
THE RAVAGES OF FATE

by Ulysses Ai

An Entry in the 2012 Windhammer Prize for
Short Gamebook Fiction

Introduction

In the northern reaches of the Empire where the land juts into ice-strewn seas lies the mountainous wilderness called Svartland. Here a great wall called The Jaw divides the land of men from the land of the trolls. To venture beyond The Jaw is to seek misery and death. There are no riches to be won; only the cold that saps the life of men and the trolls that devour their flesh, be it dead or still living.

It is to this land the accused and the condemned are sent. Where the Empire's justice cannot prove guilt or innocence the matter is left in the hands of the gods; or better said: at the claws of a troll. Likewise, those whose guilt is certain are sent, for both may win freedom by venturing into the forsaken lands beyond The Jaw and returning with one token of vindication and absolution: the head of a troll.

The following is a gamebook adventure where your choices determine how the story unfolds. You play as a character with various characteristics and abilities. At the end of each passage you will be asked to make a choice, undertake a test, or follow other instructions that result in a different outcome each time you read.

Creating your Character

Your character is an adventurer and a fighter who has gone through many experiences in life. This is reflected in the four core attributes detailed below:

Dexterity - this is your skill with tools and weapons, your general coordination and agility. It has a Base maximum of 12 points, but can be increased beyond this by special objects and other bonuses.

Strength - this is your physical brawn, how much you can lift, carry, or the force of your attacks. It has a Base maximum of 12 points.

Stamina - this is your immediate capacity for action. Once it is exhausted, you must rest to allow it to replenish. It has a Base maximum of 24 points.

Vitality - this is the measure of your life and energy reserves. When this value reaches naught you are dead. Your base Vitality is the sum of your Strength and Stamina.

To determine the Base values for Dexterity, Strength and Stamina, you have 36 points that you may distribute however you wish, except that each attribute cannot exceed the maximum stated above.

Once you have distributed the 36 points between the three attributes, add the Base values for Strength and Stamina to find the Base value for Vitality.

The Base values define your underlying physical characteristics. However, in the course of your adventure the *Current* level of these attributes may change. Current value starts off equal to the Base value and the text will instruct when you have lost Stamina or Vitality, and in rare cases even Strength and Dexterity. There are opportunities for some of the attributes to be restored up to their Base level. These opportunities will be described in the text.

The attribute that will see the most movement is Stamina. Taking action usually costs Stamina, while resting restores it. When an action costs or replenishes Stamina, the amount will be indicated in brackets next to the option.

For example:

If you want to attack, turn to **105** (-2 Stamina)

If you want to hide, turn to **234** (+4 Stamina)

If you do not have the required Stamina, you cannot take that option. You will need to manage your Stamina carefully to you do not expend all of your energy and become vulnerable.

You must also select a special skill for your character which reflects their background. The special skills available in this adventure are:

- Swordsmanship** - skill with swords allows you to increase your Dexterity in battle by +1 when using a sword. (Tests allowing this bonus are marked with a †)
- Stealth** - skill in moving silently and remaining unseen.
- Herbology** - knowledge of plants and their properties.

This table can be used to record your characteristics as well as other aspects of your adventure.

YOU			
Attribute	Base	Current	Special Skill
Dexterity			Possessions
Strength			
Stamina			Code words
Vitality			
TROLL			Notes
Attribute	Base	Current	
Dexterity			
Vitality			

Testing of Attributes

Dexterity, Strength and Stamina can all be tested individually, and sometimes in combination. The text will instruct how to undertake these tests in each instance.

The Ravages of Fate

BACKGROUND

The sun that lights your days is a small square opening high in the rough stone wall. A pale mockery shedding feeble illumination. Most often it is a portal for gelid air to flow into the cell, paining you with a dichotomy of wretchedness and remembered latitude. Somewhere out there is freedom, but it is not for you. In the early days you marked the passage of your confinement, but your scratchings on the wall are abandoned; you are no longer even sure which marks are your own. Many souls have sojourned here in their downward journey.

With a start you jerk from sleep, staring wide-eyed into all corners of the shadow-drenched niche. Another metallic clang follows and with a sense of disgust you let your head fall back onto the sodden straw. The guards are delivering the daily meal. The bowls of unpalatable gruel you are fed hardly worth waking for.

One of the other prisoners is jabbering gratefully, irritating away your encroaching slumber. Sitting up slowly you look at the window and your malnourished mind slowly turns over. It is the wrong time. You listen to the guards drawing closer, shoving bowls of gruel through the slots under the thick, reinforced doors. When it is your turn, the narrow slot in the door opens. Your bowl is already there and a chubby hand reaches out and grabs it. A few moments later it is slid back through and the slot closes with a clang.

You stare at the food and wonder if today, finally is the day you are going mad. Rather than gruel the bowl appears to be full of a thick stew, with a small motley apple carelessly tossed in on top. It is only the smell that breaks your disbelief; a pleasant aroma of hearty vittles so different from the rank stench of the cell.

Crawling over to the bowl you scoop out the stew with your hands and consume it with desperate gusto. You know this must be your last meal, but you welcome your impending death with a glee that teeters on the edge of madness.

The food does wonders for your wellbeing and you start to contemplate escape like you did when they first put you in here, accused of a crime you didn't commit. There was no evidence of the murder, just a dead body and a Watchman's word that you were seen standing over the body. You never stood before a judge or magistrate, and in the wisdom of the Empire you were sent up North to The Jaw, the great wall that forms the boundary between the world of men and the land of the trolls.

Your cell lies in the bowels of a fortress called the Molar; the old stones rounded by the wind and crumbling at the top until it does in truth resemble a flat-topped tooth jutting up from the wall. Instead of being dispatched into the troll-lands at once, you have been here for months waiting for the summer to arrive. Now it seems your time is up.

A short time later you hear the commotion as the guards open the cells one by one and clamp chains on the prisoners before dragging them out. You listen with growing excitement and soon the key rattles in the old lock of your cell door, the guard swearing as he tries to make it turn.

You stand in the middle of the small cell as the door is finally forced open. There are three guards all armed with cudgels, staring at you blackly with faces as scoured by darkness as any criminal. Even their armour seems rimmed with soot and grime as if they too have not seen the light of day for a long time.

"Hands out!" commands the chubby one, at which the other two enter into the cell to flank you menacingly. Obediently you hold out your arms and the chubby guard waddles forward with manacles in hand to secure your wrists. You are dragged out into the corridor to be chained up to the rest of the prisoners. Once all of the festering holes have spewed forth their human refuse, you and the other prisoners are directed by grunts or blows to shuffle along the corridor and upwards toward sunlight and chill air. The growing light makes your eyes start to ache and you are soon forced to close them, stumbling along at the direction of the guards. You feel the cold sharpen on your skin as you step out into the open.

You are all told to wait and you slowly open your eyes. The courtyard that surrounds you seems vast after your confinement. Above the plain grey walls is the open blue sky and you grin in pure pleasure. An official in red imperial robes, his hat crowned with a golden dragon approaches with a silken bag of dried flowers held under his nose. A lanky youth in red and black livery trails him with a wooden board jutting out from his waist secured by straps running from his shoulders. The official approaches the first prisoner and checks his incarceration tattoo before taking up a quill from the wooden board and writing something in the papers there.

One by one the official checks their names and plea. When he gets to you his dark eyes flick over you in disinterest, noting details of your general condition. You see him write down 'able' and consult another list to check your name. The bureaucracy of the empire proves efficient as ever. "And are you innocent or guilty?"

It makes no difference what you say now. Your innocence or guilt could not be determined and so it is not mere mortals who will judge you. Instead you will be banished into the perilous wilderness along with the guilty. Any who return to the Molar with the head of a troll are pardoned of all crimes for which they are accused. Some have been known to survive, but few are spared by the ravenous trolls.

"What's the point?" you ask.

"Refusal to plead innocence is taken as an admission of guilt," the official informs you, quill inked and poised ready to write. You shrug and he writes down 'Guilty' before moving on with an indifference that makes your defiance feel futile. As the official is checking over the men, the guards move in to divide those who are able into groups of four.

You find yourself chained on one side to a tall, thickset man with a mass of tangled black hair and beard. He is missing most of the teeth from a cruel mouth, but his dark eyes are bright with a keen intelligence. He is wearing a fur-lined leather jerkin with a thick belt, leather pants and heavy boots. On your other side is a thin man of nondescript appearance. He too is shivering slightly in the cold, wearing a long fine silk coat that has seen better days. He fidgets with his hands, and his eyes seem to dart everywhere, absorbing every detail.

The last in the line doesn't look like a criminal at all. He too is wearing silken finery, but his emerald coat is barely rumpled and the gold thread hasn't been picked out by desperate fingertips. His leather riding boots are shiny and there are even gold rings on his fingers. While his clothing looks almost pristine, you can see the signs of captivity in his ravaged countenance, raw emotions of confusion and anguish spoiling a face accustomed to easy smiles.

After being alone for so long, you discover that you feel awkward and find it difficult to talk to the other prisoners. You console yourself with the grim fact that these men will all be dead soon, so it's best not to become too close.

An officer in enamelled red dragon-armour emerges from a door leading into the courtyard. His golden helmet bears a plume of pale ostrich feathers to indicate his rank; but his bearing alone conveys his authority. A grey beard frames his jaw and his eyes sweep over you all with a look that is not unkind. All eyes fall to him as he steps onto a low plinth to speak without ceremony.

"Well, you all know why you're here. Bring back a troll's head and you'll be pardoned for whatever you've done or what they say you've done. It don't matter what the truth is now." The commander's eyes seem to linger on the youth lordling. "The priest has a fever so you won't be getting any blessings today, but as I see it the gods themselves don't venture beyond The Jaw. The younger trolls are afraid of fire, the older ones are too smart for that. Don't underestimate them. They may look like beasts but some kind of ken lingers under those brows. Look an old one in the eyes and you'll know what I mean. Good luck." The commander turns to the guards. "Take them through."

Your group is selected first and you are prodded towards a different door leading from the courtyard. You would have claimed in the past that for you to kill a troll was impossible. The smallest stand twice as tall as a man and their hide is said to be like stone. Yet now you find hope stirring in your heart; a feeble, laughable hope. Yet wondrously it invigorates you, and with something akin to eagerness you march with the others to your triumph or your doom. Now turn to 1.

1

The door you are pushed through leads to an unfurnished room rather than the windswept mountainside you were expecting. The room is small with only one aged guard stationed there, eyeing you unkindly. He seems to resent your hopeless chance at absolution. The only other thing in the room is a large barred window through which you can see a storeroom. Another guard waits impatiently on the other side of the bars.

The old guardsman removes your chains and grips your shoulder, shoving you towards the barred window. "Go get your equipment. Little good it will do you," he gloats.

You step forward and see arranged neatly on racks in the storeroom a collection of weapons, armour, tools, equipment and supplies. "Three items," the guard tells you. Wondering at this supposed generosity to men being sent to die you look over the items carefully and see that all of the equipment is worn, or crudely repaired. You see lengths of rope that are frayed, or made of shorter lengths knotted together; dozens of candle stubs; a motley collection of threadbare clothing.

You ask for a sword and the guard brings you a bare short sword. "Can I have something with a longer blade?" you ask.

The guard shakes his head. "That's the one I grabbed. Put up with it. What else?"

The sword seems well made, but you realise that it was once a long sword that broke, with the remaining blade ground to a point and sharpened. You look over the rest of the items on offer.

You may choose any two of the following to take with you:

Lantern	Medicine	Cuirass
Blanket	Rope	Mirror
Knife	Shield	Flint-stone

After you have chosen, make a record your equipment then turn to 10

2

You hurry along the path and fall into step alongside Gouge. He gives you a flat look. "You want something?"

"It seems you've been planning this for a while. How do we kill a troll?"

Gouge grunts. "We'll have to come on it unseen. Set up traps, lure it in. Weaken it any way we can from a distance before we move in. We can't plan anything in detail until we see the lay of the land. The biggest danger is that a troll will come upon us while we're walking like this."

"The biggest danger is going to be night," you say, gesturing to the distant column of black smoke. "Either the cold kills us or we light a fire and attract every troll in the area."

"Nah! There won't be any trolls here. That's why we have to go so far from The Jaw."

"How do you know all this?" you ask.

"I told you! I've come prepared! People have done it before, you know. Come back with a troll's head. But not for years. With all the criminals sent up here every summer the trolls have been driven north. You know what trolls eat during winter when there are no humans about?" Gouge's eyes glint with impending cleverness.

"I don't know," you say.

"Smaller trolls," Gouge replies. "And you know what that means? Only the big ones are left. The biggest is called The Ravager; lives in The Pit. The other trolls are scared of him and will stay away. That's why it's our best chance. The smoke guides us, we can come on him unawares without having to worry about another troll creeping up on us. The only dangerous part is getting there."

"And fighting the biggest troll isn't dangerous?"

"Not when we have the element of surprise. He'll be getting old now. He's a ripe fruit ready to fall off the tree."

He seems confident, and you have no choice but to trust him. You don't know where you are going or the best way to locate and kill a troll. While you are thinking, you see Gouge watching you from the corner of his eye.

"Don't get too friendly with that fop," he says quietly. "You know we aren't all going to make it and he'll be the first to die."

"I'm more worried about whether I'll survive tonight," you say.

Gouge grunts. "Don't worry about it. I've got a plan. But seriously, that dandy can't help us here. So don't be upset when he gets killed, yeah? There's no room for niceties. We live or die by what we can do, you understand?"

"Yeah, I get it," you say.

Gouge nods in satisfaction and you fall back behind him to walk in silence.

Turn to 9

4

You walk a little faster to come up alongside Silvertongue, who gives you a crooked smile. "You used to being out in the country like this?" he asks.

"I've travelled," you say.

Silvertongue grunts. "Not me. I confess I am a city boy. I come from Marlspire, city of golden domes! What they don't tell you is that for every grand avenue there's a score of filthy alleys. But it's true that gold flows everywhere in Marlspire, even through those dingy ways. So as long as you don't mind your gold being a little tarnished, there are fortunes to be made."

"Not without danger, though," you guess.

"No," Silvertongue agrees. "That's what keeps things...competitive. To be honest if I hadn't been arrested my partners would probably have knifed me in the back. It's the way, you see; you have to know who you can trust. By which I mean: you have to know how long you can trust someone, know the moment they will betray you." Silver tongue lowers his voice. "See Gouge there. An admitted murderer. He's got a plan, but he hasn't told us what it is. You know why? It keeps us dependent on him. Sure, we can go our own way, but how long will we survive out there? He needs us for something, and once we aren't useful..." Silvertongue draws his finger across his throat.

You glance back at Jerem, who is concentrating on his feet, already weary. Silver tongue sees and nods. "He's got his uses as well, otherwise Gouge would have disposed of that fop already. He's a murderer. Do you think he'll spare anyone if it gives him a better chance to slay a troll? Mark my words. He'll turn on us sooner or later."

With that sombre warning the conversation seems to lapse and you let yourself drift back behind Silvertongue.

Turn to 9

5

As you are walking you suddenly see a misery flower, a large orange bloom atop a thick woody stalk bristling with leaves.

You hurry over and start to pull off the leaves, being sure not to let any of the fluid inside touch your fingers.

"What are you doing?" Silvertongue calls out.

"Poison!" you call back simply. A very potent poison can be made from these leaves. You harvest a bagful of misery leaves and secure it in your clothing before hurrying after the others.

Add Misery Leaves to your possessions.

Turn to 9

6

Jerem is struggling, his eyes on his feet as he trudges along. You drop back beside him. "Are you all right?"

Despite his obvious pain and weariness he gives you a beaming smile. "I'm fine! Are we going to rest soon? Get something to eat?"

You shake your head. "I don't know what the plan is. But we won't be eating any time soon. This is a barren land."

Jerem frowns. "It's not very decent of them to send us out here with so few supplies! How do they expect us to kill trolls like this?"

You hesitate, but decide it's best that he confronts reality. "They didn't send us here to kill trolls. They sent us here to be killed by them."

Jerem doesn't respond to this at once and you begin to think he hasn't heard you. But suddenly he looks up. "I forget you know...I forget that I'm a criminal. I've been dragged from my home and sent to a strange place...but something in me can't accept it. I used to go hiking like this when I was younger, when my father was still alive. This feels the same. It doesn't feel dangerous. It doesn't feel real."

"Well, it is," you offer, not knowing how else to respond to his odd comments.

"Have you ever seen a troll?" he asks you.

"Not a live one. I saw a stuffed one in a travelling show once."

"I've read about them a lot as a child. In adventure books. But who knows if that world was real either?"

"Well, just keep up, we're falling behind," you say gruffly and quicken your step. You know the pace will be hard on Jerem, but becoming exhausted and falling beside the path could be the best thing for him. Every step takes you closer to the land of the trolls.

Turn to 9

8

Walking through the valley you see a surprising variety of plants. The soil is too shallow to support any trees, but you see many gnarled old shrubs that have survived countless seasons, thick with obdurate life and often sharply thorned.

The sunshine and the flowers that are clustered by the path make the journey pleasant, but you never forget that you could at any moment pass the lair of a hungry troll.

If you have the skill of Herbology, turn to 5

Otherwise, turn to 9

9

The path soon begins to climb again. Winding up into the rocky knolls, the true mountains are still in the distance. Gouge pushes everyone hard, allowing only a few rests. Jerem goes slower and slower, and with each impatient stop Gouge eyes him with calculation. It takes little to understand the glint in his dark eyes, weighing the benefits of keeping or abandoning Jerem. But even after Jerem collapses and takes many minutes to rouse, Gouge speaks not a word of abandoning him.

Eventually the air grows cold as the light starts to fade after the long hours of summer. You are near the crest of another hill, and looking back you are surprised at how far you have come. Hills line the nearby southern horizon, The Jaw hidden beyond them.

"Hurry!" Gouge says. "It's not far now."

"Where are we going?" asks Silvertongue. You hadn't realised Gouge had a specific destination in mind.

"The Long Hole," Gouge calls back over his shoulder. "An abandoned mining town."

The chance of shelter bolsters your flagging energy. Silvertongue looks ready to drop, but manages a weak smile. "The Long Hole...these Northerners are certainly unimaginative. The Jaw, The Pit, now The Long Hole. They must have a terrible time of it when it comes to naming their children."

You glance back at Jerem, who doesn't appear to have heard the good news. You say nothing to him, unwilling to disturb whatever it is that is currently making him put one foot in front of the other.

Half an hour later there is still enough light to see ahead the remains of a palisade lying in a sheltered depression between a trio of hilltops. It is not very large, but you grin at it like you are seeing a palace. A few sheds surround a main building that is still largely intact. The place has not been occupied for decades, and the palisade has been smashed apart in a number of places, but there are signs of recent repair work.

Gouge tries the door of the main building. He has to give it a hard shove to make it open, and disappears inside. You follow after him, and find the interior is surprisingly neat with a large, sturdy table and benches in the centre and a number of cots against the walls. There is even an iron stove, set of shelves and a cabinet with the doors hanging open to reveal it's bare insides. Your belly growls with its own emptiness.

Gouge is examining the graffiti which is scratched into the walls. You realise that your party is not the first of the condemned to find this place, by design or chance. You step over to examine the stove while Silvertongue with unexpected courtesy takes care of Jerem, guiding him to a cot. The young man collapses onto it, sending up a cloud of dust. He remains inert as the dust settles back onto him.

You turn away unconcerned. Dying here would be better for him than surviving to be slain by a merciless troll. You are surprised to see several lumps of coal in the stove, ready to burn. Silvertongue looks over your shoulder and grunts. "So we won't freeze tonight after all!"

Gouge had mentioned this was a mining town, and you realise it must have been for coal. Silvertongue has already taken out his flint and some kindling and is trying to light the cast iron stove. Your thoughts turn to food, but you are soon distracted by Gouge's inactivity. He is still reading the graffiti with an intense interest that tells you he is looking for something. You open your mouth to ask, but then quietly shut it again. You watch him, seeing him examine some of the carvings closely, ignoring others. He ignores a large map that looks like it has been carved by several contributors, bypasses pictures of trolls and scratchings of names and dates. Instead he examines each sizable passage of text.

Unfortunately Gouge senses your scrutiny and looks back at you darkly. "Don't know what to do with yourself? How about looking around for anything useful? Weapons, tools, materials..."

"What are you looking for?" you ask him.

"Nothing in particular," he lies. "Just anything that can help us.

"Anything there about food?" you ask a little sarcastically. The troll isn't going to be troubled by four wrecks on the verge of starvation.

"Have a look around," Gouge says flatly.

It seems like all you can do, so you leave the building. A search of the compound reveals nothing, the sheds are scattered with refuse, having already been picked clean of anything useful. You start to explore around the ruined compound. The remains of the busted palisade still reveal signs of two gates that once opened to paths wandering off between the surrounding knolls. You also see a rude path leading up to a hilltop. Unable to muster the will to climb yet another slope you turn your steps downwards.

You choose the smaller path, reasoning that the wider path must lead to the mine itself. The path winds a long way and seems to be going somewhere. It occurs to you that being out here alone as the dimming sky rapidly plunges the world into darkness may not be safe. But a curious courage born of weariness and hopelessness fortifies you. The thought of a troll bursting from the darkness is no more terrifying than the thought of dying of cold and hunger.

Regardless, once the shadows begin to creep from the crevasses and hollows around you, it seems timely to go back. But once you stop, you listen to a odd sound that has been gradually growing in your ears. It seems too much to hope for, but you realise it is only logical. Of course whoever lived

here had to have a supply of water.

You hurry down the path as quickly as the roughness will allow. It is a river, rushing through a cut in the stone and spreading out into a pool before tumbling onwards. You hurry forward and kneel at the river side. Plunging your hands into the chill water you cup your hands and bring some to your mouth. It is pure and fresh.

You decide to hurry back to tell the others.

Turn to **19**

10

BEYOND THE JAW

You stand aside while the others collect their equipment. You notice the large black-bearded man standing back as if refusing to go forward, but you see him watching the others keenly. The nondescript man with the fidgeting hands chooses a sword, flint, and a cloak. The well-dressed noble negotiates for a sword, then chooses a blanket and a mirror. He immediately wraps the blanket around his shoulders and checks his face in the mirror.

Seeing this, the big man sneers and moves forward at last. He chooses a cuirass, helmet and rope. These choices seem odd, leaving him without a weapon. But he turns from the barred window with a glare that dares you to challenge his selections. You feign disinterest and look away.

"Right," the aged guard announces. "This is the way out. Move it." He unlocks a heavy door and pulls it open, letting in a blast of cold air. It is another courtyard, this one with an open gate leading out to Svartland. You lead the way, feeling fortunate you were arrested in winter. Your heavy clothing is suitable for summer in the North. More guards line the walls of the courtyard, watching over your progress as you trudge through the icy mud towards the gate. These are not surly prison guards, but the Fangs of the North, the red-armoured warriors who keep the trolls at bay.

The burly man pushes past you. "Let's go then," he says gruffly as if you had stopped in your tracks. You follow after him with the others, passing through the gate and onto a long rock-strewn slope that is the approach to the fortress. Any enemy would have a difficult task to charge up the jagged slope, in full sight of the defenders of the wall.

You look back at the last refuge of men in this hostile land, and hope you will return. But without the head of a troll the gate will not open for you again. You and your companions struggle down the slope. After your long confinement your fitness has declined and you find it hard going; but you do better than the disgraced nobleman. The other two draw ahead of you and by the time you reach the bottom of the slope you have lost them in the jumble of stones that fill the lower ground.

You wait for the wealthy youth, who smiles at you in appreciation as he finally reaches the bottom. "Thanks!" he gasps. "A little morning exercise for us!" he offers to lighten the mood.

You let the comment blow away on the wind, pretending to look off into the distance while he recovers. "Ready?" you ask a moment later.

"Yes, indeed," he says, and the two of you set off after the others. It takes 15 minutes before you see them again. The two of them are standing on top of a large boulder looking at the way ahead. They are discussing something quietly, and as the wealthy youth stumbles noisily on some loose stones they abruptly cease their conversation and turn to look at the two of you quickly. The burly man grins at something, a dark unsavoury amusement; while the other inspects the two of you closely.

They climb down from the boulder and the four of you come together. The burly man points at a trail of black smoke that is wandering into the air from some distant point. "You see it? Trolls don't live near The Jaw. We gotta travel far. That's our destination: The Pit."

"How do you know what's out there?" you ask.

"I got a map," the burly man says, tapping the side of his head. "I knew they were going to send me here." He looks you over. "What did you do to get here?"

"I was accused of murder," you say.

"And did you do it?" he asks impatiently.

"No," you say firmly.

The burly man looks disappointed, but he shows complete scorn when he turns to regard the wealthy youth who is still panting heavily. "And what about you, your ladyship?" he asks with a sneer.

"A dreadful state of affairs!" the youth begins. "My brother came to me with a plan to accelerate our inheritance. It was his idea, he was the one who killed mother; but they accused me!"

The burly man looks irritated. "So you didn't do anything, you utter princess!"

The nondescript man looks more impressed. "No doubt that was his plan all along! Kill your mother to get the inheritance and have you moved out of the way so it all comes to him! A perfect plan!"

"He wouldn't do that!" the youth exclaims. "I mean, he hates me, but he would not do anything so...horrid!"

The burly man laughs unkindly. "Great, so the smart one's living it up somewhere and we've got the stupid, useless one!"

The youth frowns. "Now, listen here..."

"Shut up!" the brute says with surprising vehemence. "I don't care who you were on the other side of The Jaw; here you're nothing! I plan on getting a troll's head and going back south. You can either be useful, or get lost!" His furious eyes fall back on you. "Can you actually use that sword you're carrying?"

"Yes, I can," you say. "Shall we exchange names?" You introduce yourself to the group.

The burly man considers this as if it is some sort of strategy. "All right. You can call me Gouge."

The non-descript man waves. "I'm Silvertongue. I use trickery to relieve fools of their money. A conman if you will; although that term does not convey the...art of what I do." He grins.

"Those aren't real names!" the wealthy youth exclaims as if offended. "Very well! My name is...Avenger!"

Gouge laughs mockingly. "Sure thing, milady. Let's go, then."

"One moment, you," the youth says. "You haven't told us your crime, and if you did it."

"Of course I did it!" Gouge says incredulously. "I murdered a bunch of actors in a tavern. Their little act was rubbish and they refused to give me my coin back!"

He moves off down the trail and Silvertongue follows him. "What a horrible man!" the wealthy youth exclaims.

"The trolls will be worse," you warn him.

His face brightens and he laughs as if this is a joke. "Yes, yes they will. My real name is Jerem, by the way." He holds out his hand.

You humour him by shaking it. "Let's catch up," you suggest and follow after the others.

The column of black smoke looks like it is not too far away, but moving through the mountainous country will multiply travel times considerably. The Pit could be days away. You climb single file for a long time before the trail descends into a valley and the walking is easier. The valley is filled with scrubby plants and wildflowers that fill the air with a pleasant scent. There are even berries in full fruit growing beside the path and all of you eat as you walk, hands heedlessly scratched by sharp thorns.

You see no recent signs of troll activity. It seems Gouge is correct that there are no trolls in this area in the summer. You relax and consider striking up a conversation with one of your companions.

If you would like to talk to Gouge, turn to 2

If you would like to talk to Silvertongue, turn to 4

If you would like to talk to Jerem, turn to 6

Otherwise to keep to yourself, turn to 8

11

You wake up abruptly to the sound of splitting wood from outside. You blink away your sleepiness, seeing sunlight streaming in through myriad tiny holes. Jerem groans and sits up. Gouge and Silvertongue are both gone. You examine the young nobleman critically. He is pale looks disorientated. His spirits seem to have returned though and he smiles at you weakly.

"Where are we? Is this The Molar?"

You get up and gesture to the table where a bucket of water has been placed while you were sleeping. "Water there. We'll be moving out soon."

You scoop up some water in your hands and drink a mouthful before exiting the building. There are more sounds of wood splitting and you follow them to find Gouge and Silvertongue pulling down posts from the palisade. Without tools they are forced to lever off supporting timbers. They have already collected a few and laid them alongside each other to form the raft that will take you down the river.

"How are you with knots?" Gouge asks you.

"I'm no sailor," you admit.

Gouge grunts. "Better leave that to me then. Go prepare supplies for the journey."

You frown at being ordered about, but Gouge is concentrating on his task and is unaware of your objection. Seeing him applying his brute strength to lifting a post from its footing in the ground you realise it's only fair to help prepare for the journey and do as you are asked.

There is unfortunately little to prepare. There will be no need to carry water on the river, but you find the lower half of a broken storage jar that can serve as a bowl or cup. In your exploration you also find the remains of a vegetable patch with a few wilted stalks. You dig through the soil until you find several small, misshapen tubers.

Nothing else looks useful, but you take the tubers back inside to cook them on the iron stove. You catch Jerem drinking from a bottle which he hides quickly with a sheepish grin. You don't say anything, hardly caring that he hid alcohol from the rest of you.

"A little something to wet my throat," he says, "I've never really drunk water. Care for a mouthful?"

You are tempted, but shake your head. Stoking up the fire you toss the tubers on top of the plate and wait for it to heat up. Jerem finishes the last of the spirits in the bottle and seems better for it, red cheeked and bright eyed.

If you collected some misery flower leaves yesterday, turn to **13**

Otherwise, turn to **18**

13

"You mind if I have that bottle?" you ask Jerem.

"Not at all," he say curiously. "What do you want it for?"

You take the bottle and wash it out with water from the bucket. "Remember the plant I collected yesterday?"

"Yes. You said it was poison."

You fill the makeshift clay bowl with water before positioning it on the stove with the tubers. You work the fire until the water starts to boil and the tubers are done. Using another shard of clay you remove the tubers from the stove and throw the leaves into the water.

You turn to Jerem, who has watched this whole process with fascination. "Best if you stay outside while I'm doing this. You don't want to breath the air in here while I'm concentrating the poison."

"What about you?" Jerem asks as if offended.

"I'll be fine, I've done this before. But leave the door wide open."

"All right then," he says as if you are trying to get rid of him and stalks out the door.

Unfortunately it's still dangerous for you, but you have no other choice. You boil the leaves until the water volume is reduced by half and has become a sickly green colour. You use your coat to

protect your hands as you lift the bowl off the stove and to the table where you leave it to cool. Once it is ready, you slowly and carefully pour it into the bottle. You still spill about a quarter of it on the floor. When you are done you place the cork in the top and swirl it around. It is a potent poison, but it is too weak and too little to kill a troll outright.

Returning to the tubers, you use a shard of clay as a plate and carry them outside to the others.

Add Poison to your possessions.

Turn to **16**

14

Turning to face Jerem, you speak in a level tone that doesn't let any of your irritation escape. "You know why we were sent here, don't you?"

"Of course, to kill trolls!"

"No!" you exclaim, some of your irritation leaking out. "We were sent here to die! The most likely outcome is that we will all be killed fighting the first troll that finds us. If we do kill a troll I guarantee that we won't all be alive to see it!"

"You don't have to speak to me in that tone!"

"I do if you think this is one of your fancy hunting trips! As far as the world is concerned, you are a murderer. Everyone wants to see you dead!"

"But I thought this was a trial, for the gods to rule on innocence and guilt. I am innocent, so the gods will help me!"

"No, they will not," you say firmly.

Jerem frowns. "Well, that's bothersome!"

You roll your eyes and concentrate on your tubers. Once they are done you use a shard of clay as a plate and carry them outside with Jerem at your heels.

Turn to **16**

16

Gouge has used the rope he chose as one of his three items of equipment to tie the poles together. Even from the start he had his plan yet he did not choose any weapon.

The raft is long and narrow rather than broad, and all of you will have to sit in single file upon it. You can see that you will also all be getting wet.

You offer the tubers and everyone takes a couple to eat while they rest. It is a silent meal filled with a sense of foreboding.

"All right," Gouge says wiping his hands on his clothes. "Let's carry it down to the water."

You lend your strength to the effort and the four of you carry the raft down the winding path to the river. It is tough going with several pauses for rest, and once the raft slips from your combined grasp. As a test of its robustness, the raft remains in one piece. The raft is set down where it can be launched easily.

Gouge looks at the sky. "We've made good time. Let's get our things and go."

You all hike back to the compound, legs aching with the pain of the previous day. You pack your things and follow the others back down to the river. "So is this stream called, 'The Stream?'" Silvertongue asks. "Or 'The White Water?'"

"No," Gouge says absentmindedly, not picking up on Silvertongue's humour. "It's called The Gush."

"Well, that's a little imaginative," Silvertongue says sombrely.

Turn to **20**

18

You distribute the tubers on the stovetop and stoke up the fire. It takes some time and Jerem, obviously bored, moves so he can watch with keen interest what you are doing. "I've never cooked anything, you know," he says. "Never needed to. There was always..." he waves a hand, "...someone."

"In the wild it's a vital skill," you say, not mentioning that your skills are very rudimentary.

"Yes, I can see it would be," Jerem says. "I never could have imagined this before. Everything happened so fast and sometimes I wonder if this is all a dream I will wake up from." He laughs.

If you want to tell him that he had better wake up right now and start facing the harsh reality of the situation, turn to **14**

If you want to encourage him by telling him that he is doing ok and has potential, turn to **21**

19

By the time you arrive the sky is strewn with bright stars above a jagged land drenched by darkness. A warm amber light seeps through the cracks of the building in the centre of the compound, and you eye it with relief despite the treachery that lurks inside.

You jerk the door open and enter the building. Jerem hasn't moved from his cot, while Silvertongue and Gouge are sitting on opposite sides of the room. You can't tell if they have been talking or glaring at each other.

"Feel like closing the door?" Silvertongue asks pointedly.

You step inside and push the door shut. "Found a river," you report.

Silvertongue is happy to receive this news. Gouge's lack of reaction indicates he already knew the river was there. A little annoyed at the lack of detail he has revealed, you find a chair and sit down, forming the third point of a triangle of mistrust. "It's time for you to talk," you tell Gouge. "You could have told us this place was here, that we would find shelter and water."

"I could also have gone off on my own," Gouge says with an mocking grin.

"You need our help," you point out. "You can't kill a troll on your own."

"That's true," Gouge admits indifferently. "The plan is this: we build a raft from timbers here, then take the river which flows mostly north. It washes straight into The Pit. We'll get there in less than a day, then we kill The Ravager and start back home."

"The Ravager?" Silvertongue says. "Is that the Troll's name?"

"Yeah."

Silvertongue frowns. "Why does a troll have a name, and how do we even know about it?"

Gouge pauses, then leans forward in his seat. "The Ravager is what those who have survived call him. He's a giant, so big that brave warriors have run at the sight of him! That's why there are so many survivors and so many stories. He destroyed this place, coming out of the fog on a winter night desperate for food. He smashed open the gates and devoured men left and right. You see that?" He points to hole in the roof that has been repaired. "That was from his arm smashing through, to pull out men thrashing in fear before tearing their warm bodies open with his fangs!"

He grins at the end of his story and you don't know whether to believe it or not. Gouge abandons his chair and drops onto one of the cots. "I'm going to sleep. You ladies can chatter the night away if you want."

"Are we going to set a watch?" you ask.

Gouge shifts to get comfortable. "There's nothing out there that can open a door, and the trolls will just smash their way in regardless if they really want to."

He closes his eyes and seems to fall rapidly into sleep. Silvertongue shrugs and goes to his cot as well. You too start to think about rest.

Turn to **11**

Into The Pit

It takes a coordinated effort to launch the raft, but you all manage to leap onto it as the raft is pulled out into the flow of the stream with no more than wet boots. Once you are all in your positions, the raft is not too uncomfortable and the rocky hills sweep by at a fast pace. You hang on to loops in the ropes and watch the way ahead as the stream flows between formations and crashes down step-like drops, spraying all of you with water.

"There aren't any waterfalls ahead are there?" Silvertongue asks.

"I don't know," Gouge shout back over this shoulder.

"He doesn't know?" Jerem shouts in your ear. "Then....this is madness!"

"There's no other choice!" you shout back.

The stream gets rougher, running white. You and the others concentrate on the way ahead, throwing your weight from one side to the other to prevent the raft from tipping over.

The land rushes past and after what may have been an hour or two of tumbling along the stream's course the walls of the gorge suddenly open and you see a broad landscape rimmed with ragged peaks. On the far horizon the wide mouth of a glacier inexorably pushes large chunks of ice into a valley carved out in a colder age. In the summer the chunks of ice are melting, creating icy lakes around dwindling peaks of crystalline white. Rather than being barren you are surprised to see grasses and flowers have emerged from the hard soil to thrive in the long days of summer.

It is within this broad landscape that you see the thick column of smoke rising from a jumble of dark stones in the distance. "Careful now," Gouge says quietly. "This is troll country. They should be sleeping through the daylight, but let's not try to wake them up."

Silently your raft floats through the land, chill air and bright sunlight keeping you alert if not the wariness of trolls. You see birds wading in the cool lakes, and a herd of deer gambolling though the grasslands; all of which makes the tension ease from your body. Another hour passes and the thick black smoke column begins to dominate the southern sky. You can smell its dirty soot now and see the grimy film that covers everything from the accumulated deposit of tiny soot particles.

Another hour takes you deeper into a blackened land. The soot covered ground is devoid of life, and ashen waters surround jagged peaks of black ice. It looks hellish and as the smoke column looms over you, Gouge unties a long, pointed rod from the side of the raft and begins to push towards the shore. You pick up your own section of plank and start to paddle. The end of the craft thuds into the crust of dirty black ice lining the bank and Gouge quickly climbs off onto firmer ground followed by Silvertongue, yourself, and then Jerem.

The raft starts to drift away and Jerem makes a grab for it. "Help me!" He hisses.

You grab hold of him and pull him back, breaking his grip on the raft. "Let it go. It won't help us now."

The raft drifts along the river and is carried away. The four of you turn to regard the black citadel of irregular stone forming a mound that curves away into the distance either side of you. Gouge starts to climb up the side of the stone jumble and the rest of you follow. The mound of stones is not large on the outside, but once you reach the top and cautiously peer over, you are amazed at how far down the land drops away. The Pit is a large crater strewn with stones and chunks of ice. The smoke rises from its very centre where a large quantity of coal is being burned. It is still not close and is the better part of an hour's walk away.

Gouge turns to the rest of you and speaks quietly. "To face a troll in open combat is suicide. We need to trap it somehow. So be on the lookout for anything we can use." With that he leads the way as he has always done, down into The Pit with his sharpened rod clutched like a spear. You silently offer Gouge your grudging respect. Ruthlessly he has always done what needs to be done. In his way he has enabled you all to have the best chance at a hopeless task.

The soot is so thick within The Pit that it is hard to distinguish stone from ice and the sky is under a

pall. This makes the temperature drop and it feels colder and colder the nearer you get to the great fire that must disgorge the pillar of smoke at the heart of The Pit.

For half an hour you trudge across the ruined land, your heart increasingly devastated by the enormity of the task ahead. Yet step after step you and the others move, resolute in the execution of fate. Suddenly Gouge seems excited and turns to wave an arm for you all to hurry. You quicken your step up the rise and find a ravine that ends in a large cave.

"This might work," Gouge says. "If we can get the troll to chase us into this cave it will be blinded for a few moments." He gestures to the sharpened rod he has been carrying. "We can set this in the ground just inside the shadows, and get him to run right onto it!"

"Great!" Silvertongue says, "Except we get stuck in the cave with a wounded troll!"

"There's probably another way out," Gouge says confidently.

"So, you're volunteering to be the bait?" Silvertongue asks.

"I'm not that good at running," Gouge says conveniently.

"Well, I'm not doing it unless I know there's a way out," Silvertongue says.

Gouge looks at you, increasingly irritated. "Well?"

If you have a lantern, turn to **25**

Otherwise, turn to **28**

21

"You never know what you're capable of until you're put in a difficult situation," you say. "You've come this far, so you've got that to be proud of. It's going to get more challenging ahead, but at least we'll all discover what we're made of. Even if we die, as long as we die going forwards we can't expect anything more of ourselves."

Jerem absorbs this in silence for a time. "Thank you," he says at last. "I wish I had met you somewhere else, when we were not going to our deaths. You are a true friend."

"Don't worry about it," you say, slightly embarrassed

"I consider myself in your debt for the kindness you have shown me, and considering the fate that lies ahead of us I would like to do whatever I can to increase our chances. Here, let us swap swords! I gave the guard a bejewelled ring for his own sword!"

You look over at Jerem's sword. You had noticed that it seemed well-made and in good condition, but you assumed there was something wrong with it. You agree to swap and Jerem takes your short-bladed sword. The prison guards are equipped from the same armoury that services the Fangs of the North, and your new sword is suitably fine with a keen edge.

Pleased, you put the sword aside and concentrate on your tubers. Once they are done you use a shard of clay as a plate and carry them outside with Jerem at your heels.

You are now equipped with a Steelfang. This will increase your Dexterity when using it by +1, you can add this bonus for any test involving Dexterity marked with a †. This means you have a +2 bonus if you also selected the Special Skill of Swordsmanship.

Turn to **16**

23

It is only a few minutes later that you arrive at the heart of The Pit. Here a broad hollow lies in the very centre where a huge fire burns off a mound of coal. The sound of the fire fills the air with a dull roar punctuated by a loud crackling sound. The firelight gleams off the polished armour, weapons and skulls of hundreds of slain warriors arranged neatly in clusters like flowerbeds that are the gristly work of a deranged gardener. The fire forces the soot up and out of the hollow so the glittering displays remain clean. You glance at the others, all dusted now with soot until their hair faces and

skin are all black. The only relief from the darkness is the whiteness of desperate eagerness around their eyes. You are sure you look the same.

Back in the hollow other stone forms that seem purposeful are also scattered about. One seems to be a chair, another broad flat stone covered in dark bloodstains a table; but both are made in gigantic proportions. Trolls are said to be large and heavy, but The Ravager must be at three times the height of a man!

Despite his size it takes many moments for you to see the giant troll. What you mistook for part of a long mound of grey stone is actually the troll lying prone on the far side of the fire. You can see only his legs, mottled grey limbs as thick as tree trunks, long curved claws protruding from knobbed toes as large as your head. Some kind of bone jewellery decorates his thick ankles, and you realise that this is no great beast, but a intelligent being of a monstrous nature.

Gouge is not looking at The Ravager, but instead around the rim of the hollow. He motions silently for the rest of you to follow. He leads you all around to part of the edge of the hollow that rises high above the floor below. Much of the hollow appears to have been formed by scraping away the ground to dig for abundant coal that lies just under the surface. Gouge starts investigating large stones, appearing to be looking for one that is loose. He finds one and beckons you all close. The four of you gather around the stone like a council of war.

"All right," Gouge says softly. "We need to carry this rock to the edge of the hollow. We'll lure The Ravager over and then drop this down on him. We'll have to hide out of sight until he's below. If we're lucky it'll knock him out cold. Otherwise, it could just break his shoulder or something."

"What if it misses?" Jerem asks, looking more excited than worried.

"Let's not miss," Gouge says grimly.

Silvertongue nods as if the plan is watertight, not seeming to see the glaring omission. "How are you going to lure the troll over?" you ask.

"I plan to scream," Gouge says, baring his teeth in a grin. "Come on, let's lift the rock over."

The answer is unsatisfying, and you can't help feeling something is being left out. You grasp your side of the rock, and the four of your carry it over with no small amount of difficulty. The rock is set carefully on the edge, and propped up with another rock to raise one side. Hopefully you can all flip the rock up and over the edge before the troll knows it is coming.

Gouge turns to you and says, "We'll need to hide out of sight."

Why this is your job you don't know, but you turn away to look for a place where you can conceal yourself. You see at once that the height of the drop should keep you and the others from the troll's line of sight. To remain hidden you will just have to keep back from the edge.

It is obvious, and you turn back to Gouge to tell him this. You realise too late that all he meant to do was distract you. You see the flash of steel against his soot-coated armour as he pulls out a hidden knife. His eyes burning like coals he seizes Jerem in one strong arm and shoves the knife into his back. His lips part in a horrid smile of sated bloodlust. You take a step forward, but Silvertongue bars your way with his arm, giving you a sympathetic look and shaking his head silently.

He knew. Gouge would not have told him, but he knew. You should have guessed as well. Jerem alone does not understand, his mouth open in a silent scream. His dirty face seems to glow with a pure light of horror at the betrayal. As his strength wanes he struggles, but Gouge holds him fast with a long experience of murder and eases him to the ground.

"Bait," he says to you as if this justifies everything. He pulls the sword from Jerem's belt and grasps it with satisfaction. You recall his equipment choices at the start of the journey. He didn't choose a weapon. You realise that he intended all along to kill Jerem, that he had harboured the murder in his heart all the while. All the apparent care he had showed to Jerem was to allow his victim to carry himself to the site of his own disposal.

"You utter bastard!" you spit.

"Necessity," Gouge says. "Only blood will lure the troll. That fop wasn't going to be much use. Just be glad it wasn't you!" Only the glow of murder lingering in Gouge's eyes stops you from attacking him. Dark grimed in armour and now with sword in hand, hair and beard thick with

blackness he looks suddenly intimidating.

Silvertongue sidles over to you. "What he means to say is that we have to do what we can to get out of here," he says in a convincing tone. "It's a sad fact, but a fact nonetheless. If we faced that troll in open combat, one more man wouldn't make a difference. We would need half a dozen more to have a chance. We have to trick it. Jerem was his name, wasn't it? Let's kill the troll for Jerem's sake, yeah?"

You look at Silvertongue. "You knew," you accuse.

"I guessed," Silvertongue says. "And I want to get out of here."

You turn away from them, feeling furious. Jerem didn't deserve to die, but expediency does not allow you to indulge your anger. It has been done, and you need Gouge's strength if you are to kill the troll.

You turn back to the others. "So what is the real plan?"

"We drop the body down below. I scream. The Ravager comes over and thinks someone has fallen down. A free meal. He starts to eat and we drop the stone down on him."

"Fine. Let's do it," you say. Gouge nods in approval, ignoring the retribution smouldering in your gaze.

If you have a bottle of poison, turn to **26**

Otherwise, turn to **30**

25

"Let me have a look and find out for sure," you say. Silvertongue thinks this is an excellent idea and takes out his flint to help you light the lantern wick. Once you have a flame burning you descend into the ravine and start to walk along into the cave. The ancient stone closes around you slowly, giving you the sensation of being swallowed by some lethargic monster.

Your light reflects off walls that are pale, shielded from the constant rain of soot. The space inside is large enough for a troll, and broken stones carpet the floor of the cave, providing a means to set the makeshift pike. You go deeper looking for a way out. The cave narrows rapidly as you go further inside and becomes a manually cut tunnel, the walls covered in rough chisel marks. The tunnel plunges deep into the earth for several minutes before you see it opens out ahead and has its own source of light. You can smell soot again and know that you are coming to the open air.

You leave the tunnel and step into a mausoleum. About twenty stone sarcophagi fill the room, all with their lids removed. One wall of the mausoleum has been torn open and you can see the slope of The Pit beyond the ragged hole. Satisfied there is a way out you start to leave through the hole when you notice something odd. At the far end of the mausoleum there is a niche in which sits a metal box. On the floor surrounding the niche there is a large number of remains, covered in shrivelled flesh. It is too cold for the flesh to rot.

You approach the scene carefully, and reach the metal box. You cautiously pick it up and work the box open, its hinges screeching.

Inside you find a dagger with a golden handle. The blade is bright steel and has runes heavily inscribed in the flats. You see some words inscribed around the hilt and read: *Much afearred by trolls.*

You store the find in your belt and toss the box noisily aside. The clatter does not wake the dead, but you hasten from the hall and out through the rip in the side of the structure. Out in The Pit once more you hurry back around, coming to the slope you originally ascended, seeing the backs of the others.

You get quite close before without them realising you are there and make your footfalls heavier. All three turn in alarm and regard you with relief or annoyance. "Yes, there's another way out," you say.

"Good!" Gouge says. "Let's set the pike!"

You lead the others into the cave again, and Gouge selects the spot he says the troll will still be

blinded. You all lift away the stones to create a hole and Gouge sets the long wooden rod at an angle to 'rip his belly right out' as he puts it. The rest of you pile the stones back to hold the long wooden rod in place.

Gouge inspects the work and adds a few larger stones before he is satisfied. Silently, he sets off again and the rest of you follow.

Make a note of the Codeword CAVE

Add the Golden Dagger to your possessions

Turn to **23**

26

Gouge starts to crouch to pick up the body. "Wait a moment," you say and pull out the bottle of poison. Gouge understands and steps back. You kneel beside the body and uncork the bottle. You don't know where the Troll will bite, but you force the neck of the bottle into the wound with brute necessity and pour the poison into his insides.

You step back, and gesture to Gouge feeling wretchedly callous.

Make a note of the codeword POISON

Turn to **30**

28

You shake your head as well. "No way."

"Utter cowards!" Gouge spits and stalks off deeper into The Pit.

"He didn't even ask me," grumbles Jerem quietly.

"Would you have said yes?" Silvertongue asks in interest.

"Oh, no. Of course not. I just don't like being left out."

Silvertongue snorts and follows after Gouge. You follow as well and Jerem brings up the rear, starting to quietly hum a tune.

Turn to **23**

30

Gouge stoops and hauls the body over to the lip of the drop. He inhales and then releases the body at the same time as he lets a heart-rending scream of terror burst from his throat. It is a shocking sound to hear, ringing with genuine fear. Yet you wonder if it will be loud enough to rouse the troll from his slumber beside the roar and crackle of the fire.

Keenly the three of you watch and the great form stirs. As one all three of you retreat behind the lip of the drop. Fancifully you imagine the ground quaking with each footstep, but the earth remains still. Instead you gradually hear a loud wheezing as the giant troll approaches, a low growl emitted from a cavernous throat.

You cannot tell how close it is. Gouge seems paralysed with indecision and increasingly irritated with the feeling of weakness. Before he can dare a look there comes a loud and horrible sound. The snapping of bone and tearing of flesh as Jerem's body is torn in two by savagely efficient jaws.

Gouge grins and gestures urgently. The three of you scramble forward and put your shoulders under the raised edge of the stone. You feel cold dread seize your insides. You could have crept away. After this the troll will know you are here. But you push with the others, summoning up courage to advance towards your fate.

Test your Strength by rolling 2 dice.

If the total of the dice is greater than your current Strength, turn to **37**

If the total of the dice is equal to or less than your current Strength, turn to **35**

31

You motion the others to a stop, and indicate you will sneak on ahead to strike the first blow. Gouge nods, while Silvertongue makes a sweeping courtly gesture inviting you forward. You draw your blade and creep ahead. With the noise of the fire and The Ravager's own breathing you feel confident you can approach undetected.

Step by step you draw closer until the back of the troll rises before you like a wall. You level your blade, aiming between the ribs...

If you have a Golden Dagger and are using it now, turn to **34**

Otherwise, turn to **38**

32

You, Gouge and Silvertongue are about to fight The Ravager. The giant troll has the following initial values for its attributes. If you have any of the listed Code words, you can reduce the initial values by the amount indicated.

THE RAVAGER		
Attributes:	Dexterity	Vitality
Initial values:	12	72
Code words		
POISON	-2	-6
STONE	-1	
CAVE		-12
STEEL		-6
GOLD	-1	-6
Final values:		

As you fight the troll, you will need to keep track of these stats as well as your own. Once you reduce the Troll's Vitality to 0, it is dead!

Turn to **40**

33

You and the others make for the cave. A fear makes you want to run as quickly as you can and hide in the recesses of the cave, but you force yourself to slow down and look back over your shoulder.

The others are scanning the area as well. "Are you sure he's going to follow us?" Silvertongue asks.

Before he can answer you all suddenly see The Ravager's horned head emerge from the hollow. Despite being hunched, it moves swiftly, bounding with long legs and is suddenly closer than you thought possible. In a panic you run. The others are pounding the ground beside you, stumbling on loose stones and running on. You dare not look behind you, but are swifter than Gouge in his heavy armour. Silvertongue is fastest of all and leads the way to the cave while you wait for the sound of Gouge's terrified scream.

Silvertongue disappears into the cave and you follow, stumbling over the rough floor and falling

over painfully on the stones. Everything is black and you can't see anything as you scramble on your hands and knees. A crashing of metal on stone indicates Gouge has staggered into the cave as well and you turn back towards the mouth.

The Ravager's silhouette fills the opening, nearly shutting out the light as he plunges inside. You retreat back into the darkness afraid you have not moved beyond the reach of the troll. Suddenly there is a odd squishing sound and the shadowed form doubles with a cry of pain. It has worked. The Ravager hobbles backwards, then retreats from the cave and disappears over the side of the ridge.

You wait in the darkness, hardly daring to breathe. Several minutes pass. "Let's go out the back way," Gouge says. "In case he's waiting for us."

Silently you all start to move. You are unable to light your lantern in the darkness so you feel your way along until you can see the light of the mausoleum ahead. You make immediately for the rip in the wall, but Gouge and Silvertongue pause in surprise.

"People used to live here!" Silvertongue says in surprise.

"There are no valuables left," you say. "It was a long time ago."

You lead the way back outside and the three of you cautiously move back towards the hollow. It takes half an hour to reach the edge of the hollow as the three of you move as carefully as possible. Peering cautiously over the edge you see The Ravager sitting by the fire. You can see that he is still alive as his massive frame heaves with his breath.

"Well, this is it," says Gouge. "We just have to go down there and finish him off."

Feeling no need to comment on how optimistic his words are, you and Silvertongue follow as Gouge leads the way down to the floor of the hollow, keeping out of sight of The Ravager. The troll does not react, unable to move or believing itself safe in its home.

If you have the Special Skill of Stealth, turn to **31**

Otherwise, turn to **36**

34

You plunge the rune-marked blade into the troll's back before pulling it out and retreating quickly. The troll flinches in pain and surprise, surging to his feet and rounding on you as you flee. Spasms of pain flicker across The Ravager's face and he seems paralysed with agony.

Unfortunately he shakes off the effects of the knife and looks down at the three of you with a baleful glare. It picks up a hammer made from a block of stone on a metal shaft and waits for you to draw near.

Make a note of the codeword GOLD

Turn to **32**

35

You heave on the stone and with a grinding sound it tips over and flips over the lip. You step up to the edge just in time to see the stone crash onto the shoulder of the monstrous troll. You hear bone snap, and the troll roars, staring up at the three of you.

It is your first sight of the entire creature and you feel your strength start to drain out of your body. Even stooped it is as tall as three men with a great girth covered in mottled grey skin. Its large eyes are black and burn with a mounting fury, a fang-filled mouth opening in a roar. Ancient horns curling about several times sweep back from the brow and long silvered hair flows off its cheeks to form a beard that covers its massive barrel-shaped chest.

It seizes the stone you dropped onto it with one claw fingered hand, the big rock fitting in one palm and hurls it back at you with a snarl. Self preservation breaks the spell and the three of you dive for cover as the stone soars over you.

"Run!" Gouge says unnecessarily.

Make a note of the Codeword **STONE**

If you have acquired the Codeword **CAVE**, turn to **33**
Otherwise, turn to **39**

36

The three of you spread out as you advance. The Ravager turns his massive head and without surprise stands up. Turning to confront the three of you the troll picks up a hammer made from a block of stone on a metal shaft and waits for you to draw near.

Turn to **32**

37

You heave on the stone and for a moment you fear that the three of you cannot lift it, but then with a grinding sound it tips over and flips over the lip. You step up to the edge just in time to see the troll move back and the stone bouncing on the ground at his feet. The troll stares up at the three of you, unwounded.

It is your first sight of the entire creature and you feel your strength start to drain out of your body. Even stooped it is as tall as three men with a great girth covered in mottled grey skin. Its large eyes are black and burn with a mounting fury, a fang-filled mouth opening in a roar. Ancient horns curling about several times sweep back from the face and long silvered hair flows off its cheeks to form a beard that covers its massive barrel-shaped chest.

It seizes the stone you dropped with one claw fingered hand, the big rock fitting in one palm and hurls it back at you with a snarl. Self preservation breaks the spell and the three of you dive for cover as the stone soars over you.

"Run!" Gouge says unnecessarily.

If you have acquired the Codeword **CAVE**, turn to **33**
Otherwise, turn to **39**

38

You plunge your sword into the troll's back before jerking the blade out and retreating quickly. The troll flinches in pain and surprise, surging to his feet and rounding on you as you flee. Furiously the troll looks down at the three of you with a baleful glare. It picks up a hammer made from a block of stone on a metal shaft and waits for you to draw near.

*Make a note of the codeword **STEEL***

Turn to **32**

39

You and the others run as fast as you can. Silvertongue proves to be the fleetest of foot and draws ahead of you, while Gouge is weighed down by his armour and heavy frame. Ahead of you Silvertongue suddenly sees something and changes course, waving for the rest of you to follow.

You follow after him and see that he has spotted a crack in a tumble of boulders. It is wide enough for Silvertongue to disappear inside, and you follow. Gouge squeezes in after you. The crack opens

into a gap where there is a little more room, but you all have to remain standing cheek by jowl.

You wait breathlessly for several minutes. Just as you are beginning to think the troll has lost you, the click of claws on stone and a loud wheezing breath comes closer. You watch the light spilling through the crack intently. The sound of the troll searching gets louder, but then recedes and is gone. All of you wait silently for many more minutes before Gouge moves. He scrapes through the crack, the noise jarringly loud in your ears. He stops outside and peers around. No massive arm snatches him up. You follow and emerge into the muted sunlight. The Ravager appears to have gone.

"What now?" Silvertongue asks.

"Only one thing left to do," Gouge says, drawing his sword.

For a moment you think he means for you all to kill yourselves; and idea does not seem untoward. A chuckle escapes your lips and the other two look at you in surprise.

"Hold it together," Gouge growls. "Let's go."

He leads the way back. It takes half an hour to reach the edge of the hollow as the three of you move as carefully as possible. Peering cautiously over the edge you see The Ravager sitting by the fire.

"Well, this is it," says Gouge. "We just have to go down there and finish him off."

Feeling no need to comment on how optimistic his words are, you and Silvertongue follow as Gouge leads the way down to the floor of the hollow, keeping out of sight of The Ravager. The troll does not react, perhaps unable to move or believing itself safe in its home.

If you have the Special Skill of Stealth, turn to **31**

Otherwise, turn to **36**

40

By the Inferno

The light of keen intelligence burns in the eyes of The Ravager as the three of you spread out to surround the troll, the great inferno at his back. You are facing an opponent as wily as any you have faced, except this one is aided by a massive constitution and bone-crushing strength.

He seems content to let you approach him, spreading yourselves out wide...

Roll 1 die.

If you roll a 1 or a 4, turn to **49**

If you roll a 2 or a 5, turn to **65**

If you roll a 3 or a 6, turn to **83**

41

The Ravager's hand opens like a clawed net, threatening to catch you up like a hapless fish. Diving aside you avoid his grasp and roll clumsily over the rough ground. Scrambling to your feet you see Gouge take advantage of the troll's distraction to stab The Ravager in the thigh with both sword and dagger. Blood pours from the twin wounds, and seems to infect Gouge with bloodlust. Rather than pulling the sword free, you see him drop his dagger and lever the sword to increase the damage inflicted, snarling gleefully as The Ravager roars in pain.

But there is only one way it can end, and the giant troll reaches down and grabs Gouge. The stubborn killer still refuses to relinquish his weapon and the blade is pulled free as The Ravager hauls Gouge up into the air. The gaping wound explodes with blood and the troll growls in pain while falling to one knee.

Gouge hacks at the hand that has him imprisoned, his cuirass protecting him from being crushed.

But The Ravager will soon finish him off. You leap forward to attack, letting a war cry burst from your lungs to draw the troll's attention. The monstrous creature makes note of your approach as you charge into the range of his clutches.

Gouge slices The Ravager's wrist, and in annoyance The Ravager throws Gouge directly at you...

Reduce The Ravager's Vitality by 6, and his Dexterity by 1.

Reduce your Stamina by 2

If your Stamina is 2 or less, turn to **87**

Otherwise:

If your Dexterity is greater than The Ravager's, turn to **69**

If The Ravager's Dexterity is greater than yours, turn to **87**

42

You watch as Gouge and Silvertongue battle the troll, leaping in to try and wound him before jumping back out of range of the hammer. They score only a few minor wounds before The Ravager drives them back with wide swings. You prepare yourself for the next phase of the battle.

If you have Medicine and want to drink it now, you may do so to restore 12 points of your current Vitality

Turn to **99**

43

Needing every advantage, you charge at The Ravager to prevent him reaching his hammer. He turns to meet your charge, raising his clawed hands in preparation. You let your momentum build, summoning up the force and savagery necessary to inflict harm against his ancient hide.

If you want to take a running leap at The Ravager, turn to **68** (-2 Stamina)

If you want to dive under his reach, turn to **84**

44

The blow is too swift and strong for you to avoid and the hammer crashes into you with tremendous force, snapping bones like twigs and splitting your body open like a sack. You feel no pain as your body is flung through the air like a broken doll carelessly cast aside. You land somewhere and see the stones around you turn red as your blood flows out.

The pain starts to come then, but the world is fading away and soon there is nothing.

THIS IS THE END FOR YOU

45

Moving forward you keep away from the thick limbs and position yourself at The Ravager's head. Lifting your sword high, you swing the blade with all of your strength, aiming at the broad forehead, the seat of a heinous intelligence, intending to render it twain.

Test your Strength by rolling 2 dice.

If this is your second attempt, you may minus one from the total of the dice roll. If this is your third attempt, you may minus two from the dice rolls, and so on.

If your Strength is equal to or greater than the total of the dice rolls, turn to **56**

If the total of the dice rolls is greater than your Strength, turn to **86**

46

Covering your mouth to avoid breathing in ashes you watch through squinted eyes for the blazing projectiles. Sidestepping in retreat, you avoid several fiery missiles and take refuge behind one of the mounds of polished armour and skulls.

From your refuge you see that Gouge and Silvertongue find cover as well. You suddenly hear the pounding of The Ravager's feet as he runs forward, scattering burning coals in his path. You understand now his strategy. In fleeing the fiery storm the three of you have moved far apart, rendered blind and vulnerable. Weaponless, the monstrous troll is bearing down on Silvertongue who does not yet see his doom approaching. Gouge shouts a warning, but the ash-laden air seems to swallow his shout.

To rush out to try and save him, turn to **55** (-4 Stamina)

Otherwise, turn to **77**

47

You surprise The Ravager by running forward as he thunders near. Rather than swing the hammer, The Ravager jabs it forward like a battering ram. You attempt to twist aside without losing any of your momentum...

Test your Dexterity against The Ravager's by rolling one die and adding it to your current Dexterity. Roll another die and add it to The Ravager's current Dexterity.

If your total is equal to or higher, turn to **61**

If The Ravager's total is higher, turn to **80**

48

Seeing The Ravager's leg bent, you bound up and use his knee to launch yourself higher, thrusting your sword into his belly. Your sword rips upward, unleashing a torrent of blood and foul-smelling fluids.

Your sword is pulled free as you fall back down to the ground. You spin around behind one of The Ravager's legs and swing your sword with both hands, slashing at the back of his thigh to sever the hamstring. The Ravager stumbles clutching at his ruptured belly.

You wait to see how serious an injury you have inflicted and see The Ravager limp but not fall. He picks up his hammer and leans heavily on it for a moment before rounding on you fiercely.

Reduce The Ravager's Vitality by the value of your strength, and his Dexterity by 1

Turn to **52**

49

With a swiftness that belies his hulking frame The Ravager suddenly bounds towards you with hammer raised. With terrible speed he is suddenly looming over you with the hammer head descending upon you like a meteor.

Test your Dexterity against The Ravager's by rolling one die and adding it to your current Dexterity. Roll another die and add it to The Ravager's current Dexterity.

If your result is equal or higher, turn to **67**

If The Ravager's result is higher, turn to **51**

50

You pull one of the rusty javelins free and take aim. With all your strength you heave the pointed shaft. It arcs through the firelight towards the broad back of The Ravager of Men...

Test your Strength and Dexterity by rolling 4 dice.

If the sum of your current Strength and Dexterity is greater than the total of the dice roll, turn to **76**

If the total of the dice roll is greater than the sum of your current Strength and Dexterity, turn to **88**

51

Your move comes a little too late and the hammer clips you as it thunders past. Such is the force that you are spun about and slam heavily into the ground. Desperately you roll away from imaginary blows and scramble to your feet.

Gouge and Silvertongue attack the Troll from the rear and The Ravager swings the hammer in a wide arc, forcing them back.

If you are wearing a cuirass, reduce your Vitality by 2

Otherwise, reduce your Vitality by 6

If this kills you, turn to **97**

Otherwise, turn to **99**

52

You quickly retreat, avoiding injury by the slimmest of margins. The Ravager strides after you, but lets you get several yards away before he stops. You keep going, stumbling over the rough ground without daring to take your eyes off him. Finally you come to a stop.

The Ravager is still far away when he starts to swing the hammer from side to side. Suddenly he steps forward as the hammer swings back and throws it low to the ground so that the haft spins around the heavy head.

In a panic you run and try to dive away from the spinning weapon.

If your Stamina is less than 4, turn to **64**

Otherwise:

Test your Dexterity by rolling 2 dice.

If the sum of the dice rolls is greater than your current Dexterity, turn to **64**

If your Dexterity is equal to or higher, turn to **81**

53

Charging forward, you see surprise flicker in the eyes of the troll as his powerful arms swing the hammer. Rather than throwing yourself to your doom, you leap...

Test your current Dexterity by rolling 2 dice.

If your Dexterity is equal to or greater than the total of the 2 dice, turn to **85**

If the total of the 2 dice is greater, turn to **51**

54

The clawed hands grasp you, but slowly fall away as The Ravager starts to topple backwards. As he crashes to the ground you fall onto the hilt of your sword and drive it deeper into his body. A

groan escapes from his lips, and you let yourself fall off his body. Leaving your sword in his heart, you stagger over to a nearby weapon pile and find a large axe. It takes some effort to work it free, but eventually it is yours and you turn back to The Ravager.

He is not dead yet, but his breath rattles in his lungs and he coughs up thick blood. He claws weakly at the sword, but seems too weak to remove it. His end is near. You lift the axe onto your shoulder and approach him cautiously. You are halted in your steps as The Ravager's head lolls to one side, staring directly at you. His ragged breath deepens, and The Ravager starts to make sounds, varied and rhythmic. It is speaking, reciting in some language you have never hear before.

"Can you talk?" you ask The Ravager of Men.

The great eyes stare at you with sad knowing, unafraid to meet death. The Ravager speaks again and this time you understand.

*"I was born befanged and clawed
It is in my nature to be savage
Men are born soft and adored
How are such hearts turned to kill and ravage?"*

The dark eyes slide closed and after one deep inhalation, the rattling breath eases outwards and falls silent as The Ravager's chest is stilled. In disbelief, fearing trickery of regeneration you hesitate to approach the fallen giant. But as the minutes pass your courage settles in the bottom of your heart like the accumulation of ashes.

Still, you creep forward and once by the wide face of The Ravager which looks peaceful in repose, you lift the axe high. Your first stroke gets caught in the thick beard, but The Ravager does not stir. You swing the axe again and again, and eventually the head rolls free, hewn from the body. You drop the axe and let yourself fall to the ground. It is done.

You stare at the sky, wondering if the spirit of The Ravager is rising above you and how soon you will follow, trapped in the heart of this unforgiving land.

Turn to **100**

55

You run through the settling ash and cinders, a murderous scene laid clear as the shadowy curtain of ash falls away to render the dismemberment of Silvertongue raw and absolute. He is caught up in The Ravager's grasp, mouth and eyes wide with terror. His scream is a frightening wail that pierces the core of your courage. Cruelly it is cut off as The Ravager grips Silvertongue's head and shoulders with his other hand and with ponderous might wrenches your companion into two, spilling out blood and innards from an irrevocable wound.

If you want to avenge Silvertongue by charging forward with all your strength and trying to impale the troll on your sword, turn to **73** (-2 Stamina)

If you think it is wiser to dart in and score a wound before retreating to a safe distance, turn to **93**

56

Ancient bone as obdurate as stone nearly jars the sword from your grasp as you hack at the troll's skull. Your split his forehead open and cut into the bone with a resounding crack. The Ravager immediately slumps and lies still. Gouge barks in triumph and jerks his sword free.

"I don't think he's dead," you warn.

"He'll be dead after I cut his head off!" Gouge declares as he leaps down to the ground.

Decapitating the giant troll is not easy. The Ravager's neck is thicker than a log, and concealed by the thick grey beard running off his jowls. Gouge begins cutting away the thick hair to lay bare the

neck.

"We should make sure he's dead first," you say.

Gouge jerks his head in the direction of the deep chest wound. "He's on his way out! I've killed enough men to know."

"He's a troll, he might be regenerating."

Gouge rounds on you with eyes flashing. "Then instead of yapping, get out your bloody sword and stick him with it until you're satisfied!"

Your sword is already in your hand and you move around the body to the troll's side. You draw back and plunge the blade in. The Ravager's body flinches and with a snarl of pain he sits up and swats you aside with one hand knocking you over. You see Gouge with reckless courage has seized a handful of The Ravager's beard and is carried up as the troll struggles to his feet, Gouge's other hand wielding his red-bladed sword, plunging it into The Ravager's throat.

What damage is done through the thick beard is imperceptible as The Ravager seizes Gouge and tears him free. Gouge roars in defiance, fresh blood on his sword as The Ravager falls to his knees. The brutal killer once again tries to cut himself from the ponderous grasp of The Ravager, but this time the giant troll keeps his grip and with abrupt atrocity slams his fist into the ground, pulverising Gouge's head against the frozen stone. Again and again he smashes the body against the ground, painting it with blood before he carelessly tosses the armoured corpse aside with a clang.

Rising to his feet, The Ravager turns towards you with a weary, wounded gaze. Blood runs from the split forehead down into his eyes. All his fury is gone, and all that remains is a cold determination to end you and be done with this intrusion.

His eyes start to scan the ground and you realise he is looking for his weapon.

Reduce The Ravager's Vitality by 12.

If you want to charge The Ravager while he is in a weakened state and unarmed, turn to **43** (-4 Stamina)

If you want to wait to see what The Ravager will do, turn to **74** (+8 Stamina)

57

As Gouge climbs to his feet with a clanging of metal and muttering as verbose as foul, you see the trail of blood leading away. The wound to The Ravager's leg must have been severe enough for him to retreat rather than risk further attack.

You wave Gouge to silence and indicate the trail of blood. Gouge's eyes, dark and smouldering are kindled with vicious joy. You turn away, appalled by a darkness in him that seems inhuman. But then you see Silvertongue's body, bloody and torn. Hardening your heart with your own kind of darkness you look back at Gouge. You cannot know what he sees in your eyes, but he grins and gives you a nod of approval. As one the two of you turn and stark to quietly follow the trail of blood, stalking the killer.

Restore 6 Stamina.

If you have Medicine and want to drink it now, you may do so to restore 12 points of your current Vitality.

The trail curves back behind the cover of the larger mounds of trophies and heads towards the inferno. Looking ahead you see no sign of The Ravager silhouetted against the towering flames and become ever more cautious. Before you even reach the fire the trail of blood disappears. You stop where the last few drops of blood mark the frozen ground, but Gouge goes on, motioning for you to follow. You spread your hands to indicate the lack of any further trail, but Gouge has already turned his back on your gesture.

The Ravager appears suddenly, but incongruously walks into view from behind a large mound of

the inscribed bones of numerous woolly mammoth skeletons complete with curling tusks. The giant troll has fetched his hammer once more, and although he still limps you notice that the many wounds you have inflicted are closed. You remember it has been said that Trolls can regenerate themselves, but you did not imagine it could be done in mere minutes. Fortunately he has only stemmed the flow of blood, and the deeper layers of his flesh seem to be damaged still.

Appalled by The Ravager's restoration you and Gouge both are immobilised by a momentary dejection. The troll considers the two of you as if selecting a calf for slaughter.

Increase The Ravager's *current* Dexterity by 1.

Roll one die.

If you roll a 1, 3 or 5, turn to **59**

If you roll a 2, 4 or 6, turn to **75**

58

Your sudden charge takes you inside The Ravager's grasp. You try to leap and stab him but fall awkwardly against his thick legs. With a snarl you are kicked aside, sent tumbling through the air. You land against a mound of weapons, and several of them pierce your arms and legs.

You tear yourself free with a cry, collapsing to the group and splattering the pale grey stone with dark splotches of blood. You remain on your feet with some difficulty, feeling pain shoot through your entire body. The giant troll is nearby, and stoops to pick up his hammer.

As The Ravager comes for you, you do not know if you can even move...

Reduce your Vitality by 4.

If this kills you or your Stamina is 0, turn to **44**

Otherwise, turn to **52**

59

Shrugging his hammer off his shoulder, The Ravager swings it forward and suddenly is bounding towards you.

If you want to risk meeting the charge and trying to land a counter-attack, turn to **47** (-4 Stamina)

If you just want to avoid the blow, turn to **89**

60

Your sudden charge takes you inside The Ravager's grasp. You leap upwards and grasp the flowing beard of The Ravager, using it to hoist yourself up even higher. Your feet find purchase and as The Ravager's hands start to close on you, you thrust your sword with all your strength into the troll's chest. The blade slips between the ribs and pierces the great heart.

Reduce The Ravager's Vitality by the value of your Strength.

If this kills him, turn to **54**

Otherwise:

Turn to **62**

61

You veer to the side, feeling the brute force of the stone hammer brush past you before you are past immediate danger and angle in your attack, leaping to meet the forward momentum of The Ravager

with the vicious point of your sword.

Aiming at the open armpit you rise up off the ground and stab your sword through the softer skin above the highest rib. The blade sinks in, but the sinewy flesh resists penetration sufficiently to allow you to push past The Ravager, your sword trailing an arc of blood as you pull it free and land on your feet behind the stumbling troll.

Reduce The Ravager's Vitality by the value of your Strength.

Seeing The Ravager staggering, Gouge runs in and cuts at one of The Ravager's legs just as the troll places his weight on it. The towering creature comes crashing down to the ground, sending up a cloud of ash and soot. Recklessly Gouge vaults up onto the prone form of The Ravager and raises his sword high, firelight flaring off the shining steel as he plunges it down into The Ravager's chest. Eerily, The Ravager makes no sound, but writhes in obvious agony. Gouge hangs on and presses his weight on the hilt of the sword to drive it in deeper.

If you want to move in and assist Gouge, turn to **45** (-2 Stamina)

If you want to keep your distance, turn to **70** (+2 Stamina)

62

The Ravager roars in pain and grabs you, pulling your sword out of his chest as he crushes you in his grasp. Screaming in pain you stab your sword deep into The Ravager's wrist. Snarling he flings you aside and collapses to his knees. You spin through the air and strike the ground painfully, rolling perilously close to the fire. You roll the other way and stagger to your feet, seeing The Ravager also rise slowly, and start searching for his hammer.

Reduce your Dexterity by 1.

If you are not wearing a cuirass, reduce your Vitality by 6

If this kills you, turn to **97**

Otherwise:

If you want to charge The Ravager before he finds his hammer, turn to **43** (-4 Stamina)

To rest and let him make the next move, turn to **74** (+2 Stamina)

63

With ashes stinging your eyes you watch out for any flaming chunks of coal. One emerges from the billowing ash, blazing swiftly before you. You attempt to dodge it but the burning coal strikes you in the chest and knocks you to the ground. The air is blasted from your lungs and you feel as if your chest has been crushed, but you cannot afford to indulge your agony. Staggering to your feet you take refuge behind one of the mounts of polished armour and skulls.

From your refuge you see that Gouge and Silvertongue have retreated as well and are finding cover. You suddenly hear the pounding of The Ravager's feet as he runs, scattering burning coals in his path. You understand now his strategy. In fleeing the fiery storm the three of you have scattered yourselves, making each vulnerable. Weaponless, the monstrous troll is bearing down on Silvertongue who does not yet see his doom approaching. Gouge shouts a warning, but the ash-laden air seems to dull his shout.

Reduce your Vitality by 2, and your Strength and Dexterity by 1 point each.

If this kills you, turn to **97**

Otherwise:

If you want to try and run to his aid, turn to **55** (-4 Stamina)
 To wait, turn to **77**

64

Your attempts to dodge the rotating hammer are futile and the metal haft smashes into you so hard that you are stunned, coming to seeing the smudged sky rippling above you with waves of heat from the great fire.

You don't know how much time has passed, but you desperately struggle to your feet, feeling the sharp pain of new injuries. The Ravager has scooped up his hammer and is bounding towards you. Only a few moments can have passed since you were struck. The monstrous killer looms over you as a sharp pain shoots through your chest. His hammer sweeps towards you...

Reduce your Vitality by 6 and your Stamina by 4
 If this kills you or your Stamina is zero, turn to **44**
 Otherwise turn to **52**

65

The Ravager lifts his hammer and rushes at Gouge. The black-bearded warrior greets his charge with a blood curdling roar, striking his armoured chest with his sword. Silvertongue runs forward to try and take advantage of the troll's back.

If you want to run forward and attack, turn to **79** (- 4 Stamina)
 If you want to hang back for now, turn to **42** (+ 4 Stamina)

66

The Ravager appears unconcerned, knowing that you and Gouge are slowly weakening, while the troll is able to regenerate all but the deepest of wounds in minutes. Your time is running out. As if to emphasise this, The Ravager turns and decides to attack you by charging in your direction. Rather than swing the hammer, he jabs it forward like a battering ram...

If your Stamina is less than 4, turn to **80**
 Otherwise:
 Test your Dexterity against The Ravager's by rolling one die and adding it to your current Dexterity. Roll another die and add it to The Ravager's current Dexterity.
 If your total is the same or higher, turn to **61**
 If The Ravager's total is higher, turn to **80**

67

You leap aside just in time and the hammer smashes into the ground, sending an explosion of stone chips in all directions. You stagger to regain your balance as you see Gouge and Silvertongue attack the Troll from the rear.

The Ravager swings the hammer in a wide arc, forcing them back.

Reduce your current Stamina by 4
 Turn to **99**

68

You shout boldly as you leap towards The Ravager's chest. You see The Ravager step back and as if in slow motion his arm swings, claws splayed as with unerring certainty his blow moves to meet your airborne attack. You are going to be swatted from the air, smashed and shredded by his cruel claws.

You twist in the air, changing your target from the troll's broad chest to the imminent harm of The Ravager's claws.

Test your Dexterity† by rolling two dice.

If Your dexterity is the same or greater than the dice roll, turn to **92**

If the dice roll is higher, turn to **78**

† *Swordsmanship/Fang Bonus applicable.*

69

The dark, iron-clad mass hurtles towards you and you flatten yourself against the ground as Gouge tumbles through the air. With curses interspaced by grunts of pain he crashes to the ground and rolls to a stop, still clutching the bloody sword in hand.

You spring back onto your feet, weapon at the ready. To your surprise you see The Ravager has disappeared. Turning wildly in all directions you slash the empty air as your fanciful mind imagines that the wily beast has turned himself invisible.

Turn to **57**

70

You stay back and let your strength return.

Gouge continues to try and push the sword in deeper, but the blade appears to be caught in the bone and cartilage of the troll's naturally armoured chest. Swearing, Gouge jerks on the sword until it comes free, intending to plunge it in again.

As the sword comes free a agonising roar is torn from the belly of The Ravager, spewing bloody red mist into the air. With a swift movement The Ravager snatches Gouge from his chest and rolls over, slowly pushing himself up to his knees with the burly fighter still in his grasp.

The troll tries to stand, but falls back to his knees. Gouge roars in defiance and the brutal killer tries to cut himself from the ponderous grasp of The Ravager, but the giant troll keeps his grip and with abrupt atrocity slams his hand into the ground, pulverising Gouge's head against the frozen stone. Again and again he smashes the body against the ground, painting it with blood before he carelessly tosses the body aside.

Rising to his feet, The Ravager turns towards you with a weary, wounded gaze. All his fury is gone, and all that remains is a cold determination to end you and be done with this intrusion.

His eyes start to scan the ground and you realise he is looking for his weapon.

Reduce The Ravager's Vitality by 8

If you want to charge The Ravager while he is in a weakened state and unarmed, turn to **43** (-4 Stamina)

If you want to wait to see what The Ravager will do, turn to **74** (+4 Stamina)

71

You dive forward as the hammer hisses through the air, heavy with the portent of harm...

Test your current Dexterity† by rolling 2 dice.

If your Dexterity is equal to or greater than the total of the 2 dice, turn to **95**

If the total of the 2 dice is greater than your Dexterity, turn to **51**

† *Swordsmanship/Fang Bonus applicable*

72

You spin around behind one of The Ravager's legs and swing your sword with both hands, slashing at the back of his thigh to sever the hamstring. The Ravager stumbles and you retreat.

You wait to see how serious an injury you have inflicted and see The Ravager limp but not fall. He picks up his hammer and leans heavily on it for a moment before rounding on you fiercely.

Reduce The Ravager's Dexterity by 1

Turn to **52**

73

Vengeful strength charges your limbs and you increase your speed. Surging forward you grasp your sword in both hands and thrust it like a lance into the troll's back, seeking to puncture the visceral core of his fortitude.

Your sword plunges deep and you grind your feet into the ground as you shove the blade in deeper. The Ravager stiffens, bellowing in pain. You pull the sword free, red from hilt to tip. Swinging his arms as he turns, you are knocked aside, jarred by his fist as it slams into you.

Not daring to falter, you stagger, trying to keep your feet. You manage some semblance of balance as The Ravager lunges towards you with bloody hands outstretched, seeking to rend your body into pieces.

Reduce The Ravager's Vitality by the value of your Strength.

If your Stamina is less than 4, turn to **91**

Test your Dexterity against The Ravager's by rolling one die and adding it to your current Dexterity.

Roll another die and add it to The Ravager's current Dexterity.

If your result is equal to or greater than The Ravager's, turn to **41**

Otherwise, turn to **91**

74

The Ravager stoops to pick up his hammer, gasping with pain or effort, and then leans upon it heavily. He seems so much like an aged grandfather that you feel a tremor of compassion. He turns to look at you with his vehement gaze and you harden your heart again, knowing that the troll will kill you at the first opportunity he gets. His weakness only means you are winning, and your task to put him in the ground is nearing its end.

You see The Ravager pause curiously, and he seems to give you a small nod as if agreeing with your thoughts; death for one of you is the only outcome. Grimly then he hefts the hammer, and starts to walk towards you. He is still far away when he starts to swing the hammer from side to side. Suddenly he steps forward as the hammer swings back and throws it low to the ground so that the haft spins around the heavy head.

In a panic you run and try to dive away from the spinning weapon.

If your Stamina is 2 or less, turn to **64**

Otherwise:

Test your Dexterity by rolling 2 dice.

If the sum of the dice rolls is greater than your current Dexterity, turn to **64**

If your Dexterity is equal or higher, turn to **81**

75

Shrugging his hammer off his shoulder, The Ravager swings it forward and suddenly bounds towards Gouge.

Gouge stumbles away from the hammer blow and attempts a counter attack. You are too far away to charge in while The Ravager is distracted, but there are a large number of javelins in one of the display mounds next to you.

If you want to take a javelin and throw it at The Ravager, turn to **50** (-4 Stamina)

If you want to take this chance to rest, turn to **96** (+4 Stamina)

76

The javelin flies true and embeds itself in The Ravager's back. The monstrous troll stiffens and claws at the javelin in his back. He manages to grab hold of it and pulls it free by jerking it powerfully, throwing himself off balance.

Divide your Strength by two (rounding up to a whole number) and reduce The Ravager's Vitality by this amount.

Seeing The Ravager staggering, Gouge runs in and cuts at one of The Ravager's legs just as the troll places his weight on it. The towering creature comes crashing down to the ground, sending up a cloud of ash and soot, the javelin bouncing away. Recklessly Gouge vaults up onto the prone form of The Ravager and raises his sword high, firelight flaring off the shining steel as he plunges it down into The Ravager's chest.

Eerily, The Ravager makes no sound, but writhes in obvious agony. Gouge hangs on and presses his weight on the hilt of the sword to drive it deeper.

If you want to move in and assist Gouge, turn to **45** (-2 Stamina)

If you want to keep your distance, turn to **70** (+2 Stamina)

77

You shout a warning to Silvertongue who has hidden behind a pyramid of rectangular shields. Perhaps hearing you, or feeling the tremulous charge of The Ravager, Silvertongue looks around the edge of his refuge. His blackened face grows stricken with terror and he scrambles to escape. But the troll is swift and catches him up in one hand.

You hear the crack of bone as The Ravager constricts his hand tightly, and Silvertongue's scream is cut short as the breath of life is squeezed out of him. The troll then tosses him aside like a bone stripped bare of flesh. Already limp with lifelessness, only Silvertongue's face retains any rigidity, stretched in a silent scream of fear and agony. His crumpled form tumbles over the rough ground and comes to an undignified stop.

The Ravager turns to you next. His snarling maw widens in a grin and he leaps towards you, hands grasping to crush the life from you as well.

If your Stamina is less than 4, turn to 57

Test your Dexterity against The Ravager's by rolling one die and adding it to your current Dexterity. Roll another die and add it to The Ravager's current Dexterity.

If your result is greater, turn to **41**

Otherwise, turn to **91**

78

You flail awkwardly and are helplessly smashed aside by The Ravager. The world spins and you crash into the ground, tumbling over and over. You feel like several of your bones have been fractured by the tremendous impact and a cry of agony escapes from you as you pull yourself into a seated position.

The world is spinning and finally settles to the terrifying scene of The Ravager looming above you, grinning in triumph. Hammer in hand he swings it swiftly down upon you.

Reduce your Vitality by 6

If this kills you, turn to **44**

Otherwise, if your Stamina is 6 or greater, turn to **52**

If your Stamina is less than 6, turn to **44**

79

You charge forward, aiming a blow at The Ravager's back. Knowing an attack is coming from behind the troll breaks away and spins about, sweeping the hammer in an arc that threatens to smash you aside. Unable to stop your momentum, you continue forward in a desperate and courageous attack...

The troll is stooped over as it swings the hammer at his diminutive foes.

If you want to try and leap over the hammer and shove your sword into his chest, turn to **53** (-2 Stamina)

If you want to roll under the sweep of the hammer and cut at his legs, turn to **71**

80

As you move, you attempt to avoid the stone block that is the head of the massive war hammer. You fail to jump far enough and are struck by the edge of the stone. Although it is only a glancing blow, it has the ponderous force of the ancient troll behind it, and you are knocked several yards, tumbling to a painful stop.

Unable to indulge your agony you surge back to your feet before feeling the extent to which you are broken. The Ravager does not pursue you, cold and careless his eyes swing to Gouge.

If you are wearing a cuirass, reduce your Vitality by 2; otherwise reduce it by 6.

If this kills you, turn to **97**

Otherwise, turn to **90**

81

You feel the hammer tear through the air, but avoid the crushing blow. You crash and roll to your feet having escaped injury. The respite is momentary as The Ravager bears down on you, already too close for you to run. The clawed hands spread wide to enclose you as the monstrous troll sweeps in to

end you.

With a roar you meet his attack...

Reduce your Stamina by 2

If your Stamina is now less than 2, turn to **58**

Otherwise:

Test your Dexterity† against The Ravager's by rolling one die and adding it to your current Dexterity. Roll another die and add it to The Ravager's current Dexterity.

If your result is equal to or greater than The Ravager's, turn to **60**

Otherwise, turn to **58**

† *Swordsmanship/Fang Bonus applicable.*

83

The Ravager charges at Silvertongue with the mighty stone hammer raised. The trickster starts dancing from side to side, ready to dodge the blow. Gouge makes his own charge at the troll's back, waving for you to join him.

If you want to run forward and attack, turn to **79** (-4 Stamina)

If you want to hang back for now, turn to **42** (+ 4 Stamina)

84

You charge forward, fixing The Ravager with a hard stare as if your gaze is a lance of steel piercing his bloody eyes. You see his thick arm start to swing and pretend to ignore it. At the last moment you throw yourself into a roll and spring to your feet as The Ravager stumbles over you...

If your Stamina is 6 or greater, turn to **48**

If your Stamina is less than 6, turn to **72**

85

The visage of the troll, sage with years, horrid with ravenous bloodlust fills your vision as you propel yourself forwards, sword levelled at the powerful heart that charges the mighty limbs to commit ruin upon the flesh of the desperate and foolish. You launch yourself into the air, above the crippling arc of the stone hammer and thrusting forward with your remaining strength; aiming to bury your steel in his chest and bring the vile heart to silence.

You clear the hammer and the broad chest looms before you. Your momentum slams you sword-first into the body of The Ravager, your blade cleaving his scarred hide and loosing the blood of his life, drenching you in hot crimson.

The Ravager staggers, and you jerk the sword free, unleashing another gout of blood. You thump into the ground and roll clear as The Ravager clutches at the wound with one hand, the other still swinging the hammer to keep Gouge and Silvertongue back.

Reduce The Ravager's Vitality by the value of your Strength.

The monstrous troll retreats towards the fire. Although wounded, copious reserves of strength remain to The Ravager of Men, and with cunning intent he falls back still further until the mighty fire licks at his back. Taking his gaze from his hesitant attackers, The Ravager looks for something and

takes a few long strides to snatch it up, dropping his hammer at his feet.

Of all things The Ravager has picked up a shovel. Formed from a rectangular plate of steel that was once a door, and brutally hammered into concavity before being mounted on a pole; it is a crude tool used for shovelling coal to feed the towering flame.

As if ignoring his attackers, The Ravager turns his back on you. You glance at the others; Silvertongue also sharing your confusion. Gouge stares fixedly at The Ravager, his dark eyes bright with intensity as if to strip away The Ravager's flesh to lay bare his intent.

Scooping up a large quantity of flaming coals and hot ashes, The Ravager spins and flings the shovel-load in a fiery arc. You dodge a large flaming chunk of coal, but several smaller chunks hit you, and a rolling cloud of ashes stings your eyes and sears your throat.

You fall back with the others as The Ravager scoops up more burning ashes. He appears to be trying to drive you away. The coal and ashes are thrown high in the air and rain down like a shower of fiery meteors.

You attempt to avoid the chunks of burning coal, some of which are as large as your head.

If you have a shield, turn to **46**

Otherwise:

Test your Dexterity by rolling 2 dice.

If your Dexterity is the same or greater than the total of the dice roll, turn to **46**

If the total of the dice roll is greater than your Dexterity, turn to **63**

86

Ancient bone as obdurate as stone nearly jars the sword from your grasp as you hack at the troll's skull. Your blow cracks loudly against The Ravager's forehead, but it just seems to make him angry. Roaring at last with an exhalation red with blood, The Ravager tries to get up, but falls back as Gouge pushes his sword deeper. The troll paws weakly at him trying to grab Gouge, but his movements are feeble.

Turn to **94**

87

The dark, iron-clad mass hurtles towards you and smashes into you before you can move out of the way. You are knocked to the ground stunned. With curses interspaced with grunts of pain Gouge rolls to a stop nearby, still clutching the bloody sword in hand.

A cry of agony escapes from you as you climb back onto your feet as quickly as you are able, finding a sharp stone has been driven into your leg. You pull it free and the world spins for a few moments. Your sword feels heavy in your hand, but to your relief you see The Ravager has disappeared.

Reduce your Vitality by 2 and your Dexterity by 1

If this kills you, turn to **97**

Otherwise:

Turn to **57**

88

Your javelin misses and clatters on the hand ground, barely causing a distraction. You are left to watch helplessly as Gouge tries to inflict a wound on The Ravager. His sword remains thirsty and eventually he is forced to retreat as The Ravager nearly crushes him under the massive hammer.

If you have Medicine and want to drink it now, you may do so to restore 12 points of your current Vitality.

Turn to **66**

89

Rather than swing the hammer, The Ravager jabs it forward like a battering ram as he thunders forward. You throw yourself to one side.

If your Stamina is less than 4, turn to **80**

Otherwise:

Test your Dexterity against The Ravager's by rolling one die and adding it to your current Dexterity. Roll another die and add it to The Ravager's current Dexterity.

If your result is equal to or greater than The Ravager's, turn to **98**

Otherwise, turn to **80**

90

The Ravager laughs in cruel amusement and turns his icy gaze to Gouge, giving him only a moments warning before he thunders over the ground towards him. Gouge stumbles away from the hammer blow and attempts a counter attack. You are too far away to charge in while The Ravager is distracted, but there are a large number of javelins in one of the display mounds next to you.

If you want to take a javelin and throw it at The Ravager, turn to **50** (-4 Stamina)

If you want to take this chance to rest, turn to **96** (+8 Stamina)

91

The Ravager lunges towards you, his clawed hand blocking out the light as it engulfs you. You are snatched up from the ground and lifted directly in front of The Ravagers' terrifying snarl. The Ravager squeezes you in his grasp as you desperately struggle to get free.

Before The Ravager can tear you apart you feel him stiffen and snarl in pain. You can't see what is happening, but The Ravager turns around and kicks at something. Your sword arm is still free and you start to slash at The Ravager's wrist and fingers. You hear Gouge's war-cry and the next moment you are thrown through the air at a dizzying pace. Not knowing where the ground is you tumble through the air for the briefest of moments before smashing into something metal that jars you painfully, but nonetheless gives way.

Shaken, you hear Gouge cursing foully and guess that The Ravager threw you at him. A cry of agony escapes from you as you climb back onto your feet as quickly as you are able with your ribs burning. Your sword feels heavy in your hand, but to your relief you see The Ravager has disappeared.

Reduce your Vitality by 6 (or by 2 if you are wearing a cuirass) and your Dexterity by 1.

If this kills you, turn to **97**

Otherwise:

Reduce The Ravager's Vitality by 12, and his Dexterity by 1

Turn to **57**

92

You slash at the hand of The Ravager as it slams into you. You are stunned by the impact that sends you crashing to the ground. Insensible to anything except The Ravager's scream of pain. You shake off the shock, not feeling the pain of being swatted from the air until you climb to your feet. You stagger, seeing that The Ravager has paused to contemplate the finger that you have cut from his hand.

Reduce your Vitality by 4

If this kills you, turn to **97**

Otherwise:

Reduce The Ravager's Dexterity by 1

Turn to **52**

93

Scurrying forward you jump in and try to cripple The Ravager with a slash to one of his hamstrings. Your sword cuts keenly through the dense flesh, but you wrench the blade free and stumble backwards over the coal-strewn ground as The Ravager bellows in pain.

He spins to face you, eyes bright with fury. But his movements are hampered and you know that you have wounded him. He looms above you, your triumph suddenly paling as The Ravager lunges with bloody hands outstretched, seeking to rend your body into pieces.

Reduce The Ravager's Dexterity by 1

If your Stamina is less than 2, turn to **91**

Test your Dexterity against The Ravager's by rolling one die and adding it to your current Dexterity. Roll another die and add it to The Ravager's current Dexterity.

If your result is equal to or greater than The Ravager's, turn to **41**

Otherwise, turn to **91**

94

The Ravager continues to writhe in silent agony. Gouge hangs on and presses his weight on the hilt of the sword to drive it deeper. While you decide whether to try and wound The Ravager again.

To try again, turn to **45** (-2 Stamina)

If you want to keep your distance, turn to **70** (+2 Stamina)

95

You roll under the hammer and spring up to your feet with The Ravager's legs looming like trunks from an ancient forest, gnarled with age but thick with strength. You swing your sword with both hands, chopping at his knee. Your blow cuts to the bone, and The Ravager stumbles. You quickly move back as he swings the stone hammer to scatter his foes.

Reduce The Ravager's Vitality by half the value of your Strength, and his Dexterity by 1.

The monstrous troll retreats back towards the fire. Although wounded, copious reserves of

strength remain to The Ravager, and with cunning intent he falls back still further until the mighty fire licks at his back. Taking his gaze from his hesitant attackers, The Ravager turns to look for something and takes a few long strides to snatch it up, dropping his hammer at his feet.

Of all things The Ravager has picked up a shovel. Formed from a rectangular plate of steel that was once a door, and brutally hammered into concavity before being mounted on a pole it is a crude tool used for shovelling coals to feed the towering flame.

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A moment later it is clear. Scooping up a large quantity of flaming coals and hot ashes, The Ravager spins and flings the shovel-load in a fiery arc. You dodge a large flaming chunk of coal, but several smaller chunks hit you, and a rolling cloud of ashes sting your eyes and sear your throat.

You fall back with the others as The Ravager scoops up more burning coal. He appears to be trying to drive you away. The coal and ashes are thrown high in the air and rain down like a shower of fiery meteors.

You attempt to avoid the chunks of burning coal, some of which are as large as your head.

If you have a shield, turn to **46**

Otherwise:

Test your Dexterity by rolling 2 dice.

If your Dexterity is the same or greater than the total of the dice roll, turn to **46**

If the total of the dice roll is greater than your Dexterity, turn to **63**

96

You pause to regain your energy, watching as Gouge tries to inflict a wound on The Ravager. His sword remains thirsty and eventually he is forced to retreat as The Ravager nearly crushes him under the massive hammer.

If you have Medicine and want to drink it now, you may do so to restore 12 points of your current Vitality.

Turn to **66**

97

You see the view in front of you suddenly tilt, and feel something hit your side. Things are growing dim as you slowly realise that you have fallen over. You try to move, but sharp pain makes you give up at once. The Ravager is stalking towards you, but you aren't afraid. You know you are escaping, and once your eyes close you hear only silence.

YOUR ADVENTURE HAS ENDED

98

You dive and roll as you feel the brutal weight of the hammer head passes through the space you were occupying moments ago. The promise of shattered bone and torn flesh unfulfilled, you roll to you feet and retreat as The Ravager regains his balance and turns to contemplate his quarry once more.

Turn to **90**

99

The battle breaks as all of you retreat from the troll, and he is content to wait a few moments once more, swinging his deadly hammer from side to side as he regards you with his ancient gaze.

Roll 1 die.

If you roll a 1 or a 4, turn to **49**

If you roll a 2 or a 5, turn to **65**

If you roll a 3 or a 6, turn to **83**

100

Yannic cursed the wind as it howled over the battlements of the Jaw, the chilling promise of a hard winter ahead. Early ice crunched under his boots as he walked back and forth, watching the jagged and broken land to the north, wary for a threat that would never come. At the end of each watch his legs were weary and sore from all of the pacing, but standing still was worse; the cold entered into his bones and made him fear he would never be able to move again if he lingered too long in one spot.

His watch would only last another hour or so, and thoughts of the broad hearth in the watchhouse, some ale and food, and one of the scullery maids who had been smiling at him this last week brought him some extra warmth from within. He didn't know her name yet, but yesterday she had allowed him to kiss her in a shadowy corner.

His thoughts far from his duty, it took a while for Yannic to notice the figure staggering towards the Jaw. His eyes were drawn naturally to the movement of someone bundled in ragged cloth that billowed and snapped on the wind like the tattered flag of a fallen kingdom. Realising how close the figure had come, Yannic pulled his horn from his belt. It was not a troll. It was a man dragging a sledge up the slope, making no attempt to remain concealed.

Bringing the horn to his lips, Yannic blew three short sharp blasts to alert the fortress. Other guards appeared, including the sergeant who came out and grunted. "Yannic," the sergeant said, "Go and tell the Captain an Innocent has returned."

"An Innocent?" Yannic exclaimed. "Are you sure?" The sergeant said nothing, but raised his eyebrow slightly. "Yes, sir," Yannic corrected and hastily made for the watchhouse. It would be good to get off the wall, although now he didn't feel cold anymore.

When he entered the watchhouse, he found the captain had already heard the alarm and emerged from his office, already dressed in his ornate red-enamelled armour with crested helm under his arm. "What is it?"

"Sir. An Innocent."

The captain nodded. "There were a few hard ones in that last batch." He gestured for Yannic to follow him as they started down the stairs. The captain chuckled. "Remember how the priest was sick that day? None of them received his blessing, now one of them comes back. He won't be happy to hear that!"

"Yes, sir," said Yannic, unsure how to share the joke with his superior officer. But he did smile at the thought of the pompous priest being ruffled.

By the time they reached the courtyard, the traveller had been brought inside, and Yannic was able to see the sledge was loaded with two troll heads, one of which was enormous! "Gods!" the Captain exclaimed. "That troll must have been as big as The Ravager himself."

"It is The Ravager," said the traveller slowly, as if unsure of his voice.

"And the rest of your party?" the captain asked.

"Dead."

Yannic stared at the traveller, impressed by the incredible feat. The traveller himself did not seem heroic; dressed like a beggar with long hair and beard, his wind-burnt face mostly concealed by his hood. He wore a sword belted outside his thick clothing, ready to be drawn.

The captain was inspecting the trophies. The flesh of The Ravager's head was blackened and covered in frost. It had been killed some time ago. The second head had been harvested much sooner.

"You killed this second troll alone?" the Captain asked.

"Yes," the traveller confirmed.

"A great feat for one man."

The traveller shrugged, betraying his weariness. "After The Ravager, a normal sized troll did not seem so difficult."

The captain laughed, even though the traveller seemed to be in earnest. The official that the Guards called 'the Executioner' arrived with his scribe in tow. Ombar the priest came as well, a voluminous fur coat worn over his emerald and gold vestment. Yannic grinned at him, but Ombar never looked his way. After giving the traveller a disparaging look, the priest went back inside.

The official took the traveller's name and inspected the two heads. "Only one is required to prove your innocence," the 'Executioner' noted.

"There was another with me, he said his name was Jerem. The head of The Ravager is proof of his innocence."

The official checked his papers. "And Jerem Goldspun is now dead?"

"Yes."

"He killed this giant troll?"

"He played his part," the traveller said. Yannic wondered if he would have a chance to talk to the traveller to find out what had happened. It would be a great story to share over a mug of warm ale. Several mugs in fact.

The official shared a look with the Captain, who scratched at his short grey beard. "Does the law say the Innocent must return?"

"I will have to check the word of the law carefully."

"Jerem is here," the traveller interrupted, and pulled at a strap securing another bundle to the sledge. It rolled free, and Yannic saw a hand of blackened flesh flop free of the bundle, even though the bundle was not large enough for a whole man. "He was partially devoured," the traveller explained.

The official shrugged. "You've gone to a lot of trouble for a dead man. You did this for the sake of his ghost?" The official looked around for the priest.

"If he is innocent, then somebody else is guilty," the traveller explained.

"Ah," the official replied. Apparently satisfied, he wrote out two certificates of vindication.

The Captain was admiring the long horns of The Ravager's head. "If you intend to go and find the guilty party, I imagine you will need some gold for the journey. Sell us this head as a trophy and we will give you a sum of gold."

"Agreed. I need it no longer," the traveller said tiredly.

"Excellent! Yannic, take the Innocent to get something to eat and a place to rest. See if you can find him a change of clothes too."

"Yes, sir!" said Yannic.

Yannic later got to hear the story he yearned for, and that became the first chapter in the story of the man called *Troll-Slayer*.

THE END