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THE DRAGON'S LAIR

DAVE MORRIS



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1

WISH WATER

The snow made the whole countryside look different. Only it wasn't any different, thought William. It was the same as always. The thing that had changed was the way he saw it.

He kicked at a furrow in the snow, clearing it away to reveal a broken branch. He picked the branch up and swished it around in the air, imagining himself a knight of olden times. But the wood was damp and rotted, and on the third swing the branch broke in half.

William tossed the broken branch

away, his career as a knight over before it had begun.

It was mid-afternoon. Earlier, with the sun in the sky, it hadn't been too cold. The snow glistened then, droplets melting from the icicles in the trees. Now the sky was colourless, and a bitter wind whistled across the heath.

William turned up his collar. He wasn't ready to go home. He might find it changed. Not changed like the heath under the snow, but *really* changed. Not home any more.

He heard the steady *crump* of footsteps in the hard snow. Walking to the top of the rise, he looked past a copse of bare black trees and saw the burly figure of Mr Treguard. He was standing as still as one of the monoliths at Stonehenge, gazing out across the expanse of snow-covered countryside.

William moved back behind the tree. He knew Mr Treguard as a rather gruff man, rich and a little eccentric, who lived in a sprawling old house across the heath. 'Dunhelming' or something, it was called. William had been there

once with a few other children after school, at the end of the summer. They had had a party on the lawn - a birthday party for Mr Treguard's thirteen-year-old niece, Fay. William had gone exploring, venturing through one of the open doors off the patio into a long book-lined study. But he had carelessly blundered into a table and sent a vase crashing to the floor. Too embarrassed to face Mr Treguard with an explanation, he'd left the party at once.

William suddenly felt rather foolish. Fay had never mentioned it at school. His father received no irate call from Mr Treguard. The terrifying bill marked 'priceless Ming vase' which he had expected, never arrived in the post. All in all, they had been very kind about the whole incident. They must have realized who broke the vase, and William felt suddenly more shamefaced than ever. He would have blushed if the cold wind hadn't so thoroughly blanched his cheeks.

Mr Treguard suddenly raised his walking-stick, jabbed it at the ground



like a weapon, and went striding off through the snow. William watched his breath curl up like a plume of smoke behind him. He resolved to own up to the vase incident another time. He didn't feel like company at the moment, anyhow.

William made his way down to the pond known locally as Wish Water. It was iced over and looked like polished black marble under a sprinkling of snow dust. William knew better than to walk on the ice. The winter sunlight was feeble, but enough to spread cracks

that made the ice treacherous. He remembered the story of the poor girl who was drowned. It had been years ago. His mother told him about it.

William's thoughts went briefly to his mother. She was probably snug in bed, watching *Countdown* with a cup of tea. Hospital wasn't such a bad place, really - except it was difficult to get snug in sheets as hard as sailing canvas.

He wandered down to the edge of the pond and began to skirt around it. Wish Water was an odd name. William's father said these names often gave clues to local legends, so maybe the pond had been like a wishing well in medieval times, or maybe witches were dunked here. The name became grist for the mill of William's active imagination, which once again took flight in the company of sorcerers, dragons and bold knights.

His daydream was broken by a faint tapping sound. A bird? He looked up, but could see only a group of black crows ranged along the tree branches overhanging the pond.

One of the crows gave a sour croak and

launched itself into the air, sweeping down close to the pond as it flew off. William's gaze followed it, then caught with horror on a shape that was clearly visible under the ice—

A girl! White as death she was, her eyes wide open and limbs drifting slowly in the chill, dark water. Her pale Knuckles came up against the ice as though she was knocking on a windowpane. *Tap tap tap.*

William thought his heart was about to come pounding out of his throat. He



ran to and fro, staring around wildly. No one was in sight. Mr Treguard ought to be just over the ridge, but when William tried to shout his voice came out as just a strangled sob.

The girl under the ice was Fay. He could see her long black tresses swirling like eels. She saw him, too, and smiled. Even her lips were drained of colour.

William had no idea what to do, but he could see that he had to do something or Fay would drown. Kneeling at the edge of the pond, and being very careful to keep his weight off the ice, he brought his fists down hard.

The ice shivered into cobweb cracks, clouding like a broken car windscreen. He struck again. Water soaked his gloves. Another blow. The ice broke with a noise like a skull splitting.

William gave a gasp and started to get to his feet. He needed a branch or something for Fay to hold on to while he tugged her out.

A hand shot up out of the water and caught his sleeve. William was caught off-balance. He flailed his free

arm, then slipped and fell forward. He could see Fay's pale face smiling up at him. He barely had time to cry out, then there was a splash - followed by eerie silence as the freezing water closed over his head.



2

TIMES PAST

'Glub,' said William. What he meant to say was, 'I ought to be dead but I'm not!'

He was standing knee-deep in the frozen pond. Somehow he had got the impression that it was much deeper. But he was soaked to the skin, and the cold made his teeth chatter noisily.

'You'll freeze to death if you don't get out of those wet things,' said a voice.

William turned around so quickly that he nearly slipped over in the pond. Fay

was standing under a beech tree. Her own clothes were bone dry.

'I . . .' William slogged to the bank. 'Well, I thought you were drowning. Weren't you?'

Fay smiled. 'I wasn't in any danger, but thanks all the same. I really do think you'd better get out of those wet clothes now.' She pointed to a bundle of dry clothing by her feet.

William was not about to argue. He quickly stripped off his soaked pullover and jeans and, shivering violently in the cold wind, gratefully tugged on the dry clothes. 'Where did you get these from - a school play?' he asked. 'They make me look like one of the shepherds in Bethlehem!'

'They're what everyone's wearing these days,' Fay assured him.

William felt she was poking fun at him. Ordinarily he would give as good as he got, but he was feeling thoroughly confused by now. Gathering up his wet clothes, he said, 'I'd better be getting off home. I'll let you have the fancy dress back when I see you at school.'



He stomped up to the ridge and stopped. Thick forest fringed the distant outlines of the heath. Nearer, perhaps just a mile or two away, stood a round wooden fort on top of a conical hill. Plumes of smoke rose from inside the enclosure, swirling into the late-afternoon sky.

Fay came up beside him. 'Athelred's castle,' she said. 'It's the right place, then. Now we have to find out whether we've arrived in time.'

William could not help staring goggle-eyed at the castle. He had just about enough presence of mind to close his mouth so that he didn't resemble a bewildered frog. 'Athelred the Unready . . .?' he managed to stammer at last. It was not the most important question on his mind, but it was the only one he could think of for the moment.

Fay shook her head and started off in the direction of the fort. 'That was Ethelred,' she called back over her shoulder. 'But don't worry; I don't like history much either. It's really my uncle's thing.'

William recovered enough from his surprise to hurry after her. 'Your uncle? Mr Treguard? He must be around here; I saw him earlier.'

'Not *Mr* Treguard - just Treguard,' Fay corrected him. 'And actually you didn't see him earlier, you saw him later. About twelve hundred years later.'

'Maybe I knocked my head when I fell in the pond,' William mused. 'Then this might all be a figment of my imagination.'

Look at my forehead. Is there a bruise, or a gash, that you can see?'

'No,' said Fay, barely glancing at him. 'Of course, if I was a figment of your imagination too, then I might not tell you.'

William glared at her. 'I suppose you're going to tell me there's a perfectly logical explanation for all this?'

'Ah, well... an explanation, yes. But not a logical one.'

'Tell me anyway!' he pleaded.

'It'll have to wait till later,' said Fay. 'We have company.'

Two horsemen came riding out from the fort. William stared in amazement as they approached. The harnesses jangled with medallions of beaten silver, and the riders were dressed like Saxon warriors. William prudently waited where he was until they reined in, a short distance ahead of him. The horses snorted steam in the icy air. The men carried spears lightly at their sides: a bare hint of menace.

'You are the bard?' asked one of them.



'Say yes,' suggested Fay. 'It'll make everything much simpler.'

'What bard is he talking about?' William asked her.

'Oh dear,' muttered Fay. 'Now things will get very confused.'

The rider who had spoken leaned forward in his saddle and peered intently at William. The leather of his battle-shirt creaked and there was a faint smell of sweat and linseed oil. 'Who are you talking to?' he demanded.

William was about to reply when Fay chipped in. 'They can't see me,' she explained.

'What?' said William. Things just kept getting stranger and stranger.

'The lad sees visions,' said the second rider. 'He will be a good bard.'

The first man nodded. 'Follow us, lad. Tonight you will sing for King Athelred and his warriors.'

William and Fay fell in behind them as they headed towards the fort. 'This is just great,' he hissed under his breath. 'Now they think I'm crazy. And, as far as I know, they're right.'

'I'll explain,' said Fay, 'though I warn you that you won't like the explanation. My uncle is on his way to battle Aesandre the Ice Witch—'

'You're right,' said William. 'I don't like it one bit.'

'One of Aesandre's agents in this time and place wants to destroy a dragon which Treguard needs as an ally.'

'OK, I can sort of follow it,' admitted William grudgingly. 'It's like the plot of *Terminator*.'

'Whatever. Anyway, you got caught up in my spell. The end result seems to be that *you've* come through to this time, but I'm only here as a sort of shadow which no-one can see. So you'll have to do what I was planning to do.'

'Which is?' asked William. Much against his better judgement, he found he was beginning to accept the bizarre situation he was in. Not to like it, just accept it.

'You'll have to enlist the aid of the king,' said Fay. 'Then you must prevent an evil wizard from destroying the dragon.'

'And all before breakfast, I suppose,' groaned William.

A shadow fell across them. They had arrived at the gates of the fort.



3

SONG FOR A KING

That evening, in the great hall, roaring fires and tankards of mulled ale soon drove away all thoughts of the bleak snow-covered lands outside. King Athelred and his court were seated at benches forming a large 'U' around the hall. Laughter and merriment brimmed to the rafters as they dined and drank and watched the succession of entertainers who had flocked from miles around to perform at the feast.

Two barrel-bodied wrestlers, bodies greased and glistening in the firelight,



had grappled hard in contest to decide which was the stronger. William watched aghast. The bout made *WWF* look like a vicar's tea party. At last one of the wrestlers had got the upper hand. To thunderous applause, he wrenched his opponent off-balance, twisted him across his hip, and slammed him into the floorboards.

Next came acrobats who tumbled and danced around a juggler who somehow managed to keep a dazzling array of coloured balls and silk scarves in

motion through the air. William was at first surprised that the juggler was just as good as the ones he had seen in his own time. Then he felt foolish. After all, why *shouldn't* a juggler from the eighth century be just as good as one from the twentieth?

The juggler's act ended with him catching each ball in turn and tapping it on the table in front of the king. The ball broke in two and a small bird flew up into the thatching of the high roof.

'Isn't that cruelty to animals?' said William to Fay when he was sure no-one was listening. 'It shouldn't be allowed.'

'This is a cruel age,' she said. 'Soon you'll find just how cruel.'

After the juggler came musicians with simple harps and pipes. The tune was jaunty and set William's feet tapping. As the musicians played, the king's son entered the hall and all eyes turned. A few years older than William, he was tall and handsome with long golden hair and grey eyes which made him like a younger version of his father. He smiled and bowed graciously as one of

the warriors leapt up to give him the seat at Athelred's right hand.

'That's Osric,' said Fay with a smile. 'I'd rip down my pop star pin-ups to make room for him.'

'Don't say it,' groaned William, dismayed to find yet another parallel to the twentieth century. 'Anyway, he probably can't sing.'

'Speaking of which,' said Fay, 'I think you're on next.'

William looked up. The musicians were filing away. To his horror, several of the nearby courtiers were looking in his direction. An old man waved him forward. 'Come, lad, you are the bard, aren't you? Entertain us, then.'

William felt a bit sick. He stumbled forward towards the middle of the hall. His tongue felt like a piece of dry felt stuck to the roof of his mouth. He heard someone say, 'This is the lad with second sight.'

The ale-dazed warriors watched him indulgently. He found he couldn't help staring at one huge-bellied fellow with flaring red hair who was gnawing noisily

on a haunch of meat and washing it down with great gulps of ale. 'Don't anybody stick a pin in that guy!' blurted William.

There was a great roar of laughter at this. The red-haired man glared around, frowning and puzzled for a moment, then he too burst out laughing.

'That's broken the ice,' muttered William under his breath. 'But what now? I can't sing!'

Fay was beside him, though still invisible to everyone else. 'Bards don't sing,' she said. 'They recite their words like poetry.'

'Come lad,' boomed King Athelred. 'They say you are gifted with visions. What ballads have the spirits taught you?'

William glared sidelong at Fay. 'You got me into this mess,' he whispered. 'Now give me a ballad!'

Fay leaned close over his shoulder. 'Just repeat each line after me,' she said. 'Oh, and can you do a Derbyshire accent?'

'No!' grunted William, smiling weakly

along the line of courtiers waiting for him to begin.

'Pity,' said Fay. 'The Queen's English as you speak it isn't much like the King's English that they know. Still, here goes . . .!'

And William, completely at Fay's mercy, began to blurt out the lines she told him:

It was a time of hardship,
and everywhere the anger of the
dragon
was seen in gutted barns and barren
fields.
Then two close companions, worthy
hall-heroes,
came hard against the walls of the
welkin,
scaling high peaks to put an end to
terror.
One, golden-haired with eyes of
grey-
his comrade, with blue eyes blazing;
they advanced to face their foe.
But three drops of blood sufficed to win
that battle,

and parley and word-play were the
only sounds

while steel remained sheathed and
shields unlimbered.

Soon the heroes' labours won peace,
and when the dragon's pool ran clear
it was a time for the giving of gifts.

The golden one savoured but a sip from
that spring -

waters where he glimpsed and grasped
his destiny.

His friend favoured a future drawn in
dust.

The passage of years sits heavy on
men's shoulders,
but counts for little in the dragon's
unblinking eye.

In such a time, the tide of treachery
can rise.

Blue eyes now glint with greed; hatred
dwells in the heart.

He who had been a hero, a sinister
sorcerer now,
seeks to steal and shatter the dragon's
shell.

With the blood-oath broken, grief shall
fly across the land,
and he who put on the mantle of the
monarch -
he shall mourn his golden son.'

During the ballad, King Athelred had sunk into a sombre mood. Now he sat staring at William as though seeing right through him, the goblet in his hand tilted, forgotten, slowly dripping its contents on the floor. He looked ashen. Silence gradually advanced along the hall as everyone noticed the effect the ballad had had on their king.

William himself was a little bewildered. He had been concentrating on reciting the words as Fay spoke them into his ear, so he had hardly had time to take in their meaning. Now he had the nasty feeling that he might have been tricked into saying something dreadful.

Slowly King Athelred got to his feet. 'This lad has truly brought us the words of the spirits,' he declared, 'for no mortal man knows the events of which he spoke.

Some of you may remember a time many years ago, before I was king of this land, when the dragon, Talionis, who dwells in the northern hills came down to steal our cattle. Many heroes took up their war-gear and ventured into the dragon's lair, never more to see the light of day. But two young warriors came at last, hoping to win fame and fortune. The warrior with eyes like the cloudless sky was Caedmon. I was the other.

'We entered the caves meaning to put an end to the dragon, or die in the attempt. But the dragon spoke to us in an old tongue that Caedmon knew, so we parleyed with her. We learned that there was a magic pool in her lair which had become stagnant, and she depended on this pool for life. Caedmon and I unblocked the channel into the pool by swimming along it - something Talionis herself, for all her strength, could never have done, for she was too big. There was much rubble which we had to clear, but at last the channel was unblocked and the pool flowed fresh again.

In return for our help, Talionis agreed

never again to trouble the land of men, and also offered us gifts of our own choosing. Now that the water was flowing again, the pool had a magical hue. It put me in mind of the spring that flows under the roots of the World Tree, the spring that Odin the All-father gave one eye to drink from. I received a single sip which gave me dreams of things to come.'

'No doubt that helped him wrest the crown from the previous king, corrupt old Pendris,' remarked Fay into William's ear.

King Athelred, of course, had not heard her. 'My friend Caedmon had some smattering of sorcery even then,' he went on. 'Noticing a golden dust in the cave, crushed fragments of an unhatched dragon's egg broken by an intruder years before, he asked to take it. Apparently, such dust can be used in magic. Talionis gave him half a hundred pinches of the stuff.'

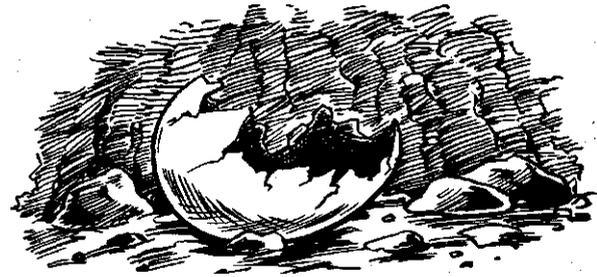
An old man rose swaying to his feet and spoke in a reedy voice. From the



way everyone hung upon his words, William guessed him to be a priest or wise man. 'Sire, the signs are clear. The "golden son" is Lord Osric, whose eighteenth birthday falls on the winter solstice in three days' time. The ballad warns that his life is imperilled, just as Caedmon now threatens the offspring of the dragon Talionis - who in a sense must be counted your sibling, by your oath of mingled blood.'

The king was sunk in thought for a moment, then his rumbling voice filled

the long hall: 'Although my friend Caedmon was a secret and dark-souled man, I have heard that he made the study of wizardry his life's work, and dwells now in a tower across the bleak Wadwo Downs.' He turned to his eldest son. 'Osric, gather my best men. Lead them to Talionis' lair and protect her and her unhatched offspring from Caedmon. Make haste, for the wizard must already be on his way. It is not only because of my oath to Talionis that I charge you with this quest, my son, but because I fear that our destinies are interwoven, hers and mine. Any harm which befalls her offspring may also bring down doom upon your own head!'



4

GIVEN NO CHOICE

That was the end of the feasting. Warriors sat in huddles along the benches, muttering their opinions in low, sober voices. Among the older men, the talk was no doubt about the true meaning of such portents. Younger warriors, keen to see battle, excitedly weighed up their chances of being chosen for Osric's war-band.

William took himself off to a corner of the hall where he could converse with Fay without being overheard. Well, I've delivered your message, whatever it was

supposed to be about. Now I'd like to get back home, if it's all the same to you.'

Fay shrugged. 'It's all the same to me, but I haven't the first idea how to go about it. Treguard told me that when the chance came I'd know it at once.'

William was shocked. 'Your uncle sent you off on this adventure and he didn't even tell you how to get back?'

'That's his way,' Fay said. 'Believe me, he's right most of the time. We'll get back.'

'But *when?*' William demanded. 'My mother's in hospital, you know.'

'I didn't know,' said Fay. 'What's wrong?'

'High blood pressure, and the baby's due any day.' William had not really intended to tell her that, but the words came spilling out. 'I ought to be at home.'

'You didn't seem to be in any hurry when you were walking at the pond.'

That took all the wind out of William's sails. He stood with his mouth half-open, lost for words. The trouble was, Fay was right. William, an only child, had not welcomed the news of a new addition

to the family. He had even once let his thoughts stray on to the notion that his mother's high blood pressure might— He didn't even finish the thought, but it had left him plunged in guilt for days. And after trying to avoid even thinking about the matter, here he was using it as an excuse to try and get his own way. He turned away, not wanting to look Fay in the eyes.

Prince Osric was standing right behind him. William took a step back in surprise.

'You, bard,' said Osric loftily. 'Your name is Will?'

'William,' insisted William.

Osric narrowed his gaze. Fay said, 'I don't think you should answer back to a prince like that.'

But the breach in etiquette was soon forgotten. Osric had more important things on his mind. 'You have the gift of second sight, I'm told, Will. Get the ostler to saddle you a horse. We're setting out at dawn.'

'We? What? Setting out where?' Osric had already turned away to consult with

his lieutenants, and paid no more attention to William. William gave a forlorn wail and said, 'I can't ride a horse!'

'I'll deal with that,' said Fay. "Trust me.'

William looked at her. He didn't know whether to laugh or burst into tears. 'Trust *you*?' he gasped. 'You're the one who got me into this whole thing!'

They took a light breakfast in the grey light of dawn. William stood in the doorway of the hall with a crust of buttered bread in his hands and watched the horses stamping on the icy ground outside. They looked rather bigger than any horse he had ever seen, and had a distinct air of haughty ill-temper. Fay's reassurances did nothing to cheer him up.

'What do you know about this Caedmon character?' he asked her.

'Little more than you. He was once the king's friend, but he was obviously well-read, since he knew the power inherent in dragon dust.'

'I must've missed that game,' said

William sarcastically. 'What is it? You collect the pinches of dragon dust and that gives you more zap?'

Fay laughed. 'Sort of, yes. All sorcerers know the secret - dragons must die for magic to live. Every spell needs a little of the powdered shell from a dragon's egg. An unhatched egg.'

'I'm beginning to get the picture. Years and years ago, Caedmon took fifty pinches of broken eggshell and that got him started on his career as a wizard. Now he's back for more.'

Fay nodded. 'And that means that he'll have to slay Talionis the dragon, because she certainly won't stand by while he shatters the egg of her unhatched offspring.'

The others of the war-band had finished their breakfast. Osric led them out into the keep. Snow had been swept clear of the ground, but lay in deep banks against the wooden pallisade. The sky was colourless, with the threat of more snow to come. They mounted.

William stood beside his horse. It watched him sidelong, as though daring

him to climb into the saddle, while scraping at the ground with its hoof. 'I'll probably break my neck now,' he said, trying to sound flippant. He felt weak.

Fay stepped past him and stroked her hand down the horse's shoulder. It quietened at once. 'You see?' said Fay. The people here can't see me, but animals can sense something.'

To the men of the war-band, it seemed as though William's whispered words had somehow calmed the horse down. 'You have other gifts besides the second sight, I see, Will!' cried Osric. 'I'm sure it'll be handy having you along.'

William climbed into the saddle but made no attempt to guide the horse towards the gate. He left that to Fay. As they rode out of the castle, Osric turned and raised his arm to where King Athelred stood watching. The gesture was half a wave, half a salute. 'Farewell, father,' he said. 'I'll return victorious, or not at all.'

In the bright glare of morning, the snow was almost dazzling. William squinted and cast a glance along the



band of warriors riding under Osric's command. There were ten of them, mostly young like the prince himself. None had bothered to tell William his name.

'There's just the one wizard,' Fay reminded him. 'On his own he could be sure of the dragon's death, but he won't be reckoning on a fully armed war-band as well.'

William gave no answer. He was brooding on another thought - one which he would have dismissed as superstitious nonsense only a day before. It had just occurred to him that Osric had put together a war-band that he believed comprised twelve people.

Except Osric did not know that Fay was with them as well. He had unwittingly chosen to ride in a group of thirteen . . .



5

INTO THE FIRE

It was three days since they had ridden out from the castle. Now, late on the night of the winter solstice, the stars glittered like hoarfrost in a black marble sky. The river had grown warmer as they followed it upstream. It melted the snow on its banks and left a veil of steam hanging in the chill night air.

Osric pointed to where the river emerged from a fissure in the rocks. That cave must be the dragon's den. Tether the horses. We'll go on on foot.'

They trudged up a steep snow-covered

slope. The water was gushing out of a lightless cavern mouth. William smelt a warm sour-sweet reek. It reminded him of the reptile house at the zoo.

One of the warriors produced a flint and tinder to strike sparks. Torches flared into life, casting a harsh amber glare off the rocks and sparkling snow. They could now see a low passage winding off into the mountain.

'If the wizard's here already, the light of the torches will warn him we're coming,' William pointed out.

Osruc nodded glumly. 'There's no choice.' He pointed to the narrow rock ledge running alongside the underground river. It was slippery with condensation. 'We daren't go any further without the torches to light our way.'

There was enough room on the ledge for two people to walk side by side. The river gushed alongside, splashing the rocks. The warriors stepped forward nervously. They were willing to give their lives in battle, but none wanted to meet his death by falling into the torrent of the underground river.



Progress along the ledge seemed to take for ever. Several times William's feet slipped and he had to clutch at the cavern wall for support. Osruc and the others were faring no better. They looked like a bunch of people trying ice skating for the first time. It might have been funny, except for the thought of the mad wizard and the dragon waiting up ahead in the darkness.

At last they rounded a bend in the passage and found themselves in a wide cavern. The torchlight barely reached

the stalactites hanging like giant teeth above them. There was more space here - at least ten paces between the wall and the river. And it was much warmer. The warriors gave an audible sigh of relief as they flung off their heavy furs.

Osrice gave orders for them to spread into a proper battle order. He placed himself and four others in the front rank, armed with swords. Behind them came five spearmen with the points of their weapons projecting past the shoulders of the men in front. William was given two torches, and one of the younger men frowned when he was also given the task of holding a torch. 'It is a warrior's job to fight, not carry torches,' he grumbled.

Even in a moment of approaching peril, Osrice had the deft touch of a born leader. 'You'll play as vital a part in the battle as the rest of us,' he assured the man. 'Without light, we'd only skewer each other.'

They pressed on, and soon the tunnel widened still more. They entered a vast chamber. Here the river flowed from a vivid blue pool. Above the pool hung a

soft glimmering mist. Osrice advanced and stared into the pool. Deep below in the clear water lay the huge white bones of old dragons. 'The ancestors of Talionis . . .' said Osrice. 'Her lineage must stretch back to the dawn of time.' He seemed hypnotized by the sight.

'Remind him we must hurry!' said Fay anxiously.

But Osrice did not need reminding. Cocking his head to one side, he listened. The others did too, and in the stillness they heard a crackling of flames. Then a hollow roar boomed out of the darkness. The howl of the dragon.

Osrice lifted his sword and pointed to the back of the cave. 'Advance!' he cried.

As they pressed deeper into the mountain, a flickering pattern of light and shadow became visible on the wall just ahead. Turning sharply, the tunnel ended in a sheet of leaping flame. From beyond it came the sound of two voices - one human and wickedly crowing; the other thunderous and full of reptilian hisses.

William noticed a trail of blackened

powder beside the wall of fire. 'Dragon's egg dust,' he guessed. The wizard must have used magic to get through.'

Osric was staring aghast at the fiery barrier that blocked their path. 'No doubt the dragon intended this fire as protection for her lair - but now it only prevents us going to her aid!'

Fay had an idea. 'Tell them to go back and fetch their fur cloaks,' she said to William. 'Soak them in the river, then lay them across the wall of fire. We might be able to get through.'

Osric seemed dubious when William told him the plan. Beyond the wall of fire, a crack of lightning was followed by an agonized roar that shook the cavern walls. 'The wizard will kill Talionis to reach her egg before it hatches,' said William. 'Surely any plan is worth trying?'

Osric nodded and turned to two of his men. 'Go back, wet the cloaks, and return with them,' he said.

They had to listen, helpless, as the

sounds of battle echoed from the other side of the flames. The noise of continual whooshing roars told them that Talionis was blasting her fiery breath at the wizard, but obviously to no avail - his thin cackling laughter only became louder as he chanted the lightning-spells that were steadily driving her back.

The two men came racing back, each with a bundle of sodden furs. Without waiting for an order, they hurled these down across the wall of fire.

The flame dropped. Steam and smoke drifted up, along with a reek of scorching fur. 'Now!' called Osric to his men as he dived through into the chamber beyond.

William felt the flame scorch his boots as he ran through behind the others. They were in a great domed cavern. On the far side, nestled on a shelf of rock, the dragon's egg gleamed golden in the flickering firelight.

Something huge moved, throwing a long shadow across the cavern roof. William felt his legs go weak under



him. He had seen lifelike robot dinosaurs in the Natural History Museum, and they had been convincing enough to be scary, but the sight of a real, fully grown dragon was utterly terrifying.



6

ASHES TO ASHES

The dragon reared up, spreading her leathery wings against the cavern walls. There was an inrush of breath through the giant nostrils. Standing in front of her clad in his velvet robes, the wizard Caedmon looked a frail figure indeed. But there was no sign of fear on his face. In fact, he was smiling.

The dragon's head swung down and a geyser of flame erupted from her mouth. William suddenly realized he was in the line of fire. Fear kept him rooted to the spot, but then he felt a

heavy buffet across his shoulders as one of the men dived to one side, carrying him to safety in the nick of time.

The flames crackled around the wizard. For several seconds he was completely engulfed in an awesome inferno. But as the flames died down he still stood unharmed. He threw his head back and laughed, holding up a handful of dust that glittered violet light across his thin face. 'He's cast an anti-fire spell,' said Fay. 'The dragon's breath can't hurt him.'

Taking another pinch of dragon's-egg dust from his belt, Caedmon flung it into the air and muttered the words of a spell. White lightning spat through the last flickers of red-gold flames, and Talionis gave a roar of pain as she shuddered back. There were patches of charred scales all across her serpentine body. Caedmon smiled. There were only two pinches of the magic dust left in his pouch, but he was sure they would be more than enough to slay the dragon . . .

'Attack him!' William called out to



Osric. 'Talionis' breath can't get through his defences, but your swords can!'

Osric nodded, but Caedmon had heard William's words too. He glanced at them, eyes flashing cobalt in the firelit gloom. 'Athelred's son,' he said with a sneer. 'And a paltry war-band of would-be hall heroes. You're too late to stop me.'

Osric tried to buy time as he edged closer. 'Why?' he said. 'What's the need for all this, Caedmon? You and my father were friends once. You both swore an oath to the dragon.'

The eyes narrowed to brooding blue slits. 'My former friend!' he spat. 'He was so selfless, so self-righteous! "All I ask is this one sip from the pool we restored," he wheedled. I know he disapproved of my choice - the dragon's dust of power. But he got power, didn't he? A kingdom of his own! While I have had only a life of lonely seclusion, shunned by all.'

'You cannot blame my father for that,' countered Osric. 'He is a good and noble man.'

Caedmon nodded wryly. 'Easy to be noble when one is a king. You did not know him in his youth.' For a moment his voice took on a sad quality as he added: 'You know nothing. He was worse than I by far . . .'

Osric moved a step closer. His sword-point began to sweep upwards, but Caedmon was faster. The thoughtful look in those piercing blue eyes was swept away again by the glare of madness. He drew a pinch of dust and sprinkled it in front of him. A blinding arc of lightning cracked through the air. Osric flung himself to the floor of the

cave, but some of the warriors behind him were not so fortunate. They used their last breath in groans as they fell.

William and Fay had scrambled to cover behind a jutting spar of rock. 'We have to do something,' William said.

'There's nothing we can do,' said Fay. 'This is a time of wizards and warriors. We can only watch.'

Caedmon moved back against the far wall so that he could face both Talionis and the remnants of Osric's band. Apart from the prince himself, William counted only five warriors still moving, and most of them had been badly burned by the lightning bolt.

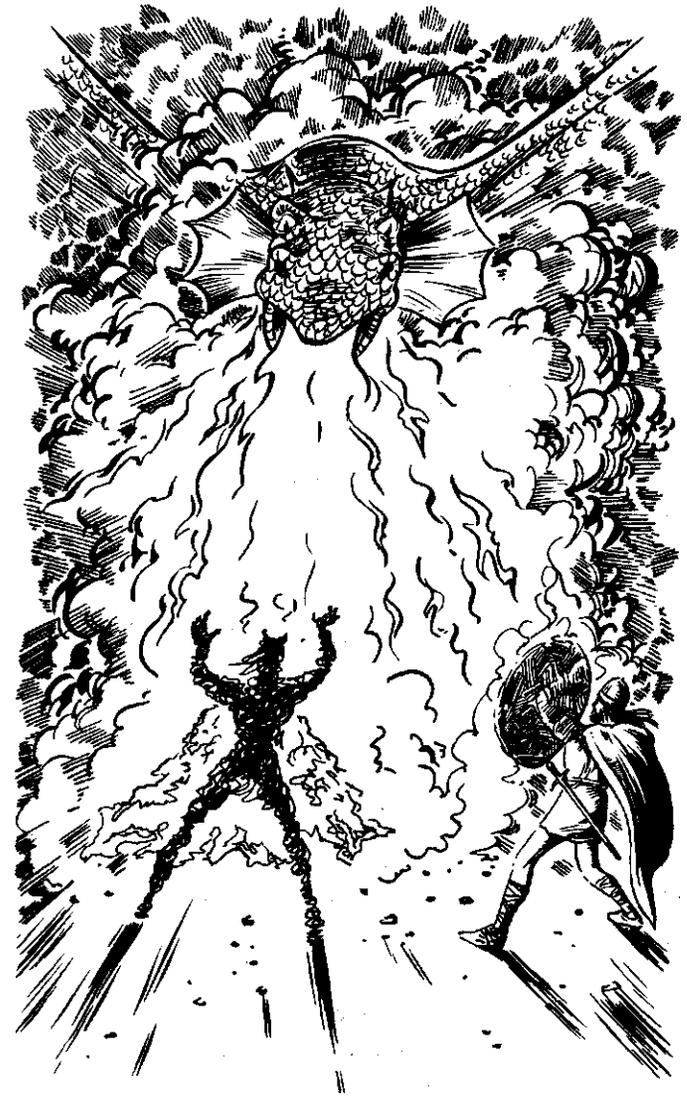
Caedmon had drawn another pinch of dust from his pouch - enough for one last spell, though none of his foes could know that. He had to kill all his foes now. He looked around for inspiration, then he saw the serried spikes of stalactites hanging from the ceiling. A cave-in could bury Talionis and the last of those vexing warriors if he judged it right, and still leave him unscathed. Caedmon's face pinched in concentration as he hastily

gauged the precise force he should use.

As he began his spell, Talionis raised her head for another blast of fiery breath. Caedmon did not even glance at her, only raised the hand holding the violet-glowing dust of his defensive spell as if to remind her that her effort was futile.

Suddenly, one of the warriors - William had never caught his name - rushed forward and launched himself directly at the wizard in a desperate leap. Lunging, he struck the outstretched hand. The violet dust was scattered on the air.

The warrior went sprawling at Caedmon's feet. The wizard glared at him in fury, his expression flickering through a gamut of emotions in a split-second: anger, confusion, amazement . . . shock, as he realized he had dropped the dust of his defensive spell . . . fear, as he saw the dragon about to unleash her breath. But William was sure that the last thing he saw stamped on the wizard's face, an instant before the fire streamed down and burned it out of existence, was



a look of acceptance at his fate.

There was a long moment of silence. Two burning bodies lay on the ground: Caedmon's, and that of the warrior who had dashed forward. He had not had time to get out of the way of the blast. Osric got to his feet and went over to the body of his comrade.

William and the remaining warriors joined him. 'His name was Alcuin,' was all that Osric said.



7

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

There was a cracking sound. They all turned to look at the egg. Talionis was weak from her wounds, but she lumbered across the cavern to greet her newly hatched offspring. A small coppery-coloured snout pierced the shell. Then two brightly gleaming eyes appeared. As the young dragon forced its way into the open, the shell's golden gleam faded to dull grey.

'The hatching process absorbs the magical power from the shell,' Fay



explained to William. 'That's why the wizard needed dust crushed from an *unhatched* egg.'

The little dragon stretched his wings and flew up to perch on his mother's shoulder. She looked down at the tiny human figures in front of her, reptilian eyes shining like a giant hawk's. Then she spoke. 'You are very like your father.' The voice was like dry leaves scattering in a breeze.

Osric was not overawed. 'He sent me to help you,' he replied.

Talionis' head bobbed on the end of her long neck. 'You came in time to save my son. What boon can I grant you?'

'My father drank a drop from the magic pool. . . ' said Osric.

'You can also, if you wish. But one drop only - any more than that, and you would see so much of the future that it would drive you insane.'

Talionis extended a wing larger than a ship's sail, snuffing out the wall of fire that blocked the passage back to the pool. As they walked back, the young dragon fluttered playfully overhead. That curl to his snout makes him look rather like he's grinning, wouldn't you say, Will?' chuckled Osric.

Talionis followed behind, moving slowly in the narrow passage. 'Since my son owes his life to you, Prince Osric, it is you who should give him his name.'

Osric thought about this for a moment. 'Then I'll call him Smirkenorf,' he said.

Fay was delighted at this, much to William's bafflement. 'Smirkenorf is the dragon who's destined to help Treguard in the future,' she said. 'That means

we've accomplished what we were supposed to do.'

'What *you* were supposed to do,' William reminded her. 'I only blundered into all this by accident.'

Osric was standing by the pool with his remaining warriors. He looked back and called William over to join them. 'Still talking to people who aren't there, Will? Why not taste a drop of this magic water and see what the future truly has in store?'

William thought of his mother, lying pregnant in a hospital bed. 'No, I don't want to see the future,' he said.

Suddenly, Fay gave a yelp of delight. 'Look - there in the pool!' she cried. 'It's my uncle!'

William leaned over her shoulder. Deep in the shining blue water he could see the image of Treguard. He seemed to be reaching down a long tunnel towards them.

'That's our way back,' realized Fay. 'Quickly, William, take his hand!'

William reached to dip his fingers into the water, then paused and glanced

back. The warriors watched him blankly. Behind them, Talionis loomed as large as a crag. If she could see Treguard in the pool, she gave no sign of it. The newly hatched Smirkenorf looked on with his expression of sly amusement.

'So long, Prince Osric,' said William. 'And good luck. I'll be sure to look you up in the history books.'

'Hurry *up!*' said Fay. 'The image is fading . . .'

William plunged his hand into the water. He felt strong fingers close



around his, and he was yanked off his feet into the water. There was a moment of cold, but strangely he did not feel wet. Even more strangely, it didn't feel as if he was being dragged down. Instead, he was being lifted *up* . . .

'Welcome back to the twentieth century,' said a deep voice.

William realized he'd closed his eyes. He opened them to see Treguard lifting him up on to the bank beside the frozen pond. For some reason, the first thing he noticed was how he was dressed. 'I'm back in my normal clothes!' he blurted out. 'How did that happen?'

Treguard gave a rumble of kindly laughter. 'I have just lifted you through twelve centuries, youngster,' he said. 'Restoring your normal clothing was a matter of no difficulty at all compared to that feat.'

'Mr Treguard . . .' began William.

'Just Treguard,' Fay reminded him. Then she added: 'Or *Lord* Treguard would be better.'

William had seen enough adventures not to feel foolish as he said, 'Lord

Treguard, the wizard was stopped in time. Smirkenorf is safe.'

'Good,' said Treguard. 'He is an invaluable ally in the battle against Aesandre and her minions. Well done, both of you.'

He turned and strode off through the snow, his walking-stick plunging ahead of him like a sword. William and Fay glanced at each other, then hurried after him. 'Er . . . I ought to apologize about breaking a vase at your house last summer,' he said.

Treguard's brow furrowed in thought, then he gave a broad smile. 'That hideous thing? I'm glad to be rid of it.'

William fell into stride beside him. 'Now what? I mean, all this is real, right? Are you going to face Aesandre?'

'Yes, but not here and now. Not in either the past or the future, but in her own world of Winteria.'

William took a moment to digest this. 'Winteria? Where's that?'

They had arrived at a snowdrift. Treguard reached into it and pulled open a round door that lay hidden under the snow. A tunnel led off into the darkness,



stone steps sparkling with a sheen of ice.

'Right here,' Treguard said to William. He tapped his walking-stick three times on the ground. It wasn't a walking-stick any more; it was a sword of burnished steel.

Fay stepped into the tunnel. William started to follow, but Treguard shook his head. 'You've played your part in this drama, and played it right well,' he said. 'Now go back.'

'But I want to come with you and Fay,' protested William.

Treguard shook his head again. 'You've had a taste of fantasy and adventure, the stuff that dreams are made of - but it's enough. Wizardry is for the likes of me and Fay, but *real* magic is the province of mortals.'

'What do you mean, real magic?' asked William.

'Oh, you know . . . ' Treguard grinned, then dug his fingers into the snow and pulled out a rose in full bloom. 'Life, for instance.' He handed the rose to William, winked, and vanished into the mysterious tunnel, closing the door behind him.

William suddenly forgot all about the castle and the dragon and the evil wizard. Without quite knowing why, he was running pell-mell for home through the snow. He arrived breathless at the kitchen door to find his father just pulling on an overcoat. He had the car keys in his hand.

'There you are!' said his father. 'I thought I was going to have to go without you.'

'Are we going to see Mum?' asked

William as they went round to the garage.

'Actually, the hospital phoned.' William's father suddenly could not stop a huge smile spreading across his face. 'Guess what! You have a brother. It all happened so fast — I couldn't get there in time!'

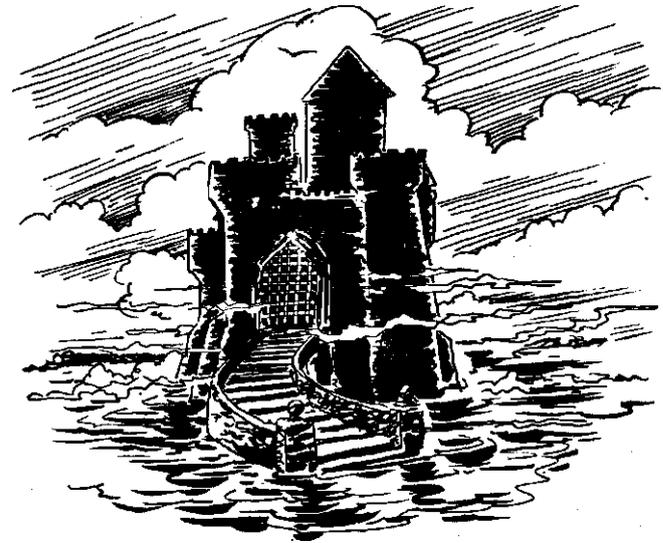
William was dazed. 'A baby...' he repeated as he got into the car. He thought about the idea. Slightly to his surprise, he found that it made him feel really good.

He looked at his father and grinned. 'So I'm a brother now! I *knew* there was something different about today.'

THE END

THE KNIGHTMARE CHALLENGE

THE FUTURE KING



You will need a pencil and paper for noting down possessions, spells and codewords that you acquire during your adventure. You will also need a six-sided die.

THE RULES OF THE QUEST

Your Life Force has three levels: GREEN, AMBER and RED. You begin the adventure with Life Force GREEN, since you are unwounded. During the adventure it is possible for you to lose Life Force levels. (For instance, if you were on AMBER and were told to lose one level, your Life Force would change to RED.) Keep a note of your current Life Force. Once you are on RED, any further loss of Life Force will kill you.

You can carry up to six possessions at a time. If you already have six possessions and you come across an item that you think you might need, you will have to discard one of your other possessions to make room for the new one. You can

discard a possession at any time just by crossing it off your list.

Food is useful, because each item of food you eat will increase your Life Force by one level. (Your Life Force can never go higher than GREEN, though.) You can eat food at any entry marked with an asterisk (*). Items of food count as possessions.

It is possible to learn spells during the adventure. Each spell can only be used once. (Spells are *not* possessions, so there is no 'carrying limit' on how many you can learn.)

NOW YOU ARE READY TO SET OUT!

1

Treguard greets you in the Great Hall of Knightmare Castle. Logs hiss and spit in the hearth as he explains your quest. 'You are to journey through Tangle Wood to the Lake of Wisps,' he says. 'In the centre of the lake is a mighty stronghold where the future king of the land is held prisoner. You must free him.'

'All right,' you say, nodding. 'I'm ready to set out.'

'Whoever told you that you were ready was speaking rashly!' booms Treguard. 'First I must give you your possessions for the journey.' He opens a casket and takes out a helmet which he puts over your head. Even though the visor is a solid metal plate with no eye-slit, you find you have no trouble seeing out. It is the Helm of Justice. Record it as the first of your possessions.

Next Treguard hands you a spear with a jewelled haft. 'This is the Lance of Truth,' he says. Record the Lance of Truth as one of your possessions.

The last item he takes from the casket is a shield whose border is decorated

with intertwined dragons in copper and gold. You are told this is the Shield of Honour; note it as your third possession.

'Now you're ready,' says Treguard. He steps over to the doors and flings them wide. A shimmering blue haze lies beyond - the magical gateway to the first stage of your adventure. You step forward into the haze and the scene behind you vanishes ...

Turn to **13**

2

The light comes from the window of a cottage. You are just about to go up and knock at the door when it swings open and a huge burly troll comes lumbering out. Fortunately he is intent on getting his axe and bow slung comfortably over his shoulders, so he does not notice you. Recovering hastily from your alarm, you hide behind a rain barrel and watch him go stomping off into the woods with his two heads grumbling at each other.

Once he is out of sight, you can decide whether to go inside the cottage

(turn to **69**), take a look around the back (turn to **80**), peek into the rain barrel (turn to **91**) or leave before the troll returns (turn to **102**)

*3

You cannot keep up with the nimble little creature, who soon disappears into the darkness with the precious Helm. You stop and look out across a clearing ahead, where there is a low-eaved ramshackle cottage. Outside the front door, the two-headed troll who lives here is splitting some wood for his fire. You wait until he has gone inside to go a little closer.

If you look into the rain barrel beside the door, turn to **91**

If you sneak around the back, turn to **80**

If you make your way back to the cave, turn to **15**

*4

You explain that you spied on them earlier and that is how you know about their ailing queen.

One of the knights blows a horn, and the queen's couch comes hovering between the trees. The moths carrying it set it down on a bed of moss and the knights cluster beside you to look at the sleeping queen. 'Can you help her?' they ask urgently.

Well, can you? You might use a smoke-filled jar (turn to **27**), a jar of nectar (turn to **38**), or a MEDICINE spell if you have it (turn to **49**)

If you have none of those, you realize you cannot help the queen and regretfully you take your leave of the sorrowful knights; turn to **114**

***5**

Hordriss is shuffling a deck of cards. As you step up to his table, he looks at you and says, 'I came in here with a number of coins. I gave four to my daughter, spent half of what was left on beer, then won three at cards.'

You glance at the pile of coins in front of him, counting five. He seems to want you to guess how many he had to start

with. Has he told you enough to let you work it out?

If you say he began with six coins, turn to **39**

If you say seven coins, turn to **50**

If you say eight coins, turn to **61**



6

If you have a horse, you will soon outdistance them: turn to **105**

If you have no horse, the soldiers catch up with you: turn to **18**

7

The sergeant breaks the pie open and gives a cry of disgust and outrage.

'Beelzebub's trousers!' he shouts. This pie has been made with human flesh!

The soldiers all turn to stare at you, frowns creasing their unshaven faces. 'You nasty little ghoul,' says one.

'But I didn't know!' you say. 'I stole that pie from a—'

The sergeant gives a sneering grin at this. 'Stole it, eh? So we've got you either way, haven't we?'

You are hauled off to the nearest town and hanged without trial. You can decide for yourself whether you really were guilty, but in any case your adventure ends here.

8

He chortles, and a long fragrant puff of blue smoke rises from his pipe. 'Sure an' that's right. You saw right through that little pun o' mine, eh? I see I can't pull the wool over your *eyes*. Now since you've answered me riddle, you'll be after a snippet o' help, no doubt.'

'I'd be glad of it,' you reply.

He points with the stem of his pipe back along the road you've taken. 'Then

return to the cross, is my advice, an' take the sinister path. When you reach a pond, turn off into Tangle Wood. An' watch out for the drow - sure an' they're nasty fellers to run afoul of!'

Taking the leprechaun's advice, you backtrack to the stone cross and take the other path.

Turn to **105**

*9

The boulder is heavy, but you find a branch which you can use as a lever. Even so, it is hard work getting the boulder to move. Soon you are covered in sweat, and you have to take off the Helm of Justice and put it on the ground behind you, as it is too stifling to wear while making such an effort.

The carved stone face glares at you as you strain and puff at your makeshift lever. You could almost imagine that it was the face of some ancient god, annoyed at being disturbed in this way. At last the boulder begins to shift. Insects go scuttling away as you dislodge

the soil and moss which has been their home for years. Just as the boulder rolls back to reveal the darkened cave-mouth, however, you hear a sniggering from behind you.

You whirl round to see a lean bulberry-coloured spriggan grinning down at you from the branch of a tree. To your horror, he has the Helm of Justice! As you take a step towards him, he gives another chortling cry and goes swinging away through the trees like a monkey.

You must delete the Helm of Justice from your list of possessions, then decide whether to chase the thieving spriggan (turn to **3**) or go into the cave (turn to **15**)

10

The ghostly gipsies react angrily when they see you rummaging in their treasure pile. A bloodless hand swipes out, a knife clutched in thin dead fingers, and you are slashed to the bone. Lose one Life Force level.

If still alive, you have time to snatch

just *one* item from the pile. Will it be a pouch of fifty silver coins, the golden mace, or the ivory box? Note the item you are taking, then run for your life into the woods before the gipsies can catch you.

Turn to **76**

*11

'Excuse me,' you say to the sentry.

He turns and glowers at you. 'I can excuse you for your stupidity and scrawny appearance,' he growls, 'but I cannot excuse you for delaying me. My breakfast awaits me. It is the one pleasure I have in life, to sit by my fireside and eat fried eggs and griddle-cakes before getting a few hours' sleep. At other times I am obliged to walk along the cold battlements of the castle, my old bones at the mercy of the wind and weather. So do not ask me to excuse you!'

Well, he seems rather grumpy.

If you have a coin and want to bribe him, turn to **56**

If you know the CHARM spell and wish to cast it, turn to **67**

Failing either of those options, you must continue up the steps to the gate: turn to **23**

12

As you begin to climb, a ferocious wolf conies bounding down towards you and launches itself at your throat. You fling your arm up in the nick of time and the wolf tears a hunk out of your flesh. Lose one Life Force level. If you are still alive, you look around expecting a fight but the wolf has mysteriously vanished. This castle is a place of uncanny perils. Alert to the possibility of further danger, you continue to the top of the stairs.

Turn to **123**

13

You find yourself in a dark forest. Soaring pine trees surround you, stretching up towards a sky filled with glittering stars. You pick a direction at random and begin to walk.

After a short time you see something flitting between the trees. It is a bat. Something seems odd about the way it

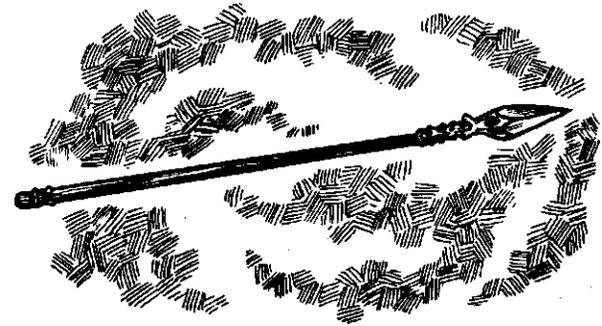
is flying. You dart back behind a tree and watch as it comes closer. You can now see there is a tiny silver saddle on its back, and holding its reins is a faerie knight no bigger than a carrot. His couched lance appears to be a long pine needle.

You watch the bat-mounted knight go flying off between the trees.

If you sneak after him, turn to **24**

If you call out to him, turn to **35**

If you ignore him and continue on your way, turn to **46**



*14

Note the codeword ANNAL.

An old man comes hobbling towards

you with a huge pack tied on his back. It looks as big as he is, and the sight of him with his scrawny legs supporting such a massive load is enough to make you burst out laughing.

'Aye, have a titter at an old man's expense!' he snaps. 'Weary as Sisyphus, I am, and there you are laughing at me - a strong youngster like you. Bah and bother! I suppose it'd be useless asking you just to carry the pack a short way for me so I can get my breath back?'

If you agree, turn to **25**

If you refuse and continue on your way, turn to **46**

15

No sooner have you taken a step inside the cave than a huge black bear comes hurtling out of the darkness. Moonlight flashes on its gleaming spittle-flecked teeth. Its roar makes your limbs tremble and sends a gust of rancid breath into your face.

If you wish to fight the bear, turn to **26**

If you run off, turn to **58**

16

You should have fled while you had the chance. Casting the spell takes too much time. By the time your wounds are healed, the tiny knights have prodded you on to a concealed trap. Twigs and grass give way under your feet, and you plummet into a deep hole from which you will never escape. Your quest ends here.

17

If you still have the Lance of Truth, turn to **72**

If not, turn to **83**

18

Do you possess a hooded red cloak?

If so, turn to **29**

If not, the soldiers march past without giving you a second glance; turn to **40**

19

They give you a sound thrashing and impose an on-the-spot fine. Lose one Life Force level and any money you might'

possess. If you survive, the soldiers finally tire of kicking your cowering form and saunter off along the road. You can now crawl painfully on your way (turn to **40**) or return to the stone cross and take the other route (turn to **105**)

20

'Ah, whist, an' don't you sound just like a horse?' He blows a puff of pipe-smoke right into your face. 'You look a bit like one, too, come to that.'

You raise a hoof in protest. You stare at it. Before you can whinny a complaint, the leprechaun gives a short peal of laughter and goes skipping off across the fields.

You're a horse. You can't complete your adventure now, but look on the bright side. Maybe another adventurer will come along and ride you back to Knightmare Castle . . .

21

He shakes his head. 'I'm afraid not. You see, my brother lives much further away

from my uncle's place than I do, so he had to go much faster to do the journey in that time.'

'The question wasn't fair, then!' you retort angrily. '*You* didn't tell me that!'

He shrugs. 'If you have any complaints, you can submit them in writing to—'

You've heard enough. Giving him a shove which makes him topple over the fallen tree, you go running back along the road. After a few moments you hear a cry of 'Evasion of tax is a capital offence!' and a crossbow quarrel goes whistling past your shoulder.

He must be mad. And if you stay in clear sight he will probably kill you with his next shot. Unwelcoming though the forest seems in the darkness, it is better than certain death. You leave the road and race into the cover of the trees.

Turn to **42**

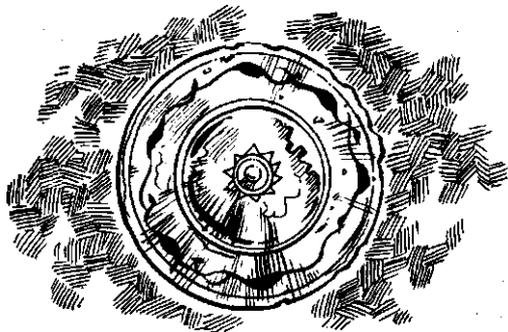
*22

You hang one of the horseshoes over the arch above you. A foolish superstition,

perhaps - but in the land of Nightmare, superstition is as real as science.

You enjoy a couple of hours of deep restful sleep, and wake refreshed and ready to be on your way. Restore one lost Life Force level if you are wounded. It is still an hour until dawn, but you sense that you are close to your goal now. A merry whistling can be heard, coming closer through the trees.

Turn to **44**



***23**

The portcullis is open, but the way into the castle is guarded by a massively powerful figure with a huge halberd in

his hands. His limbs are as thick *as* barrels, and his shoulders are as broad as a mantelpiece. From the look of him he could hold off a whole army of attackers without even raising a sweat. Craning your neck, you look up at the eyes burning intently under the brim of his helmet and ask for him to let you pass.

'What is the password?' he thunders in reply. 'All who wish to enter must give the password.'

If you think you might know the password, turn to **34**

If you possess a hat of invisibility and would like to use it now, turn to **45**

Failing either of those, you must abandon your quest on the very brink of victory . . .

24

Spying on the knight from the cover of some bushes, you see him flying from flower to flower. He has a cup made from an acorn in which he is collecting

nectar from the night-blooms. This is *a* more dangerous task than you might expect, because the flowers in question are carnivorous. Several times you see him jump back in the nick of time to avoid a hungrily snapping bloom, and once he has to draw his sword to cut a tendril away that has ensnared his leg.

At last, with the cup full of nectar, he spurs his bat off into the darkness. Will you follow to see where he goes?

If you follow him, turn to **57**

If you decide to continue on your way, turn to **46**

***25**

Add the pack to your list of possessions. It is very heavy and counts as *two* items. You struggle on with it for what seems like hours, until your legs are wobbling under you. At last, deciding that a good deed can be carried only so far, you ask the old man to take it back.

Your heart sinks when his only reply to this is a snort of laughter. Take it

back? Not in a month of Sundays, youngster! I carried that pack through winter's cold and summer's blaze for many a year, I can tell you.'

You try getting the pack untied, but you cannot. 'Is it cursed?' you say.

He nods. 'That it is. You can only get rid of it by finding some dope who'll take it from you. Bad luck, dope.'

Will you accept this situation (turn to **36**), or attack the old man for tricking you (turn to **47**)?

26

Flinching back, you thrust the Lance of Truth blindly into the gloom ahead of you. Luck or sorcery must have guided your desperate blow, because the bear's savage roar is instantly silenced.

You wait until your eyes adjust to the darkness inside the cave. To your astonishment, instead of a living bear, the Lance has just pinned an empty bearskin to the back wall of the cave. You rub your eyes, but there is no mistake. The bear whom that pelt came from must have died years ago. It is

very strange, because you surely saw the beast charging you and heard its terrifying roar - didn't you . . . ?

A voice calls to you from deeper into the cave. You glance across to see a plump elderly woman beckoning you over.

If you talk to her, turn to **70**

If you run off, turn to **81**

27

The moment you unstopper the jar, a cloud of thick smoke comes pouring out. It envelops the whole clearing, sending you and the tiny knights into a coughing fit. As the smoke clears, they glare at you and one of them cries, 'You fool! How could that be any help to our poor queen?'

They set about you again with their spears and you have to beat a hasty retreat. Lose one Life Force level and remember to delete the smoke-filled jar from your list of possessions. If you are still alive, you run away from the bat riders as fast as your legs will carry you.

Turn to **114**

*28

Brother Mace is not his usual jolly self. You soon discover that his downcast mood has come about because he lost the sacred relic he was entrusted to guard. 'It was stolen by gipsies,' he says, staring deep into his tankard with a worried look. 'Not ordinary gipsies, mind you, but phantom gipsies. I'd creep in among them and try to steal it back, but I'd never pass for a phantom gipsy, not a man of my, er—'

'Girth?' you put in, trying to be helpful.

'I was going to say, a man of my distinguished bearing,' he says sharply. Then, peering closely at you, he adds, 'A scrawny person such as yourself might manage it. Well, will you help?'

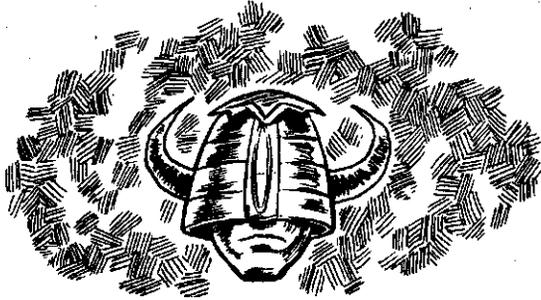
If you agree, turn to **94**

If you say that you cannot because you are on another quest, turn to **115**

29

One of the soldiers points you out to his companions. 'There is the thief who stole the baron's chickens the night before last! I recognize the cloak.'

They are rushing forward to seize you. Decide quickly whether you will make a run for it (turn to **73**), stand and fight (turn to **51**), or try to explain your innocence (turn to **62**)



***30**

Cross the gold coin off the total remaining in your money pouch. The sergeant takes it and sourly tells you to shove off. You go to move past them, but he grabs you by the front of the jerkin and roughly shoves you back the way you came. We don't care for your sort in these parts,' he says. 'Make sure I never see you again.'

You reluctantly go back to the stone cross and follow the other fork in the road.

Turn to **105**

31

You are just skirting the pond when a figure steps out of the marble pavilion. She is a tall sorceress whose robes glint in hues of hard white, blue, and frosty grey. Raising her wand, she shouts a magical command and a flurry of snow swirls across the surface of the pond, freezing it instantly.

Aesandre the Winter Witch! Luckily she has her back to you.

If you want to dive into the bushes before she spots you, turn to **64**

If you flee along the road, turn to **53**

If you rush to attack Aesandre, turn to **75**

32

'True but strange,' he says. After a moment's calculation on his fingers, he raises his crossbow. 'I've assessed

your tax. It's everything you possess.' Seeing you hesitate, he adds, 'Better pay promptly, or I'll have to charge interest.'

You begin to suspect that he is not really a tax inspector. In any case, adventurers are exempt from paying tax. You give him a shove and, stumbling into the tree-trunk behind him, he falls over. You run back down the road, but before you reach the safety of the woods he has regained his balance and sent a crossbow quarrel whistling through the air to impale your shoulder. Lose one Life Force level. If still alive, you plunge off into the darkness of Tangle Wood.

Turn to **42**

33

You settle yourself down to doze, but within moments of closing your eyes you are suddenly alarmed to hear a babble of small shrieking voices rushing towards you. You jump to your feet as tiny fingers no bigger than insects' legs go poking through your clothes. You catch just a glimpse of many tiny violet-cheeked imps in ragged sable

cloaks. Then they go scampering off across the grassy sward with many a laugh and shout of malicious glee.

When you examine your belongings, you discover they have stolen all your money. (If you had no money, they stole any one other item from your list of possessions. Cross off the item of your choice.)

You realize you cannot rest here. It is still several hours till dawn, and you are groggy with fatigue, but you set out again through the woods. After a while you hear something and, cupping your ear, you make out the words of a merry tavern song ringing out in a rich baritone.

Turn to **44**

***34**

The Gatemaster hefts his polearm and waits for you to venture the password. What will you say it is?

'Egress.' Turn to **110**

'Dogma.' Turn to **78**

'Sunflower.' Turn to **89**

'Dunshelm.' Turn to **100**

35

Hearing you, the faerie knight reacts with alarm. Clamping his helmet on to his head, he digs his bramble spurs into the bat's flanks and urges it to a - well, not a gallop, but whatever the flying equivalent of a gallop is called. As he recedes into the darkness, you can only make him out by the moonlight shining on the feather plume of his helmet. You would have to run very fast to catch him up.

If you try, turn to **68**

If you let him go, turn to **46**

*36

A thought comes into your head. It did not seem to be your own thought, but a tinnily spoken brainwave that may have come from the Helm of Justice itself. You roll the thought around inside your head like a person sucking at a toffee. It is a good thought, whether it is your own or not, and you decide to act on it...

'All right,' you say to the old man, 'I'll keep the pack. There's just one thing.

If I'd known I was stuck with it for years, I'd have been more careful to get it positioned comfortably. It's chafing my shoulders already.'

'The youth of today!' he says, spitting. 'Little punes, the lot of you. Give it here, then, while you get the straps sorted out.' No sooner has he laid a hand on the pack than you slip out of the straps and leave him holding it. 'Hey!' he cries. 'I only touched it for a second. I wasn't taking it back!'

You fold your arms and give him a smug look. 'Obviously even a light touch is enough to set off the curse,' you reply. Then you notice he has dropped a couple of items. You bend down and pick up a smoke-filled jar and a money pouch containing twenty gold coins.

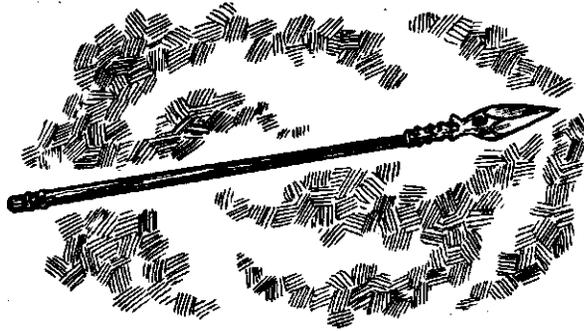
'Those are mine,' says the old man in an outraged voice.

'You've got enough to carry,' you tell him. Delete the pack from your list of possessions and (if you wish to keep them) add the smoke-filled jar and the money pouch. Remember to keep a note of how many coins are in the money

pouch; it still counts as just one item.

Leaving the old man to fume over his bad luck, you set off.

Turn to **46**



37

Do you have a smoke-filled jar among your possessions?

If you do, turn to **48**

If not, turn to **59**

38

'She has the twilight sickness,' declares one of the knights, 'and if she is not treated with the nectar of the night blossoms she will die.'

Fortunately you had the foresight to collect some nectar earlier. You pour it on to the queen's lips and it works almost at once. The colour comes back to her cheeks and she suddenly sits up. The knights give a great cheer, and several of them blow a fanfare on their trumpets.

'Thank you,' says the queen in a sweet clear voice when she has been told what you did. She blows a spangle of faerie dust into your nose and you discover that you now have a CHARM spell.

Delete the jar of nectar from your list of possessions. Just as you are about to set out again on your quest, the queen calls to you: 'If you are venturing through the deep forest, you may run afoul of our wicked cousins, the drow. They are malicious pixies who hate humankind. You can protect yourself from them by hanging a horseshoe above you while you sleep.'

Turn to **114**

***39**

'Oh, you utter blockhead,' he gasps in a withering tone. 'Go on, go away

and come back when you've *learned* something!

He reminds you of a bad-tempered schoolmaster. When he isn't looking, you drop a handful of wood-shavings into his wine-goblet and then hurry away before he turns round. You can now talk to the woman in green (turn to **17**) or the monk (turn to **28**), or you can leave the tavern (turn to **115**)

***40**

A little further along, you see a fellow squatting by the side of the road with his tall hat held tightly down over a patch of grass.

If you possess a horse, turn to **63**

Otherwise, you can either speak to him (turn to **74**), or pass by (turn to **85**)

***41**

You have never felt more relieved as now, watching the threatening sneers

on the soldiers' faces turn to looks of friendship. The sergeant claps you on the back as though you were his boon companion. 'Good job you ran across us before you got any further,' he says. This is a dangerous road to travel at night.'

'I'm on a quest to rescue the future king, actually,' you reply.

They look impressed. 'I wish I was as brave as you,' chirps up one young lad.

The sergeant points back along the road. 'You want to go back and take the other road,' he says. 'When you get to Aesandre's Pool, enter the woods and press straight on till you reach the castle.'

Thanking them, you set out as directed. Remember to cross the spell off your list; you cannot use it again.

Turn to **105**

***42**

You have not gone very far into the forest when you see a lurid green glimmer between the black trunks of the trees. Moving closer, you peek out from

a bank of ferns to see a large gipsy encampment. But these are no ordinary gipsies. Crouching sombrely around the weird green fire, or slumped on the steps of their caravans, they have the faces of dead men. There is none of the laughter and music and merriment you would expect of a gipsy camp. The only tune is a funereal dirge that one of the ghostly gipsies is playing on a violin.

The firelight sparkles on a pile of treasure. Gaping caskets spill their contents of silver, gold and jewels over the grass. One of the phantom gipsies idly pours emeralds through his fingers as he sits staring into the fire.

If you approach the camp, turn to **65**

If you press on through the woods, turn to **76**

***43**

The spell carries you back several hundred metres, safely out of sight of the whimsical brigand. You head off into Tangle Wood. Cross off the BLINK spell, then turn to **42**

***44**

It is Brother Mace, pushing a wheelbarrow along on the other side of a stream that runs through the woods.

If you have the codeword WURU, turn to **55**

If not, he gives you a friendly wave before going on his way; turn to **66**

45

Incredibly, the Gatemaster is still able to see you despite your magic hat. He sweeps his halberd down, making a sound like a helicopter rotor cutting through the air. The blade stops just in front of your chest. The password! he says again.

You will have to make a guess.

Turn to **34**

***46**

As you pass on through the forest, you reach a high bank formed by a ledge of moss-covered rock. Climbing down the bank, you notice a cave with a large

boulder rolled across the entrance. The boulder has been crudely hewn to resemble an angry face, as if warning travellers away from this spot.

You turn, scanning the darkness for signs of habitation. A glimmer of light catches your eyes far off between the trees.

If you roll the boulder aside to get into the cave, turn to **9**

If you go towards the light, turn to **2**

If you continue further through the forest, turn to **58**



47

The old man gives a cry of pain as you punch him hard. He does not wait for

further punishment, but goes running off on surprisingly sprightly legs. You are too weary to chase him after carrying the heavy pack all this way. However, in his haste to get away he dropped a parcel of cheese which you can add to your list of possessions. Eat it at any entry marked with an asterisk (*) and it will restore one lost Life Force level.

Remember that you must keep the cursed pack. Underline it on your list of possessions to remind you of this, and also note that it counts as two items. Then you can continue dolefully on your way.

Turn to **46**

48

You unstopper the jar and the smoke billows out. It soon makes the bees drowsy enough for you to sweep them aside and get at the hive. You watch them crawl wearily across the honeycombs inside, too stunned by the smoke to take to the air and attack you. You get a honeycomb, which you can add to your list of possessions. Eating it will restore one lost

Life Force level. You also find a quantity of nectar, which you can collect in the now-empty jar. If you do that, alter your list of possessions to read 'jar of nectar' instead of 'smoke-filled jar'.

Fearing that you might run into the troll at any moment, you return to the woods.

Turn to **102**

49

Remember to cross off the spell. Your magic makes the queen a little better. Some colour creeps into her cheeks, and she gives a deep sigh in her sleep. 'At least now she might live long enough for you to find a proper cure,' you tell the knights.

You can tell from their sad expressions that they do not hold out much hope, but they are grateful that you did what you could. 'Beware of the drow when you travel onwards through the deeper forest,' they tell you.

'Who are the drow?'

'Our evil cousins - dark pixies who

hate all mortals. To be safe from their tricks, sleep with a horseshoe hanging over you.'

Thanking the faerie knights for the warning, you set off.

Turn to **114**

***50**

Hordriss gives you a withering stare. Anyone would think you'd just confessed to a gruesome murder, rather than just getting his daft puzzle wrong. 'You're a prize dunce, aren't you?' he grumbles.

'Possibly so,' you admit. 'In my defence, however, I would just like to point out that I do not in any way resemble a goat who has been wrapped in a red robe and left too long under a hairdryer.'

Ignoring Hordriss' stare of indignation at this retort, you turn and walk away from his table.

If you want to speak to the woman in green leathers, turn to **17**

If you approach the monk, turn to **28**

If you wish to leave, turn to **115**

51

You can use a sword (turn to **84**), the Lance of Truth (turn to **95**), or a BLINK spell (turn to **106**), if you have them. If you have none of those, or prefer not to use them, turn to **117**

52

'Obviously this isn't my cloak,' you point out. 'It belonged to a troll. See, there are *two* hoods, because it was a two-headed troll.'

The soldier who accused you strokes his stubbly jaw. 'Could be that the bloke I saw had two heads . . .' he admits grudgingly.

They accept your explanation at last, but insist on taking the cloak off you as 'evidence'. Probably it is the sort of evidence that will be filed at a pawnbroker's shop just before their next visit to a tavern, but you see no sense in arguing. Cross the cloak off your list of possessions. You hurry off, glad to have got off so lightly. And perhaps it would

be a good idea to go along the *other* path this time. You head back to the turning and take the left hand path.

Turn to **105**

*53

You walk on for a mile or so. A fallen tree lies across the road ahead.

If you want to climb over it and continue on your way, turn to **119**

If you decide to leave the road here and strike off into the forest, turn to **42**

54

As you begin to climb, a ferocious wolf comes bounding down towards you and launches itself at your throat. It is impaled on your weapon. Tugging the bloodied spear-tip out of the body, you step cautiously over it and continue up to the top of the stairs.

Turn to **123**

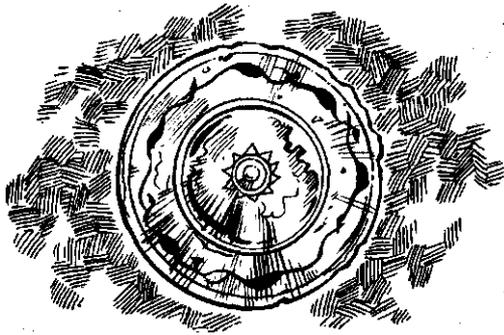
*55

Brother Mace veers his barrow into the stream and comes splashing across to where you are standing. 'Did you get

it?' he calls out anxiously. 'Did you get the relic?'

If you have an ivory box, turn to **77**

If not, you have to tell him regretfully that you failed to find the relic, and bid him farewell; turn to **66**



***56**

He takes the coin and bites it to check the metal is genuine. Slipping it into his purse, he says, 'If you want to get into the castle, you'll need the password.'

'What is it?' you ask.

He leers mischievously. 'I'm not supposed to tell you. But I will say this: it's not quite "open sesame".' Sniggering to himself at what he imagines to be his

clever wit, he hobbles off in the direction of the jetty. You turn and square your shoulders before climbing the last few steps to the gate.

Turn to **23**

57

The little knight keeps looking back as though he senses someone close behind him, but you are careful to keep out of sight. As he flies on, he seems to be getting increasingly anxious. You see him prodding the bat with cries of 'Giddy up, Battefax!'

You follow him to a glade where he meets with other tiny knights. Some ride on bats, while others have come here on the backs of mice or nightingales, or in chariots drawn by huge stag beetles. Their agitation is obvious as they wait in a murmuring throng. They do not notice you crouching behind a boulder at the outskirts of the clearing.

After several minutes, as the moon reaches the highest point of the sky, a tiny couch is borne into the glade, carried by moths who are attached with

spider-silk to its corners. On the couch lies a faerie lady, apparently stricken with a fever. The knight you followed presses the cup of nectar to her lips, but she only moans fitfully. It is not enough,' you hear him say. 'We need more, or our queen will die . . .'

If you step out from behind the boulder and show yourself, turn to **101**

If you sneak off quietly, turn to **14**

58

You are suddenly set upon by a horde of tiny imp-like knights riding on the backs of bats. Their lances prick your skin painfully as they swoop in to the attack, easily avoiding your clumsy swipes. With high strident cries they warn you to retreat from their territory.

What will you do? You can offer to help them (turn to **92**), protest that you did not realize you were trespassing (turn to **103**), or run off at once (turn to **114**)

59

The bees swarm around you, stinging

you relentlessly. You are forced to give up your attempt to get at their hive. Wailing with pain, you run pell-mell towards the woods with the bees in angry pursuit. Lose one Life Force level and, if you survive, escape by turning to **102**

***60**

You can buy a good horse for twelve gold coins or an old nag for six. Cross off the money and note your horse, if any. (The horse does not count against your limit of six possessions because, of course, you do not have to carry it!)

You can now go to the tavern (turn to **71**), the smithy (turn to **82**), or off along the road (turn to **93**)

***61**

'Well done,' says Hordriss. 'Bright spark, eh? I like that in an adventurer. Now we've covered some simple maths, I'd better teach you to spell. . .'

He shows you a few bewildering card tricks. At the end of these, you realize

that you have acquired the BLINK spell - as in blink and you'd miss it. 'What does the spell do?' you ask Hordriss.

'Try it in a tight spot,' he advises. 'You'll soon find out how useful it is.'

You can now talk to the woman in green (turn to **17**) or the monk (turn to **28**), or you can leave the tavern (turn to **115**)

62

The soldiers search you while listening to you protest your innocence.

If you offer them a meat pie, turn to **7**

If you bribe them with a gold coin, turn to **30**

If you use a CHARM spell, turn to **41**

If you simply keep insisting you have done nothing wrong, turn to **52**

***63**

You rein in and look quizzically at him. 'What have you got under the hat?' you ask. 'A rabbit?'

'Much better than that!' he declares.

'It is a leprechaun. I mean to make him show me where he has his secret treasure, but first I must bind him with a silver chain. Do you have a silver chain on you, at all?'

If you have a silver chain, turn to **96**

If not, turn to **107**

64

You watch with mounting astonishment as a motley horde of goblins, spriggans and pookas come capering out of the fields and hedgerows to skate on the frozen pond. Music is provided to accompany the strange merriment, courtesy of four crow-headed goblins who sing a most disharmonious tune. You've heard Brother Mace talk of plainsong, but this is more downright ugly!

If you have a smoke-filled jar and wish to use it, turn to **86**

If you have a hat of invisibility and want to put it on, turn to **97**

Alternatively, you could creep off down the road (turn to **53**) or into the woods (turn to **42**)

65

You step out of the cover of the trees and walk into the camp of the ghostly gypsies. A few of them cast morose looks in your direction. The scrutiny of their dead eyes makes you shiver with dread.

If you still possess the Helm of Justice, turn to **87**

If not, turn to **98**



***66**

Brother Mace calls out to you: 'If you are going to the castle, be warned that no magic will work against the Gatemaster. You must have the password!'

Do you know the password? There is

nothing you can do about it now, in any case, so you wave to Brother Mace and continue on your way, listening to his jaunty tune fade into the distance.

It is almost dawn by the time you reach the Lake of Wisps. It looks like a silver mirror wreathed in swirls of misty silk. The castle stands on an island in the centre, its black walls just beginning to take on solid form out of the shadows of departing night. A boat glides towards you and stops at the jetty. The cowed ferryman beckons you closer. You have enough experience of adventuring to know that he is waiting for you to pay him.

If you have a coin to pay your fare, turn to **88**

If you know the FREEZE spell and want to use it, turn to **99**

Otherwise, turn to **110**

***67**

The spell makes the old sentry as friendly as a favourite uncle. 'Mind you watch out for the Gatemaster,' he

warns. 'He won't let you into the castle unless you give him the password.'

'Which is?'

He scratches his head. 'Er ... I can't remember. I know it's some sort of plant, but I'm not sure which. Maybe you'll make a lucky guess.'

Thanking him, you race up the rest of the way to the castle entrance.

Turn to **23**

68

Roll a die.

If you roll 1, 2 or 3, turn to **79**

If you roll 4 or 5, turn to **90**

If you roll 6, turn to **57**

69

Inside the cottage you find an oak table on which rests a freshly-cooked meat pie. On a rack next to the door are a hooded red cloak and a sword. After rummaging in a few drawers, you also find a money pouch containing five gold coins.

Take any of these items you wish (remembering that you can only carry six

possessions in all): the meat pie, the hooded red cloak, the sword and the money pouch. A money pouch counts as just one item for carrying purposes, regardless of how many coins there are in it. The meat pie can be eaten at any entry marked by an asterisk (*) and will restore one lost Life Force level.

You must hurry, because the troll could come back at any minute. Will you go around to the back of the cottage (turn to **80**), or leave and return to the woods (turn to **102**)?

***70**

The old woman cracks a snaggle-toothed grin as you step warily nearer. 'Don't be frightened, dearie,' she says. 'I might be an old witch, but there's no harm in me.' When she sees you cast a nervous look over your shoulder at the bearskin, she goes on: 'Oh, it was real, all right. An evil spirit got into the skin and made it come alive, and it's kept me trapped in this cave since before you were born. Looks like you've killed it,

though. I'd leave the weapon pinned through it there, if I were you, just to make sure it stays dead.'

You are about to go, but first the witch insists on giving you a MEDICINE spell. You can use this once, at any point in the adventure when the entry is marked with an asterisk (*), and it will restore one lost Life Force level. If you are mindful of her warning to leave the Lance of Truth where it is, you must cross it off your list of possessions. When you have decided about that, you bid her farewell and set off through the woods.

Turn to **58**

***71**

You enter the tavern - a low-raftered room whose dark wood interior seems cool and dingy in contrast to the bright sunshine outside. The landlord looks up, immediately insisting that you buy a drink for one gold coin.

If you agree, cross off the money and turn to **104**

If not, you must leave; turn to **115**

***72**

Gwendoline the Greenwarden gives you a fiery look as you approach her table. She seems outraged by the sight of the Lance of Truth, which she has apparently mistaken for a hunting spear. Muttering something about 'dumb animals', she gets up and barges past you out of the tavern.

You look around. The wizard has also gone. You can either talk to the rotund monk (turn to **28**), or leave the tavern (turn to **115**)

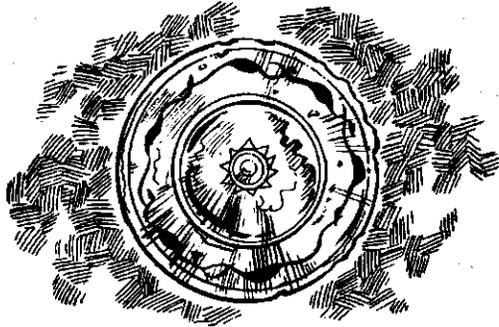
73

One of the soldiers had his crossbow cocked in case he spotted a pheasant. Or maybe he was looking to shoot a peasant. Anyway, he loses off a quarrel and you are struck in the arm. Lose two Life Force levels - unless you are still carrying the Shield of Honour, in which case you lose only one Life Force level.

Assuming you are still alive, do you have a horse?

If you do, you head back to the other path; turn to **105**

If not, you must now fight; turn to **51**



***74**

What is that hat?' you ask him.

'Why, 'tis a magic hat of invisibility,' he replies. 'I have only to hold it to the ground each day at sunset to recharge its magic, and then when I wear it it allows me to be as difficult to see as a shadow at twilight.'

He offers to sell you the hat for one gold coin. If you agree to the deal, cross off the coin and note that you now possess a hat of invisibility.

Bidding the man good evening, you continue down the road.

Turn to **85**

75

Aesandre hears you coming. Whirling round, she makes a magical gesture and her long silver-painted fingernails claw a miniature blizzard out of the night air. An icy gust of wind blasts into your face, forcing you back. You can feel icicles forming in your hair . . .

Do you have the Shield of Honour?

If you do, turn to **108**

If not, you are frozen solid by the witch-queen's spell and will remain as a warning to future adventurers!

***76**

You arrive at a wide clearing where the carpet of grass is broken by many rings of odd black toadstools. You detect a rich cloying scent in the air. The moonlight seems to hang like strings of diamonds in the foliage. There is magic here.

Bone weary after your escapades, you cannot go any further without a rest. There is an old wooden arbour at one side of the clearing. You take a closer look and discover that, although the seat inside is crusted with moss, it looks comfortable enough. Just as you are settling down for forty winks, you notice a mark in the lichen-stained arch above you. Peering at it, you see the unmistakable outline of a horseshoe. It looks as though a horseshoe has often been nailed to the arch in the past, although there isn't one there now.

If you have a horse *and* took it to be shod at the blacksmith's, turn to **22**

If you have no horse, or did not bother to have it shod, turn to **33**

***77**

'If this is it,' you say, handing him the box with the crucifix on the lid.

'Oh yes!' he says happily, taking the box and looking inside.

You take a peek around his massive shoulders. The box is filled with powder. 'A snuff box, is it?' you ask.

He booms with laughter. 'A snuffbox? Yes, I suppose so, in a manner of speaking. This is all that's left of Joan of Arc after she snuffed it, you see!'

You are about to be on your way when Brother Mace calls you over to see what is in his wheelbarrow. 'I've been collecting a few lost objects,' he says. 'Do any of these belong to you?'

If you have lost any of the following, then you will be delighted to discover that he has recovered them for you: the Helm of Justice, the Shield of Honour, and the Lance of Truth. Restore these to your list of possessions if you had lost them.

Turn to **66**

78

You are denied access to the castle. Sadly you slump to the ground and sit looking out across the lake as the sun rises and burns away the tendrils of fog. There is nothing else for it - you must return to the start of the quest and try again. Remember the adventurers'

maxim: There is no such thing as defeat, only temporary setbacks.'

79

The faerie knight hears the snap of a twig as you hurry after him. Steering deftly between the boles of two trees, he leads you a merry chase. You are exhausted and on the point of giving up when you blunder into a briar patch and scratch yourself very badly. Lose one Life Force level.

By the time you have untangled yourself, the knight is long gone. Weary and sore, you set off at random through the forest.

Turn to **46**

80

At the back of the cottage you find a beehive. The bees make an annoyed humming as you approach. Although torpid because of the chill of the night, they rouse themselves in a menacing cloud ready to protect the hive.

Do you still have the Helm of Justice?

If not, you must lose one Life Force level because of the bees' stings.

Assuming you survive this, you can raid the hive (turn to **37**) or run off into the woods (turn to **102**)

81

Retrieving the Lance of Truth, you race off into the comparative safety of the woods. You only stop running when you have put at least half a mile between you and the sinister cave. Just as you are getting your breath back, you hear a high-pitched squeaking sound followed by the thin clear note of an elfin bugle.

Turn to **58**

*82

The blacksmith looks up from his work over the anvil. He is a fat sweaty fellow, stripped to the waist. He is so hairy that it looks like he has a carpet glued to his chest. Curiously, although he has hair everywhere else - including a lot

sprouting from his thick nostrils - he has none at all on the top of his head. What do you want?' he demands gruffly.

If you have a horse, he will shoe it for six gold coins. Decide if you wish to spend the money, remembering to cross it off if so.

Then turn to **93**

***83**

Recognizing Gwendoline the Greenwarden, you ask her your best route to the castle on the Lake of Wisps.

Take the road out of the village till you reach a stone cross,' she replies. 'From there, go left until you see a pond, then enter the wood.' Greenwardens are sworn to help travellers through the woodlands, so you know you can trust what she says.

You look around the room. The wizard has left.

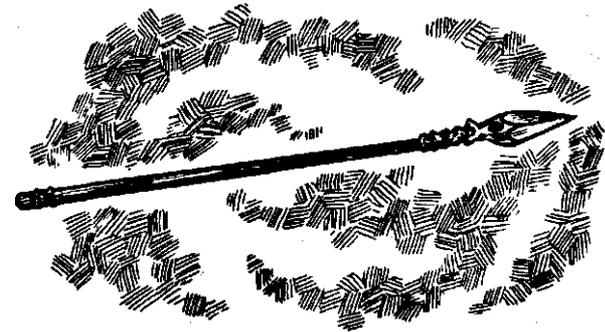
If you approach the rotund monk, turn to **28**

If you are ready to leave the tavern, turn to **115**

84

The sword is too heavy for you to wield easily, and you are soon surrounded and overpowered. Lose one Life Force level. If you are still alive, the soldiers also confiscate your sword. (Actually, they confiscate it whether you are alive or not, but if you are dead then you probably don't care!)

If you survive, turn to **62**



85

Just as the moon rises, you pass a turnstile where a little leprechaun is sitting smoking a pipe. His fluffy whiskers make him look like a crafty dandelion

wearing a scarf. Without any preamble, he launches into a strange bit of doggerel: 'Two twins watch everything else, but never one another, and both get confused when each crosses his brother.'

Before you can reply, he holds up his hand and adds, 'I'm after having a yes or no answer - which is like an aye or nay, if it's all the same to yourself.'

What on earth can he mean? What will you reply:

'Aye.' Turn to **8**

'Nay.' Turn to **20**

'I don't understand.' Turn to **112**

86

When you pull out the stopper, a cloud of thick smoke shoots from the bottle and settles like a fog over the frozen pond. You hear Aesandre's proud voice raised in baffled cursing. 'Where has this smoke come from, by the three legs of Ymir!' she screeches. 'Hoarfrost and hellspawn, I cannot see a thing!'

While Aesandre and the goblins are blundering about, you feel your way

carefully around to the pavilion. Inside you find a scroll which, when you read it, gives you the FREEZE spell. Make a note of this and remember to cross the smoke-filled jar off your list of possessions.

Now you had better hurry away before the smoke clears. You can either go into the forest (turn to **42**) or head off up the road (turn to **53**).

87

The Helm is too distinctive. Even in the dull depths of their long-dead brains, the ghosts recognize that you are not one of them. With hissing howls of hatred, they stumble to their feet and start shambling towards you.

Your gaze falls on the pile of treasure beside the fire. You see a couple of items that might be worth grabbing: a golden mace and an ivory box with a crucifix on the lid.

If you decide to run away at once, turn to **76**

If you have a BLINK spell and want to use it, turn to **120**

If you decide to risk pausing long enough to grab some of the treasure, turn to **109**

***88**

He accepts your payment and punts you slowly across the lake. The eastern sky gleams with pale gold light. You can hear the croak of ravens in the trees along the shore as they rattle the night's chill out of their feathers.

The castle looms out of the mist, dauntingly huge. A long flight of stone steps winds up from the jetty to the great iron portcullis. The boat bumps against the jetty and you step out. You have reached the final stage of your quest.

Turn to **121**

89

The Gatemaster steps aside. 'Enter,' he tells you.

You move past him warily. The castle keep is deserted. As you cross towards the inner dungeon, a hail of arrows descends from the narrow slits lining the

courtyard walls. You break into a run, desperate to reach the safety of the dungeon entrance.

If you have both the Helm of Justice and the Shield of Honour, you take no injury. If you have only one of those items, lose one Life Force level. If you have neither item, lose two Life Force levels. Assuming you survive, you reach the dungeon and shelter inside the entrance while the arrows continue to pelt the cobblestones outside.

Turn to **111**

90

Try as you might, you cannot keep up with the bat and its rider. Before long you are forced to stop, out of breath from running. You have lost sight of your quarry altogether, so you may as well press on through the forest.

Turn to **46**

91

A thin white hand emerges from the

water and steals any gold coins you might possess. If you have no coins, it steals one other item (you choose which). Cursing, you thrust your arms down into the water to catch hold of the thief, but to your amazement there is no-one there!

Delete the coins (or one item) from your list of possessions.

If you now want to take a look around behind the troll's cottage, turn to **80**

If you decide to leave before he catches you prowling around, turn to **102**

92

The tiny warriors scoff, saying, 'What help can you give us?'

If you have the codeword ANNAL, delete it and then turn to **4**

If you did not have that codeword, you must turn to **103**

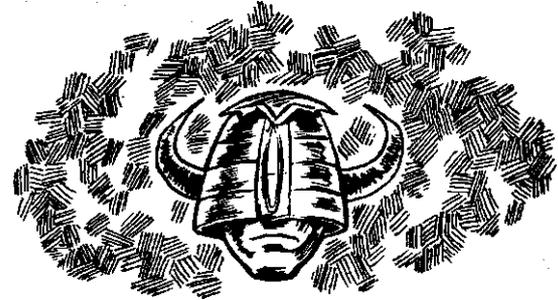
***93**

It is already mid-afternoon by the time you set out. Soon you are walking along a lane that skirts between

yellow corn-filled meadows and deep forest. Eventually, as the sun sinks low in the sky and shadows fill the dales, you come to a stone cross. From here, the path forks in two.

If you go left, turn to **105**

If you go right, turn to **116**



***94**

'Oh, that's excellent,' says Brother Mace. He has brightened up considerably now that there is some hope of getting the relic back. He tells you that the camp of the phantom gipsies is in Tangle Wood. Turn left at the stone cross, then stay

on the road until you reach a pond,' he adds.

Note the codeword WURU and then turn to **115**

95

You sweep the Lance around, forcing them to dive back away from you. Their swords are not long enough to reach you while you keep them at bay. Unluckily, the heavy Lance slips out of your grasp and falls into the ditch beside the road. The soldiers immediately give a gleeful yell and lunge towards you.

If you stop to retrieve the Lance of Truth, turn to **117**

If you run off without it, delete it from your list of possessions as you rush back towards the turning, to take the other path this time. Turn to **105**

96

A familiar voice suddenly gives a stern cough: 'Ahem.'

You turn. Treguard is standing beside you with a disapproving look on his face.

'Tut tut tut,' he says. 'Liars never prosper in the land of Nightmare, you know. Surely you realize that the only person you were cheating is yourself?'

With that, you are whisked out of the adventure and cannot try it again until you have learned to be more honest.

97

With the hat of invisibility on your head, you feel quite safe. You step out of the bushes and saunter over towards the pavilion.

The music stops. All the goblins are staring at you. A shadow falls across you, and you look up into the proud face of the ice witch. 'Er . . . I'm invisible . . .' you say lamely.

'No, you're not,' she replies. 'You're just risible.' So saying, she turns you into a snowman, and your adventuring career doesn't last much beyond sunrise.

98

The phantom gipsies hardly notice you slip in amongst them. As they sway dolefully to the morbid tune of the violin, you

crouch beside their pile of treasure and inspect it out of the corner of your eye. You see two items that might be worth taking: a golden mace and an ivory box with a crucifix on the lid.

If you have a BLINK spell and want to use it, turn to **120**

Otherwise, you can try to steal some of the treasure (turn to **10**) or you can just sneak off empty-handed (turn to **76**)

***99**

The spell freezes a path across the lake, allowing you to skate out to the castle. The ferryman gives you a sour look, but you waste no words on him. Excitement is stirring in your blood. Your adventure has reached its climax. Ahead lies the castle where the prince is held captive.

Turn to **121**

100

You confidently step forward but the Gatemaster repulses you, prodding you back with the blunt end of his halberd.

'Can I have another guess?' you ask.

'No,' he says. 'If you wish to enter, you can return to the start of your quest and attempt it all again. Perhaps you will learn from your mistakes this time. But I warn you, the password may be different when you come this way again.'

Your adventure has ended. You were so close to succeeding! Try once more, and surely this time you will reach your goal.

101

They are outraged by the sight of a mortal in the midst of their secret glade. As the queen's catafalque is whisked safely away by the moths, several of the faerie knights lower their lances and come speeding towards you.

If you decide to run away, turn to **14**

If you stand your ground, turn to **122**

***102**

You can either go back to the cave with the boulder at the entrance (turn to **113**),

or continue your way through the woods (turn to **58**)

103

The faerie knights take no notice of anything you have to say. You are forced back, but you unseat several of the knights with wild swipes of your arms, sending them flying across the clearing. In the meantime it is difficult to defend yourself, since their attacks come from all directions at once. Each spear-prick on its own would be nothing to worry about, but the combined effect of repeated thrusts is extremely painful. Lose one Life Force level. If still alive, will you use a MEDICINE spell if you know one (turn to **16**), try to stop the fight by offering to do them a favour, assuming you have not already tried this (turn to **92**), or just run away (turn to **114**)?

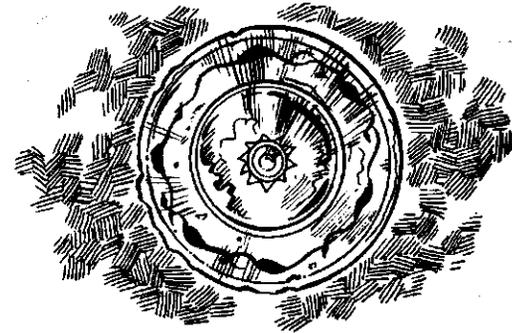
***104**

You see several people sitting around the room. There is a wizard with red

streaks in his white hair and beard, an athletic young woman in a green jerkin, and a portly monk with a huge tankard of ale in front of him.

You can approach the wizard (turn to **5**), the woman (turn to **17**) or the monk (turn to **28**)

If you decide to leave the tavern without speaking to any of them, turn to **115**



***105**

The moon is shining brightly across the fields by the time you arrive at a pond beside the road. On the far side of the pond, you notice a small pavilion of white marble with ivy growing

on the walls. You look to your left, where the tangled woods loom darker than a coal cellar at midnight.

If you wish to investigate the pavilion, turn to **31**

If you venture into the woods, turn to **42**

If you head on along the road, turn to **53**

***106**

You speak the spell. The next thing you know, you are back beside the stone cross, at the point where the road forks in two. Since you now know that the soldiers are just around the bend ahead of you, you turn around and take the other path, hurrying so that you will be out of sight before they arrive.

Cross off the BLINK spell as you cannot use it again, then turn to **105**

107

'Oh no,' he groans. 'If we don't bind him before the moon rises then he'll regain

his magic power, tunnel into the ground, and get away.'

You shrug. 'Sorry, but I haven't found any silver chain.'

'Ah, well, I think I know where I can get some, up at the town,' he says. He glances at the horizon, now steeped in twilight. 'If you lend me your horse, I might just be able to get back before moonrise. Be sure to hold on to the hat while I'm gone, and don't let the little devil get away.'

If you agree to watch the hat while he fetches a chain, turn to **118**

If you prefer to be on your way, turn to **85**

108

The Shield takes the brunt of the spell, but you still lose one Life Force level because of the deadly chill spreading through your limbs. You have to drop the Shield, as it is now encased in ice and is too cold to touch. Cross it off your list of possessions.

Aesandre gives a whistle, and a horde of gruesome goblins come capering out of

the ditches and hedgerows. You cannot possibly fight them all. Turning on your heel, you race into the dark woods.

Turn to **42**

109

You seize two handfuls of treasure just as the phantom gipsies seize several handfuls of you. You are helpless to resist as they lift you off your feet and begin a macabre tug-of-war with your body as the rope. You are stretched beyond endurance, but mercifully you black out before they manage to render you armless. Your adventure has met a grisly end.

110

You can go no further. You faltered when your goal was in sight. But do not be disheartened - go back and try again, and this time perhaps you'll succeed.

***111**

You look around. A narrow stairway spirals up the walls of the dungeon tower into the gloom.

If you have the Lance of Truth, turn to **54**

If not, turn to **12**

112

He puffs at his pipe until thick clouds of blue smoke rise around you. You cough and wave your hands, grimacing at the unpleasant stench of his odd tobacco.

'Get confused, now, did ye?' he says. 'Maybe you should have been payin' a bit more notice back there.'

You can no longer see his face for the smoke. Groping blindly forward, your fingers catch the hem of a cloak. As the smoke clears, you find yourself looking up into Treguard's face. You are back in Knightmare Castle. Treguard gently disentangles your grip on his robe and says, 'Ah, you ran into Seamus of the Shee. He's quite a trickster. Apparently he's sent you back in time to the start of your quest.'

This is right. You are about to start the adventure again, but this time forewarned by your experiences

the first time round. Delete all possessions, spells and codewords. Restore your Life Force status to GREEN.

Then turn to **1**

113

Returning to the cave, you set to to remove the boulder blocking the entrance. At last it rolls back, and you enter the cave.

Turn to **15**

***114**

You progress through the wood to a village, where you find a haycart. Wary from your travels, you slump down in the hay and fall fast asleep. It is after noon when you wake up. You decide whether to go to the stables here (turn to **60**), visit the tavern across the village green (turn to **71**), go into the blacksmith's workshop (turn to **82**), or set out again on your journey (turn to **93**)

***115**

You leave the tavern and glance over towards the stables, which are now

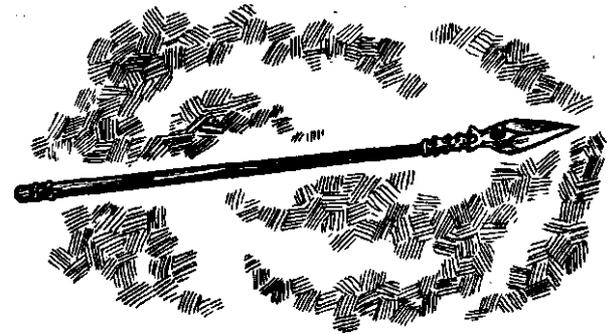
closed. If you have not already bought a horse, you've missed your chance. You can drop in at the blacksmith's (turn to **82**) or leave the village (turn to **93**)

116

Foot soldiers are coming along the lane towards you. In the twilight you failed to notice them until they are almost upon you.

If you turn and flee, heading for the other path, turn to **6**

If you stand your ground and speak to them, turn to **18**



117

They overpower you and start searching carefully through your belongings.

'What are you looking for?' you ask the sergeant.

'Evidence,' he barks back at you. 'I can tell a criminal when I set eyes on one, and I've rarely seen a more disreputable little scoundrel than you.'

If you possess a meat pie, turn to **7**

If not, turn to **19**

***118**

He jumps into the saddle and rides off down the road, leaving you holding tightly to the hat's brim.

You listen to the sound of pounding hooves recede into the distance. Silence. After a while, an owl hoots. You hear a frog croaking in the ditch running beside the road.

The moon rises. There is no sign of the man. Nor your horse.

You look under the hat. Nothing. No, wait - there is a scrap of paper with something scrawled on it. You hold it up to the moonlight and read the one word written there. *Sucker*.

Cross the horse off your list of possessions. Add the tall hat if you decide

to keep it. Grumbling under your breath, you trudge angrily off along the road.

Turn to **85**

119

Without warning, a ferret-faced man in a grey tunic steps out into the road. He has a crossbow pointed at your chest. 'Good evening,' he says. 'I'm part of a new economic scheme for redistributing wealth. Your co-operation is appreciated.'

You look at him dubiously. 'You're a brigand, aren't you?'

He is taken aback at this. 'No, I'm the local tax officer. I'll assess your tax according to a simple questionnaire. There's only the one question, and here it is. My brother and I set out to see my uncle. I took my horse and got there in two hours six minutes, less seventeen minutes for a shortcut. My brother took his mule and got there in one hundred and eleven minutes. Who is the faster rider?'

What will you answer?

'You are.' Turn to **21**

'Your brother is.' Turn to **32**
Or will you just use a BLINK spell
if you have one (turn to **43**)?

***120**

You have time to snatch up the ivory box as you recite the spell. The phantom gipsies lunge towards you, but their dead hands close on thin air - you have already been whisked off to a safe distance by the BLINK spell.

Note the ivory box among your list of possessions. Remember too that, now you have used your BLINK spell, you cannot use it again. Hearing an owl hoot in the distance, you are reminded of your quest. You set off through the woods.

Turn to **76**

***121**

As you trudge up the steep steps towards the castle gate, you pass an old sentry who has just come off the night watch. He coughs in the damp morning air and you hear him utter a curse under his breath. He barely gives you a glance

before stomping off down towards the jetty.

If you want to speak to him, turn to
11

If not, turn to **23**

122

You try to explain that you mean no harm, but the people of faerie are distrustful of humans, and your words fall on deaf (and pointed) ears. The tiny lances jab deep into your flesh. Lose one Life Force level. Yelping in pain, you stagger away from the glade. 'Begone!' cries the chief of the knights. Trespass here again, and we shall not let you off so lightly.'

Note the codeword ANNAL and then turn to **46**

123

At the top of the tower you find a small room where a baby lies asleep in his cradle. From the gold decoration on the cradle, you guess that this baby must be the future king whom Treguard spoke

of. As you lift the baby up, he wakes and gives you a great broad smile . . .

Colour and light blaze and swirl around you. The next moment you realize that Treguard is beside you. His stewards rush forward to take the young prince from your arms. 'I'm back in Knightmare!' you say in amazement.

That castle *was* Knightmare,' he explains. 'Or a part of it, at least.'

'And the future king?' you ask, glancing over to where Treguard's servants are busily making the baby comfortable.

'King Arthur, of course - the only rightful ruler of Britain,' says Treguard with a twinkle in his eye. 'You'll be hearing more about him, young adventurer, if you follow the path to Knightmare!'



Knightmare

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