

Escape from the Tower of Stars

Text, rules, and design by David M. Donachie, Jan 2023
This is a previously unpublished game

Let's begin

If you have played a **GNAT** adventure before, feel free to use an existing character, or read on to create a new character.

- Set your *Talent* to 9
- Set your *Vitality* to 3
- Set your *Fortune* to 3
- Gain two *Basic Skills* from the list below
- Pick a *One-handed, Long or Two-handed Weapon* (see equipment list below)
- If you took a *One-handed Weapon* you may take a **Shield**

Because you are prepared for a long trip into the mountains, you should also take the following (whether your character is new or not).

- 3 **rations**, 10 **gold pieces**, and a **rope (+1 climbing, heavy)**

Optionally, you may reduce your Talent by one to gain another Basic Skill. You may do this up to three times.

Skills

Climbing, Diplomacy, Larceny, Linguistics, Naturalist, Occult, Search, Stealth, Swimming, Tracking.

(Note: Swimming is not used in this adventure, so if you are making a character just to play this, you can ignore it)

When you are done, [turn to 1](#).

GNAT Quickstart Rules

(For the full rules reference, visit <https://bit.ly/gnatcore>)

Your character is defined by two numbers: **Talent** and **Vitality**. Talent covers your luck and expertise, while Vitality measures your will to survive and capacity to endure harm.

Talent and Vitality

Testing Talent

While playing you will be asked to Test your Talent. Roll two 6-sided dice and compare to your current Talent score; you succeed if the result is less than or equal to your Talent. A natural roll of double 1 (a **critical**) always succeeds, while a double 6 (a **fumble**) always fails.

Some rolls have modifiers, (e.g. Test your Talent at -3). Apply this to your Talent before rolling.

Occasionally ill-luck or misfortune can result in a loss of Talent. In this case you will be told to *Lose 1 Talent*, which affects all tests from then on. You may also be told to *Restore 1 Talent*. Restoring Talent will not raise your score above its maximum value. Talent cannot go below zero.

Skills

Skills supply a bonus (+2) to your Talent if you possess them.

If you are asked to (for example) *Test Climbing*, then you Test your Talent, adding +2 if you have the Climbing Skill. Sometimes you are still allowed to roll at -2 even if you don't have the skill (the adventure will tell you where you roll at -2).

- **Climbing:** Climbing, balancing, and athletics
- **Diplomacy:** Used to negotiate with others
- **Larceny:** Locate and disarm traps
- **Linguistics:** Used to translate dead languages
- **Naturalist:** Knowledge of plants and animals
- **Occult:** The supernatural and spellcasting
- **Search:** Used to find hidden things
- **Stealth:** Sneaking and hiding
- **Swimming:** Used to swim and fight in the water
- **Tracking:** Follow trails and find people

Vitality

Your Vitality score measures your ability to push on and endure harm. When it reaches zero, your character is overcome — dead or severely injured. Damage to your Vitality is measured in **Wounds**. If you are told to *Take a Wound*, you reduce your Vitality by one. (Sometimes you may be told to *Take two Wounds*,

or more).

You may sometimes be told that damage ignores armour (e.g. from drowning or hunger), in which case the loss cannot be prevented by armour (see below). You may also be told to *Heal one Vitality*, which allows you to heal a point of lost Vitality.

Most adventures will tell you what to do if you reach zero Vitality. If they do not, your character dies and the adventure is over.

Some adventures offer opportunities to *Rest*, which generally involves consuming a **ration** (see Equipment, below). When you rest you will usually be told to restore some Talent and heal some Vitality. Sometimes, if you don't have a ration, you will lose Talent or Vitality instead.

Spells

Spells are magical rituals that must be inscribed on scrolls, tablets, or other items, because unleashing the spell destroys the item that contains it. If you have a spell, you may cast it when instructed to e.g. *Cast Fly by Testing against a 10*. If you succeed, the spell is cast, otherwise the spell is destroyed without effect, unless you choose to *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour* in which case you keep the spell.

Fortune

All characters have a pool of three Fortune. You can spend a Fortune point after any dice roll to re-roll one of the dice. You can do this after you've used any other re-rolls, and you can continue to spend Fortune and roll again until you like the result. Regain a Fortune each time you gain Experience, or when told to *Gain 1 Fortune*. You may not have more than 3 Fortune.

Combat

When you face combat, you will be told to *Fight*. To *Fight*, Test your Talent. If you pass, you win the fight. If you fail, you *Take a Wound*.

Many combats involve a penalty, to represent the strength of the opponent, and some last multiple rounds — which means you must test your Talent multiple times. For example if you are told to *Fight three rounds at -3*, that means you must test your Talent three times, with a -3 penalty on each roll, suffering one wound for each round you fail. If you are still alive at the end of the three rounds, you win the fight.

If you *Fumble* in combat, take an extra Wound.

Weapons, Shields, and Armour

Your character can carry multiple weapons, a shield, and a suit of armour, each of which give bonuses in combat. If you are carrying more than one weapon, you choose which to use at the start of combat. If you have no weapon, fight at -1.

One-Handed Weapons require one hand to use and may give a bonus to your Talent in combat. e.g. a **Sword (+1)**.

Two-Handed Weapons require both hands to use (so you cannot use a shield). A two-handed weapon may re-roll the first 6 rolled each round — you must take the second result.

Long Weapons (such as spears) require both hands to use (so you cannot use a shield). They may sometimes provide an extra bonus where their length is relevant.

Ranged Weapons (such as bows) require both hands to use (so you cannot use a shield), and do not give a bonus in combat. However, you may find certain actions only open if you have a ranged weapon.

Shields require one hand to use. Shields reduce any combat penalty you suffer by 1.

Magical Weapons give you *Advantage* (see below).

Armour comes in Light (1 protection), Medium (2 protection), and Heavy (3 protection). When you *take a wound* while wearing armour, you may choose to ignore the wound — and you may do this a number of times per adventure equal to the protection value. Some adventures may offer the chance to *repair your armour*, which restores its protection value.

When wearing armour, you take a penalty to *Stealth* and *Climbing* skills equal to the undamaged protection value.

Advantage and Disadvantage

When you fight with a distinct advantage — such as when you are flying and your target is not — you have *Advantage*; you may re-roll any one dice, taking the second result. You make this re-roll after any other re-rolls (e.g. from a two-handed weapon).

Sometimes the opposite is true. In this case you have *Disadvantage* and must re-roll the first 1 or 2 you roll each round when fighting, taking the second

result.

Equipment

Equipment is marked in bold, such as a **jewelled dagger**, a **ration**, a **flight spell**, or a **pickled serpent's head**. When you take equipment, you add it to your character sheet. You also have a *Coin Pouch* that holds any number of gold pieces (gp).

You can carry as many of these normal items as you wish, but the same is not true of *Heavy Items*. The total number of heavy items you can carry is equal to twice your *maximum* Vitality. (For a new character, this is 6.)

Weapons, shields, and armour are all heavy items. If some other item is heavy it will be listed in the adventure where you find it, e.g. barrel of ale (heavy).

Some items give a bonus to a Skill (e.g. "Tome (+1 occult)"). In this case you count this bonus to your Talent whenever testing that skill. If you carry multiple items that give a bonus to the same skill, only the highest applies.

Keywords and Titles

During your adventures you may gain vital clues, or participate in certain events, which are marked by **Keywords**, which are given in italics, e.g. "Gain the keyword *Arbalest*". Keywords are not equipment, and aren't lost if you lose your items. You can mark keywords on the list at the back of the book.

You may also be awarded **Titles**, which are measures of respect and rank. Titles may give you access to certain restricted parts of adventures.

Keywords can be removed when an adventure is finished, but Titles are retained from adventure to adventure.

A checklist of keywords used in the adventure can be found at the back of the game.

Experience

If you are successful in your adventures, you will be awarded one or more *Experience Points (xp)*. You can spend these points to increase your abilities as follows:

Increase Talent: pay experience points equal to your current Talent to raise it by one level. For example, to increase from Talent 6 to Talent 7, pay 6xp.

Increase Vitality: pay experience points equal to twice your current Vitality to raise it by one level. For example, to increase from Vitality 3 to Vitality 4, pay 6xp

Advance a Skill: pay experience points equal to your current Skill bonus to give it a +1. For example, to increase from Climbing +2 to Climbing +3, pay 2xp.

Gain a Skill: pay 2 experience points to buy a new *Skill*.

You may spend experience any time you take a *Rest*, or between adventures.

End of Adventure

If you are not dead at the end of an adventure, you may *Restore your Talent and Vitality*, spend experience, and buy from the standard item list.

I.

Five generations ago, the War of the Wizards devastated Paldoria. Mountains cracked, rivers drowned, cities sank into the sea. The few surviving wizards retreated to their fastnesses and closed their doors against the world outside, leaving the survivors to face the aftermath alone.

One generation ago, when you were still a child, the decrepit sorcerers of Treysham, all but consumed by their decadent excesses, re-opened the doors of their citadel to the outside world. Within a handful of years the other surviving fastnesses — Heldad, Marinth, Krendar, and Jarson — followed suit. It was the dawn of a new age; an age of fresh opportunities, and ancient grudges. For those willing to leave the dubious safety of their village walls, there were fortunes to be made.

You are grown now, and have left your own birthplace in search of one of those fortunes. Your travels have brought you to the desolate mountain passes of Attarkund, where the freezing north wind never ceases, and — you are beginning to think — you have no right to be.

You are starting to really hate the tattered map you bought from the old woman back in Kamra village. It promised an easy route over the Attarkund mountains to the fabled ruins of Pannagor, which you were hoping to loot for treasure.

Instead, it led you into a labyrinth of dead-end valleys and knife-back ridges, snow covered, and, frankly, miserable. The goat-fleece coat you *also* bought in Kamra hasn't proved much better — it's barely keeping out the freezing wind that howls down the valley. You press closer to the cliff wall, trying to get some shelter, but there's not much on offer.

Thankfully, your ordeal is surely nearly over. Not far ahead of you, the trail peaks. Only one curiously shaped pinnacle, its hazy silhouette a little like a fantastic tower, reaches any further into the bright morning sky, and that's on the other side of the chasm. The mountains go no higher. Once you've crossed the crest, it will be all downhill to Pannagor and fabulous wealth.

You've barely had that thought when a much more solid shadow passes over you, accompanied by a deafening shriek, and a blast of frigid air that rocks you onto your heels!

You look up in time to see a gigantic bird wheel up into the sky and then dive towards you!

- » [Run uphill for cover \(turn to 77\)](#)
- » [Throw yourself off the path \(turn to 3\)](#)
- » If you have a **bow**, [draw your weapon \(turn to 5\)](#)

2.

You are still keeping your distance, when you notice that the lynx has an unnaturally long and bushy tail, and oddly thick fur on its back. Something isn't right.

You realise that the sleeping cat isn't a lynx after all, but a small splintercat. Yet another magically-warped abomination left over from the war. You know that splintercats are capable of shooting poison needles from their tails.

[Return to 74.](#)

3.

You roll out of the way, and your momentum takes you straight off the narrow path, and into the void!

You scabble at the icy slope as you skitter down it, before coming to an abrupt and painful stop on a narrow ledge. The impact knocks the breath out of you, leaving you lying on your back, staring at the sky. High overhead the bird wheels and screeches, its cries loud enough to shake the snow-pack.

The bird disappears behind the lip of the cliff, and you hear rumbling and crashing from up above.

What is it doing?

You haul yourself up into a crouch, careful not to slip off the edge, and consider the ledge you've ended up on. A steep wall of stone and ice stretches back up to the path and plunges down below you to a narrow valley running back up towards the strangely shaped peak you saw from the path. Luckily, using your rope, both directions look climbable, though you aren't sure what might be waiting at the top!

- » [Climb back up \(turn to 55\)](#)
- » [Descend the cliff \(turn to 79\)](#)

4.

Gain the keyword *Malleable*

You decide there's nothing for it but to try and clamber up there and get the idol for yourself.

It's not a thought that fills you with joy.

Setting aside anything heavy that might unbalance you, you climb out of the shattered doorway and lean forward, hoping to brace yourself on the other side before you fall ...

Test Climbing at -2 (if you don't have Climbing, *Test your Talent at -4*). If you fail, you slip on the icy stone, sliding horribly towards the edge! *Test your Talent*. If you fail the second check as well, you lose your grip on the freezing stones — [turn to 65](#) now.

If you pass either check, then you manage to haul yourself to the top of the broken pinnacle, clinging on to the rock with what amounts to a death grip, and resolutely *not* looking down. You stay where you are for a long moment, eyes closed, chest heaving, before you summon the courage to pluck the idol from the rock and shove it into your pack. You give yourself one more moment to summon your courage before inching your way back the way you came.

This had better be worth it!

After what seems like an eternity, you sink back onto the safety of the steps and examine your prize. It is a dull metal idol, about a foot tall, representing an old man holding a broad-headed spade in his left hand. You recognise Gwyon the Gravedigger, a constellation of the autumn skies. You tuck the **gravedigger idol** safely in your pack and [return to 44](#).

5.

You snatch your bow from your back and loose arrow after arrow at the plunging shadow, sure that a single hit will take it down — it's only a bird after all.

It's only as the shadow grows and grows, and *grows*, that you realise that the bird must be enormous, its wings as wide as the pass you are climbing. Your arrows do nothing.

Test your Talent. If you fail, you *Take 1 Wound*, as the diving bird clips you with one immense claw. This isn't a fight you can win!

- » [Run for cover \(turn to 77\)](#)
- » [Roll off the path \(turn to 3\)](#)

6.

You build a heap of flammable items in the clear space at the centre of the mechanism, brushing away the snow to form a makeshift fireplace, and then set light to it all. The small flames gradually build into a warming fire. You may *Restore 2 Talent* as the heat washes over you, and if you have a **ration** you can eat it to *Heal 1 Wound*.

Turning away from the comfort of the fire to examine its effect on the machinery, you are less pleased. Where the dull metal rods and cogs are closest to the fire, the fine sheen of frost and ice melts a little, but the devices stay as stubbornly immobile as when they were frozen.

Eventually, the fire burns down, and then out. The cold returns full force, and the frost creeps back across the metal.

[Return to 76.](#)

7.

If you have a **pouch of silver dust**, [turn to 64](#) now. If not, you will have to [return to 43](#) and find some.

8.

Gain the keyword *Marble*

You crouch down in front of the empty niche and brush away some of the snow, wincing at the cold. Slowly, you uncover what appears to be a stone cobra, lying on its side under the snow.

An Oracular Serpent! You've heard of these, statues enchanted to foretell the future.

The statue is cracked, some of its tail is missing, but it seems possible that it might still work.

You heave the damaged statue upright. It's too heavy to lift back into the niche, but you prop it against the cliff face and brush away the majority of the snow, before bending down to breath directly into its open mouth. You sit back, and watch as the statue slowly comes to life. It creaks and pops, shedding ice and flakes of stone, as it turns to face you.

Beware the stars, the snake hisses. If you wish to survive, open the Eye of Heaven. The sign of the serpent will show the way.

The snake falls silent, leaving you to ponder its cryptic words.

[Return to 14.](#)

9.

Test Larceny (if you don't have Larceny, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you pass, you manage to snatch some **nest material** (flammable) from the nest and duck [back down the stairs \(turn to 11\)](#) before you are noticed.

If you fail, the movement attracts the hell bird's attention. It whirls, and slams one enormous claw down on your outstretched arm before you can snatch it away. Like it or not, you are going to have to [fight \(turn to 68\)](#).

10.

You throw yourself at the stairs, and tumble down towards the floor below with the bird snapping at your heels. *Test your Talent* or *Lose 1 Talent* as you bash yourself off the steps.

You drag yourself to your feet and [hurry down the stairs \(turn to 11\)](#).

II.

You emerge into the topmost chamber in the tower, and halt, staring in awe — or is it fear — at the sorcerous mechanism that fills it.

Enormous lenses stack one upon the other between your head and the ceiling, arrayed under a final, even more enormous, lens set into the ceiling. Armatures and gears support the lenses, along with many square tablets representing the signs of the zodiac, though the tablets are scattered at seemingly arbitrary heights and angles.

Everything is thick with frost.

The lenses are arranged directly above the open top of the shaft that plunges down the length of the tower, and you assume that the great lens must be the source of the light you saw below, but a closer inspection shows that the lens is covered by some sort of iris. Instead, angled mirrors reflect light from the many open archways around the outside of the room down the shaft.

Picking your way past the rough circle of tablets, armatures, and gears, you discover another, smaller, staircase, that must lead to the roof of the tower. Beyond the stairway the chamber is circled with arches opening directly to the bitter mountain air.

It looks to you like the mechanism needs to be reset if you want to activate it.

- » [Look out of the windows \(turn to 87\)](#)
- » [Try to reset the mechanism \(turn to 76\)](#)
- » [Climb the stairs to the roof \(turn to 20\)](#)
- » [Head back down the tower \(turn to 44\)](#)

II.

You pick your way around the circumference of the chamber, looking for anything that might be hidden in the shadows. Old snow has piled up in every corner, with drifts reaching four feet up the walls. Under the snow, you see dark blue glazed tiles, decorated here and there with enigmatic circles and lines.

Test Search (if you don't have Search, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you pass, [turn to 53](#). Otherwise, you gain nothing but a lost *Talent* from digging through the snow piles. You can search again, or [return to 56](#).

13.

You secure your rope with what you hope is a slip knot, that will release when you give it the right sort of tug, but not while you are climbing down into the chasm. You give it a pull, but there's really no way to know if you did it right, other than to try it.

Test Climbing (if you don't have Climbing, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you pass, you manage to safely [reach the bottom \(turn to 80\)](#) and recover your **rope**. If you fail, the slip knot gives way halfway through the climb. You tumble the rest of the way, bashed and battered. *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this reduces you to 0 Vitality, [turn to 65](#) now. Otherwise you can pick yourself up and [turn to 80](#).

14.

You reach the top end of the chasm, where it narrows to a rubble-choked point at the base of the pinnacle-tower. An arch of ice-sheathed stone opens onto a dark passage running into the mountain itself. If there was a door closing it, it is long gone.

To the right of the entrance, a small niche is set into the cliff-face. You can see an empty plinth inside the niche, but it's mostly choked with hard-pack snow.

It looks like there is no way on but forward.

- » [Examine the niche \(turn to 8\)](#)
- » [Enter the mountain \(turn to 34\)](#)

15.

You place the idols in what you hope are the right positions — they are not.

As soon as the fourth idol is placed, eldritch energy runs around the ring, but instead of charging, or running along the metal lines, it snaps out of place, lashing through the air like a whip! *Test your Talent*. If you succeed, you manage to knock one of the idols out of place before the energy can grow out of control.

If you fail, the energy strikes you as you are trying to break the arrangement, earthing through your body with an agonising *crack!* *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this kills you, [turn to 91](#) now.

Once one of the idols is removed, the energy dies down again, and you can [return to 44](#).

16.

You take a coin from your pocket (lose 1gp), and toss it down the shaft.

It rattles its way down, with the ring of metal on metal. *Ching! Ching! Ching!* Then there's a distinct *clink* as it hits something at the bottom. The shaft is definitely hollow, and from the sound of it, extends well down into the rock of the mountain.

» [Return to 41](#)

17.

Gain the keyword *Mettle*

You start to chip away at the ice encasing the metal doors. It's exhausting work. *Test your Talent*, if you fail, *Lose 1 Talent*.

Eventually, lumps of ice break free, toppling down to the floor below, and you are able to clear away the face of one of the doors. Now you can see that the dull metal is decorated with fantastic metal casts of animals and people. Serpents twine around armed warriors. Hawks dive past the heads of hunters. Deep channels spiral around and between the figures, which you recognise as constellations — the Water-Snake, the Warrior, the Huntsman, the Hawk.

The sound of falling ice breaks your concentration. You think another part of the ice covering the door has fallen down, before you realise that the cracking is coming from the chamber walls.

You look round in time to see two of the frozen corpses drag themselves clear of the chamber walls. They wear lead masks beneath their tattered robes, and wield hooked sickles in their mummified hands.

Luckily you can use the stairs to funnel their attacks. *Fight 2 rounds and -2*, shields count double. If you lose, [turn to 21](#).

If you survive, you can attempt to [open the doors \(turn to 52\)](#), or [hurry back down the stairs \(turn to 56\)](#).

18.

You find yourself at the upper entrance of the tower, where it opens on to the natural bridge connecting it back to the path. Snow whirls past the entrance, layering thickly on the stone of the bridge — you wouldn't like to risk crossing it, and there's little to be gained by doing so anyway.

A stairwell [descends into the mountain \(turn to 48\)](#), while an arched passage [opens onto a gloomy chamber \(turn to 56\)](#).

19.

The apparition claws at you with spectral hands made of snow flurries. They inflict no wounds, but chill you to the core. Weakened and helpless, you collapse onto the ice, where your bones will eventually join those of the forlorn ghost you were trying to kill.

THE GAME ENDS HERE

20.

You mount the narrow stairs up to the roof of the tower.

As your head emerges from the hole, you see that the hell bird has indeed made a nest on the top of the tower, and you have come up right at the edge of it. The bird is right there, close enough for you to make out the star patterns marked on its blue-grey feathers, almost a precise copy of the patterns in the tower down below.

It looks like you might be able to [snatch some of the nest \(turn to 9\)](#) before the bird notices you, anything else, and it will be on you instantly!

- » [Attack the bird \(turn to 68\)](#)
- » [Get back in the tower, now \(turn to 11\)](#)

21.

Relentless, the animated corpses cut you down. When life has fled, they place a sickle into your dead hand, and press you into the icy walls, ready to take your place at their side.

THE GAME ENDS HERE

22.

You dive to the controls, trying the best to wrest the remaining nineteen zodiac signs into their places before the bird can catch you. Mother Danna, the village lore-master, would be laughing in her sleeves to see your life depending on the star-lore she tried to teach you all those years ago!

You must make tests until you have succeeded three times. You may only make each sort of test once. Valid tests are *Larceny* (understanding the mechanics), *Linguistics* (remembering your star-lore), *Occult* (knowing the placements), and *Tracking* (seeing where the device was last time it was used). If you don't have the relevant skill, or have run out of skills to use, *Test your Talent at -3* instead.

If Mesarthim is helping you, you have +2 on each test.

If you fail a test, you must *Fight 1 Round at -1* with the hell bird. If this reduces you to 0 Vitality, [turn to 31](#) now.

If you succeed in making your three tests without dying, then if you have the keyword *Metric* [turn to 92](#), inf you do not [turn to 95](#) instead.

23.

You venture into a darkened chamber, built into the solid rock of the pinnacle. Only the outer wall, where it pierces the skin of the mountain, is made of masonry. A few of the stones have come loose, not enough to light the room, but enough to allow snow to build drifts in the corners, and a sheen of frost to spiderweb the floor.

A stone shelf is built into a niche in the wall, but there's nothing on it.

If you have the *Search* skill, *Test Search at +1* (if you don't have Search, *Test your Talent at +3*). If you pass, [turn to 30](#).

Otherwise, there's nothing to do here but [go back to the main chamber \(turn to 56\)](#).

24.

You descend the narrow stairs on the north side of the pinnacle, which ought to lead to the far side of the pass, and safety. The icy steps terminate in a small chamber and a narrow archway. Wind, snow, and bright mountain light pour through the arch, and you can see a narrow trail heading steeply downhill on the other side.

Escape, at last!

You step through the door, only to be greeted by a terrifying shriek and a staggering buffet of wind. The hell bird is *right there*, swooping down from above. You dive to one side as an ice and rock projectile the size of your torso smashes into the ground. Is the bird dropping them, or spitting them at you?

You don't wait around to find out!

There's no shelter to be seen other than the door you came out of, so you throw yourself back inside and sink down on the stairs. One more rock falls, and then everything grows silent.

Staring out at the sunlit path, you realise that one of the broken bits of the ice projectile looks different to the rest, not rock, but metal. Squinting, you think you can make out a pair of feet sticking out of the snow — some sort of statue. Do you dare try to grab it?

- » [Grab the statue \(turn to 42\)](#)
- » [Go back up the stairs \(turn to 48\)](#)

25.

If you already have the **gravedigger idol** there is nothing more to do here. [Return to 44](#)

You cautiously peer through the broken wall, and see the lower part of the broken buttress just to your right, with the idol you knocked down perched on the edge. You take a firm grip of the cold wall with your right hand, pressing yourself against the stone, and reach out with your left hand until you have a firm grip on the object and can heave it back into the tower.

You sink back in relief, keeping well away from the edge, and examine your prize. It is a dull metal idol, about a foot tall, representing an old man holding a broad-headed spade in his left hand. You recognise Gwyon the Gravedigger, a constellation of the autumn skies. You tuck the **gravedigger idol** safely in your pack and [return to 44](#).

26.

You are in Mesarthim's windowless chamber. Mesarthim himself is still lurking amongst the freezing shadows. He doesn't seem to mind your company, though you aren't sure you welcome his.

There's a cold empty fireplace in the centre of the room. If you have flammable items (either made of wood, or marked *flammable*) you may burn one to *Restore 2 Talent*. If you also have a **ration**, you may eat it to *Heal 1 Vitality*.

If you don't have the keyword *Monitor*, and want to challenge Mesarthim about his presence and purpose here, [turn to 84](#).

- » [Get out of here \(turn to 48\)](#)
- » [Ask Mesarthim to explain the plan, again \(turn to 27\)](#)
- » [Attack Mesarthim \(turn to 36\)](#)
- » If you have a *View* spell, and cast it on Mesarthim [turn to 46](#)

27.

Mesarthim explains.

"This place was an observatory, before the war. Not a place for watching the stars, you understand, but a place for stealing their power. The wizards working here hoped to drag star demons from the heavens and enslave them for their war efforts." He glances at the doorway leading to the skeleton-filled chamber. "They did not succeed."

"But their mechanisms still run the length of the tower. At the top, there is a concentrating lens that drags star-stuff from above. It is very dangerous, very destructive, when activated. And, as you've probably noticed by now, the top of this tower is where the hell bird makes its nest. All you need to do is re-activate the mechanisms, and the bird will be destroyed."

"And how do I do that?" you ask.

"You must unlock three mechanisms placed below the top of the tower. The first is a gate on the third floor, there you must connect the symbols of the Huntsman and the Water-snake using silver dust.

"The second is on the fourth level. There you will find four plinths. There should be idols placed on each that match elements to constellations — earth to the Gravedigger, water to the Water-snake, fire to the Lamplighter, air to the Hawk. The idols must be out of place now, I imagine.

"Finally, on the top floor, beneath the creature's eyrie, you must place the star-signs in the order of the zodiac, that will cause the star lens to open."

"You make it all sound so easy," you respond, "but silver dust, icons, where will I get these?"

Mesarthim shrugs. "I don't know the answer to that, I'm afraid. I haven't been able to pass the closed gate. There are ... obstacles."

Of course there are ...

[Turn to 26.](#)

28.

If you have the keyword *Malleable* [turn to 25](#) now.

You cautiously peer through the broken wall, taking in the vertiginous drop below, and the side of the tower still rising high above you.

Some sort of buttress, or side-tower, juts out from the main structure a little to the right of where you are standing, its steep sides free of snow. It looks like some sort of massive impact broke off the entire top of whatever it was, leaving behind a roughly-angled stone top about seven feet above your head.

There's something up there, you realise. An object, about the same size as the hawk statue on the plinth behind you, lying on its side in the snow. You can just make out the dull gleam of metal. You are sure it must be another idol.

You can't see a way to reach the idol from here. You could throw something at it, but it will definitely fall into the chasm if you do. You could step across to the bottom part of the buttress, but you still couldn't reach it.

[Return to 44](#)

29.

The barbed needles strike your exposed neck. Burning pain lances from the wound, they are poisoned! If you have a **blessing of immunity** or some other way of avoiding poison damage, then you survive the wound. Set your Vitality to 1, and then [turn to 56](#) as you stagger back into the main chamber.

If not, you slump to the floor here, stone dead.

THE GAME ENDS HERE

30.

There's nothing of value in this abandoned chamber, but there *is* something of interest.

In the corner by the door, someone has drawn on the wall in chalk. It's hard to make out, but it appears to be a stylised sketch of a bird, wings spread, in a beam of light ... or perhaps it is supposed to be superimposed on a drawing of the tower. Either way, it's hard to imagine that this is unrelated to the hell bird that chased you in here.

Above the bird and pillar, or beam, are three small symbols. One looks like the sun, one the moon, the third you don't recognise at all.

There seems to be nothing else here to find, so you [return to the main chamber \(turn to 56\)](#).

31.

You fight valiantly, but against this foe your skills are of no use. The giant beak goes *snip-snap* and you are cut entirely in half. There's no coming back from this!

THE GAME ENDS HERE

32.

You lean cautiously out through the doorway, gulping as disturbed snow spirals down into the void below you.

About a yard away, a broken spike of masonry totters in the open air. It looks like it might have been a buttress, or even a side-tower, before something hit it with sufficient force to rip the top away entirely.

What's left behind is a snow-covered slope of stone, angled away from the tower, and connected about seven feet below you. Lying on the top of the spire, half-buried in snow, is a dull metal idol in the shape of a man holding a spade. You can't reach it from here, not without risking a dangerous jump, and if you throw something to dislodge it, it will plummet off the side of the mountain.

What you *really* need is something you can loop around it, to pull it over to you.

- » If you still have your **rope** and want to use it to pull the idol [turn to 89](#)
- » If you want to try and climb up there, [turn to 4](#)
- » [Go back down the stairs \(turn to 44\)](#)
- » [Go up the stairs \(turn to 11\)](#)

33.

You emerge onto the fourth floor of the tower, a chamber much like those below, with the same metal shaft piercing its centre like an arrow. Part of the outer wall has fallen away, allowing light and snow to swirl into the room.

The four idols are sitting where you left them on the four plinths. The ring connecting them pulses with a faint blue light, like starlight. Above it, hanging in mid-air, spectral images of constellations drift in the freezing air. When you pass your hand through the images, they jumble and scatter — no more than snowflakes drifting in the air — but reform when you are no longer disturbing them.

The stairs here lead up and down.

- » [Ascend \(turn to 11\)](#)
- » [Descend \(turn to 71\)](#)

34.

You venture into the darkness of the tunnel. Inside, it's actually brighter than you feared. Pale light filters through the entrance, illuminating empty chambers, and gaping doorways rimed with frost. Windblown snow is banked up in every corner.

The passage eventually terminates in an ascending stairwell, cut from the living rock. More light seeps down from above. Thanks to that light, you can see the precarious state of the stones that make up the staircase. Some are missing, others are balanced loosely against each other. Frost has cracked and broken the rock.

It's no surprise then, when you head up, that the stones shift and rock beneath your feet. Then, one of them slips out of its socket entirely, plunging downwards with a terrible echoing crash! The whole stairway trembles. Mortar and snow shower down. In a terrifying chain reaction, more stones rip away from their moorings and fall after the first!

You run upwards.

You reach a landing, just in time, as the whole structure of the stairs you just climbed falls away. Dust and snow explode up the shaft, and when it clears, you can see that the whole stairwell is blocked with rubble. There's no way back.

Luckily, the landing is not a dead end. [Turn to 48](#)

35.

You return to the chamber where you fought Mesarthim. It is as cold and dead as before, though you can make use of the fireplace if you like. If you have flammable items (either made of wood, or marked *flammable*) you may burn one to *Restore 2 Talent*. If you also have a **ration**, you may eat it to *Heal 1 Vitality*. When you are done you [return to 48](#).

36.

Gain the keyword *Malus*

You draw your weapons and wade in to attack Mesarthim.

At once, the bearded man begins to glow. His flesh becomes translucent, and a pattern of actinic stars appears. He's a star demon, just like the ones he warned you about!

Fight 4 rounds at -5. You gain +1 if you have a **star shaped amulet**, and have *disadvantage* if you have a two-handed weapon, due to the constrained space. A *ranged* weapon can't be used at all.

If you lose, [turn to 78](#). If you win, Mesarthim collapses to the ground, his body fading from view as it had never been there. "A cold victory!" he hisses. "Gienah the hell bird is a far stronger star spirit than I! You will rot here as I have!"

The spirit fades away, leaving behind a small, dead, gem.

[Turn to 35](#).

If you have the keyword *Malus*, [turn to 35](#) now.

Otherwise, if you have the keyword *Metric*, [turn to 26](#).

If you have neither, gain the keyword *Metric* and read on.

You cautiously step through the archway, only to find yourself in a dark chamber, windowless and cold. There is no sign of whatever was casting the red light you saw from outside, only a cold fireplace in the centre of the room.

"Greetings, stranger."

You jump in surprise at the sound of the voice, which issues from the shadows at the back of the room. You peer into the darkness, and make out the shape of a heavily-bearded man leaning against the icy wall.

The man steps forward, and you see that his arms and chest are bare despite the biting cold, his dark skin heavy with swirling tattoos. His lower half is swathed in some sort of dress or kilt of dark material. You don't see any weapons.

"Forgive me, I have startled you. My name is Mesarthim. Welcome to my humble home." He gives you a very toothy, almost menacing, grin.

You explain about the hell bird attacking you, the blocked passes, your hope to cross the mountains through the ruin.

"Ahh yes, then we are the same. I too am trapped here. I am afraid that you will not be able to leave as you imagine. The hell bird, as you call it, will not allow you to leave. It is tireless. It never sleeps. No, the only way out is to deal with it once and for all. I cannot do this, but you look as if you may be capable."

"And how am I to do that?" You ask.

[Turn to 27](#)

38.

You set out across the natural bridge, keeping one eye on the sky.

You are entirely exposed here, both to the biting wind, and to the hell bird, should it choose to attack. Your only hope is that it fails to notice you as you scurry across to the pinnacle-tower.

Test Stealth at -1 (if you don't have Stealth, *Test your Talent at -3*). If you pass, you manage to [make it across to the tower without being noticed \(turn to 62\)](#).

If you fail, the bird spots you, and dives down from the tower top, screeching its anger. You throw yourself on the frozen stone as it passes overhead, but your grip is slipping ... slipping ... *Test Climbing* (if you don't have Climbing, *Test your Talent at -2*) if you pass, you manage to regain your feet and [make it to the entrance \(turn to 62\)](#).

If not, [turn to 65](#).

39.

You retreat into the shelter of the cave, hoping to wait the bird out, but it seems tireless. The rumble of falling rocks is endless, and the cave trembles with each crash.

What if the entrance gets blocked?

You push the thought away and make camp as best you can. If you have flammable items (either made of wood, or marked *flammable*) you may burn one to *Restore 2 Talent*. If you also have a **ration**, you may eat it to *Heal 1 Vitality*.

If you have the *Naturalist* skill, [turn to 96](#) now.

Eventually, the racket ceases, and you [venture back outside \(turn to 57\)](#).

40.

You are incinerated where you stand by your own magic, but your burnt corpse has barely tumbled its way to the ground before it is claimed by the snow.

THE GAME ENDS HERE

41.

You go far enough up the open stairway to be able to peer into the gap where the metal cylinder is cut in two. The gap is about three feet high, big enough to fall into if you aren't careful. Peering over the edge, you see that the cylinder is hollow, plunging down into the depths of the mountain. You can't get much of a view in the other direction, but the light makes you sure that the top must be open to the sky somewhere above.

There's no snow in the shaft, however, and it was certainly snowing outside. Something transparent must be blocking the top of the shaft, something that concentrates the pale mountain light and focusses it all the way down the spine of the tower.

You are tempted to drop something down the shaft, but think better of it — or do you.

- » [Drop something down the shaft \(turn to 16\)](#)
- » [Return to 56](#)

42.

You wait until you are certain the hell bird must have returned to its eyrie atop the tower, and then gradually edge forward, stretching out one hand to grab the statue.

Test Larceny (if you don't have Larceny, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you succeed, you snatch the statue back into the shelter of the stairwell without being noticed. If you fail, you do the same, but the tension involved is enough to set your heart racing and your brow sweating — *Lose 1 Talent*.

Either way, you end up back on the stairs and can examine the object more closely. It turns out to be some sort of idol, about a foot tall and cast from a dull hard metal. It depicts a woman with a raised lamp in one hand and a taper in the other. You recognise Merva the Lamplighter, whose wood-wormed statue stood at the entrance of your village's disused shrine, and know her for a constellation of the late winter skies.

You tuck the **lamplighter idol** into your pack and [head back up the stairs \(turn to 48\)](#).

If you have the keyword *Mercurial* [turn to 71](#) now.

You climb the stairs and emerge into a cold dim chamber. Solid sheets of ice sheathe the walls, covering over the open arches of windows. You can see faces in the ice, grim cadavers, frozen into the ice in poses of contorted agony.

The metal shaft, with its ring of steps, continues upwards for another floor, but the way up is blocked by what appears to be some sort of sealed gate, encased in ice. You climb us as far as you can, close enough to make out two slabs of corroded metal beneath the ice. They seem to be heavily decorated with swirling lines and embossed creatures, though you can't make them out clearly.

If you have the keyword *Mettle*, you have already cleared the ice from the doors, and can [try to open them \(turn to 52\)](#). Otherwise, it looks like there is no way onward unless you decide to [break the ice \(turn to 17\)](#).

» [Go back down the stairs \(turn to 56\)](#)

44.

If you have the keyword *Microcosm*, [turn to 33](#) now, otherwise, read on.

You emerge onto the fourth floor of the tower, a chamber much like those below, with the same metal shaft piercing its centre like an arrow. Part of the outer wall has fallen away, allowing light and snow to swirl into the room.

Four stone plinths surround the central stair. The plinths are joined by a ring of silvery metal set into the floor, and connect in turn to bands of the same metal that run up the walls and through the ceiling. Frost covers the floor, but there is no frost on or near the metal. On top of one of the plinths, is a dull metal idol in the shape of a sitting hawk with folded wings.

The other four plinths are empty, but you can see elemental symbols set into their faces — earth, water, and fire. It's no surprise that the occupied pillar bears the sign of air. It's clear that placing idols on each of the remaining plinths will serve some magical purpose.

Is that a good idea? You don't know.

If you have three idols, and wish to place them on the pillars, [turn to 72](#). If not, it might make sense to [examine the broken wall \(turn to 28\)](#), or [search the chamber \(turn to 93\)](#).

- » [Ascend \(turn to 66\)](#)
- » [Descend \(turn to 71\)](#)

45.

You place the idols in what you hope are the right positions — they are not.

As soon as the fourth idol is placed, eldritch energy runs around the ring, but instead of charging, or running along the metal lines, it snaps out of place, lashing through the air like a whip! *Test your Talent*. If you succeed, you manage to knock one of the idols out of place before the energy can grow out of control.

If you fail, the energy strikes you as you are trying to break the arrangement, earthing through your body with an agonising *crack!* *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this kills you, [turn to 91](#) now.

Once one of the idols is removed, the energy dies down again, and you can [return to 44](#).

46.

Gain the keyword *Manifest*

You make the subtle gestures required to activate the *View* spell you are carrying, ending by briefly holding your circled fingers in front of one eye.

Mesarthim's image shimmers and fades. Points of light appear, cold and actinic, marking out each joint, with pale lines linking each. It's a constellation! You feel a chill of fear — Mesarthim is no man, but the very sort of star demon he previously described!

You don't know whether that means you can still trust him, but you must be cautious.

[Return to 26.](#)

47.

Gain the keyword *Microcosm*

You place the idols in the right positions. The **snake idol** on water, the **lamplighter idol** on fire, and the **gravedigger idol** on earth. (Remove all three idols from your inventory).

As soon as the fourth idol is placed, eldritch energy runs around the ring, in a flash of fire the colour of moonlight. The pulse passes through each idol in turn, and then settles into the circle of metal like water flowing into a pool. As the fire subsides, a glow spreads across each of the radial spokes, and up through the ceiling.

Then, gradually, images appear in the air above the idols — spectral representations of constellations picked out in nets of dots and lines. The images revolve slowly around the axis of the tower, presenting new constellations as you watch.

Cautiously, you wave a hand through one of the images and it breaks apart into flecks of light, no more than softly glowing snowflakes suspended in the air. When you take your hand away, it forms again.

[Turn to 33.](#)

48.

You enter a large chamber, seeming carved out of the solid rock of the mountain. Low archways lead onto two stairwells, one at each end, with stairs heading both up and down. The downward stair on one side — leading back to the south side of the pinnacle — seems to have collapsed, and the well is blocked with rubble. The stairs on the other side ought to lead to the far side of the pass.

The chamber is dark and windowless, but the centre is illuminated by a bright shaft of light, shining through a sort of tube or duct that pierces the middle of ceiling. Below the shaft, the floor is scooped away into a sort of wide bowl, stepped, and thickly coated with ice. Even from here you can make out a jumble of bones and other human remains heaped in the middle of the bowl, as if someone had casually tossed a pile of bodies together and left it to rot away.

There's another source of light in chamber, a dull red glow that issues from an archway placed between both sets of stairs.

It looks like you can skirt the pool of light, staying away from the scattered bones, and reach any of the exits.

- » [Head up the broken stair \(turn to 18\)](#)
- » [Head up the intact stair \(turn to 73\)](#)
- » [Head down the intact stair \(turn to 24\)](#)
- » [Go through the glowing doorway \(turn to 37\)](#)
- » [Investigate the bones \(turn to 69\)](#)

49.

You realise that you have seen some of these symbols before, inscribed on the stone lintel of the abandoned shrine back in your home village. These are the signs of stars and constellations, and also of the elements.

There are many you do not recognise, and some that you do. You see the barred arrow of the Huntsman, paired with the inverted triangle of Earth; the circle and horns of the Bull, paired with the dotted circle of Gold; and the double-arcs representing the Hawk, paired with the upright triangle of Air.

[Return to 44](#)

50.

You place the idols in what you hope are the right positions — they are not.

As soon as the fourth idol is placed, eldritch energy runs around the ring, but instead of charging, or running along the metal lines, it snaps out of place, lashing through the air like a whip! *Test your Talent*. If you succeed, you manage to knock one of the idols out of place before the energy can grow out of control.

If you fail, the energy strikes you as you are trying to break the arrangement, earthing through your body with an agonising *crack!* *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this kills you, [turn to 91](#) now.

Once one of the idols is removed, the energy dies down again, and you can [return to 44](#).

51.

You guess that this is a *tornrait*, a ghost that clings to the remains of its dead body. The poor creature's bones probably lie somewhere in the frozen pool it's hovering over. You know that a *tornrait* cannot go far from its body, maybe not even as far as the edge of the pool. You also know that whatever treasure the dead man had, it will lie where its bones do.

- » [Attack it \(turn to 59\)](#)
- » [Sneak past it \(turn to 14\)](#)

52.

Examining the doors closely, you pick out at least twenty different constellations represented as relief images cast into the dull metal. Deeply incised channels run between and around the images, forming a network of spiral lines.

You press and push at the images, hoping that something will move, depress, or shift, but nothing does. You come to the conclusion that something needs to be placed into the channels. Not a liquid, the angle of the doors are wrong.

If you have the keyword *Metric*, [turn to 7](#) now.

- » If you have a *View* spell, and cast it on the doors, [turn to 61](#)
- » If you want to place something into the channels, [turn to 90](#)
- » If you want to head back down the stairs, [turn to 56](#)

53.

If you already have the **snake idol** there is nothing more to do here. [Return to 56](#)

You notice something half-buried in one of the snowdrifts. Brushing away the snow, you uncover a small statue of a coiled snake, cast from what appears to be the same dull metal as the cylinder in the centre of the chamber. Hefting it, you see that there is some sort of astrological symbol embossed into the front of it.

You decide to take the **snake idol**, and then [abandon your search \(turn to 56\)](#).

54.

You cautiously approach the machinery, which thrums with arcane power. You can see that glowing rods of metal rise from the floor in four places, no doubt connected to the idols on the floor below, lending some sort of mystical power to the mechanism.

Studying the tablets more closely, you can see that the twenty zodiac signs are all out of place, but it looks like it ought to be possible to manipulate them back into their traditional ordered circle.

You start with the sign of the Huntsman, the first constellation in the midwinter sky, cajoling it into position. As you do, the mechanism comes to life. Wheels spin, and arcane energy pulses and races through the device.

The movement is answered with a terrifying scream from above. A shadow darkens the windows, and a vast beak stabs through one of the open arches, nearly catching you in its snap! It's the hell bird, craning down from above to jam its enormous head upside-down through one of the archways. You roll aside, avoiding the blow, as it switches windows, snapping at you and the machine alike.

It's clear that it will do everything it can to stop you!

- » [Cry out to Mesarthim for help \(turn to 67\)](#)
- » [Keep trying \(turn to 22\)](#)
- » [Get out of the chamber \(turn to 33\)](#)

55.

You start to climb the cliff, pressing yourself against the icy rock, inching your way back to the path. *Test Climbing* (if you don't have Climbing, *Test your Talent at -2*) (remembering the +1 bonus for your **rope**.)

If you pass, you make the climb without *too* much difficulty. If not, by the time you reach the path, you *Lose 1 Talent* from the biting cold!

Now, [turn to 88](#).

56.

The entrance passage opens out into a vaulted chamber, vast and gloomy. Massive pillars, curved to support the weight of the tower above, close together like claws. In the centre, a dull cylinder of metal runs from floor to ceiling like an additional pillar, but that pillar is cut in the middle, and by the light gleaming from it, you guess that it must contain a hollow shaft running all the way up to the top of the tower.

An open spiral stair wraps around the pillar, leading further up into the tower. From this vantage you can see that strange patterns, almost like star charts, are inlaid across the curved ceiling, though the darkness and frost combine to conceal them.

Washed out sunlight spills through two archways on opposite sides of the main chamber, while two other archways — one on either side — are dark.

From here you can [examine the cylinder \(turn to 41\)](#), or [search the room \(turn to 12\)](#).

When you are done, you can:

- » [Go through the entrance door \(turn to 18\)](#)
- » [Go through opposite arch \(turn to 73\)](#)
- » [Go through the left door \(turn to 23\)](#)
- » [Go through the right door \(turn to 74\)](#)
- » [Climb the stairs \(turn to 43\)](#)

Not far from the cave, the narrow trail reaches what you guess is its highest point, before taking a sharp turn and descending towards the far side of the Attarkund mountains — or at least it would, if the path wasn't entirely blocked by a massive landslide of snow and boulders.

This is the work of the hell bird, you have no doubt. A massive stretch of path has been torn away by the falling rocks, while the narrow pass beyond is blocked by rubble. It's too far to teleport past, even if you have the spell, and taking to the air with a flight spell would surely be suicide with that bird around!

The only ways onwards from here appear to be down into the chasm below the trail, back down the way you came, or across a narrow bridge of stone to the oddly shaped pinnacle.

Only — now that you see the pinnacle from another angle, you see that it doesn't just resemble a ruined tower, it *is* a ruined tower, perched atop the highest point of the mountains and rising up at least five stories to a sort of lantern, with many arches. Ice-covered breastworks and crumbling portals suggest that the mountain itself may contain more chambers beneath the ground. Maybe there's a way across the mountains over there?

Before you can decide what to do, a chilling screech draws your eye back to the tower, just in time to see the shadow of wings opening and closing atop the roof. That must be the creature's lair.

- » [Cross the bridge \(turn to 38\)](#)
- » [Go back down the path the way you came \(turn to 60\)](#)
- » If you have a **rope**, [descend into the chasm \(turn to 79\)](#)

58.

Battered and bloody, you stand over the defeated corpse of the hell bird, and shout your triumph to the vast mountain sky.

You root amongst the frosty wood of its nest, hoping for some cache of treasure, but the only thing of interest are the bird's blue-grey feathers, which are as hard as iron, and patterned with stars. You manage to wrench away a **handful of iron feathers** (treasure, 200gp).

If you take these feathers to a weaponsmith you may trade them for an **iron-feather cuirass** (counts as heavy armour, but prevents 4 wounds per repair instead of three).

Exhausted by your battle, you descend the tower, glad to be rid of its mysteries, and [take the northern exit \(turn to 97\)](#).

59.

You rush across the icy lake, swinging your weapon at the tenuous figure. *Fight 2 rounds at -2*. If you lose, [turn to 19](#).

If you survive, the shape dissolves into the snow with a mournful cry, and vanishes down into the ice of the pond, like the smoke of a fire running in reverse. Bending down, you see that an ivory scroll case protrudes from the ice in that spot. Working it free, you see that it contains a **Fireball spell** and a **View spell**. You can take the scroll, if you wish.

Not wanting to see if the apparition returns, you continue quickly up the valley — [turn to 14](#).

60.

You hurry back down the path, keeping as close to the inner wall as you can, one eye on the sky in case the bird returns, the other on chasm yawning to your right, and both on the icy ground in case you slip.

You make it about two-hundred yards down the path before you find your way blocked by a *second* landslide, even bigger and more impassible — if that's possible — than the first. Glacial gusts of cold air whistle over it, carrying the distant cry of the hell bird, as if it is mocking you. One thing is for sure, it means to catch you, and if you stay out here in the open, it will.

There only seem to be two options:

- » [Cross the rock bridge to the ruin \(turn to 38\)](#)
- » [Descend into the chasm \(turn to 79\)](#)

61.

Gain the keyword *Mortify*

You cast your view spell, holding the circled fingers of your right hand in front of your left eye to reveal what is hidden.

A pale blue glow begins to gather around two of the images, the Water-Snake and the Huntsman, and then the channel running between them. You memorise the complex route before the spell ends and the light fades.

[Return to 52.](#)

62.

You dive through the doorway into the mountain. Beyond, is a frost-shrouded passage. Washed out daylight, cold and grey, filters down the passage and into a large chamber beyond.

Just inside the entrance, a stone stairwell spirals down into the mountain. Frigid air blows up the stairwell, softly moaning, as if some other entrance lies somewhere below. Across the threshold, someone has inscribed a line of animals, a lynx, a snake, a hawk, an ox. The carvings are worn and full of snow.

Going back out is too risky, you need to head further in.

- » [Go down the stairs \(turn to 48\)](#)
- » [Follow the passage \(turn to 56\)](#)

63.

You take cover behind a frost-sheened boulder, and watch the shape as it flits back and forth above the ice. It almost has the shape of a man, though one made of little more than snow flurries and frigid air.

It dawns on you, after a little study, that the creature strays no more than a few paces in either direction from the centre of the frozen pool, never reaching the sides of the valley. Hesitantly at first, and then with increasing confidence, you skirt the pool, keeping to the edges of the chasm, and [pass it by \(turn to 14\)](#).

64.

Gain the keyword *Mercurial*

You carefully measure out the silver dust in your hand (remove the **pouch of silver dust** from your inventory), and then gently fill the track connecting the constellations of the Huntsman and the Water-snake.

As you pour in the last drops, the silver dust seems to catch fire, flickering with aurora-light. The light spreads to the figures of the two constellations, which rotate in their sockets, as if invisible hands were turning them. There's a click, and the doors fall open. The way up is clear.

- » [Ascend \(turn to 44\)](#)
- » [Descend \(turn to 43\)](#)

65.

You scream as you fall ... a scream abruptly cut off as you smash against the frozen rocks and tumble to your death.

THE GAME ENDS HERE

66.

If you have the keyword *Malleable*, [turn to 11](#) now.

You ascend the stairs from the idol room, finding that the steps pass through a solid section of tower before they reach the next floor.

Solid, that is, but for a small doorway. You suppose it must have opened into some sort of side-chamber, but now it just gives onto open air, a dizzying drop into the void that has you hugging the metal core of the stairwell in fear.

- » [Go up \(turn to 11\)](#)
- » [Go back down \(turn to 44\)](#)
- » [Investigate the gap \(turn to 32\)](#)

67.

You roll to the open top of the central shaft and yell down it: "Mesarthim! Help me!", then try your best to stay out of the bird's reach until he responds.

You consider running down the stairs yourself, but what if the bird destroys the mechanism while you aren't there? You don't dare to take the risk. You need to distract it, and the only thing you have to distract it with is you.

Fight one Round at -1. Gain +1 if you have a *long* weapon to stab the bird with. If you are reduced to 0 Vitality, [turn to 31](#). If you survive, read on.

You hear footsteps on the steps, and Mesarthim appears, his swirling tattoos glowing with the same arcane light suffusing the mechanisms around you.

He takes one look at the head of the hell bird and shouts, "Get to the controls, I will distract Gienah."

[Turn to 22.](#)

68.

You are in battle with the hell bird, a mighty beast as large as a wagon, shaped from the very stuff of the stars.

You just have time to think: *I'm going to die!* before it attacks.

You must *win three rounds at -5* (losses inflict damage, but do not advance the fight), fighting blade to claw with the bird on the top of the platform. *Ranged* weapons are of no use here, and *Small* weapons inflict disadvantage if you choose to use them.

After any round you may [choose to flee \(turn to 10\)](#)

After you have won those three rounds, the bird takes flight, stooping at you from the darkling sky and hurling icy projectiles from its open beak. You must *Fight three rounds at -4*. You suffer disadvantage if using any weapon other than a *Ranged* one, though a *Long* weapon gains +1. Shields count double in this stage.

If the bird kills you, [turn to 31](#). If, by some miracle, you win the fight [turn to 58](#) instead.

69.

You cautiously approach the pool of light, and tentatively slide a foot across the edge, expecting something terrible — but nothing happens.

Three steps lead down into the icy circle where the bones lie under their blanket of frost. It looks like they might have been engaged in some sort of ritual when they died — you can see complex patterns cut into the floor, coloured stains of spilt wax, even bowls of offerings preserved by the cold.

The bodies themselves give away little. Their flesh has rotted — or was burnt — away, leaving a scatter of unarticulated bones furry with tiny crystals of ice. A few objects, things the dead men were holding or wearing when they died, lie amongst the bones. You can take an **archaic helmet** (counts as light armour), a **large flat bowl** (flammable), a **dagger** (one-handed weapon), a **pouch of silver dust**, and a curious **star-shaped stone amulet** (treasure, 100gp).

You make a quick gesture of thanks, pressing your knuckles together, lest the dead rise to molest you, and [step out of the circle \(turn to 48\)](#).

70.

You place the idols in what you hope are the right positions — they are not.

As soon as the fourth idol is placed, eldritch energy runs around the ring, but instead of charging, or running along the metal lines, it snaps out of place, lashing through the air like a whip! *Test your Talent*. If you succeed, you manage to knock one of the idols out of place before the energy can grow out of control.

If you fail, the energy strikes you as you are trying to break the arrangement, earthing through your body with an agonising *crack!* *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this kills you, [turn to 91](#) now.

Once one of the idols is removed, the energy dies down again, and you can [return to 44](#).

71.

You follow the stairs into the door chamber. Thankfully the doors remain open, and the grim guardians are silent in their icy tombs. You decide not to disturb them any further by hanging around.

- » [Ascend \(turn to 44\)](#)
- » [Descend \(turn to 56\)](#)

72.

If you have the keyword *Metric*, you already know the right order.

Otherwise it's going to be a matter of guesswork, with the possibility that something will go magically awry if you get it wrong. Still, there's only six options, right?

If you'd rather not risk it without more information, you can [return to 44](#) instead.

If you want to go ahead with a guess, pick an option from the list below. In each case the idols will be placed on earth, fire, and water, in that order.

- » [water-snake, gravedigger, lamplighter \(turn to 50\)](#)
- » [water-snake, lamplighter, gravedigger \(turn to 15\)](#)
- » [gravedigger, water-snake, lamplighter \(turn to 45\)](#)
- » [gravedigger, lamplighter, water-snake \(turn to 47\)](#)
- » [lamplighter, gravedigger, water-snake \(turn to 70\)](#)
- » [lamplighter, water-snake, gravedigger \(turn to 82\)](#)

73.

You find yourself in a short passage with a descending stairway opening off it. The passage leads one way into the mountain — where it opens onto a large dim chamber — and the other to an open doorway, through which the wind and light of the open mountains floods.

You rush to the doorway, hoping to find an exit from the tower and a way out of the mountains, but are brought up short by the sight of a shattered bridge, arching out over the vast drop of the northern mountain face. Snowy chasms and cascades of frozen water plummet away below you.

You peer carefully over the edge, and make out another door some way below. Maybe that's your exit?

As you draw back from the edge you notice a piece of wood tucked in against the wall. It looks like a broken staff. It's not much of a weapon, but you could probably burn it. If you have not already taken it, you can add the **broken staff** (flammable, heavy) to your inventory.

- » [Head down the stairs \(turn to 48\)](#)
- » [Follow the passage \(turn to 56\)](#)

74.

If you have the keyword *Missile*, [turn to 83](#) now.

You step through the archway on the left-hand side of the chamber, and stop on the spot.

The room beyond is dimly lit by the light falling through a chink in the icy stone, but it's bright enough for you to make out a large striped lynx curled up atop a frosty pile of detritus. It appears to be asleep.

You are about to step back out of the room, when you notice the glint of metal amongst the detritus. Is that gold? Silver? You can't tell for sure.

If you have the *Naturalist* skill, you may [turn to 2](#) to examine it further.

- » [Step out of the room \(turn to 56\)](#)
- » [Charge at the lynx, yelling \(turn to 85\)](#)
- » [Creep in, and try to snatch the treasure \(turn to 94\)](#)

75.

You place the idols in what you hope are the right positions — they are not.

As soon as the fourth idol is placed, eldritch energy runs around the ring, but instead of charging, or running along the metal lines, it snaps out of place, lashing through the air like a whip! *Test your Talent*. If you succeed, you manage to knock one of the idols out of place before the energy can grow out of control.

If you fail, the energy strikes you as you are trying to break the arrangement, earthing through your body with an agonising *crack*! *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this kills you, [turn to 91](#) now.

Once one of the idols is removed, the energy dies down again, and you can [return to 44](#).

76.

If you have the keywords *Mercurial* and *Microcosm*, [turn to 54](#) now. Otherwise, read on.

You try your best to manipulate the mirrors, tablets, and lenses, but everything is frozen tight. Needles of frost, as fine as the nap of velvet, cover every surface. Looking more closely at the tablets, you see that they are all out of order, and guess that they need to be arranged back into their traditional circle, if you could only make them move.

It occurs to you that maybe the ice could be melted by a sufficiently large heat.

- » If you have a *Fireball* spell, and cast it, [turn to 81](#)
- » If you have at least three *flammable* items, and want to light a fire, [turn to 6](#)
- » If you have the keyword *Metric*, and want to call Mesarthim to help you, [turn to 86](#)
- » If you want to look elsewhere, [turn to 11](#)

77.

Going over the edge of the path would be suicide, and you refuse to turn back, so you sprint up the icy trail, looking for any sort of shelter before the bird launches its next attack.

There! Up ahead, an overhang.

You press yourself into cover under the shelter of a rock jutting from the cliff rising to the left of the path. It seems that this is the entrance to a very shallow cave, overlooking the path and chasm.

Before you can even think about exploring, the overhang judders under a massive impact. Rocks and snow shower over the entrance, narrowly missing you. Boulders smash into the path and tumble over the edge, ripping away chunks of ice. You risk a quick glance at the sky, and see the hell bird release something from its claws; the bird is hurling rocks at you!

[Seek shelter in the cave \(turn to 39\).](#)

78.

"What a waste."

Mesarthim hauls your body from his chamber, and tosses it onto the frozen pile of skeletons outside.

He shakes his head again. "Yes, what a waste."

THE GAME ENDS HERE

79.

It doesn't take long to realise a problem. If you tie your rope off here at the top you'll have an easy climb, but there is no way you'll get the rope back. If you use it in a way you can keep it, you'll be at risk of falling.

- » [Climb down safely \(turn to 80\)](#) (remove the **rope** from your inventory)
- » [Take the risks \(turn to 13\)](#)

80.

The bottom of the chasm is narrow and deeply covered with snow, but it's so cold that the snow is hard, and surprisingly easy to walk on.

The chasm is no more than twenty feet wide, too small — you hope — for the hell bird to reach you. At its bottom is a small stream, but the stream is so thickly covered in ice that you can walk along it like a path, and the ice is so clear that you can see trickling water, and the occasional silver flash of a fish, beneath it.

The chasm ends at the base of the fantastically shaped pinnacle that you saw from the road. Looking at it again from this angle, you realise that it doesn't just resemble a tower, it *is* a tower, carved into the rock of the mountain. Crumbled breastworks and ice-cloaked openings, suggest that there must be chambers inside the mountain, and at the very base, where the chasm reaches the rock face, there appears to be a door!

You are halfway to the door, when something stops you.

Just ahead, the chasm widens slightly, where a frozen pool nestles between icy rocks. There is something moving back and forth across the pool, no more than a disturbance in the softly falling snow. You squint, and think that you can make out the shape of a figure in the air.

What is it? A ghost? A spell?

- » If you have the *Occult* skill, and wish to study the shape, [turn to 51](#)
- » If you have a *Teleport* spell, and cast it, you can [bypass it \(turn to 14\)](#)
- » [Attack the shape \(turn to 59\)](#)
- » [Hide \(turn to 63\)](#)

81.

What could go wrong with aiming a destructive spell at an incredibly complex and ancient piece of arcane machinery in a confined space? You decide to find out.

Standing as well back as the limited space inside the tower allows, you hurl your fireball. Blinding flame explodes amongst the delicate construction, and then rebounds from the walls, washing back over you!

Test your Talent or *Take 1 Wound*. If this reduces you to 0 Vitality, [turn to 40](#).

If you survive your own fireball, you see the ice crystals blasted from the mechanisms by the touch of the flame ... before the flame itself is drawn into the machinery. In an instant the flame goes out, and the dull metal returns to its former cold state. Then, a faint sound of crackling fills the room, and you realise that the ice crystals are rapidly reforming.

[Return to 76](#).

82.

You place the idols in what you hope are the right positions — they are not.

As soon as the fourth idol is placed, eldritch energy runs around the ring, but instead of charging, or running along the metal lines, it snaps out of place, lashing through the air like a whip! *Test your Talent*. If you succeed, you manage to knock one of the idols out of place before the energy can grow out of control.

If you fail, the energy strikes you as you are trying to break the arrangement, earthing through your body with an agonising *crack*! *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this kills you, [turn to 91](#) now.

Once one of the idols is removed, the energy dies down again, and you can [return to 44](#).

83.

You enter the dark chamber where the splintercat had its den. There is nothing there now except the cold remains of its bedding. If you wish, you can root through the dirty scraps. If you do, *Test Search at +1* (if you don't have Search, *Test your Talent at +3*). If you pass, you find some more **scavenged bedding** (flammable). If you fail, you *Lose 1 Talent* as you paw through splintercat scat.

You may also light a fire here, though a smoky one. If you have flammable items (either made of wood, or marked *flammable*) you may burn one to *Restore 2 Talent*. If you also have a **ration**, you may eat it to *Heal 1 Vitality*.

When you are done here, you [return to the main chamber \(turn to 56\)](#).

84.

You confront Mesarthim.

"You are not telling me everything. No one crossed this pass before me, and no one could be trapped here, in the cold, without food, for so long and be so casual about it. And you know too much. Tell me the truth, or I won't help you."

Test Diplomacy (if you don't have Diplomacy, *Test your Talent at -2*). You may add +1 for each of the following keywords you have: *Manifest, Marble*. If you fail, Mesarthim tells you nothing. [Return to 26](#) now.

If you pass, gain the keyword *Monitor* and read on.

"Alright, what does it matter," Mesarthim snorts.

"I didn't lie to you, I just left some things out. The truth is I *am* one of those star demons the wizards were attempting to control, and that means I am trapped here until the lens is open again, unable to go home. I am sure you can sympathise.

"And that creature you call the hell bird, Gienah, is also from the stars. Its coming killed your wizards and trapped us both here. When you open the lens we will both leave, and you will be able to escape too."

"And why haven't you done it yourself?"

"Because the magics above are designed to control star spirits. I cannot touch them, but you can."

He has no more to tell you. [Return to 26](#).

85.

Gain the keyword *Missile*

You try to scare the lynx away, reasoning that its likely to be easily terrified out of its den. Instead of running, it raises an oddly-broad tail above its head, and with a shrug of its arched back, launches a spray of barbed needles at you! It's not a lynx at all, it's a splintercat! A monster from the war.

Fight 2 rounds. Shields provide +1. You have *disadvantage* if you fight with a *ranged* or *two-handed* weapon. If you lose, [turn to 29](#).

If you win, you manage to drive the splintercat out of the chamber. It scrambles off, and vanishes somewhere in the depths of the tower. You pick over the remains of its den and (assuming you have not already taken them), find some **scavenged bedding** (flammable), and a **small silver ring** (treasure, 20gp).

When you are done, you [return to 56](#).

86.

You shout down the central shaft, calling for Mesarthim to help you if he wants to be free.

If you have the keyword *Malus*, you remember that you killed Mesarthim, and it appears that he isn't about to come back to life. Shaking your head, you [return to 11](#).

Otherwise, *Test Diplomacy* (if you don't have Diplomacy, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you fail, there is no answer, [turn to 11](#) as above, if you succeed, read on.

You manage to craft a suitable plea for help. The bearded man answers, and makes his way up to the top of the tower to join you, though you notice that he stays well away from any of the mechanisms of leaden metal, and appears far more ill at ease up here than he did in the lower reaches of the tower.

"You told me to arrange the signs of the zodiac in order," you say, "but I can't make them move. Nothing works."

"If you had been listening more carefully, you would have heard me tell you to do it last. Until the idols are in their places, the device will not work. That is the design of the thing."

He takes another uneasy look around the chamber, and departs.

[Return to 11](#)

87.

It was early morning when you entered the pass over the mountains, and it can't be much later than noon now, even accounting for the time you have spent exploring the tower, yet, when you peer cautiously through the arches that make up the wall of this lantern room, the sky is dark, and the sun is no more than an orange chink hovering at the lip of the mountains below.

Either you have lost track of time, or some magic means that these windows look out on a *different* sky than the ones below. You feel the icy touch of fear, colder even than the gelid air gusting through the arches. Looking back at the arcane machinery in its jacket of ice, you feel certain that the second option is true. This is not your sky. It is the sky of the star demons that the dead wizards hoped to control, and the sooner you are away from it the better!

[Return to 11](#)

88.

You haul yourself back onto the path, your arms aching with exhaustion, only to be greeted with a deafening screech of rage from just above your head!

Daring to look up, you see the hell-bird perched only twenty feet up the cliff, peering down at you with an eye the size of a corsair's shield. It cocks its immense head and clacks its beak hungrily.

No time to think! You have to [get into cover \(turn to 77\)](#)!

89.

Gain the keyword *Malleable*

You carefully tie your rope into a loop, and toss it over to the pinnacle, so that it sits behind the metal idol. Nervously, you edge it forward, inch by inch, until it's right on the lip. You try to reach it from here, but there's no way.

Crossing your fingers, and whispering a prayer to the dead gods for luck, you give a final tug, and the idol rolls to the edge and drops down to the buttress that connects the pinnacle to the main part of the tower. It skitters across the bare stone, but then, much to your relief, comes to a stop.

It looks like you will have to head [down the tower \(turn to 44\)](#) to recover it.

90.

You gaze at the many symbols and conclude that they need to be linked together in some sort of pattern, and with some sort of substance. But which pattern, and with what? Looking closely, you see the faint glitter of metal in some of the channels, as if fine silver dust had been scattered there.

If you have the keyword *Mortify*, you think you know the pattern; [turn to 7](#) now. Otherwise, read on.

If not, you decide there's nothing to do but guess. You take snow, water from your flask, even chalk from your climbing kit, and fill paths almost at random.

Your failure, and the results, seem almost preordained. Once more the sound of cracking ice fills the chamber, and another of the frozen guardians pulls itself free and advances, swinging its sickle in jerky arcs. Luckily, a lone enemy is much less threat than a pair. *Fight 1 round at -1*. If the corpse defeats you, [turn to 21](#), otherwise [return to 52](#) and choose another option.

91.

The out of control star magic courses through you, ripping limb from limb and bone from bone, until you are no more than dust.

THE GAME ENDS HERE

92.

Ducking and diving the increasingly desperate and ferocious attacks of the hell bird, you slam the final constellation, the Lamplighter, into place.

A chime issues from the machinery, as deafening as the tolling of a bell in a belfry. The sky outside the lantern windows is swallowed in blackness, and the great lens opens onto a view of impossible stars. The starlight pours through the meniscus, focussed through the stack of lenses below into a coherent beam of blinding brightness that arcs down into the core of the tower.

At the same time, a terrible shriek echoes from the tower roof, as Gienah the hell bird is ripped apart by the arcane energies and cast back into the sky where it belongs. You are free!

A second beam of light, gentler than the first, pauses its skyward leap at your side, and you see the shape of Mesarthim rendered in ethereal blue.

"Yes, I too am a star-spirit," he says, "trapped here by the misguided artifice of long-dead wizards. Let this place burn itself out and good riddance to it. But in thanks to you, I leave a gift."

The starlight figure shoots up through the lens, and into the alien sky, but the trail it leaves behind coalesces into a glowing sapphire gem that settles into your hand.

While you carry this **crystallised starlight** you may use it to step into the constellation of Mesarthim the Traveller. Inside this space you may *Rest*, and *Restore 2 Talent*. In addition, Mesarthim's spirit will *Repair your armour*. You may only use the starlight once per adventure.

Breathing a sigh of relief, you hurry to the base of the tower and step cautiously through the exit, one eye on the sky in case the bird somehow returns, but the sky is clear.

[Turn to 97](#)

93.

It seems the ancient wizards who built this tower used this chamber to store their books and alchemical ingredients, which they placed on semi-circular stone shelves built into the outer walls. The ingredients have perished long ago, and the books have been ruined by frost and time, but you can gather enough bits and pieces to make a **bundle of kindling** (flammable).

Below the shelves, old gritty snow has built up into irregular banks. You brush away the upper layers to reveal symbols and signs engraved on the stones of the wall. There seem to be abstract signs paired together, circles and arrows, dots and lines.

Test Linguistics (if you don't have Linguistics, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you fail, you cannot make sense of the symbols, and must [return to 44](#) now. Otherwise, [turn to 49](#).

94.

You decide to try and sneak in and take whatever the shiny thing is. Better to let sleeping lynxes lie, after all.

Test Stealth at -2 (if you don't have Stealth, *Test your Talent at -4*). If you pass, you manage to edge into the room, and extract some **scavenged bedding** (flammable), and a **small silver ring** (treasure, 20gp), from the den. If you fail by no more than 2, you just get the bedding. Either way, you [escape the room \(turn to 56\)](#).

If you fail, the lynx jerks awake before you can lay your hands on anything. Caught short, you wave your hands, and shout, hoping to [scare it away \(turn to 85\)](#).

95.

Ducking and diving the increasingly desperate and ferocious attacks of the hell bird, you slam the final constellation, the Lamplighter, into place.

A chime issues from the machinery, as deafening as the tolling of a bell in a belfry. The sky outside the lantern windows is swallowed in blackness, and the great lens opens onto a view of impossible stars. The starlight pours through the meniscus, focussed through the stack of lenses below into a coherent beam of blinding brightness that arcs down into the core of the tower.

At the same time, a terrible shriek echoes from the tower roof, as Gienah the hell bird is ripped apart by the arcane energies and cast back into the sky where it belongs. You are free!

Breathing a sigh of relief, you hurry to the base of the tower and step cautiously through the exit, one eye on the sky in case the bird somehow returns, but the sky is clear.

[Turn to 97](#)

96.

What sort of monster am I dealing with?

You wrack your brains. It's nothing natural, for sure. You guess that it must be a beast left over from the wizard's war, which probably also means that its partly mechanical, such creatures often are. If that's the case, it's really bad news, because a war weapon isn't going to give up like a normal animal might.

You curse the map and the woman who sold it to you some more.

Eventually the sound of falling rocks ceases, and you risk a glance out of the cave mouth. No sign of the bird. You decide to [leave \(turn to 57\)](#).

97.

It is with immense relief that you leave the enigmatic tower behind, and start your descent of the northern side of the Attarkund mountains. Night is falling, true night, not one produced by spells, and Pannagor awaits.

Leaving the mountains, you may *Rest, Restore your Talent and Vitality, and Gain 3 Experience Points.*

THE END

Use the following list to track keywords you have encountered.

Malleable

Malus

Manifest

Marble

Mercurial

Metric

Mettle

Microcosm

Missile

Monitor

Mortify

Thanks

Thank you for playing, and thank you to Victoria Lawford, Stephen Conkar, Marco Burgman, Vicent Valensky, and Nigel Ward for playtesting.

If you enjoyed the game, or have any comments (or questions), please get in touch with me at stranger@teuton.org

David M. Donachie