
SWORDPLAYER

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Short Gamebook Fiction

RULES

Welcome to Swordplayer, a gamebook where you play a freewheeling duellist and expert in swordcraft. Discontented, your character will soon enter a convoluted testing ground of puzzles and death matches. Before the imperilment begins, however, you must know the rules, create the hero, and prepare for the most challenging short gamebook ever conceived.

SCORES

On a sheet of paper, write the following scores:

WAR 5

ACT 5

DON 5

EGO 5

OWN FIT FOE

1

The WAR score determines your sword fighting ability. This value gets pitted against enemies' WAR in battles.

Your ACT score, or reflexes, lets you avoid some battles by acting in time to escape detection.

DON indicates the quality of armour worn. A higher DON value means you can take more damage.

EGO represents your morals, rectitude, humanity, righteousness, and sociability. In Swordplayer, EGO lets you solve puzzles for hints; however, you can lose EGO points for Fighting Dirty (explained later).

Each score starts as 5, but you have another 5 points to distribute as desired. For maximum challenge, invest every point into EGO. Some character designs provide an easier quest than others, but any arrangement can win the game.

You will record any found items under the OWN list. FIT points determine your health and fitness. If they reduce to zero, your character dies and you must start a new game by making another character. Your FIT points start as *twice* your DON score. So you can start with a maximum of 20 FIT points if you chose to invest in a starting DON score of 10. The FOE points show how many foes you have recently slain. Life has turned rather dull of late, so you start with just 1 FOE point.

HOW TO USE ITEMS

Brawn, staunchness, and warrior's pluck will not suffice in the dungeon maze you will soon explore. One can only succeed in Swordplayer by collecting items and using them in various locations. The text will give an *item number* for each item found. You must record the item and its number (in parenthesis) under your OWN list. Often, an item gets destroyed upon using it, and you must cross it off the list.

In many rooms, the text will indicate that you can (or must) *use an item*. To do so, first choose an item to try from your OWN list. Save the current section so you can return there in case of a wrong item choice. Then, add your chosen item number to the current section number and turn to that new section. The text will indicate right away if you choose the proper item. Otherwise, you must turn back to the saved section and choose a different option.

Choosing the wrong item simply means you don't use it after more careful thought. In a few cases, though, applying the wrong tool can have devastating consequences.

You may only try *one* item at a time unless otherwise directed. Making another attempt requires leaving the room and re-entering. Using the right items in the proper areas may take some lateral thinking, but a high EGO score will provide hints for the toughest choices.

You wear scraps of armour picked off the battlefield and carry a beautifully crafted broadsword, far superior to what your opponents use. However, these do not count as “items” as described above.

LIMITED LIGHT

Swordplayer allows for backtracking and exploration of areas already visited. However, the text will require you to deduct an OIL unit roughly every four dungeon rooms. If you have zero OIL units remaining when the text demands the use of another, your adventure ends. You will stumble through the dark until capture by a guard patrol. Therefore, avoid roving into previously explored rooms unless you have new items to use in them.

Refuelling the torch lets you see deeper into the dungeon's adjacent rooms. Take advantage of this information to avoid going in circles. The oil item does not have an item number. Just keep track of how many oil units you have left.

SOLVING ANAGRAMS

Sometimes, the dungeon will reveal clues which call upon goodness of character. With a high enough EGO score, you may solve various anagrams—puzzles whereby you rearrange the letters of each word to get a phrase that makes sense. For instance, with the following anagram:

RAMS EAR STOOL

the letters in each word can rearrange to make:

ARMS ARE TOOLS

This provides a vital clue about the usefulness of any weapons you happen to find.

MAPPING THE DUNGEON

You may *not* draw a map until you have found a certain set of items. The text will indicate when to start mapping. If your adventure ends after starting a map, you may not reuse the information and instead must gather the required components again in a new game.

BATTLES

Swordplayer battles let you choose Attack or Defend moves action by action until you or the adversary dies. The text will explain what to do, so you can start playing right away without memorizing any procedures. Mastering the art of swordplay may take some practice. You will likely die many times and have to remake a new character. Each battle, though, will teach you more about the necessary tactics.

FIGHTING DIRTY

In battles, the text will sometimes provide the option to Fight Dirty. This involves feigning weakness, striking the most sensitive areas, tripping, backstabbing, distraction, faking blows, etc. Due to the cruel and ignoble nature of these tactics, you will always lose 1 EGO point for each Fight Dirty move as your humanity, honor, and self-respect depreciate. However, taking advantage of the Fight Dirty option will *always* grant you triple damage on your next attack!

If your EGO score reaches zero, you may *never* Fight Dirty again. Enemies will detect your savagery and can easily anticipate any tricks.

A clarification: If you keep choosing Defend after taking the Fight Dirty option, the tripled damage carries over until you finally do land a strike. The circumstances of the strike do not matter. You will do 3 points of damage after paying the EGO point, whether you outmatch the enemy's WAR score or you both hit each other simultaneously. This will make more sense once you engage in battle.

Only the best trained fencers such as yourself can Fight Dirty. But only the cleverest can press through this adventure, which may take hours. Watch for subtle hints in the text, as they can save your life. Now, begin by reading the BACKGROUND below.

BACKGROUND

Adventurer, mercenary, treasure hunter, freelance sword fighter—these titles have yet to garner the fame you deserve. Your recent meanderings for something bigger led you to Stumbling, a region of fertile farmlands ruled by knights and noble law. The trudge through their crimeless lands brought only more delays.

You remember standing before the mighty table of the Elite Righteous Select. Its council of fastidious and grizzled old cavaliers, each encased in gilded armour, judged you with a stoicism found only in icebergs.

“How dare you appear in these...grubby misshapen scraps fit for a blind bladesmith,” one of them said of your battered rig. Then, after some muttering among the mist of grey beards, “Prove yourself, vagabond. Destroy the evil lounging beneath Castle Ironhold. Then, we may consider having you labour for us.”

A gauntlet of steel scales rose to brush you from view. With strained etiquette, their austere squires ushered you out of the stony chamber, leaving just your fumbling shadows to protest on torchlit arches. Thrust outside, you vowed into the wind to prove yourself as the greatest swordplayer, one worthy of song, prestige, and legend.

Two days of wagon travel shuttled you across the feudally divided lands. Not one brigand's hat feather peeped over the horizon, and the simple carriage drivers never heard of bodyguards or hired hilts like you. They took only your tales for fare, as if parched for an ear's wisp of adventurism. You inquired of the danger lurking at your destination, Ironhold, and how it could trouble a landscape so dotted with castles and flags. But the passive folk knew nothing of evil and questing.

“...for all mages fell into their ashes long ago,” they said.

Even the last feckless peddler to let you off by the roadside shared this adage. He jostled his horses onward, taking the odour of delicious meats and wares with him. You turned toward the Endless Woods and shuddered in lonely anticipation. Your footloose life, a gleaming moment in the arms race against evil, could end in a black dungeon. Worse, no one would write of it.

Or perhaps, a man of letters will query a seasoned survivor of this venture. And perhaps you will put a story in his hand.

Now, you gaze upon the ancient Ironhold. Its mossy parapets house rotten wood and sagging towers. All mortar has fled from the masonry with the rain, leaving wrinkly brickwork stuffed with dead bats. Behind the ruin, a wall of tangled forest threatens to consume every stone like an incoming tide. Yet, the abandoned castle still stands, defying the pelting wind that wraps hair around your face and sings off the sword blade locked in your hand. The harassing gusts continue long after you enter the yawning gate.

Turn to **51**.

1

A skinny man in rags rushes at you with a raised shortsword. His kidnappers jail such peasants until suitably insane. This one does guard work for a few hours of freedom. Your blade rises in defence. Record his scores:

Brainwashed Peasant: WAR 4 FIT 2

Decide now if you will Attack or Defend, then turn to 78.

2

A seething orc charges in wielding a club. Orcs resemble apemen, but have green fur as camouflage in their jungle habitat. You've never seen them trained as patrollers until tonight. Your sword rises as if by its own will. Record the beast's scores:

Orc Guard: WAR 6 FIT 3

Decide now if you will Attack or Defend, then turn to 67.

3

A bearded man in black steps into your torchlight. You behold one of the cruel agents occupying this dungeon for whatever vile cause. He offers no words or answers, only death. His boney hand draws a long dagger from the blackest of shrouds, and you step to the challenge. Record his scores:

Cloaked Madman: WAR 5 FIT 2

Decide now if you will Attack or Defend, then turn to 87.

4

A tall and robust creature with green fur enters, waving his club like a flag. Freakish orcs of this size dominate their group in the wild; however, this one patrols the dungeon serving an elusive trainer. You lift your sword and squeeze extra hard, knees energetic and ready to bolt. Record the alpha male's scores:

Alpha Orc: WAR 8 FIT 4

Decide now if you will Attack or Defend, then turn to 74.

5

Something massive stomps your way. The black-furred monster must hunch his spine in two places just to enter the room. As the sasquatch straightens, you lift your torch to see beady eyes glaring through the wall of fur. He doesn't like you.

Some awful humans drugged the beast and dragged him from a passive life of nuts and berries. Now, he has nothing to chew on except intruders and a log the size of your leg. You hide behind your sword, feeling like a trapped insect. Record the following scores:

Sasquatch: WAR 10 FIT 5

Decide now if you will Attack or Defend, then turn to 76.

6

Your footsteps echo while treading into a nearly bare room. A faint buzzing drones from a large chest in the northeast corner. It has no lock device. Killer bees live inside, and a few come and go through an air hole in the lid. Opening this chest would first require something to scare off the territorial insects. You may use an item here. If you choose wrong or don't wish to use anything, then leave through the doorway to the west (turn to 8) or south (turn to 9).

7

The doorway leads to another empty room with an oddly deep closet in the east wall. Many cloth sacks hang in the back. They look tempting. You may retrieve the bags (turn to 91) or use an item here beforehand in case *something* happens. If you choose wrong or wish to skip the closet, leave through either the west (turn to 9) or south (turn to 10) doorway.

8

The next room has dozens of opened crates and old trunks. Though looted bare, they at least yield a hint: you now roam the storage areas of a vast dungeon. Huge supplies have accompanying traps, so beware of the surrounding rooms.

Your face springs up at the sound of someone approaching from the west. This room's three exits make it a thoroughfare for patrollers. A lone fighter like yourself should avoid confrontation in such a big stronghold. With an ACT score of 6 or more, you may rush through the east (turn to 6) or south (turn to 12) exits in time. If you lack enough ACT points or intend to go west, you must prepare to fight—*save this section* and turn to the current FOE number.

If you win, you hide the body in a crate and may choose west (turn to 11) or one of the exits mentioned above.

9

A waft of hot air slams you upon entering another room. The heat rises from a wide and shallow pit with metal surfaces. Candle-like flames burn from hundreds of small holes at the bottom and slowly char some discarded skeletons. This dungeon has clever methods of body disposal, rather telling of Stumbling's dark history.

Your torch dims. Deduct 1 OIL unit to relight it. One could hop down and search the black bones, if not for the flames. You can use an item here to extinguish them. If you choose wrong or do not wish to use anything, then leave via the north (turn to 6) or east (turn to 7) doorway.

10

You step through the doorway into a room filled with mounds of mouldy clothes. Prisoners of yore had their garb stripped and pile here.

The musty room has three exits, making it a junction for skulking denizens. As such, you soon hear loud footsteps approaching from a room to the north. An ACT score of 7 or more lets you flee through either the west (turn to 13) or south (turn to 14) doorways. If you lack enough ACT points or wish to go north, you'll have to fight whatever appears—*save this section*, and turn to the current FOE number.

If you win, you hide the body under some clothes and head north (turn to 7) or take one of the other two exits noted above.

11

You enter a prison with empty cells along the north and south walls. Some more bars in the floor seal off a cramped dwelling. It looks deep enough for an inmate to crouch and do nothing else. Some vague objects lie down there, but the lock mechanism has fused with corrosion. You may use an item on the floor bars. If you choose wrong or don't wish to use anything, leave via the west (turn to 15) or east (turn to 8) archway.

12

The doorway leads to an adjacent storeroom left vacant for centuries. Rectangles stamped in the floor dust show where heavy chests once sat. Only one remains in the southeast corner, forged from iron and having no lock mechanism—the kind you like.

Perhaps when the other treasure boxes speckled this place, they would have distracted you from noticing a missing block in the southwest ceiling corner. A trap surely awaits. If you want to open the chest with caution, turn to 93. You may use an item in the room beforehand as a precautionary device. If you choose the wrong item though, turn to 93. To skip the chest, leave through either the west (turn to 16) or North (turn to 8) exits.

13

You enter a picturesque study lined with bookshelves and ornate candle holders. A large desk in the centre shows signs of recent use, contrasting with the other rooms' disrepair. You may take a bottle of ink and a quill pen from its well stocked drawer if you haven't already. Add the pen (#27) and ink (#25) to your OWN list. The desk contains nothing else, and distant chatter deters any reading. However, you may use the pen and ink on a third item by combining all three item numbers and turning to the sum. *Save this section* and return here if you choose the wrong combination.

The talking comes from behind a bookcase at the south wall. Markings in the floor there reveal that the case swings open like a door, an overused secret passageway. You may enter to investigate the many mutterings behind it (turn to 94) or leave via the west (turn to 17) or east (turn to 10) doorway.

14

The adjacent room bears a haunting resemblance to the chamber of knightly councilmen who sent you here. A long bench with decorative seats, now filled with cobwebs, once propped up haughty inquisitors. The ring of stout chairs before it face a man-sized cage. Who knows how many villagers awaited the scrutiny and derision of nobles while pressed to those bars?

Voices of grumbling men vent in from the west doorway like ghosts on business. Leaving your torch in a sconce, you creep westward and spy a war room lit with a hundred candles. Over a dozen hooded figures hunch around a table layered with plans of the purest evil. The masterminds explicate their plans for depopulating the world of *everyone*, themselves included.

You back-step to the comforting grip of the torch, not wanting to pull your sword by instinct or temptation. The whole conclave could swarm a lone fighter with ease. One can only enter the war room by first luring out its conspirators. Perhaps using an item that makes a delayed noise would work while you rush to find some other entry.

You may solve the following anagram for a hint in your plot against evil, but this requires an EGO score of 7 or more. Otherwise, ignore the puzzle.

SKID MAGE

Use an item now, or leave via the north doorway from where you entered (turn to 10).

15

You re-enter the slab room where this journey started. Deduct 1 OIL unit, as your torch dwindles to a flicker. After refuelling it, you see iron holding devices in the rooms to the west and east.

It occurs to you that the shrieks of vivisected prisoners would have echoed through the open archways, terrorizing the captives beyond. But now, the table's maroon straps dangle in the blustery wind that sneaks in from the north archway. The ascending steps to freedom taunt you with disparagement, for escaping Ironhold means failure to subvert the mysterious evil here.

The shelves in the south wall remain bare as you left them, so head either west (turn to **20**) or east (turn to **11**).

16

Your torchlight shrinks as you walk into a prison. Deduct 1 OIL unit. Cells along the north wall hold nine scraggly orcs, apemen-like creatures with green fur. Some of them stand and stare, while others, cross-legged, scoop up gruel from metal pans on the dirty floor.

These jungle dwellers await training that will make them subjugated guards. But what will a hero do for a pan of gruel? Not wishing to impale the exploited creatures through the bars, you may try using an item instead. If you choose wrong or don't wish to bother them, leave through either the west (turn to **21**) or south (turn to **22**) archway, or take a doorway to the east (turn to **12**). The east room has a chest, the west contains more jail bars, and the south chamber has shadowy pillars.

17

You enter a room brought to life with drawings. Many easels and lecterns show sketches of apemen, their anatomy, tools, expressions, primitive weaponry, and even behaviours drawn in sequences. Here, the dungeon occupiers do research on training wild "guards" carted in from distant jungles. Your tired eyes half expect a capitulated orc to leap out from behind the diagrams. If you have an EGO score of 8 or more, solve the anagram below for a clue about the guards.

PEAS VOLE MATE

Without enough EGO points, artsy endeavours get only a glance from you, so skip the puzzle.

The flame in your hand dwindles. Deduct 1 OIL unit as you add another rag and hurry onward. Peering through the south doorway, you see a wide hall running north to south. Your blazing ball of torchlight reveals one exit at its south end. To go completely through the hallway and out this doorway, turn to **27**. To go east into a well-kept study, turn to **13**.

18

You enter a room with man-sized cages hanging from the ceiling. Your torchlight casts striped shadows on the walls, enlarging the iron bars' haunting presence. The cages look mercifully empty.

Your ears barely detect primitive grunts and shuffling beyond the west archway. A tingle of remorse fights its way into your chest, for men use the dungeon cages to turn quiet ape folk into fighters. Perhaps, if you find any jailed primates, a humane action could supersede the sword. Solve the following anagram if you have an EGO score of 8 or more.

PEELINGS SAG

Going west without the right preparations could lead to an early death in the orcs' den. You may smother your torch and sneak in anyway (turn to **34**) or head east instead (turn to **26**).

19

The wide gate opens to a room piled high with mesh cages. They once held exotic animals used for the dungeon's sick purposes—consuming the executed, developing poisons for testing on prisoners, or worse. Thankfully, the rickety pens all look empty.

While refuelling the dying torch (deduct 1 OIL unit), your eyes cast down to a chalk drawing on the floor. An adventuring party drew this crude map of another square room to plan out a strategic attack. The sketch shows a pit with a large snake-like beast and some circling stick figures. Careful interpretation of the plan requires an EGO score of 6 or more. If you have this, then solve the anagram below. Otherwise, skip it.

WORTH RIFE

The sketch may pertain to the west room, where your torchlight reaches a huge pit. You can go there through the wide gateway (turn to **23**) or take another gateway south to a room of taxidermists' trophy animals (turn to **24**).

20

Through the archway, you enter a clammy-walled dungeon cell. Empty manacles line the walls all the way around. Iron rings set into the stone floor hold even more chains. Everything looks bolted down, leading to a realization: you must scavenge for every available tool. Your wits and sword expertise will not suffice in this brutally hard place.

Something about the acrid stench wafting in from the south archway, its warmth and moisture, makes you tense. Only your intuition can provide guidance. If you have an EGO score of 6 or more, then solve the anagram below. Otherwise, ignore this clue.

RUNT NAD FEEL

Decide upon leaving via the south (turn to **25**) or east (turn to **15**) archway.

21

The next jail room you enter has a row of sharp hooks set high into the north wall. You shudder while imagining their former use. Now, black albs in good condition hang there. A wall of locked iron bars blocks them, and your sword's tip would barely brush the nearest alb when reaching through with it. You may use an item here combined with your sword to steal one of these ceremonial robes. If you choose wrong, or do not wish to use anything, leave through the west (turn to **25**) or east (turn to **16**) archways.

22

Through the archway, a cold room with pillar supports makes you shiver. Gargoyle engravings in the stonework lick their own faces with contorted tongues. Offering more ugliness, two orcian brutes glare from their guard post, flanking a slab door and lever in the south wall. They do not attack, for their overseers trained them too well.

Surely, these most burly and muscular orcs, armed with spiked sledgehammers, protect something of high value to their evil lords. You cannot risk fighting both at once in this awkward jungle of pillars.

But maybe returning while disguised as a someone important would get you past the slab. To dress up, combine the item numbers of three appropriate objects and turn to that section. *Save this section* in case you pick the wrong combination of things to wear.

If you choose wrong or do not wish to use a disguise right now, then leave through the west (turn to 26) or north (turn to 16) archways.

23

The big iron gates have a vital function in this part of the dungeon. They keep animals contained. As you walk through, either the creaking hinges or your torchlight stirs a giant worm in the southwest corner. Its head end flops out of a wide pit in the dirt floor. This river-sized beast, known in legend as a planet worm, has four lines of crisscrossing teeth leading to a tip probing about the ground. Somehow, it senses you!

The adrenal weightlessness kicks in while you decide what to do. Exploring the pit of presumably digested treasures would first require luring out the monster. You would also need to escape *fast*. To whip up a distraction for the hungry planet worm, add the item numbers of two objects and turn to the sum. *Save this spot* in case you pick the wrong combination.

If you choose wrong, turn to 95. To leave without risking your life, take the west swinging gate (turn to 27) or the east one (turn to 19).

24

A screechy whine jolts you upon entering a trophy room. The preserved animals here, while posed menacingly, stare at nothing with blank marble eyes. However, one creature, not part of the exhibit, jumps and yelps for your attention—a monkeyman. He has the body of a monkey with a human-like head. Imprisoned behind a barred vent in the wall, he squeezes his furry arm and bearded face out as if pleading for something.

You sympathize with the intelligent creature, wishing to donate something valuable. Use an item here to give it to him. If you choose wrong, he refuses to take the gift. Alternatively, you may leave this dead zoo by taking the gate in the north wall (turn to 19) or the west (turn to 28).

25

You step ankle deep into maggoty orc dung upon entering an otherwise empty room. The sludgy excreta covers the whole floor and has deep footprints everywhere. The stench of this improvised sewer system slaps your face at every angle and settles into your clothes, even the parts under your armour.

With the room's three archways and obvious utility, the dungeon guards arrive here all too often. Someone approaches as you struggle to breathe, but the sucking goop slows your escape no matter how hard you trained your legs. Only a sword can help now. *Save this section*, and turn to the current FOE number.

If you win, you watch the body sink into the awful excrement. Leave via the west (turn to 29), north (turn to 20), or east (turn to 21) archway.

26

The next room's archways once had doors, though now, only hinges remain. You tread through with care, for pyramidal spikes cover the whole floor. They don't puncture your boots, but instead have a more revolting purpose. Erstwhile, the old rulers would lock nude prisoners in here for days. However the peasants rested, the inescapable points would press into their flesh with each agonizing change of body position.

The recent squatters of this dungeon probably removed the doors for easier guard patrols. You wonder if this cult could ever do more evil than the supposedly noble knights who built this place.

Your torch glow lands on some interesting markings on the wall. Someone dabbed a message in their own blood. The flaked-off letters seem barely legible after so many decades, making it hard to decipher. If you have an EGO score of 7 or more, then solve the anagram below for a warning.

FARE LIVERS TIMES

Skip the puzzle if you lack enough EGO points, as your patience wanes. This former prison has three exits, making it a likely juncture for guards. Not wishing to linger, you may leave through the west (turn to **18**) or east (turn to **22**) archways. Alternatively, some missing bricks in the south wall reveal a tunnel through the hard earth (turn to **30**).

27

You enter a room with wide swinging gates left open in the west and east walls. The north wall has a regular doorway with an empty hallway beyond. Ancient skeletons litter the floor, most of them kicked aside by passing guards. This place marks a different quadrant of the dungeon with a sinister purpose for you to discover.

Those who supplanted power beneath Ironhold, while horrible in other ways, didn't slaughter these masses of people. The bones look too old and yellow for modern times. The highfalutin nobles of yesteryear did this to their peasants.

Apperceiving that junctions bring trouble with so many guards afoot, you hurry to leave. The north exit leads to a hallway ending in another doorway. To go down this hall and out its north exit, turn to **17**. Or, try adjacent rooms to the west (turn to **31**) or east (turn to **23**).

28

You nearly vomit while stumbling into the next room. A putrid stench assails your airways, and you almost trip over the bodies of slain adventurers dumped here unceremoniously. Gaping mouths in their brown and liquifying faces seem to call for your hand in vengeance. Some dead apemen lie here too, but no valuable equipment.

Your trembling torchlight flashes around the room as you choose among three exits. But a guard's footsteps echo in from the east. An ACT score of 8 or more lets you flee through the west (turn to **32**) or south (turn to **33**) gate. If you lack enough ACT points or wish to head east, you must fight whoever appears. *Save this section*, and turn to the current FOE number.

If you win, the body joins the others, and you may leave by going east (turn to **24**) or in the other directions noted above.

29

As your torchlight spills into the next room, you hear shuffling feet in its northwest corner. An iron grill there makes up a quarter of the floor. Beneath this, you see a large crawl space filled with the glinting eyes of silent orc prisoners. They have assumed positions and now prepare to thrust spears

upward through the grill if you dare approach. Some small kegs lie against the west wall, but the orcs will impale anyone who tries to take one.

You hear faint grunting sounds of more orcs through the archway south. They have a den in there. Do not enter unless you have something that will help you hide.

You may use an item here against the spear slaves for access to the kegs. If you choose wrong or do not wish to use anything, leave through a south archway into the orcs' den (turn to **34**) or east into a room that reeks of dung (turn to **25**).

30

The tunnel soon opens into a natural cave dominated by a huge steel trunk in the centre. Strangely, its flat lid has a large keyhole on the top surface. You half expect a trap to spring just by looking at it.

You may use an item here to unlock the trunk. If you choose wrong or wish to leave things alone, then leave via the west tunnel (turn to **35**) or a north one that ends at a hole through a brick wall (turn to **26**).

31

You intrude on a massive tusked gorilla in the next room. Sitting cross-legged on a motley rug, he looks up from a big trunk of children's toys that keep him preoccupied. You snatch at your sword handle by instinct, but the tame beast seems unmoved and resumes mashing dolls together.

Relieved, you look about the well furnished girl's room with its pink walls and little twin beds in the corners. How unbecoming of such a dungeon! Perhaps a noble lord kept his daughters entertained down here while he went off killing prisoners. Who knows what the new rulers want with this giant from the jungle? His eyes follow yours as you glance at a shelf of golden picture frames and brassy toys. A fight seems avoidable, provided you leave this creature's stuff alone.

You can give something to the tusked gorilla by using an item here. If you choose the wrong gift (which he won't accept) or don't wish to use anything, then leave via the east gate (turn to **27**) or a hole smashed through the west wall where a tunnel begins (turn to **36**).

32

Beyond the gate, you find the dungeon's ransacked laboratory. Chained to the south wall stands the biggest wolf you have ever seen, probably bred from a lineage of freaks. Your torchlight gleams off a huge steel collar and a pair of lime coloured eyes. Something tells you they feed it the putrefying bodies stored to the east. A little shelf behind this growling beast holds the last of this room's glassware.

Wild carnivores have indomitable speed, so a fight here would cost everything below your elbows. You may instead use an item on the wolf to get at the containers. If you choose wrong or wish to leave the creature alone, go through the gate to the west (turn to **37**) or east (turn to **28**).

33

The next room you enter has a vast indoor pool with a stone walkway along the west and north wall. The still water stretches beyond your torchlight's reach. To see what lies out there, you could wade in with your torch held aloft. This requires something with which to dry yourself when you return to the walkway. Exploring the dungeon while soaked would sap too much of your dwindling energy.

If you have a suitable item for drying, you may use it here. Otherwise, leave via the west (turn to **38**) or north (turn to **28**) gate.

34

You smother your torch before sneaking into the orcs' den. Over two dozen of the green-furred creatures grunt their crude language around a central fire pit. They don't notice your sidling close to the walls.

The floor has only filthy hay bedding and failed attempts at crafting bone weapons. Only two archways, to the north and east, provide exits. Just as you make to scuttle out, a patrol of tall orc guards stomp in and bully the others away from the fire. The subordinates scurry off, scattering themselves throughout the den. Some now wonder in your direction! You *must* use an item here to save your hide, but choose with care. If you return here having picked the wrong item, turn to 97.

35

With a forced slouch, you emerge into another cave. Tending to your hungry torch adds to the frustration. Deduct 1 OIL unit. The blazing new light plays on a steel chest down the east passage. To the west, another tunnel leads to a glowing fire pit. The rocky hole that cramps you now, however, provides only despair. It seems that all hope lies anywhere but here.

You feel languid, and patience escapes. The distant chest looks so important, yet taunting. A fleeting intuition, perhaps built on your encounters with animals in the dungeon, hints that you *need* something before tackling that chest. But what? If you have an EGO score of 7 or more, then solve the anagram below for a clue about the required item.

PRIDES PITS

If you lack enough EGO points, skip the puzzle. Leave this empty cave by taking the west (turn to 39) or east (turn to 30) tunnel.

36

Your torch dims yet again. Deduct 1 OIL point to replenish the light source. The short tunnel leads to a smooth-walled cave. They built Ironhold over a network of natural caverns. You see a murky pool with some indistinguishable objects in its shallow depths. Judging by the acrid air and discoloured rock in here, you deem the water acidic.

You can try using *two* items in here, one to collect some acid and another to retrieve the submerged objects safely. Use one item after another from this spot if you wish, but don't try more than three in a row.

When finished, or if you choose not to use anything, take one the three tunnels out of here. Your torchlight sparkles off another placid pool in a cave to the west (turn to 40). The east tunnel ends at a hole in some brickwork that connects to the man-made dungeon (turn to 31). To the south, you just make out another cave with holes carved into the rock wall (turn to 41).

37

The room neighbouring the laboratory has three scruffy lions. They lie on a bloodstained stone floor, defeated in spirit and chained to rings in each wall. The east gate, from where you entered, has no lion bound to its wall; however, the chains look long enough for all cats to land a surprise pounce. Instead, they just lie and look.

Feeling stressed, you press your eyebrows hard. The great master trained your body for fighting men, not all these wilderness kings. Despite the lions' torpidity and unmotivated gaze, you apply more fuel to the torch to scare off any attack. Deduct 1 OIL unit. The extra light reveals only an airy room with no other exits.

A sense of pity settles in as you turn back to the laboratory. Could sympathy for the exploited animals provide a clue on dealing with the giant wolf? If you have an EGO score of 6 or more, solve the anagram below.

VOWELS HIDS

If you lack enough EGO points, skip the puzzle. Turn to **32**.

38

Through the gate, you see a room with deep chasms along the north and south walls. The remaining strip of floor spans east to west like a bridge. Walking over it with a newly lit torch (deduct 1 OIL unit), you step over many perfectly round logs. Some sick fiend placed them here so intruders without enough light would trip and plummet to their deaths. You want to kick the hazards over the side, but this would alert the patrolling guards of your intrusion. To take *one*, however, add the log (#12) to your OWN list.

Midway across, someone left a symbol etched in the floor which you would have missed without the extra light. Your knowledge of symbols goes back to pupil years, but did you get along well enough with the whimsical artist? An EGO score of 7 or more helps with remembering and lets you solve this anagram:

NERVE PALE

If you lack enough EGO points, skip the puzzle.

The leaping torchlight reveals a vacant room through a gate at the west end. Beyond the east gate, the walkway bends north. An archway in the south wall hangs over the chasm within easy jumping range. You can hop through this south opening into the room beyond (turn to **98**), go west into the vacant room (turn to **85**), or take the gateway east (turn to **33**).

39

The short tunnel widens into another cave, this one stuffed with stalagmites. Someone, probably orcs, made a small fire pit here. Now, only red coals and a few licks of flame remain. You may use its heat to construct something, given you have the right components. Add the *three* item numbers of the objects you wish to combine here, and turn to that section. *Save this spot* in case you choose the wrong combination.

You may also use just *one* item here at the fire pit to improve it somehow. Use this item as you normally would, by saving this spot and adding the item number to this section number (**39**) to get the new section.

After two tries with using items, or if you choose not to use anything, leave by taking the east (turn to **35**) or south (turn to **42**) tunnel.

40

The tunnel ends at another cave. A small pond in the rock floor contains some cave piranhas and a human skeleton at the bottom. The clear water must feed in through an underground spring. You vaguely see some deteriorating clothes still worn over the bones.

These pugnacious cave piranhas would strip the flesh off your arm if you reached for the skeleton. You may use an item on the pond first to make it safe. If you choose wrong, or do not wish to investigate the bones, leave through either the west (turn to **42**) or east (turn to **36**) tunnel.

41

You take the tunnel which leads straight to another cave. The place looks empty except for some cubbyholes carved high into the south rock face. They look deep and out of sword's reach. If you brought an item big enough to stand on, you may use it here. If you choose wrong or do not wish to check the cubbyholes, leave by taking either the north (turn to 36) or south (turn to 44) tunnel.

42

You emerge in a cave with three exits and an artificially levelled ground. A huge pit in the centre has fancy silver work around its rim like radiating sun rays. Maybe this embellishment made the bottomless grave seem more acceptable. Ancient blood trails cover most of the decoration.

Someone approaches from the east. An ACT score of 10 lets you race around the pit and escape through the north (turn to 39) or south (turn to 45) tunnels. Lacking enough ACT points or wanting to go east means you must fight. *Save this section* and turn to the current FOE number.

If you win, you roll the body into the pit. Take either the east tunnel (turn to 40) or one of the exits noted above.

43

The tunnel spits you into another cave dominated by a portentous obelisk. It reads:

CERTAIN DEATH AWAITS US ALL.

Your torch fizzles down, and you must refuel it. Deduct 1 OIL unit. Spiders dot the walls and ceiling, adding to the despair. They descend to your head, nearly enticing you to roast them alive.

You feel the dispiriting grasp of this place crushing your exhausted mind and chilling your bones. What good can one ever achieve in such a miserable and daunting hole? The spiders...maybe they can teach something about surviving to the end of this dungeon. If you have an EGO score of 8 or more, solve the following anagram:

TICKS NO NOTES

Skip the puzzle if you lack enough EGO points. Demoralized, you wander through either the west (turn to 45) or south (turn to 46) tunnel. The westward cave has some barrels, and to the south lies an underground lake.

44

You clamber into a cavern with mossy walls. Bricks and debris have spilled in from a cave-in some years ago. The big swinging gate at the east wall lies warped and torn off, jutting from a pile of mud.

Despite the loss of surefootedness here, guards frequent this junction for the convenience of its three passageways. Someone or something hears your shuffling and approaches from the westbound tunnel. With an ACT score of 9, you may flee through the north tunnel (turn to 41) or east into the man-made dungeon area (turn to 85). If you lack enough ACT points or wish to head west, then prepare to fight. *Save this section*, and turn to the current FOE number.

If you win, you hide your deed by burying the body under some debris. Take the west tunnel (turn to 46) or one of the exits mentioned above.

45

The tunnel leads to a cave packed with barrels, their lids nailed shut. Hacking them open would dull your sword and make too much noise. But perhaps the right tool could help pry off a lid. You may use an item here for this task. If you choose wrong or do not wish to use anything, leave via the north (turn to 42) or east (turn to 43) tunnel.

46

The tunnel soon ends at another cave, this one having a corrosive lake that extends into the darkness. Its acrid fumes sting your throat, making your eyes water. Above, needle-like stalactites drip natural sulphuric compounds from the cave ceiling into the water.

Steppingstones provide a route for exploring the lake, but you would need to shield yourself from the dripping acid somehow. You may use an item here. Otherwise, leave by walking around the lake to the north (turn to 43) or east (turn to 44) tunnel.

47

Saw used successfully!

The saw noisily cuts through one bar after some effort. This, however, wears down the already dull teeth, rendering the tool useless. Remove the saw from your OWN list. You strain to bend the rusty bar upward, making enough of a gap to squeeze an arm through. Reaching down to the floor, you scoop up a wooden urn and pull it sideways through the opening. The old urn contains ashes. Add the urn (#8) and ash (#45) to your OWN list as two separate items.

Poking your torch through the gap, you see human bones down there, but nothing more. You bend the bar back into place to avoid raising alarm should guards enter later. Once everything looks as it did before, you leave through the west (turn to 15) or east (turn to 8) archway.

48

Hay used successfully!

You pile some hay around the chest and ignite it with a touch of your torch. Cross off the hay item. Flame and smoke soon envelop the lid, which you flip open before running. A swarm of flustered killer bees scatter to the ceiling of the dungeon. You wait for the last few to buzz away from the smoke.

Ebbing closer, you peer in and see only beeswax. Worker bees ate all the honey, but you take some empty honeycomb anyway. Add the wax (#19) to your OWN list.

You close the lid and see bees flying back home through the air hole once the flames and smoke die. Leave by heading west (turn to 8) or south (turn to 9) through one of the doorways.

49

Jug used successfully!

You hurl your jug at the grill. Cross this item off your OWN list. It shatters, sending a rain of horrible acid dribbling down on the hunched orcs. As the scattering and howls of agony ensue, you race across the grill section and seize a keg. You carry it back to the safety of the stone floor, unscathed.

After a sigh of relief, you pry the lid off and find the keg half filled with syrupy tar. You pour a small puddle on the ground and test its flammability with your torch, but the sticky sludge won't burn. You must make due with your oil supply. Add both the keg (#40) and tar (#14) to your OWN list

as separate items. They will surely have some creative uses.

The south archway leads to a highly dangerous orcs' den (turn to **34**). Going east takes you into a dung-filled room (turn to **25**).

50

Sap used successfully!

You coat the sword tip with viscous sap. Your old master would scowl. Remove the sap item, as the tiny vile had little.

Now, you reach with your sword through the bars. The hanging cloth sticks when brushed, and you pull it through to your side. Add the alb (#43) to your OWN list. Its sweaty odour and good condition hint of recent use. But by whom?

Hoping no one will notice one of the uniforms missing, you go west (turn to **25**) or east (turn to **16**) through one of the archways.

51

You explore the musty corridors and towers of Ironhold, but find only grime and cobwebs. Looters stripped the interiors bare a century ago. Knowing that your quest lies in the dungeons, you collect oil-saturated rags left in torch sconces. The dying daylight allows you to pocket a decent supply. Add oil x20 to your OWN list.

The last sun rays sneak through an arched window back on the ground floor. Here, you find an iron-banded door. The hinges moan and creak under your strong hand, and it opens to reveal a downward spiralling staircase. You take the first stone step into the coldness, knowing you will probably die in here.

A torch protrudes from the wall. No one dared to take it and explore the dungeon, until now. You kneel and light it with a few sparks from your flint, setting aglow the cramped stairwell. Proceeding down the steps to a black archway, you enter a dungeon room dominated by a waist-high slab of stone. It has many leather straps for buckling prisoners to the bloodstained surface. Although unused for decades, the operating table makes you wonder whether surgeons treated injured captives here...or tortured them.

Some empty shelves set in the south brick wall look picked clean. Using your sword for reach, you poke around at the highest shelf out of eyesight. Your exploring blade flicks two hidden objects off the top shelf, and they clatter onto the floor: a sturdy wooden tub, which looks like it once held organs, and a bone saw. Add the tub (#48) and saw (#36) to your OWN list.

The dungeon seems made of adjoined square rooms. Your torchlight reveals prison chambers through roundheaded archways in the west and east walls. Ignoring the north archway that leads up to the castle, you may begin your search by going west (turn to **20**) or east (turn to **11**).

52

Jar used successfully!

You hurl the jar on the ground. Cross it off your OWN list. It smashes, spreading its volatile chemicals across the floor. As a hissing mist rises from the liquid, you hurry through the west archway. After a brief wait in the slovenly jail room, the knock-out gas dissipates with the sound of gurgles and gags from collapsing orcs.

When you dare to creep in again, the abject creatures appear struggling to regain consciousness. You kneel and reach through the bars to take one of their empty gruel pans. Add the pan (#38) to your OWN list. Now, take either the west (turn to **21**) or south (turn to **22**) archway, or an open doorway to the east (turn to **12**).

53

Hay used successfully!

You place some hay beneath the hole in the ceiling. This bedding should soften the fall of a metal alarm object that could drop and clang on the stone floor. When you open the chest, however, a jar of clear liquid thuds onto the hay pile instead. Simultaneously, two iron doors slam down, sealing the room's only two exits. Finding the chest empty, you close it and go pick up the jar. It must contain some volatile toxin for incapacitating thieves. Add the jar (#36) to your OWN list.

While bagging the hay as well, you feel a powerful draft shoot through the opening above. Perhaps the old trap mechanism ushers in air to circulate a gas, though you don't see any. Change the hay item number to (#42) as half the straw has blown across the floor. After an uneasy ten minutes, the immovable iron doors rise on their own to reset the trap. Escape this room through either the west (turn to 16) or north (turn to 8) doorway.

54

Ash used successfully!

In one asperse, you fling the ashes over the pit. A puffy grey cloud settles on the flames, smothering them. Cross off the ash item, but keep the wooden urn.

You hop down to the metal pit floor and poke around the charred bones with your sword. A black jawbone, once flipped over, flashes its many golden teeth. Add the jaw (#35) to your OWN list. You climb out with the gruesome treasure and see the tiny flames slowly igniting once again, burning through the ashes. Leave through either the north (turn to 6) or east (turn to 7) doorway.

55

Tub used successfully!

You place the tub, upside down, beneath the closet entrance in case a hidden door falls there. Going in circumspectly with a torch, your free hand explores the large bags hung at the back. One contains a careworn skull cap too small for your head. You take it anyway, along with a bag to carry other treasures. Add the cap (#26) and bag (#22) to your OWN list. The sack looks big enough to sleep in, probably an enticement to lure in thieves...

Sure enough, a stone slab crashed down behind you the moment your fingers lift the bag. But the sturdy tub has stopped it from reaching the floor. You crawl on your belly through the gap, escaping the deadly closet with your belongings. After several minutes, the slab rises, resetting the trap. You would have suffocated in there without taking the right precaution! Cross off the tub item, as the impact has cracked its wood, making it fall apart in your new bag. Leave through either the west (turn to 9) or south (turn to 10) doorway.

56

Bag used successfully!

Desperate to hide, you crawl inside the bag and lie still, trying to control your breathing. An orc's foot stomps right next to your head and lingers, but the fatuous creature eventually roams elsewhere. Someone trained these savages not to touch *anything* in the dungeon not belonging to them. After a few minutes (which feels like hours), you peek out and see the place mostly deserted. Many orcs went out for guard patrol, no doubt. The territorial brutes around the fire pit still number too many to fight single-handed.

You quietly squirm out of the bag and toss in some hay which may come in handy later. Add the hay (#41) to your OWN list. Also, change the item number of the bag to (#23). You can no longer crawl inside it with all that stuffing—not that you'd want to try such a ridiculous stunt again! Keeping low and clandestine, you sneak out and relight the torch (deduct 1 OIL unit). Take either the north (turn to 29) or east (turn to 18) archway out of the orcs' den.

57

Hat used successfully!

You place the soggy hat on some hot stones near the coals. Steam hisses off the old cloth until it feels nice and dry. Change the hat item number to (#7). Return to section 39 to try more items on the fire pit, or leave by taking either the east (turn to 35) or south (turn to 42) tunnel.

58

Key used successfully!

You kneel like a knight and insert the delicate key. Blue arcs of electricity snap at the air from the keyhole, making your heart pound with fear. Nervous, you delay and feel the key growing warm. The electric current, however, won't conduct through the wax to harm your good sword hand. Eyes wide, you gently turn the key and hear the mighty clunk of lockwork.

As you try to retract the key, a spark leaps to your palm. You jump back reflexively. The reaction broke the key off in the lock, making it useless now. Cross off the key item.

You lift the trunk lid with care. It opens, and inside, some massive electric eels thrash about in their steel aquarium. The long key's tip would prod the crowded and stressed eels, agitating them to emit electric pulses. This cruel trap would shock anyone inserting a metal key or lockpick.

Surely, something important lies at the bottom, but the polluted water and all those angry eels make it difficult to see. Reaching in or using your sword (or any metal object) against the eels would cause a shock. You try tipping over the trunk, but it won't budge. The madmen thought of everything.

Use an item here to kill the eels. If you chose wrong, you must close the lid (and it re-locks) leaving no sign of your invasion. The broken end of the wax key has melted and dripped into the water. Exit through either the west tunnel (turn to 35) or the north one which leads through a broken wall in the dungeon (turn to 26).

59

Rag and log combination used successfully!

You tie the rag around one end of the log, rigging a second torch. Once set alight, the fabric burns with an eerie green flame. You lob the fire into a corner. The dimwitted beast, somehow locomoting, chases after and singes its dividing mouth parts trying to devour and spit out the torch simultaneously. Cross off the rag and log.

The distraction gives enough time to run forth and jump in the pit. You land on a bed of crunchy bones. A frantic search under shaky torchlight yields only a jug of ale amongst the skeletons. Add the jug (#39) and ale as two separate items on your OWN list. The ale has no item number. Drink it at any time except in battle to restore 2 FIT points for its pain numbing effects. You may only drink once, crossing the ale off your OWN list afterwards. But remember to keep the empty clay jug.

Above, the flickers of green light die at once. You fear the planet worm has either eaten the torch or

smothered it under that giant bulk. A thunderous rolling draws near, confirming your dread and making the rib piles quiver. You scramble to the side of the pit, only to find it too deep for escape! Even your highest jump won't let your fingernails touch the edge.

One tool may help in a last desperate climb. Use an item here. If you chose wrong, turn to **95**.

60

Top used successfully!

Keeping quiet, you kneel and spin the top. The twirling old toy still works, and it roams over the gritty floor as if brought to life. You hurry out via the north doorway, back to the room heaped with clothes, and soon hear the top fall over and clatter from losing its spin. The sound of many pattering feet follows, as the cult members flood in to investigate. A furor ensues.

Cross the top off your OWN list. Perhaps the shadowy men will hunt for their disturber long enough for you to infiltrate their sanctum. Leave through either the west (turn to **65**) or north (turn to **7**) doorway.

61

Dye used successfully!

You pour the dye into the pool and watch its water turn black. Cross off the dye item. Maybe these cave piranhas rely on vision to detect prey. With the environment clouded, they will bump into each other and refrain from biting their own kind. You take a deep breath, and, with moxie, plunge your arm into the blackened depths. Your hand grips something slimy and pulls out a soaking black hat. It probably belonged to a piratical officer who somehow met his disturbing fate in these caves. Add the hat (#18) to your OWN list. However, you cannot wear the soggy thing until you find some way to dry it.

The pool gradually clears again, as the dyed water circulates with fresh current entering from the spring. Thankful for not getting bitten, you leave through either the west (turn to **42**) or east (turn to **36**) tunnel.

62

Cap used successfully!

You begin scooping out acid and flinging it aside using the cap as a makeshift bowl. The cloth lining dissolves, ruining it. Cross off the cap item. With patience, you bail out enough acid to reveal a battle axe and some human bones at the bottom of the pool.

You tear off a strip of clothing and tie it around the axe handle to make a comfortable grip. Add the axe (#23) to your OWN list. While putting the axe in your bag, you notice the acid trickling back to refill the pool due to the slight funnel shape of the rock floor made from eons of erosion. You may return to **36** to try another item, or leave via either the west (turn to **40**) or south (turn to **41**) tunnel. An east tunnel leads to a hole smashed through the dungeon stonework (turn to **31**).

63

Wig, hat and alb combination used successfully!

You leave the gargoyle room and don your disguise. The alb barely stretches over your armour, and the hat, though dried, looks cruddy and algal. Nonetheless, you flick the bangs of the wig over your face and march back through the pillars, torch held high.

Facing the bellicose orcs, you gesture at the lever with a commanding demeanor. One of them reaches for it, but the other smacks his thick arm down and barks. The authoritative orc grunts at his own free hand, his other tightening around the spiky weapon. He *wants* something.

Use an item here to pacify the orcs. If you choose wrong, they do not accept and turn you away. Leave through the west (turn to 26) or north (16) archway.

64

The enemy attacks!

If you chose Attack, you both strike one another simultaneously and lose 1 FIT point each. If you chose Defend, the enemy strikes you for 1 FIT point *only* if his WAR score exceeds yours.

If the enemy's FIT points have reached zero, turn to 72. Otherwise, decide now if you will Attack or Defend as your next move, and turn to 76.

65

You enter a picturesque study lined with bookshelves and ornate candle holders. A large desk in the centre shows signs of recent use, contrasting with the other rooms' disrepair. You may take a bottle of ink and a quill pen from its well stocked drawer if you haven't already. Add the pen (#27) and ink (#25) to your OWN list. The desk contains nothing else. However, you may use the pen and ink on a third item by combining all three item numbers and turning to the sum. *Save this section* and return here if you choose the wrong combination.

Markings in the floor reveal that the south bookcase swings open like a door, an overused secret passageway. You may enter to investigate what lies behind it (turn to 92) or leave through either the west (turn to 17) or east (turn to 10) doorway.

66

Jaw used successfully!

The tusked gorilla snatches the jawbone from your outstretched hand. He smiles and flips it over many times, marvelling at the goldplated teeth. The delighted beast half stands and lumbers to the shelf of flashy junk. He adds your gift to his collection. Cross off the jaw item.

While the creature turns his back, you grab two objects from the toy trunk and bag them: a grey-haired wig (#13) and an old top (#46). Add them to your OWN list. The engrossed gorilla returns to his spot and resumes playing with toys. You leave, hoping he won't notice two missing. Exit via a tunnel through a hole smashed in the west wall (turn to 36) or a wide gate to the east (turn to 27).

67

The enemy defends!

If you chose Attack, you strike the enemy for 1 FIT point *only* if your WAR score exceeds his. If you

chose Defend, no one strikes, but you *may* decide to Fight Dirty. If so, lose 1 EGO point now and do triple damage next time you strike, irregardless of how or when that next strike happens.

If the enemy's FIT points have reached zero, turn to **72**. Otherwise, decide if you will Attack or Defend as your next move, and turn to **74**.

68

Axe used successfully!

You shake all the barrels and hear something soft tumbling in one. The axe blade, when wedged under the lid, makes a great tool for prying...until the handle snaps. Cross off the axe item. You made enough of an opening, however, to insert your hand and apply some muscle. With a loud creak of ancient nails, the wooden lid comes off. Inside the barrel, you find a lupine fur pelt. Add the fur (#38) to your OWN list along with the lid (#34) which might also turn out useful. Leave this cave by taking either the north (turn to **42**) or east (turn to **43**) tunnel.

69

Eel used successfully!

The orcs look at the dangling dead eel in your grasp. The aggressive one snatches it, bites the poisoned carcass in two, and gives half to his comrade. Cross off the eel item. They munch away in your presence. You learn that orcs chew their food to a smooth paste before swallowing.

They won't budge from their post until finished, so you leave the room once more. Upon returning minutes later, you find both green guards incapacitated and vomiting in fetal positions. You pull the lever and remove your disguise as the stone slab rises with a groan.

Through the opening, a perfectly bare stone room awaits—the unbeating heart of the dungeon. What could the doomsday cult hide in this nexus? Why such nothingness under heavy watch? Your struggling torchlight falls on smooth rock walls, not the regular brickwork that had for hours scrambled across your weary eyes. While your fingers prowl for a secret passage or even a blemish in the flatness here, the slab falls with an echoing crash. The dungeon itself has trapped you!

Some time later, your torchlight dies. But, the blueness of dawn cuts through a massive iron grill three stories up. While you won't suffocate in here, you can't escape either. Your body collapses after the arduous quest, so close to daylight, yet condemned to starve.

A grumble of stone makes you rise in a swivet. The floor now slides away at a tortuously slow pace. Looking down the widening gap, you see only blackness. Your boot nudges the dead torch into the abyss, but you don't hear it land. Use an item here to save yourself from this deathtrap. If you choose wrong, your back presses to the wall until the floor disappears beneath your heels, and you plummet to your death.

70

Sai used successfully!

You whip out the sai and stab the pit wall. The protruding handle makes a good foothold for launching yourself up with one foot. You do so and grab the edge above to hoist yourself out. A second later, the raging planet worm dives into its nest. The whole room rumbles. Cross off the sai item that just saved your life, and flee through the west (turn to **27**) or east (turn to **19**) gateway.

71

Fur used successfully!

You set the fur on the brick walkway for later. The water feels ice cold as you lower yourself into the pool. You stand neck deep and begin the chilling walk southeast. Years of swordplay help with ignoring the arm strain from keeping your torch raised overhead.

You wade out and see a womanly statue standing chest deep in the pool. Your feet bump into a stone pedestal which you step on to meet the statue face to face. Her red gemstone eyes twinkle in the flickering firelight. Should you fail to solve the mysteries of this wending dungeon, the gems would at least fetch a prince's fortune. But you need a tool to chisel them free. Use an item here. If you choose wrong or don't wish to use anything, you wade back to the walkway to collect your gear and dry off with the fur (cross the soaking fur off your OWN list). Leave by heading west (turn to 38) or north (turn to 28).

72

You land the killing blow. Add 1 FOE point. If your FOE points have now reached 6, reset them to 1 and gain 1 WAR point. You will not take the crude and inferior weapon. Return to your saved section and pick an exit.

73

Can used successfully!

You open the can and pour its caustic goo into the aquarium. The eels die within minutes. At last, you plunge your arm in and feel around the trunk's floor. Your hand grasps something round, which you lift out for a look. You have obtained a heavy and perfectly spherical orb made of copper. Add the orb (#17) to your OWN list. What strange purpose did the mad mechanics conceive for this?

You also take a dead eel. Maybe if the guards kill you, they will eat the poisoned eel and die too. Add the eel (#6) to your OWN list. You close the trunk lid and hear it locking. Leave through the west tunnel (turn to 35) or the north one that leads through a hole in the dungeon wall (turn to 26).

74

The enemy defends!

If you chose Attack, you strike the enemy for 1 FIT point *only* if your WAR score exceeds his. If you chose Defend, no one strikes, but you *may* decide to Fight Dirty. If so, lose 1 EGO point now and do triple damage next time you strike, irregardless of how or when that next strike happens.

If the enemy's FIT points have reached zero, turn to 72. Otherwise, decide if you will Attack or Defend as your next move, and turn to 86.

75

Jug used successfully!

You fill the jug with acid by carefully dipping it in the pool. If it contained any ale, you must drink it beforehand and cross the ale off your OWN list. Change the jug item number to (#20).

You stopper the jug tightly, shake off any droplets on the outside, and bag it. You may try another item on the pool by returning to **36**. Your torchlight sparkles off another calm pool in a cave to the west (turn to **40**). The east tunnel ends at a hole in some brickwork that connects to the man-made dungeon (turn to **31**). To the south, you just make out another cave with holes carved into the rock wall (turn to **41**).

76

The enemy defends!

If you chose Attack, you strike the enemy for 1 FIT point *only* if your WAR score exceeds his. If you chose Defend, no one strikes, but you *may* decide to Fight Dirty. If so, lose 1 EGO point now and do triple damage next time you strike, irregardless of how or when that next strike happens.

If the enemy's FIT points have reached zero, turn to **72**. Otherwise, decide if you will Attack or Defend as your next move, and turn to **87**.

77

Gem used successfully!

The excited monkeyman takes your gem and scrambles away down the vent. He returns a moment later and thrusts a filthy rag through the bars. It reeks of harsh fumes, but you take it anyway. Remove the gem from your OWN list and add the rag (#47). Feeling quite cheated, you leave the menagerie through the west (turn to **28**) or north (turn to **19**) gateway.

78

The enemy attacks!

If you chose Attack, you both strike one another simultaneously and lose 1 FIT point each. If you chose Defend, the enemy strikes you for 1 FIT point *only* if his WAR score exceeds yours.

If the enemy's FIT points have reached zero, turn to **72**. Otherwise, decide now if you will Attack or Defend as your next move, and turn to **64**.

79

Key used successfully!

You squat and insert the key. Before you can turn it, a powerful electric shock hurls you across the cave. Your flailing arm launches the key some distance away, where it pings off the wall. Lose 2 FIT points. If you survive the massive dose of electricity, you rise and gather the key, which feels warm. Fearful of messing with the lock mechanism again, you stumble from the cave through either the west tunnel (turn to **35**) or the north one that leads to a hole through the dungeon wall (turn to **26**).

80

Lid used successfully!

You hold the lid over your head and make sinuous jumps across the stones. The cover stops any

acid from dripping on your head. These steppingstones don't go in far, but having moved closer to the pool's centre, your torchlight now lands on a skeleton bobbing in the acidic water. A sai handle protrudes from the unfortunate's ribcage. It looks within your reach, so you pull out the blade and backtrack to safety. Add the sai (#11) to your OWN list, but cross off the lid as its rope handle has already dissolved.

Discarding the barrel lid, you leave through either the north (turn to **43**) or east (turn to **44**) tunnel.

81

Keg used successfully!

Standing on the keg, you can now reach into the cubbyholes. A large silver key rests in each one. On closer inspection, the keys look identical. You may take one. Add the key (#49) to your OWN list. You step down, retrieve the keg, and leave via the north (turn to **36**) or south (turn to **44**) tunnel.

82

Sai used successfully!

You chip away at the statue's left eyelid, striking the sai handle with your torch like a mallet and chisel. To your amazement, blood drips out of the corner of her eye where you removed some stone. You can clench the sai in your teeth and use an item here to collect the blood. If you choose wrong or want to keep working on extracting the gem, turn to **96**.

83

Tar used successfully!

In desperation, you pour sticky tar over your armor. It coats the handle of your sword, fusing it with the scabbard. As the last bit of floor slides away, you plaster yourself to the wall face-first.

Incredibly, it works. You stick on like human glue and hear the empty keg crash on a stone floor many storeys below. With great effort, you pull one limb at a time away from the tarry mess and replant them lower. Then, you press in hard to pry your torso off the wall and lower yourself a notch. The viscous tar has dribbled far down the rock face, making a snail's path. You repeat the exhausting motions dozens of times. While staring into the blackened wall at your nose, endless dungeon rooms manifest before your delirious eyes.

Your feet touch floor at last. Nearing collapse, you strip off your armor to regain some mobility. It may take days to clean, if you even live to escape.

Panting, you look around the gloomy chamber. Daylight from far above plays upon a room-sized mound of silver scales. You strain to see a long neck uncurling from a pile of pure metal claws. A tail made of ten million coins unwraps from the mountainous body. You have awoken the iron dragon.

Flabbergasted that creatures of bedtime stories exist, you hobble to a wide plinth in the centre of the floor and hide. The top surface has a circular hole leading down to darkness. You crouch, but the monstrosity fills up most of the chamber, and its uncoiling tail brushes your boot heels. A massive, iron-billed head careens down to eat your divestiture of armor, tar and all. The legendary creatures really do come from other worlds. This one's unearthly metabolism melts iron and grows it into scales. The air gets unbearably hot each time the beak opens.

The iron dragon finishes your armor snack, then looks at you. Its beak yawns open, revealing a maze of lava inside. Use an item here. If you choose wrong, turn to **99**.

84

Urn used successfully!

You open the urn of blood, set it on the floor, and slide it forward with your sword. The slaving wolf laps up the blood faster than your old master could spill it. The hunched beast chews the wooden urn to splinters, never looking up from its dish. Cross off this item.

With the wolf occupied, you glide to the shelf and grab three containers: a bottle of black dye, a can labelled "spider venom", and a vile of tree sap. Add the dye (#21), can (#15), and sap (#29) to your OWN list.

Pleased that the monster did not make you its second appetizer, you leave through either the swinging gate to the west (turn to 37) or east (turn to 28).

85

You enter a blood-caked room with hooked chains dangling from the ceiling. Some old fish scales on the floor may provide a hint about dungeon animals...to those who retained the relevant knowledge from childhood studies. If you have an EGO score of 5 or more, then solve the anagram:

BURL SIT LOOP

Skip the puzzle if you lack enough EGO points. Finding no use for the bits of hair and dried blood, you leave through either a broken gate to the west (turn to 44) or a functioning one to the east (turn to 38).

86

The enemy attacks!

If you chose Attack, you both strike one another simultaneously and lose 1 FIT point each. If you chose Defend, the enemy strikes you for 1 FIT point *only* if his WAR score exceeds yours.

If the enemy's FIT points have reached zero, turn to 72. Otherwise, decide now if you will Attack or Defend as your next move, and turn to 78.

87

The enemy attacks!

If you chose Attack, you both strike one another simultaneously and lose 1 FIT point each. If you chose Defend, the enemy strikes you for 1 FIT point *only* if his WAR score exceeds yours.

If the enemy's FIT points have reached zero, turn to 72. Otherwise, decide now if you will Attack or Defend as your next move, and turn to 67.

88

Wax, box and pan combination used successfully!

You set the pan on some hot coals and drop in the beeswax. Once the wax melts, you pour it into a hole on the closed box's side. After several minutes, feeling certain the wax has cooled and solidified, you open the box. A perfectly shaped wax key has formed in the mould.

Add the key (#28) to your OWN list, and cross off the wax. You bag it carefully, not wishing to break the delicate key in two. Now, you may return to **39** and try another item on the fire pit, or leave by taking the east (turn to **35**) or south (turn to **42**) tunnel.

89

Pen, ink, and map combination used successfully!

Having acquired the necessary items, you can henceforth draw a map of the dungeon and make notes while exploring. Begin by drawing a square room on the center of your paper to designate the study. It has exits in the west and east walls (the left and right sides of the square, respectively). Draw every room the same size and adjacent to one another.

Should you fail this adventure, *do not* look at this map again! You must refind the necessary items in a new game. Leave the study via its west (turn to **17**) or east (turn to **10**) doorway.

90

Urn used successfully!

If the urn still holds ashes, you must dump them out (cross off the ash item). Shivering, you position the urn under the statue's cheek. It fills with tears of blood. Someone must have hollowed out the head for this strange purpose. The blood flow eventually stops, and you have a difficult time holding the torch and urn in one hand while extracting the gem with the other. At last, you succeed in plucking out the eye—a large diamond that looked red from the blood stored behind it.

Add the gem (#53) to your OWN list. Also, change the urn item number to (#52). Carrying the sai in your teeth and the other items in your raised hands, you wade back to the walkway. The remaining diamond eye must wait for another adventurer, because you feel chilled to the point of immobility. You dry off with the fur and gather your possessions, careful to set the closed urn of blood upright in your bag. Cross off the fur item, now too soaked for further use.

Moving to keep warm, you leave through either the west (turn to **38**) or north (turn to **28**) gateway.

91

You enter the closet and take one of the bags. The peg on which it hangs flicks up a bit, and a huge stone slab crashes down behind you. With the entrance sealed, your lungs soon heave in the stuffy air. The bag contains a dented helmet that you pound on the thick slab with both hands. It makes a huge impression...on the helmet.

The torch, which you dropped in a panic, now burns with a smaller flame, competing for the remaining air. Decide if you will keep it alight to make this quicker, or smother it and die slowly in the dark. Either way, the slab rises several minutes later to reset the closet trap, and the body resting there slumps over.

92

The bookcase swings open with a gentle pull. Candlelight floods your eyes from the war room beyond. You see a table covered with sketches of malefic trap designs and machinations. Many of the chairs got knocked over in a recent rush that left this room empty.

Your eyes pelt the table, while angry voices approach from a doorway to the east. Taking too many

esoteric papers will leave a noticeable gap, and they'll send the entire guard for your head. You grab only the most interesting document—a map, presumably of this dungeon. It looks like a seven by seven grid with the four corner squares removed. A dragon's head marks the center room. Why would a cult, driven to end all humanity, stamp a picture from children's stories here? Hopefully, they don't keep another toy room and tusked gorilla in there.

You also take a small wooden box half buried under some scrolls. It feels heavier than expected, making you fumble. The latch slides, and the box flips open, exposing it as two solid blocks of wood hinged together. The inner sides have a large key shape carved into them, forming a mould. Molten metal can go into a hole on one side. Add the box (#31) and map (#37) to your OWN list.

Not daring to stay a second longer, you lunge through the secret passage and close the bookshelf. Deduct 1 OIL unit and turn to 13.

93

You open the chest and find it empty. Worse, two iron doors slam down, sealing the room's north and west exits. Simultaneously, a jar drops from the ceiling hole. It smashes on the floor, spreading its volatile contents. A hissing white gas rises from the splash, and you cannot escape the fumes. You struggle with both handle-free doors, but they won't budge. Gas of the knock-out variety overwhelms your throes.

You awake in a squalid cell. They took your stuff, and the gruel tastes funny. If the cult here fails to destroy all humanity on schedule, they will at least let you leave the cell and wander about as one of their guards. But that won't happen for years.

94

The bookcase swings open with a gentle pull. Candlelight floods your eyes from the war room beyond. You see a table covered with sketches of cruel trap designs. More than 20 collected men, all berobed, sit around the table and stare at you, their faces lined with pure evil. They all draw daggers longer than your forearm. No one here uses that honor system of fighting one-on-one.

You try to hold them at the secret passageway, but half of their team circle into the study through another dungeon route. Swarmed from both sides, you fall under their concerted rain of attacks. Bits of you will never leave the cracks in the floor.

95

The planet worm descends, ending your quandary. Its head splits open in four places, like a blossom with teeth on every inner surface. Those hooks go all the way down its digestive tract. It swallows you and your torch, tossing your body into a thorny tunnel. You draw your sword, but wet musculature envelops and compresses, like a living iron maiden. Your skin gets ripped off in a gruesome suctioning that propels the rest of you...somewhere.

96

You work faster, and the dribble of blood streams down the statue's cheek. Tears drip into the icy water, turning it red all around you. At last, you pluck out the gem and clench it in your fist.

Unbeknownst to you, some sick wretches filled this pool with sea water carted in from the distant ocean. They filled the statue's head with blood to attract the sharks, also brought in barrels from the sea while young and small. But now, they have grown so big from all the peasants' limbs tossed into the pool over the years.

Something bites off your leg as you cling to the statue for dear life. You can only embrace her and scream into the gaping eye socket as more of you gets wrenched off under the reddening water. Eventually, you let go.

97

An orc sees you and yelps a throaty alarm cry. You dash for an exit, but a group brandishing hefty clubs blocks the way. Drawing your sword, you hurriedly slay two irascible orcs that rush forward without support. The rest form a half-circle and close in slowly. They outnumber you by over two dozen. Backed to the wall, you clench your teeth.

In a few minutes, another seeker of memorability joins the pile in room 28.

98

You take a mighty leap...and bounce off the stone wall where someone painted a black archway. After falling a few storeys, you land on a bed of spikes, of all things. They punch through your armor like forks in a baked potato. Your torch lands nearby, illuminating a sea of impaled skeletons who seem to laugh at their new company. Temerity has at least brought a swift death.

99

The whole chamber fills with flame. You even breathe a bit of your own. Few have the honor of death by dragon's fire. You do. An agony of legends, yet one never put to scroll, rips out eyes in each part of you.

100

Orb used successfully!

You stand and drop the orb into the plinth opening. A clattering noise echoes up, followed by a metallic rolling sound on unseen ramps. In the iron dragon's throat, a ring of thorned tonsils shrink, making way for fire.

But the canoe-sized beak closes. A grating noise makes the creature gaze up. The grill above now slides open, an event the rancorous doomsday cult had planned for much later.

They wanted to use the dragon as an assassin, an unstoppable force that could encompass the world, killing whomever interferes with the cult's annihilative agenda. But bending the mind of such a beast takes time and research. You have released their monster early, with its own will intact.

Ignoring you, the iron dragon begins climbing the chamber wall, an impossible feat given its bulk. On a whim, you run up and cling to the scales on its back, hoping for a lift out of here. Your ride seems unconcerned, entranced by the prospect of freedom.

Egressing through the pit in Ironhold's courtyard, you notice a thick green gunk oozing from a slot where the grill slid away. This substance coated the metal, preventing the captive from eating through it.

Once free, the dragon takes to telekinetic flight. Having no wings, it soars by will alone. You hug the scales as the preternatural beast circles the castle, venting flame at every degenerate tower. It even dives low to roast the battlements in a cathartic bath of fire.

From your remarkable vantage point, you see the tusked gorilla fleeing the razed castle. Now just a speck on the shrubby landscape, he flounces into the rugged thicket of the Endless Woods. Merles follow him, flying from their nests in the blazing castle's arrow slits.

The dragon lands two fields away with a shock wave that knocks away your grip. You tumble down the scaly back and faceplant into sweet grass. The serpent of myth glares at you, then flies away. It shrinks to a mere dot in the north, then disappears.

You watch the ancient castle fall into itself, throwing a hail of sparks skyward. Surely, the blackest plumes come from the cult members, none of whom escaped.

Something mewls and tugs on your ragged pant leg—the monkeyman! He returns your gem, which has iron dust on its sharpest point from filing. The adventure has freed more than a dragon, it seems.

In gratitude, the little primate hands you a bag filled with other precious stones and jewels. It has enough to buy new armor, a horse, some land...

...and certainly a night at the inn on the horizon where a great extolling awaits. Or perhaps, something greater than personage and fame will guide your fate. You will not join the caste of the Elite Righteous Select. Discovery of their dark past has led to your turnabout. Those lofty and supercilious bullies had complicity in far worse acts than the doomsday madmen. Noble ancestry may even have held the dragon long before the cult arrived. The tavern goers will hear of it tonight.

You hoist the monkeyman onto your shoulder for the journey. Only one thing matters out here as you wade off, immersed in Pangaea's fresh air — what to name him?