them what happens when you steal my pack."

Agree and charge in, Turn to 41.

Tell Qorc to wait and see what they do next, Turn to 45.

48

A short trek through the swampy jungle and you emerge in a dry spot where a camp is set up. A tent just large enough for one person is pitched by a small fire, over which a pot of soup bubbles away. A bespectacled gentleman sits sketching in a notebook and who occasionally gives the soup a stir.

He looks up as Qorc approaches. "Ah, hello. Human are you? Formaticorumese, I gather. Welcome! It's good to see a civilized face here in the wilds."

The gentleman gestures for Qorc to sit and begins to spoon up a bowl of soup. "Now, judging from your attire and that blade you have there, I presume you're in search of the temple."

"Temple?" asks Qorc.

"The Cucurbita Pepo temple. No? I'm surprised. A tribe of courgettes live in out the Quag. Evolved magically with the vegetable jungle and everything else. Their temple is said to house all sorts of treasures. Ah, so you are interested! It's not for me, mind. I'm just a simple horticulturist,

here to catalogue the plants of the Quag. Who knows what might have grown from the simple selection I hisa once stored here? It's very exciting! But, ahem, yes... the temple. As I was saying, far too dangerous for me, but I do know where it is. I'd be happy to draw you a map. Ah, but, well you see... there is a species of Mache that only grows in the tundra. Far too temperate here. I'd love to add it to my studies, though. If you could bring me a sample, I'll draw you a map."

Qorc grunts a thanks at the offer and gets up to leave. "Do be careful out there," says the horticulturist in parting. "If you're ever in need of sustenance, do return. There's always a place for a friend at my table."

*If you have the Winter Mache, you can exchange it for a map. **Turn to 43.***

Lose 1 Hunger.

*Return to the gates, **Turn to 40.***

*Search the jungle for the temple on your own, **Turn to 51.***

49

*Check Trust: 1. If less, Qorc is unwilling to plunge into the jungle without a guide. **Turn to 40.***

Qorc splashes through the water and is soon pushing through the plants and vegetables. The sky is obscured by rutabaga leaves and broccoli branches. He trudges deeper in, using you to cut away vines.

"Wait," says Qorc, suddenly stopping. "Did we not pass that stalk of Chard just a few minutes ago? Where do you think you are taking us?"

"To the d'Jquam?"

"Well, which way is it?"

"I'm... not exactly sure. Somewhere in this swamp. Not far, I think."

"You had better find the way quick."

Lose 1 Trust, then:

*Press on, there's got to be a way through somewhere. **Turn to 46.***

*Follow the hooting sounds in hopes that whatever's making them can help. **Turn to 42.***

50

Qorc follows the Gr'olive's trail through the jungle. Before long, you spy a stone temple rising above the tops of the vegetables. Pushing through one last wall of foliage, you find yourself in a large clearing with the temple at its center. Gr'olives are perched on stone pillars and ancient statues that cover its surface. There seems to be an altar at the temple's base. Even from this distance, you can see a huge wine bottle perched on the altar, guarded by a group of cucumber men armed with spears.

"The d'Jquam!" exclaims Qorc! He tightens his fist on your grip.

"Wait," you caution. "Look. There's a door in the temple by the altar. If there's another way into the temple, we can sneak through it and not get skewered by a bunch of pickles."

Qorc grunts. "Not the way I would do it, but perhaps your idea has merit." He circles around the edge of the jungle, and sure enough, there's a small opening in the far side of the temple.

Making sure he's out of sight from any guards, he sprints across the clearing and into the opening.

Turn to 53.

51

Check Trust: 1. If less, Qorc is unwilling to plunge into the jungle without a guide. Turn to 40.

Vines and vegetables crowd Qorc from all sides as soon as he enters the deep jungle. He cuts through brush as best he can, but the work is hard and progress is slow. After a couple of hours, he comes across a path made in the underbrush by what is obviously a large animal.

Follow the path, Turn to 54.

Keep pushing through the thick jungle, Turn to 56.

Return to the camp. Turn to 44.

52

Qorc drops the ice into the tureen. Within just a few moments it has melted away, turning the soup ice cold. Qorc takes a ladle from the tureen and tries a spoonful.

"Not what I was expecting," he muses, "but not bad." He follows behind the slowly ambling Gazpágos Tortoise, eating his fill. Once finished, he heads back into the jungle with renewed vigor.

Set Hunger to Stuffed, then Turn to 56.

53

The tunnel is long, straight, and silent. You can see a dim light shining from an opening at the far end. About halfway down the tunnel Qorc comes to a door set in the wall. Pushing on it, he finds it locked.

"It is not a complicated catch," he says, examining the keyhole. "I could open it if I had the right tool, something long and thin. A piece of wire, or needle... I could even make do with a bird's feather."

If Qorc has an appropriate tool, he can pick the lock by Turning to 57.

Leaving the door behind, Qorc continues to the end of the tunnel. You peer out into a large shadowy chamber. It appears to be free from guards, but dozens of Gr'olives are perched on carvings that line the walls. Cautiously, Qorc enters the chamber.

(If you've already acquired the jeroboam from the temple, you find nothing else of value here and return to the gates. Turn to 40.)

Turn to 61.

54

Qorc follows the path through the underbrush. It isn't long before he comes upon its maker. A giant tortoise is slowly pushing its way through the underbrush, crushing leaves and vines under its heavy feet. Instead of a shell, the tortoise is laboring under a heavy tureen filled with a steaming

red liquid. Qorc licks his lips.

*Remind Qorc he's looking for a temple, not a turtle, and urge him to continue the search. **Turn to 56.***

*Leave him to his own devices. **Turn to 58.***

*Return to the camp. **Turn to 44.***

55

Qorc follows the map through the jungle. It's well drawn with clearly labeled landmarks, so it is not long before he finds his destination. Pushing through one last wall of foliage, Qorc discovers a large clearing with the temple at its center. Grape-olive creatures are perched on the stone pillars and ancient statues that cover its surface, and there looks to be an altar at its base. Even from this distance you can see a huge wine bottle perched on the altar. However, it is guarded by a group of cucumber men armed with spears.

"The d'Jquam!" exclaims Qorc! He tightens his fist on your grip.

"Wait," you say. "Look. There's a door in the temple by the altar. If there's another way into the temple, we can sneak through it and not get skewered by a bunch of pickles."

Qorc grunts. "Not the way I would do it, but perhaps your idea has merit." He circles around the edge of the jungle, and sure enough, there's a small opening in the far side of the temple. Making sure he's out of sight from any guards, he sprints across the clearing and into the opening.

Turn to 53.

56

*(If you've already acquired the jeroboam from the temple, Qorc wanders in the jungle for a few hours before finds his way back to the gates. **Turn to 40.**)*

You're making slow progress through the jungle when you hear a sudden cracking sound from under Qorc's feet. Before he can react, he falls through a thin mesh of celery into a deep pit. He manages to grab a handful of vines as he falls, but they aren't strong enough to hold him. With a hard thump, he lands amidst a collection of vines, leaves, and other debris.

Reduce Health by 1.

It's immediately apparent there's no way out of the pit. Its sandy sides crumble away as soon as Qorc attempts to climb out. He's in the process of weaving several of the vines together to make a lasso when a squashed, misshapen face appears over the side of the pit.

"An intruder, eh? Very well. Come with me."

A ladder is lowered into the pit. When Qorc emerges, he finds himself surrounded by five cucumber men. Four of them brandishing wicked looking spears, and the fifth—the one with the squashed face—is wearing ornate robes and seems to be the leader. With a gesture, he indicates a path through the jungle.

"This way, if you please."

Qorc doesn't have much of a choice, as the guards force him to follow the squashed face down the path with jabs of their spears.

Qorc has acquired a vine lasso. If he gets out of this situation, it might help him climb to otherwise unreachable areas. Add it to his Items.

The cucumbers prod Qorc through the jungle to a large clearing with the temple at its center. Grape-olive creatures are perched on stone pillars and ancient statues, hooting like monkeys. The cucumbers take Qorc past an altar at the base of the temple where a large glass winebottle sits in a place of reverence.

"The d'Jquam..." whispers Qorc.

The lead cucumber turns at the sound of his voice. "Ah, so my suspicions were right. You've come to steal the relic of Saint Ihisa."

The guardsmen drive Qorc forward into the temple. The interior is composed of a hollow, shadowy chamber. More of the hooting creatures sit on carvings lining the walls. The head cucumber steps forward to address this strange congregation.

"Sacred beast of Cucurbita Pepo, I bring a nullifidian who seeks to steal our sacred relic. Please, show him the mercy of Saint Ihisa." Then, without another glance at Qorc, he retreats from the temple. The guards follow him and shut the heavy doors behind them, leaving Qorc alone in the dark chamber.

Turn to 61.

57

Cautiously, Qorc works at the lock. It only takes a minute of fiddling before he emits a small grunt of satisfaction. He pushes the door open a crack and peers through. Inside is an unoccupied storage room. Various religious paraphernalia such as candles and chimes line the shelves. Qorc grabs a few of the more expensive-looking ones and slips them into his pack.

Add 3 holy objects to Qorc's items. Note that they are trinkets.

As Qorc is going through the stash, you see him pick up a tassel. Just as he is about to toss it aside, you stop him.

"Wait! I can use that."

"You? How?"

"I can sense a magical power in it. Tie it to my pommel."

Qorc attaches the tassel and you feel a surge of power travel up your being.

Add Healing Spell to one of your three spots on the Character Sheet. This magic allows you to raise Qorc's Health by one step any time during a fight, once per each battle.

Finding nothing else of value in the storeroom, Qorc continues to the end of the hall. You peer out into a large shadowy chamber that appears to be free from any guards. However, dozens of Gr'olives are perched on the carvings that line the walls. Cautiously, Qorc enters the chamber.

Turn to 61.

58

If Qorc is carrying a substantial amount of ice, Turn to 52.

Qorc catches up with the tortoise. He immediately grabs the ladle from the tureen and downs a large mouthful of the piping hot soup.

"Arg!" he cries, dropping the ladle. Frantically waving his hands to cool his burnt tongue, he pulls you from the scabbard. "Why didn'th you stop me?"

His pride hurt more than anything, he sulks back into the jungle.

Lose 1 Trust

Keep exploring the jungle. Turn to 56.

Return to camp. Turn to 44.

59

Check Trust: 3. If less, Qorc pulls you up to parry instead. Turn to 65.

Qorc slashes, making a shallow cut into the King Gr'olive's mass of flesh. The momentum of the attack pulls Qorc safely out of harm's way as the King Gr'olive springs forward. Enraged, the King strikes out with its sticky, whip-like tongue.

Attempt another slashing attack. Turn to 62.

Trust forward. Turn to 64.

Fall back and parry. Turn to 67.

60

Check Trust: 4. If less, Qorc retreats and parries instead. Turn to 63.

Seeing an opening, Qorc dashes in and slashes at the Gr'olive's body. The King is too slow to avoid the blow. Qorc's long cut sends green blood splashing. The King responds by leaping forward.

Slash again. Turn to 59.

Meet the attack with a thrust. Turn to 64.

Parry the blow. Turn to 65.

61

Suddenly a loud, echoing belch fills the chamber. The Gr'Olives stop hooting and in the silence you hear a something in a dark corner start to stir. Wet, thunderous footsteps echo against the walls as it moves forward.

A massive Gr'olive, easily ten times the size of the others, steps into the dim light. Its sickly green body is mostly composed of a gaping mouth filled with massive slabs of teeth. It pulls itself along on squat thin limbs in a manner that reminds you of a bloated bullfrog. On the top of its pimento rests a tiny crown.

The King Gr'olive peers at Qorc with its beady eyes, and lets out another deafening belch. Qorc draws you from your scabbard and prepares for a fight.

The **King Gr'olive** has a **Health of 14**. When you've dealt enough damage to kill it, **Turn to 69**.

The King Gr'olive rears back on its haunches, tensing its leg muscles. Qorc holds you ready, his palms slick with sweat.

Make a quick slash. (Deal 3 damage, plus any modifications from Hunger) Turn to 59.

Thrust forward with a powerful strike. (Deal 5 damage, plus any modifications from Hunger) Turn to 64.

Parry any potential attacks. Turn to 65.

62

Qorc slashes at the King's tongue, cutting into it as it slams into him. He's sent flying back into the floor. Shaken, he pulls himself to his feet and prepares for the next attack.

Reduce Health by 1.

The King belches a challenge, setting Qorc's ears to ringing.

Jump forward and slash. Turn to 60.

Charge with a powerful thrust. Turn to 68.

Wait and parry. Turn to 63.

63

Qorc and the Gr'olive circle each other, neither making a move. Then, with a quickness you wouldn't expect from its size, the King leaps forward.

Snap forward with a slash. Turn to 59.

Lunge forward with a thrust. Turn to 64.

Retreat and parry. Turn to 65.

64

Qorc and the King Gr'olive lunge forward at the same moment. Qorc deals a thrusting blow that cuts deep, but is smacked to the ground in the process.

Reduce Health by 1.

The King Gr'olive hangs back, watching you warily.

Slash quickly. Turn to 60.

Charge and thrust. Turn to 68.

Be cautious and parry. Turn to 63.

65

The King Gr'olive springs forward. Anticipating the attack, Qorc turns it aside with ease. The King watches to see what Qorc will do next.

Make a quick slash. Turn to 60.

Trust with might. Turn to 68.

Hang back and parry. Turn to 63.

66

Qorc's feet crunch in snow as he steps through the arch. He wraps his arms around himself in a feeble attempt to fend off a blast of cold wind.

"Welcome to the Wastes," you tell him. Qorc is standing at the crest of a wave overlooking an endless frozen sea where green-gray waves caught mid-turmoil stand like mountains under an overcast sky. A harsh wind blows through their valleys forming an eerie high-pitched keen. A handful of arches made of glittering ice stand at the top of this wave, allowing passage to other realms.

"W-what is this place?" Qorc asks through chattering teeth.

"Every good pantry needs an icebox. Ihsa used the ice here to keep the rest of The Spence fresh, back before he died and things went wild."

"How is that supposed to work?"

If you had shoulders, you would shrug them. "I don't know. Magic?"

Qorc grunts. "How do you expect to find the d'Jquam out here? It is endless."

"If I had to guess," you reply. "I expect it would be down there."

Qorc turns. Behind him is a vast, motionless whirlpool spirals down into the ice ocean. A dozen sailing ships lie caught in its frozen grasp and, at the maelstrom's nadir, a three-master sits half-submerged.

Due to the freezing cold, Qorc fights with a disadvantage while in The Frozen Wastes. He does -1 Damage unless he has something to wear against the cold.

Slide straight down the whirlpool towards the ship at its bottom. Turn to 75.

Follow the curve of the whirlpool around to one of the smaller ships. Turn to 72.

Or travel through an arch. (Formaticorum: 12, The Locker: 20, Crisp Quag: 40)

67

Check Trust: 3. If less, Qorc slashes at the tongue. Turn to 62.

Qorc quickly brings you up to defend himself from the lashing tongue. The blow knocks Qorc into the air, but he nimbly tucks and rolls, managing to land on his feet. He's winded but unhurt. The King continues the assault, whipping his tongue around for another strike.

Slash quickly. Turn to 62.

Thrust powerfully. Turn to 64.

Parry prudently. Turn to 65.

68

With a mighty battle cry, Qorc rushes forwards to run the Gr'olive through. The King simply hops to the side and Qorc goes stumbling past.

Qorc's attack misses and does no damage.

The King lashes his tongue towards Qorc's back, but Qorc manages to spin around in time meet the attack.

*Slash at the tongue. **Turn to 62.***

*Continue with your momentum and thrust again. **Turn to 64.***

*Parry the blow. **Turn to 67.***

69

The King Gr'olive falls with a heavy thud. The crown slips from his head and rolls to Qorc's feet. The other Gr'olives slap the temple carvings, but they seem too afraid to do anything besides hoot and yell. Qorc picks up the crown. It's made of cheap tin, but the glass gems embedded in it might be worth a handful of coins.

Add 4 Gr'olive Gems to Qorc's items. Note they are trinkets.

Crossing the temple, Qorc pushes open the double doors that lead to the altar outside. There are no guards in sight. Perhaps the commotion of the battle chased them away. Qorc strides to the altar unopposed and hefts the giant bottle of wine from its place of honor. It is easily four sizes larger than a normal bottle, and filled with a wine of deep mahogany. Qorc stuffs it into his pack and lets out whoop of triumph.

"You're welcome," you say as Qorc crosses the clearing back to the jungle, and ultimately, Formaticorum.

"Aw, I could have found it myself. Easy." Still, you can't help but notice that he is resting his hand on your pommel as he makes his way back to the gates.

Gain 1 Trust.

*You've found a jeroboam of Château d'Jquam. Mark it on Qorc's items. **Turn to 12.***

70

*If this is your first visit, **Turn to 66.***

You stand at the top of a wave on the frozen ocean. The whirlpool plunges below, ships caught in it like insects in a web. The galleon at the bottom tempts you with the thought of the treasures it might hold.

*Slide straight down the whirlpool towards the bottom. **Turn to 75.***

*Follow the curve of the whirlpool around to one of the smaller ships. **Turn to 72.***

Or travel through an arch. (Formaticorum: 12, The Locker: 20, Crisp Quag: 40)

71

Check Trust: 3. If less, Qorc refuses to climb the icy scramble that leads to the hull for fear of falling. Turn to 77.

It takes some effort, but Qorc manages the short but tough climb up to the hull of the broken schooner. There isn't much left inside besides broken crates and empty barrels. Whatever supplies the ship was carrying were lost when the schooner was ripped apart. However, Qorc searches behind a pile of broken planks and finds a small packet of gunpowder, fuses, and a striking flint. He tucks the packet carefully into his pack. A thorough searching reveals nothing else of worth, and Qorc makes the short climb back down to the spiraling path.

Add Firing Kit to Qorc's items. Turn to 77.

72

You spot a small ship frozen in the spiraling waves near the lip of the whirlpool. The majority of its hull is embedded in the ice, and its mast can be seen jutting out at an odd angle.

Enter the forecastle. Turn to 74.

Climb the mast. Turn to 76.

Continue down the spiral. Turn to 77.

Climb up the whirlpool to the arches. Turn to 70.

73

The wreckage of the schooner lies scattered across a wide ledge of whirlpool. Most of it is useless. Half-buried planks, shattered decking, and broken mast poles are frozen into weird structures. Two pieces of wreckage are of note. The first is a collection of pieces from the ship's bulkhead that form a sort of shelter. The second is an iron cannon that is buried into the ice at a skewed angle.

Explore the shelter. Turn to 79.

Examine the cannon. Turn to 82.

Return to the spiraling path. Turn to 77.

74

You can only advance a few feet into the forecastle before you discover the way is blocked by a wall of solid ice. Peering into the ice, you can make out part of a table covered with maps, navigation tools, and a loaf of bread. Qorc licks his lips.

"That thing has to have been frozen for centuries," you protest in futility as Qorc pulls you from the scabbard and starts to hack at the ice. After a few minutes of strenuous digging, he had hacked away a substantial amount of ice but is barely any closer to reaching the bread. Dejected, he leaves the forecastle, sparing the loaf a sad final glance.

Gain 1 Hunger. Qorc has found a Substantial Amount of Ice. Add it to his items. Because the amount is so substantial, you won't have to worry about it melting before putting it to use. Turn to 72.

75

Qorc takes a few tentative steps down the side of the frozen whirlpool before he slips and falls. He tumbles and bounces on the steep slope several times before coming to a stop on an icy protrusion. He's significantly closer to the galleon, but has gained several nasty bruises in the processes.

Reduce Health by 1 step and lose 1 Trust.

*Continue down the spiral. **Turn to 83.***

*Begin the hard climb back up. **Turn to 77.***

76

Qorc climbs the rigging to the top of the mast. The new vantage point gives you a good view of the galleon trapped at the whirlpool's center. Other than view, there's not much of interest here.

On the climb back down, Qorc gets an idea. He cuts away a few of the ropes and stuffs them into his pack.

*Qorc has found Rigging. Add it to his items. If you find hooks to combine it with, it will make a useful tool for attaining otherwise unreachable areas. **Turn to 72.***

77

Further down the spiral you come across an old schooner that was ripped apart as the sea froze. A large section of its hull is still intact a short climb from where Qorc stands, while the rest of it is scattered in pieces nearby.

*Climb to the ship's hull. **Turn to 71.***

*Explore the scattered debris. **Turn to 73.***

*Continue down the whirlpool. **Turn to 83.***

*Retreat up towards the arches. **Turn to 72.***

78

Qorc clings to the railing to keep his balance on the sharply tilting deck. A thin coating of frost makes the precarious footing even more dangerous.

Slowly, Qorc makes his way towards a hatch in the deck. Suddenly, he slips on the frost and goes careening down the ship. He manages to catch himself on the railing just before sliding into a pair of iron hooks hanging from one of the masts. Despite their age, they look as sharp as the day they were made. Perhaps they might prove useful.

*Qorc has found a pair of Hooks. Add them to his items. If you find rigging to combine them with, they will make a useful tool for attaining otherwise unreachable areas. **Turn to 81.***

79

A section of the schooner's bulkhead has formed something of a shelter here, and as Qorc ducks under a section of broken boards you discover something you never expected to see in this icy wasteland. There are plants growing here. Part of the ship's cargo must have been seeds and soil.

Tiny bright green leaves dot the ground around a smashed crate. In the ice, you can see a thin layer of spilled dirt just below the surface. The shelter must protect this spot from the harsh wind,

creating conditions just right for a wild garden to bloom.

Qorc pulls a few of the leaves out of the ice and munches on them.

“Not bad,” he says between bites. “Nutty.”

Reduce Hunger by 1. Qorc has found Winter Mache. Add it to his items. Turn to 73.

80

Qorc pours gunpowder into the cannon, chips out a cannon ball, and loads it. He preps a fuse and the cannon is ready to fire. However, because its base is frozen in place, there’s no way to change the trajectory. It is currently aimed across the whirlpool at a non-descript swirl of ice.

“Are you really going to do this?” you ask.

A gleam in Qorc’s eye is his answer as he strikes the flint and lights the fuse. He has just enough time to dive behind some wreckage before the cannon fires. There’s an deafening crack as the cannon explodes. Shards of ice rain down around Qorc, and, when he peers around the wreckage, the whole edge of the outcropping the cannon was on is gone.

On the far side of the whirlpool you watch as a section of ice knocked loose by the the shot slides down the slope of the vortex, building in momentum until it slams into the galleon at the bottom.

“Okay then,” you say.

Turn to 73.

81

Qorc makes his way through one of the upper decks. The stuffed animal specimen lining the walls make it apparent this ship was part of a scientific expedition. Long-toothed great cats, horse-sized birds with terrible talons, and deer with antlers growing from their snouts all stuffed and mounted on stands. Qorc makes his way slowly through the eerie silence towards a ladder leading further down.

If Qorc has a Desert Yam, Turn to 84.

Proceed down the ladder. Turn to 86.

Return outside to the base of the Galleon. Turn to 83.

82

An old iron cannon rests here, trapped in the ice at a skewed angle. It’s muzzle points out across the expanse of the whirlpool. There are a few cannonballs buried near it, but none so deep that Qorc wouldn’t be able to free them with a little digging. The problem rests with the lack of gunpowder. Without any, the cannon is just a relic from when this ocean wasn’t a frozen desolation.

If Qorc has a Firing Kit, he can try firing the cannon by Turning to 80. Otherwise, Turn to 73

83

The galleon sits frozen at a desperate angle at the bottom of the whirlpool, its prow rising towards the ash-gray sky. From here, the icy swirls of the vortex create a dizzying sensation despite the stillness of the place.

The galleon itself is huge. Even with approximately half of it buried in the frozen ocean, there is still much to explore. A weave of netting dangling down its side provides easy access to the deck.

Climb the netting. Turn to 78.

If you've fired the cannon, you can inspect the damage. Turn to 85.

Head back up the spiral towards the arches. Turn to 77.

84

Suddenly, one of the stuffed specimen leaps at Qorc and knocks him to the ground. Sniffing through his pack, it soon finds the yam and pulls it free. Qorc raises himself onto his elbows and finds the Hound sitting back, munching contently.

"What th-? How did you get here?" asks Qorc, sitting up. The Ham Hound barks and licks his face with its big meaty tongue.

"I guess the same way we did," you reply. "It must have gone through one of the gates. Came down to the ship looking for food."

"Crazy mutt. I thought it was one of these stuffed creatures." The Hound barks and runs off among the specimen. "Hey! Wait!" Qorc leaps to his feet and follows. He dashes in between a stuffed hog the size of a rhinoceros and what appears to be a 12-foot-tall sloth. He finds the Ham Hound sitting by a knothole in a floorboard, a big dopey grin on its face.

"Hmm... I feel a magical energy coming from here. But it's faint..." you say.

Qorc kneels down and pulls the board free. In the space between decks someone shoved a small metal box. When he opens it, the magical energy increases ten-fold. Inside is a short length of golden wire.

"Wind that around my handle."

Qorc does so and you feel the energy flow through you and travel down your length to the tip of your blade.

Add Magic Blast to one of your three spots on the Character Sheet. This magic fires a beam of magical energy that cannot be avoided. It deals 4 damage and can be used any time during a fight, once per each battle.

The Ham gives Qorc's face another lick then bounds off into the darkness of the ship. Qorc spends a few minutes searching for it, but it has disappeared.

"It probably headed back to the gates," you reassure him. "I wouldn't worry. It seems good at finding food."

"I guess..." says Qorc with a backwards glance, then proceeds to the ladder and climbs down.

Turn to 86.

85

You go to the hole in the bulkhead where the ice knocked loose by the cannonball crashed into the galleon. Qorc climbs through and finds himself in one of the mid-decks. This part of the ship

seems to have been used for storage, since it is full of crates and barrels strapped into netting. Most of it is useless: old spices long gone to dust and faded rolls of fabric.

Qorc finds a small chest tucked amongst the crates. Inside, there is a handful of silver coins of a make you don't recognize. They're stamped with a coat of arms on one side and a depiction of the globe on the other. As Formaticorum trades in any currency regardless of origin, Qorc pockets them quickly. There's not much else here. You can either climb stairs to an upper deck or retreat through the rend in the hull.

Gain 1 Trust and 3 Coins.

Head upwards. Turn to 81.

Return outside. Turn to 83.

86

Qorc climbs down the ladder past the mid-decks to the bottom the ship. Here, the deck slopes down only a few dozen yards before ending in a sheet of ice where the ship meets the sea. The hold is empty except for two things. First and most notable is a shaggy mammoth encased in a massive block of ice. Unlike the specimens upstairs, this creature doesn't appear to be stuffed. Instead, it looks to have been cut out of a glacier or mountainside. Its two curved tusks and half of its trunk are free from the ice, as are its four legs below the knees.

The other object of interest in the hold is a large wine bottle, about four times normal size, resting against the ice sheet.

"The d'Jquam..." Qorc whispers and begins making his way towards it down the tilt of the deck. As he does, the ice-encased mammoth suddenly swings around. It's frozen, but not dormant! It's glassy eyes peer out from inside the ice, unmoving and unfocused. It lowers its tusks towards Qorc and charges.

*The Ancient Mammoth has a **Health of 17**. When you've dealt enough damage to kill it, **Turn to 96**. Remember, unless you've found some protection against the cold, you do one less damage during this fight.*

Quickly slash. (Deal 3 damage, plus any modifications from Hunger) Turn to 88.

Thrust with force. (Deal 5 damage, plus any modifications from Hunger) Turn to 92.

Parry with caution. Turn to 94.

87

Check Trust: 4. If less, Qorc's nerves get the best of him. He falls back, parrying. Turn to 90.

Qorc thrusts you into the ice protecting the mammoth. You feel your blade slam into its skin. It rears back in pain, allowing Qorc to pull you free. Angry, the mammoth swings its trunk down at him.

Slash at the trunk. Turn to 91.

Thrust into the ice again. Turn to 89.

Parry the blow. Turn to 93.

88

Qorc swings you at the charging mammoth. The slash strikes near the spot where the trunk emerges from the ice. Chips of ice dance from the edge of your blade, but the effect is minimal.

The ice protects the mammoth. This slash deals 1 less damage than normal.

Seconds later, the mammoth slams into Qorc, sending him flying against the bulkhead. He picks himself up to find the creature looming above him. It swings around its trunk for a whipping blow.

Reduce Health by 2.

*Slash at the trunk. **Turn to 91.***

*Thrust mightily. **Turn to 89.***

*Parry the oncoming blow. **Turn to 93.***

89

Qorc thrusts you through the ice and into the mammoth's body. For his troubles, he receives a slap to the head from the mammoth's swinging trunk. He yanks you free from the ice just as the mammoth lowers its tusks and starts bearing down on him.

Reduce Health by 1.

*Slash quickly. **Turn to 88.***

*Thrust forward. **Turn to 92.***

*Parry. **Turn to 94.***

90

The mammoth stamps its feet in agitation while Qorc hangs back in a defensive stance. The two opponents face each other, neither making a move, when the mammoth launches forward and charges at Qorc.

*Slash at the oncoming animal. **Turn to 88.***

*Thrust into the rushing attack. **Turn to 92.***

*Attempt to parry the charge. **Turn 94.***

91

Qorc slashes at the trunk, cutting into the mammoth's exposed flesh. The slash isn't enough to turn aside the heavy trunk, and it slams into Qorc, sending him staggering backwards. Not wasting the opportunity to attack, the mammoth begins another charge, tusks lowered.

Reduce Health by 1.

*Slash at the onrushing mammoth. **Turn to 88.***

*Meet the charge with a thrusting blow. **Turn to 92.***

*Attempt to parry the charge. **Turn to 94.***

92

Check Trust: 3. If less, Qorc panics and slashes instead. Turn to 88.

Qorc meets the charge with a valiant thrust. You slam into the mammoth, penetrating the ice and cutting into its flesh. Seconds later, the mammoth slams into Qorc flinging him against the bulkhead. He staggers to his feet to find the mammoth looming over him. He quickly grabs you by the handle and pulls you from the ice. The mammoth starts from this sensation and stumbles backwards. It's unblinking eyes watching Qorc's every move.

Reduce Health by 2.

Slash. Turn to 95.

Thrust. Turn to 87.

Parry. Turn to 90.

93

Qorc turns the slap away with a well-timed parry. As he does so, your blade cuts along the trunk. Surprised, the mammoth backs away. It shuffles its feet, watching Qorc's next move.

Deal damage equal to a slash attack.

Slash at the creature. Turn to 95.

Thrust deep into the ice. Turn to 87.

Parry any incoming attacks. Turn to 90.

94

Qorc manages to bring you up into a defensive position just in time to meet the charge. The force of the blow lifts Qorc off his feet, but he manages to land nimbly and, aside from having his breath knocked out of him, is unharmed.

The mammoth swings towards Qorc, whipping its trunk around at him with vicious speed.

Quickly respond with a slash. Turn to 91.

Thrust hard. Turn to 89.

Turn aside the trunk with a parry. Turn to 93.

95

Qorc leaps at the wary animal. It attempts to dodge the blow, but the slash is too fast. However, the attack cuts into the ice instead of any of the exposed flesh. The mammoth responds by slapping its trunk down at Qorc.

The ice protects the mammoth. This slash deals 1 less damage than normal.

Continue the attack and slash again. Turn to 91.

Leap in and thrust. Turn to 89.

Parry the blow. Turn to 93.

96

The mammoth's legs stagger, it takes a few tentative steps, then collapses. The force of it slamming into the deck shakes the whole ship. The bottle of d'Jquam rocks and starts to fall. Qorc leaps for it and catches it just before it crashes into the frozen ocean surface. He turns back to the mammoth. Its ancient, black blood seeps from cracks in the ice, eyes still frozen open.

"What a monster," you say.

Qorc grunts in agreement. "But we got the d'Jquam."

He makes room for the bottle his pack. It's so large that the neck of it extends up and out of the bag. Once it is securely in place, he heads back to the ladder. As he passes the mammoth, he notices some chips of ivory that broke off the creature's tusk during the battle. He pockets them and then begins the long climb up and out of the whirlpool and back to Formaticorum.

Gain 1 Trust and four pieces of ivory. Add them to Qorc's items. Note they are trinkets.

*You've found a jeroboam of Château d'Jquam. Mark it on Qorc's items. **Turn to 12.***

97

Qorc crosses the Red Windsor dome, his back bent slightly from the weight of the three jeroboam clinking against each other in his pack.

"Ho, where is everyone?" Qorc stops and looks around. Usually the gates are filled with people traveling to The Spence's various regions, but now the dome is empty except for him and you.

A familiar voice echoes throughout the chamber. "I evacuated the building. Wouldn't want anyone interfering with our... transaction."

"Roplunde!" In front of the Entrance Arch, the one that leads out of The Spence and back to Ihisa's studio in the outside world, sits Roplunde. He has drawn in his legs so only the iron box that serves as his prison is visible.

"Do you know how much those bottles are worth?" he hisses. "They're Ihisa's greatest treasures. Absolutely priceless! You're going to give them to me if you know what's good for you. Just set the pack on the ground."

"I had to slay a mammoth to get these," says Qorc. "I am not giving them up to any catchpenny spider."

"Come now, Roplunde," you say. "This is absurd. What could you possibly do to threaten us?"

Suddenly, something pulls you free from the scabbard. Qorc spins around to see Rothschild dropping from a thread, brandishing you in his two forelegs.

"Now then, put the pack on the ground."

"How... how did you get out of your jail?" you stammer.

"Oh, I've been free of that box for years. I only wear it for convenience. Tends to put people off their guard. Now then, I'm not going to say it again. Put down the pack." He advances toward Qorc, waving you menacingly.

"No," says Qorc, his brow furrowed with determination.

"Your funeral then. It's no skin off my cephalothorax if you live or die." Roplunde leaps at Qorc and swings. You have no time to turn the blow, but perhaps, if you and Qorc are on the same page, you can save his life.

*Slash. **Turn to 98.***

*Thrust. **Turn to 99.***

98

Check Trust: 6. If less, read on. Otherwise, Turn to 100.

Qorc anticipates a thrust and spins to the side. Your blade cuts deep. He stumbles back, blood spilling out of a long gash across his chest. He slumps to the ground and tries to say something, but blood gurgles out instead.

"I'm... I'm sorry," you say as Roplunde scuttles over and begins pulling off the pack.

"See? You should have done what you were told in the first place. Oh well, no great loss. And I did get a fancy sword out of the bargain," he says holding you up to the light. "I'll be able to get a fair few coins for you."

"You're a monster..."

"I may be," says Roplunde pulling the pack over to his box. He sets you on the ground and swings open the barred window on the box. With surprising flexibility he squeezes his body in, and pops his legs through the holes in the side. Picking you up and hoisting the pack onto his back, he chuckles. "But I'm about to be a very rich monster."

And with that, he scuttles out of the dome, leaving Qorc, and your freedom, behind.

The End

99

Check Trust: 5. If less, read on. Otherwise, Turn to 100.

Qorc leaps backwards, anticipating a slash. Your blade penetrates deep into his chest. He gasps and falls to the ground.

"I'm sorry... I'm sorry," you whisper as blood spills out around your blade. But it's too late. He's already dead. Roplunde scuttles over and pulls the pack off Qorc's body.

"Thanks for finding these," he says, tapping a bottle. "I honestly didn't think you would be able to." He drags the pack over to his box. He swings open the barred window on the front and, with surprising flexibility, squeezes his body in. He hoists the pack onto his back and scuttles towards the dome's exit.

"What about me?" you call.

"What about you? You were such buddies I'm sure you won't mind spending some more time together." Roplunde's chuckles stay with you a long time. People will discover the body soon, and who knows what's going to happen to you. Perhaps one of them will be another Bearer. But you get the feeling you won't be free from The Spence for a long time.

The End

100

It's as if you and Qorc share one mind as he anticipates your attack and dodges smoothly around it. He closes the distance to Roplunde and brings his fist down on the spider's head. You clatter to the floor as Roplunde stumbles from the blow. Qorc snaps you up and brings you to bear.

"Okay. Alright. You got me." Roplunde moans. "Fair's fair, right? No hard feelings?"

"What should we do with him?" you ask.

Qorc glances at you, and then at the now defenseless spider.

"Kill him?"

"No..." you say. "Roplunde, get back in your box."

Sheepishly, Roplunde scuttles back to his jail. He swings the barred window open and, with surprising flexibility, he squeezes his body in. Qorc slams the window closed.

"There. That latch there." You say as Qorc examines the window. "I don't know how you got it open, Roplunde, but your days of freedom are over."

Qorc sticks your point past the bars and uses it to bend the locking mechanism closed.

"Noooooooo..." moans Roplunde. Qorc tests the window. Satisfied that it's secure, he slides you back into your scabbard.

Qorc strides over to the Entrance Gate, secures the world's rarest wine in his pack, then strides through. After so many years trapped in The Spence, you're free.

The End

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