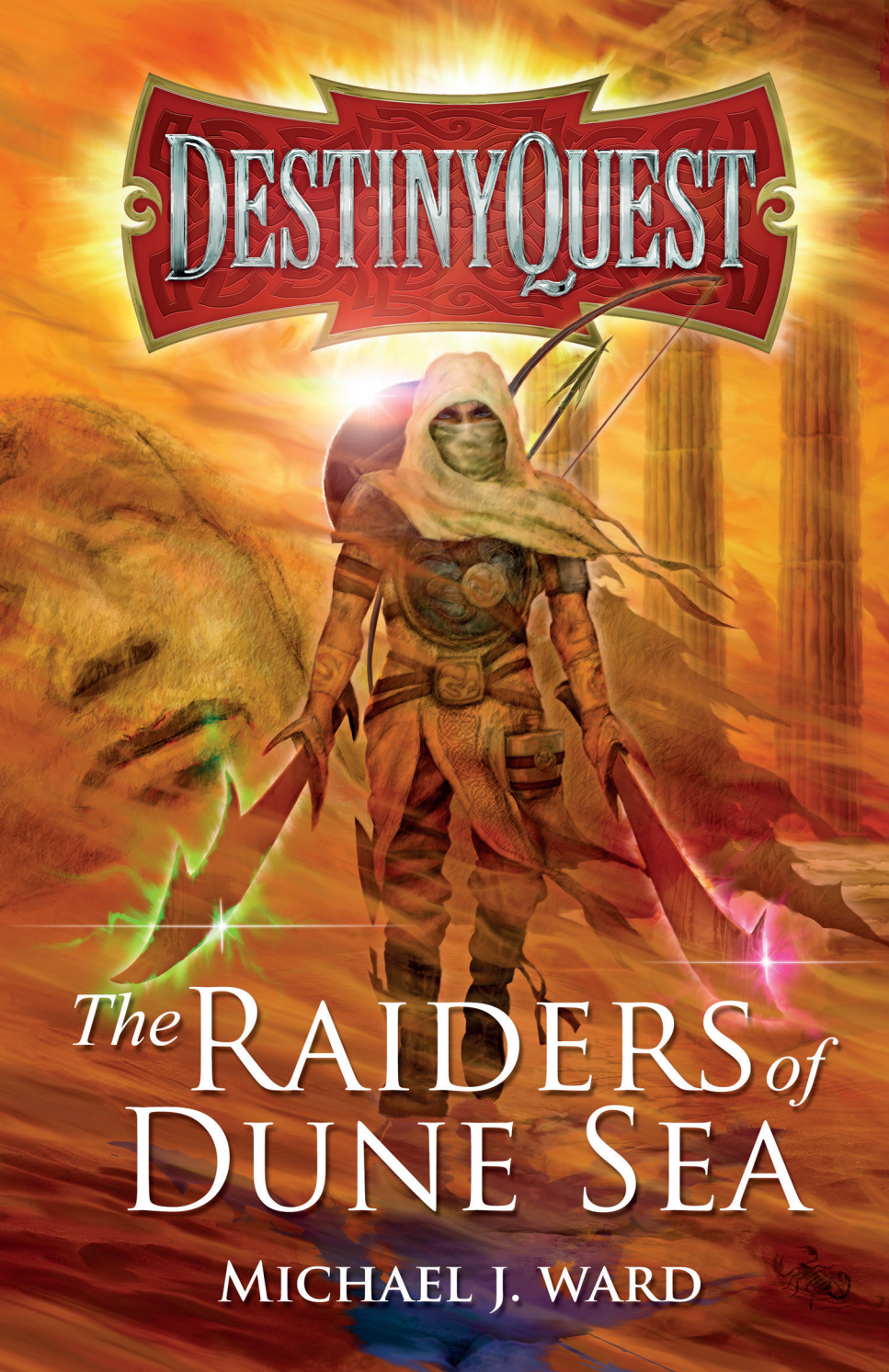


DESTINYQUEST

The background of the cover is a desert scene. A hooded figure, possibly a raider, stands in the center. They are wearing a light-colored hood and a patterned tunic. They hold a bow in their right hand and two glowing, curved blades in their left hand. The blades are one green and one red. To the left is a large, craggy rock formation. To the right are tall, thin columns. A scorpion is visible in the bottom right corner.

The RAIDERS *of* DUNE SEA

MICHAEL J. WARD

THE TOMB OF GARRIOT

BONUS DUNGEON DELVE



Dungeon delve: The tomb of Garriot

(Note: This is a challenging Act 2 dungeon delve. You are advised to complete the red quest *Night in the necropolis* before beginning this challenge.)

Torchlight pools across the stone fragments, a myriad of angular shapes that seem to thwart your attempts to re-assemble them. You give another curse of frustration, wondering why Kay seems to delight in giving you such tasks. The clatter from the nearby room confirms that she is still sorting through the hundreds of boxes and crates of Lamuri artefacts in an effort to catalogue and study them.

‘Having fun?’ rasps a voice as soft footfalls approach.

You squint towards where Fetch is now standing, then give your tired eyes a rub. ‘Kay’s not happy,’ you smirk. ‘Apparently, my father was good at the collecting part, not so good at keeping things in order.’

‘Indeed.’ Fetch passes his long pale fingers across one of the stones. ‘There is much to be learned here.’

You snort, pushing away the nearest stone, its surface inlaid with perplexing script. ‘I can’t even read common, what hope do I have to decipher these?’

Fetch reaches into his robes and procures a rolled up piece of leather. He offers it out to you. ‘Perhaps this will be more to your liking.’

‘I doubt it.’ You snatch it sullenly, opening it out to reveal a series of scrawls daubed across its tanned surface. ‘Is this supposed to make any sense to me?’

‘It’s a map,’ says Fetch, frowning with indignation. ‘You can grasp that part, can’t you?’

You turn the leather, trying to work out the correct orientation of the lines and shapes. One area is marked with a cross. ‘Don’t tell me, it’s a pirate map to treasure?’ you grin coyly.

‘Of sorts.’ Fetch folds his arms. ‘I was there when your father bought it.’

‘He paid for this?’ You lean away from the ragged leather, trying to imagine anyone giving away coin for such a crude item. ‘They really saw him coming then, eh?’

‘It was an ashwalker,’ replies Fetch curtly, a hint of impatience creeping into his voice. ‘And they are no fools. Scavengers who ply their trade in the dangerous southlands known as the mosaic. He drew the map based on information he was given from the other side.’

You look up at Fetch, frowning. ‘You mean the shroud?’

He nods. 'It marks the final resting place of Thomas Garriot.'

Again you give a nonchalant snort. 'Who?'

'One of Ibrahim's disciples – a survivor from the mythical city of Arcadia.'

Your look of bemusement remains.

'It could be a lie, but don't you think it is worth investigating?'

'No.' You toss the leather onto the table. 'I'm done with dusty relics. Can't we just leave the dead in peace for once?'

Fetch's emerald eyes narrow with annoyance. 'Your father never had the chance to investigate the claim, but he believed there might be answers there – clues as to the very origins of the Khitesh people. Take another look at the map. Any of it familiar?'

With a grunt, you lean back across the table and snatch up the map. Once again, you rotate the myriad of scrawls, trying to discern some meaning. As you continue to study it, you start to imagine yourself looking down on a landscape, the lines marking hills and avenues, the shapes arranged to suggest buildings and courtyards. 'This... this is here. The ruined city.' You trace a finger along the map, following it in your mind's eye, picturing the broken shells of buildings, the crumbling walls and leaning pillars. 'This is to the north, near where we were training.'

Fetch nods with approval.

You give a sigh, then roll up the leather and offer it back. 'Good luck,' you reply, with a sardonic grin. 'But like I said, I've had my fill of dead places.'

'I really can't convince you?' His pale fingers close around the map. 'Think of it as advanced training.'

You are about offer an retort, when you hear the scuff of boots approaching from the adjoining room. Kay is struggling under the weight of another load of stone fragments, piled high enough that she has to crane her head around the side to see where she is going. 'I've found some more that you can help me put together,' she gasps breathlessly. 'I think these might match the others.'

You glare at the approaching pile, then at the scattered fragments on the table, which have been driving you to the edge of madness for the last hour or more. Your eyes lift to meet Fetch's gaze – and his widening smile.

'Okay,' you glower. 'You win. Tomb raiding it is.'

Fetch gives a rasping chuckle. 'Then best we prepare.' His eyes twinkle beneath his hood. 'There's a sandlin camp where the entrance is marked. We might need to do some... pest control.'

For the duration of this dungeon delve, you have access to the following special ability:

Dark distraction (co): Use this ability when you have lost a combat round to avoid taking damage from your opponent's damage score. You may also inflict 1 damage die to an opponent of your choosing, ignoring *armour*.

When you have updated your hero sheet, turn to 849.

844

Beneath where the rift had once stood, you notice glowing embers of dark magic flickering amidst the dust. Perhaps some residue from the other side that could now be used to bolster your powers.

You have gained a *major artefact* (this is a backpack item and takes up one slot) and one of the following rewards:

Dark aegis (chest) +1 speed +3 armour Ability: consume, deflect (requirement: warrior)	Lingering dark (head) +1 speed +1 magic Ability: dark pact, wrath (requirement: mage)	Dread clarity (talisman) +1 speed +1 armour Ability: critical strike (requirement: rogue)
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When you have updated your hero sheet, turn to 871.

845

The thieves' weapons and armour glow with enchantments, as do many of the trinkets packed into their bags. You have gained a *minor artefact* (this is a backpack item and takes up one slot), 10 silver and one of the following items:

Convex of shadow (main hand: sword) +1 speed +2 magic Ability: leech strike	Midnight ash (talisman) +1 speed Ability: blind, charm	Phantom treads (feet) +2 speed +2 magic Ability: slipstream
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You may now restore your *health* and attributes, then turn to 861.

846

Mucous dribbles over the matriarch's flabby chin as she gives a final, shrill scream – loud enough to force you to recoil. She staggers sideways, grubby fingers seeking to stem the flow of pus and innards that are spilling out of her

many wounds. Then with a final, gargling hiss she topples backwards, hitting the stonework with a sticky slap.

‘Judah’s teeth, what was that?’ you grimace, staggering away from the stench.

‘The taint of the shroud,’ replies Flinch matter-of-factly. He steps around the corpse, his attention drawn to the makeshift throne of bones. ‘Can you not feel it, beneath this place?’

Indeed, you can sense something pulling at your magic, a faint whisper barely discernible at the edges of your mind. ‘There’s a break near here, between our world and the shroud...’

Fetch nods. ‘Probably what drew the sandlins here, though they won’t have understood what it was. The magic has probably been infecting them for years, decades. And that’s the result.’ He casts an eye over the corrupted trolls and the pus-covered remains of their leader. You search the area and find 30 silver, as well as one of the following rewards:

Dung bombs (4 uses)

(backpack)

Use any time in combat to lower an opponent’s *speed* by 1 for one combat round

Black mesa

(cloak)

+1 *speed* +2 *brawn*
Ability: sideswipe, charm

Opposing force

(left hand: shield)

+2 *speed* +2 *armour*
Ability: counter

Restore your *health* and any lowered attributes, then turn to 852.

847

Fetch shares some healing draughts from his pack, which you gratefully accept. (You may restore your *health* and any lowered attributes.) You then set off deeper into the tomb.

The passageway leads a short distance before widening into another rectangular chamber. At its centre are three stone coffins, one large and the other two small. Their lids lie shattered across the pitted floor of the room. Across the east and west walls are the remains of faded frescoes, the crumbling images marred by huge rips and gouges. You feel a sense of unease in this chamber, as if whatever once transpired here still carries its residue into the present.

In the far wall, behind the three empty tombs, you see an irregular opening. It looks to have been hastily cut away using tools or magic and leads through into a narrow tunnel.

Fetch walks the length of one of the frescoes, his lantern illuminating the torn fragments. It would seem that the scene depicted a garden or oasis, with palm trees and birds. There may have been characters in the image once, but they have been ripped away, leaving only hints at robes and limbs.

Fetch pauses, then crouches down next to the dusty rubble at his feet. He pushes one of the stones away then lifts out a small and thin rectangular device. You step closer, intrigued by his find.

‘What is it?’ you ask, squinting in the gloom.

Fetch turns it over in his hands, his fingers pushing at the oddly shaped protrusions. All of a sudden there is a hissing sound from the box. Fetch lets go in surprise, the box tumbling to the ground.

Static continues to pop and whistle from the machine.

You lean closer, weapons drawn. To your astonishment you start to make out a voice, whispering from its depths. Tentatively, you lay aside one of your weapons then pick up the box – feeling it reverberate in the palm of your hand.

‘What torture to know they did not find rest.... awoken... restless shuffling. We had to put an end to it, but no man should be forced to end... beloved... life...’ The voice becomes fractured then fades into a hiss of static. You lift the box closer, noticing a window of green light flickering with indecipherable script, beneath which are an arrangement of buttons. You decide to press one of them, feeling the soft material give easily at your touch. More static, then the voice returns, louder this time.

‘Stay here... watch the others dig... deeper to the source. They are afraid... now I am left alone. Brought my studies, books, the equipment...’ Another series of cracks and pops. *‘Feel the taint, the virus is eating away at me. The worms have come but I have met them with force... what these children would call demons... but I sense...’* More words you cannot hear or decipher. *‘Trojan inside now. I’m changing... they’ve stopped bringing food. Water. Locked in... closed in... my tomb. But I need no sustenance for the virus is a benefactor. Changing my...’* An angry hiss of static. *‘Azimus. Dear friend Azimus. Of all those... kind, gentle. Taught me your ways. Perhaps a key, a hint at how I can repair what has been made... an antidote to this contagion.’*

More static sputters from the box, repeating until you once again push against the buttons, wondering if they are somehow linked to the mysterious voice trapped inside. When the speaker returns, their broken words sound more distraught. *‘Forgive me Azimus! I had to... understand me... visits too seldom, I had to use the code... keep you here... study. You look at me differently now. What is it you want me to learn? I know... I am changed... losing myself... losing more... losing...’*

A series of popping cracks, followed by some bestial-sounding roar. You can hear thumps and the clatter of rock, then the box falls quiet. No further interaction with its strange buttons can re-summon the voice.

You lift your eyes to Fetch, too stunned to speak.

‘It’s a thing of evil,’ he scowls, snatching it from your hand and dashing it against the wall. The thin metal breaks apart, spilling out its innards in a confusion of strips and wires. He tosses them away, wiping his hand against his robes as if seeking to remove some taint from them.

‘What happened here?’ you ask, your gaze sweeping back to the empty tombs. ‘The taint... this must have been his wife’s tomb. His children. He spoke of infection – a virus.’

Fetch snorts, then draws his weapons. He starts towards the opening in the wall, motioning for you to follow. ‘This tunnel was not part of the original structure,’ he rasps. ‘He must have dug deeper to find the source of the evil.’ Turn to 862.

848

Your weapons whip through your opponent, blasting them backwards in a showering miasma of black light. The chains that once held you drop away – curling into a fine mist as they touch the ground. You fall to your knees, exhausted by what you have endured, your vision still blurred from the after effects of the magic.

You feel a heat, like the morning sun touching your face – a soft and gentle caress that brings back memories of forgotten days, spring air and laughter. Sahna and Harmon. The crack of training swords. A blue sky and vast plains. Birds wheeling overhead...

You shake away the thoughts, your gaze lifting to the radiant being that stands before you. By instinct, you draw back – the tortures you endured at the hands of the church having made you fearful of such holy light. But this does not sear and burn like their ministrations, this feels pure and comforting.

Music fills your ears, as enchanting as the memories that still tug at your mind, scents and flavours, the press of lips against your cheek. You look up into the light, even though its brightness forces tears to run down your cheeks. Kneeling before such oneness, such perfection, makes you feel small and broken. An imperfect thing, not worthy to be in its presence.

‘Azimus?’ you whisper.

The being raises the palm of their glowing hand and places it gently on your forehead. You feel a rush of golden light pouring into you, its heat

stealing away your breath as it spears down into that deep well of darkness from whence your magic comes. You feel a conflict there, a churning sensation of nausea, then the sickness has passed. The hand pulls away – taking its warmth with it, but some small part of itself still resides within you.

You have gained the following special ability:

Seraph's protection (wa): Raise your *armour* by 3 and restore a *charm* ability (if available) that you have already used. This ability costs 4 *health* to use.

When you have updated your hero sheet, turn to 854.

849

In this dungeon delve, you cannot restore your *health* or any lowered attributes between combats. Instead, you will be given opportunities to restore these once you reach 'safe areas' of the dungeon. As you venture deeper, the foes you face will get tougher and more formidable – but the rewards will also increase in worth and value. Good luck! When you are ready to face this challenge, turn to 858.

850

You sense a dark enchantment woven into the runic circles. Perhaps Fetch is right to avoid triggering such magics. Grudgingly, you accept his caution and back away. The musical cadence that spills from the creature quickly becomes a shrill blast of anger, almost deafening within the confines of the cavern.

Fetch quickly motions you towards the passageway. 'Time to go.'

You are quick to comply, covering your ears from the discordant din as you follow him deeper into the caves. Turn to 864.

851

Exhausted, you drop to your knees as the tinkling shards crash down around you.

'We should leave this place,' you pant breathlessly.

Fetch slides down to the ground beside you, his own breath rattling in his lungs. 'And where would the fun be in that?'

'You have a strange idea of fun.'

Fetch tilts his head, his green eyes staring off into the darkness of the passageway. 'You heard what the ghost said. He wants us to release him. A demon has dominion here, and we need to put a stop to it.'

'I was afraid you'd say that.' You pick up one of the glassy fragments, turning it over in your lamplight. 'At least the demon was kind enough to leave us some of its magic...'

You may now help yourself to one of the following rewards:

Mind splinters (necklace) +1 brawn +2 health Ability: revenge (requirement: warrior)	Cerebral shard (left hand: dagger) +2 speed +2 magic Ability: mind fumble (requirement: mage)	Razor light (gloves) +1 speed +2 brawn Ability: blind, gouge (requirement: rogue)
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Once you have updated your hero sheet, turn to 847.

852

To your surprise, Fetch begins hacking away at the throne, his bright blades severing the bones and leather straps that support it. When the structure is finally brought down, he proceeds to kick the bones away, clearing away a space.

'That make you feel better?' you ask, cocking an eyebrow.

He glances your way, then crouches down – rubbing his palm through the layer of grime and sand. 'This is the place where our map says we'll find the entrance.'

'You're kidding me...?' You walk over, surprised to see that Fetch's efforts have started to reveal a circular flagstone with a woman's face carved into it. 'Is that the entrance to the tomb?'

'We're about to find out.' Fetch removes a small gourd from his belt, then flicks open the stopper. He then proceeds to pour a smoking liquid around the edge of the flagstone, following its circumference. Within a matter of minutes, the strange concoction has burnt down through the grimy sand and rock. He then unslings his pack and removes a pair of iron pry bars. He tosses one to you.

'Now for some elbow grease.' He inserts the curved edge of his bar in the groove made by the acid, then begins to lever up the flagstone. You lend aid to the endeavour, working together to lift the heavy stone from its resting place.

Once the circular stone has been shifted aside, you are left staring down at a small angular recess, which drops away into darkness. A foul reek rises up from the depths. You step away with a cautious frown. 'I'm not so sure about this...'

‘Where’s your spirit of adventure?’ Fetch swings his legs over the side, bracing his hands against the edge. He stares down into the darkness. ‘Sometimes you just have to take a leap of faith...’

‘Wait!’ You go to grab him but are too late. He pushes himself off, dropping away into the darkness with merely a whisper of his silks. Several heartbeats later and you see a light flickering below, illuminating a drop of ten metres or more. Fetch waves you down.

‘Are you coming?’ his voice echoes.

With a resigned sigh, you summon your magic then step off into empty space, manipulating the currents of air to propel yourself safely to the ground below. Turn to 859.

853

The ghost of the man reappears ahead of you, desperation and pain etched onto his glowing visage.

‘Release me!’ he screeches, reaching out with grasping fingers.

You have the chilling sense that he can see you – unlike the previous manifestation.

‘Who are you?’ Fetch hisses back.

The apparition glides forward, arms outstretched. ‘Please, find a way... Azimus. Find a way...’ His head suddenly jerks back as his body goes into spasm, shuddering and jerking. Then in a bright explosion of light, his chest is ripped open to expel a flurry of translucent tentacles. They spill out in a writhing mass, followed by a reptilian-looking head of scales and teeth. Another blood-curdling scream as long spidery legs punch out of his torso, his own form wavering and distorting as it is pulled inside the malign form that is now being fashioned.

Within a matter of heartbeats the old man is gone – and in his place, a demonic entity of nightmare. With an eldritch screech that claws at your mind, the demon launches itself forward, trailing spectral dust in its wake. It is time to fight:

	Speed	Magic	Armour	Health
Mind demon	10	7	7	100

Special abilities

- Mind razors: Each speed, combat or modifier ability you use will cost you 4 *health* in this combat.

- Domination: At the end of the sixth combat round and each round thereafter, your hero takes 5 damage, ignoring *armour*.

If you defeat this psychic horror, then proceed to the next encounter with your remaining *health* and attributes. Turn to 865.

854

The soft music that once filled the cavern quickly fractures into a discordant din, forcing you to cover your ears. The demon is clearly agitated, its form flickering like a wind-blown candle. The noise intensifies – a grating, squealing clash.

‘Stop this!’ you cry out, your head pounding from the assault.

Blades distend from the creature’s hands, sparking with magic. Then with a howling dirge of rage, the demon streaks away in an arrowhead of light, channelling itself into the tunnel. The rough-hewn walls glow bright at its passing, then fall back to darkness.

A calm silence descends once more.

After taking a moment to recover, you look around for Fetch – only to find him lying prone on the ground. You crawl to his side, relieved to see that he is still breathing. His eyes flicker open, their emerald-depths seeming paler than before. He gives a wheezing gasp, then sits up quickly, hands scrabbling for his weapons.

You put a reassuring hand on his arm. ‘Easy, it’s okay.’

He looks around, then back at you. ‘What happened? Those chains... I couldn’t fight their magic.’ His eyes flick to the broken circles. ‘Where is the demon?’

‘Gone. I think they might have a score to settle.’ You stumble to your feet, then offer out a hand.

Fetch glares at it, then starts rubbing at his head. ‘This is not... what... this is not the way I thought it would go.’ He frowns, then puts a hand to his chest, grunting as if feeling a pain. ‘What did you do to us?’

You snort with confusion. ‘Just saved some light demon who didn’t deserve to be imprisoned for eternity. I’d say that was a good day’s work. Now, I sense our newfound friend may need our aid. Are you coming, or do you want to sit this one out? Master.’ You smirk as you emphasise the final word.

He glowers up at you, then snatches your hand. ‘Perhaps you’ll be the death of me after all.’ Record the word *avenger* on your hero sheet, then turn to 864.

855

The thieves' weapons and armour glow with enchantments, as do many of the trinkets packed into their bags. You have gained a *minor artefact* (this is a backpack item and takes up one slot), 10 silver and one of the following items:

Umbral greaves (feet)	Vengeful spirit (talisman)	Darksider wraps (head)
+2 speed +1 armour	+1 speed +1 brawn	+1 speed +1 brawn
Ability: haste	Ability: guardian	Ability: sixth sense

You may now restore your *health* and attributes, then turn to 861.

856

Pushing aside Fetch's concerns, you step into the outer circle. As you do so, there is a crackle of dark energies as the intricate runes flash into life. You back away, fearful of what you might have unleashed.

The magics continue to fizzle and snap, the bars of lightning flickering together to form a dizzying mesh. And at its centre, a dark spectre starts to form, the magic feeding it with power until it has become a hulking giant of black bloated flesh.

'Nice work,' glowers Fetch. 'Next time, try...'

His words are silenced by an ear-piercing screech as the beast's flesh is ripped back, revealing an abyssal maw filled with jagged fangs.

'Yeah, point taken.' You quickly raise your weapons as the gruesome apparition lunges towards you, lightning shimmering across its massive bulk. It is time to fight:

	Speed	Magic	Armour	Health
Outer guardian	9	5	7	100

Special abilities

- **Anguish hex:** This ability starts at zero and is increased by 1 at the end of each combat round.
- **Piercing menace:** Your opponent adds 1 to their damage score for each point of *anguish hex* that is currently in play.

If you defeat this rune guardian, then proceed to the next encounter with your remaining *health*, attributes and *anguish hex* total. Turn to 870.

857

You emerge in what might have been a large cavern. Now it is covered in thick and rotting folds of black mould, forming a vast incomprehensible monstrosity that stretches over every perceivable space.

You follow the contours of its rippled flesh, eyes drifting past bubbling lesions and pulsing membranes, to finally settle on the rift of violet light that cuts through the gloom. It is as thin as a rapier-blade – its existence seemingly as alien as the growth that now pervades the gloom.

And you can feel it. The pull of the other place, filling your body with a strange longing. You take a tentative step towards the rift, and then another – seemingly drawn to it like a moth to a flame.

A sudden gargling croak brings you back to your senses.

Reluctantly, you lift your eyes to the ceiling. Hanging suspended amidst the leaking pustules and rotted flesh, is a man. It is difficult to tell what remains of him – you glimpse a head and an arm, perhaps a leg, but where they end and the growth begins it is difficult to tell. Another bubbling rasp escapes his broken lips as if he is struggling to communicate. The realisation that he still has consciousness makes the horror of his condition all the worse.

With wet-sounding slaps, the growth starts to move, flowing into a column of writhing flesh. You back away as the globulous mass begins to convulse, shapes starting to emerge from its bulbous form. Thick pulpy shoulders push out from glistening flesh, stretching into limbs that then split into tentacles. Segmented legs burst forth in sickening sprays, lifting its terrifying bulk high into the air. Each second, the mass seems to grow larger, sucking matter from the surrounding walls to add to its monstrous size.

As the aberration advances across the cavern, you see the man's face now trapped at the centre of its mucus-covered torso, his mouth open in a silent scream. If you have the word *avenger*, turn to 31. Otherwise, turn to 868.

858

Sandlins are nothing if not surprising. You always had them down as cowardly creatures, who flee when there is the merest hint of being outmatched. But not these sandlins, as the mounds of stinking bodies attest to. You flick the gore from your weapons with a grimace, taking a moment to catch your breath.

'They don't normally fight with such vigour,' wheezes Fetch, wiping his

blade against the filthy rags of one of the corpses. ‘Means they’re defending something important.’ His emerald eyes flick to the colonnaded-structure at the end of the paved street. You can see leather awnings flapping in the breeze, erected between the leaning pillars. ‘I’d advise caution.’

Warily you both approach the crumbling building, eyes darting to the shadowed remnants of the nearby structures. Once or twice you are convinced you catch movement – perhaps more of the sandlins. But they make no move to attack. A wise choice, no doubt having witnessed the carnage that has just occurred.

You advance up thorn-choked steps to a cracked courtyard, the broken stubs of its surrounding pillars providing supports for the leather coverings. Bones and other refuse litter the space, flies buzzing over hunks of half-eaten carrion. Beneath the largest of the awnings, a corpulent creature is slouched across a makeshift throne, its sore-riddled flesh crumpled into rolls of flab. Standing next to the creature is a tall and hunchbacked sandlin, fanning a palm leaf back and forth. On seeing you, he barks some guttural command, his wily eyes hinting at a devilish cunning.

From the shadows that stretch between the pillars, two trolls emerge – their own bodies seemingly mutated by disease, lesions and sores weeping a foul ichor across their pale flesh. They shuffle forward, the sunlight glinting off barbed weapons – no doubt filched from these very ruins.

As they continue to advance, the tall sandlin snatches up a leather bag, then leaps for one of the broken pillars, lithely clambering up its crumbling side. With a sniggering laughter, he pulls something out of the sack and flings it in your direction. You dodge aside, spinning round to watch as the missile splats against the flagstones.

It appears to be a reeking mass of fresh dung and broken bones.

‘Might want to avoid those,’ Fetch grimaces, spinning his blades. ‘No getting rid of that stink.’

The two trolls come at you swinging, whilst the sandlin continues to toss dung bombs from his elevated vantage point. It is time to fight:

	Speed	Brawn	Armour	Health
Corrupted troll	9	7	9	60
Corrupted troll	9	7	9	60
Dung flinger	10	5	4	30

Special abilities

- Regeneration: Each troll heals 2 *health* at the end of each combat round.

Once a troll is reduced to zero *health*, this ability no longer applies. (This cannot take a troll above its starting *health* of 60.)

- **Dung bombs:** If the dung flinger is still in play, then at the end of each combat round roll a die. On a result of 1 or 2 you are hit by a dung bomb. Your *speed* is reduced by 1 in the next combat round.
- **Outnumbered:** At the end of each combat round, you must take 1 damage from each surviving opponent, ignoring *armour*. This ability only applies if you are faced with multiple opponents.

If you defeat these mutated adversaries, then proceed to the next encounter with your remaining *health* and attributes. Turn to 869.

859

You open the shutters of the lantern clipped to your belt, it's enchanted light spilling out to illuminate smooth stone walls – a passageway that stretches away into the dusty dark. Whatever taint has a grip of this place, you can feel it growing stronger, as if coming awake.

You find yourself casting your eyes skyward, to the angular glow of daylight above you. The thought of being trapped here is one that is hard to shift, even with your magical gift for safely returning to your vault. One day... one day, perhaps that gift will let you down. A cold shiver fingers along your spine.

Fetch appears to sense your discomfort. 'Come on. We need to investigate this. Such breaks with the shroud are not something we want on our doorstep.'

He leads the way down the passageway, taking you past a series of intricate mosaics. Most of the scenes display a woman in white robes with two children in tow. She is being led through a succession of encounters with angelic beings, bright stars forever depicted overhead and a darkness beneath where other figures are shown – kneeling and offering prayer.

'I thought our Garriot was a man,' you whisper, afraid to speak too loudly in the oppressive gloom.

Fetch calls a halt, raising his hand. He is leaning forward as if listening. Then his hands quickly go to his weapons. He stalks forward cautiously, the glow of his lantern falling across the bodies sprawled across the passageway.

Their clothing has almost wasted away to filthy rags, revealing grime-coated bones and grinning skulls. One still clutches a leather sack to his partly-exposed ribcage, another is reaching with clawed fingers for a blade that is just out of reach. Another sack glows with magic.

‘Tomb robbers,’ rasps Fetch.

‘How can that be?’ You shake your head confused. ‘The stone above was intact. It was covering the entrance to this place.’

Fetch catches your eye. ‘Perhaps there were others waiting for them above – companions who were quick to seal this place when they realised the danger.’

He takes a step closer to the skeletons. As he does so, there is a distant cry from the darkness, then an amethyst mist starts to gather around the bodies, settling into their hollow cavities and creeping between the joints. There is a dull clatter, then a whispering groan – a dry cracking sound as one of the skeletons starts to lift itself from its dusty slumber. The others follow suit, rising up in a series of jerking motions, the mist coalescing to form weapons in their hands and a grave-light within their hollowed eye sockets. They lurch forward, driven by some unnatural power.

Fetch quickly dispatches the nearest adversary with his blades, sending bones clattering across the passageway. Some immediately powder to dust, whilst others are lifted back up into the air, carried by the strange mist towards the remaining skeletons. You watch with a grim horror as the bones of the fallen robber reform themselves, snapping into place to become extra limbs or coats of haphazard armour – to bolster the strength and defences of the undead host. It is time to fight:

	Speed	Brawn	Armour	Health
Tomb robber	9	5	5	40
Tomb robber	9	5	5	40
Tomb robber	9	5	5	40
Tomb robber	9	5	5	40

Special abilities

- Bone mantle: Each time a tomb robber is defeated, the *brawn* of all remaining tomb robbers is increased by 1 and their *armour* is increased by 2.
- Shadow blades: At the end of each combat round, you must take 1 damage from each surviving tomb robber, ignoring *armour*.
- Light’s hope: If you have the *warding lantern*, then each opponent takes 1 damage at the end of each combat round.
- Body of bone: Your opponents are immune to *bleed* and *toxic blades*.

If you defeat these undead thieves, then proceed to the next encounter with your remaining *health* and attributes. Turn to 867.

Green light flashes as you weave in and out of reality, dodging the creature's hasty lunges to strike at its flanks. After a tiring battle, the beast is finally brought down, its body splintering into black shards of ice.

A snickering laughter from behind you.

You spin round, just in time to see a series of glowing chains whipping through the air. They snap around your limbs, coiling like serpents, their touch sending lancing pain through your body. You can hear similar cries coming from Fetch.

A cloying darkness has started to cloud your vision. Dimly, you can see a man standing at the edge of the final circle, a horned figure with a mane of shadow-flecked hair and a body riddled with dazzling runes. He grips the lengths of chain in his fists, feeding dark magic into their roiling lengths.

'Come,' whispers a voice in your ear. 'I will show you the true torment of eternity.'

Desperately, you try and break the spectral chains, but your weapons are deflected by their magic, leaving barely a mark. With no other option, you stagger towards the devilish jailor, aware that your mind is becoming ever more fogged by his strange enchantments. It is time to fight:

	Speed	Magic	Armour	Health
The warden	9	7	8	100

Special abilities

- Chain gang: You cannot use any speed or combat abilities for a number of rounds equal to your *anguish hex* total.
- Into darkness: If the rune warden is not defeated by the start of the twelfth combat round, then you automatically lose the combat as you succumb to the magic of the chains.

If you defeat this final guardian, turn to 848. If you are defeated, then you may restore your hero and return to 856.

The passageway ends in a small rectangular chamber, the shattered remnants of three statues looming jaggedly out of the darkness. They clearly once depicted a woman and two children – no doubt the same figures featured

on the mosaics. Chunks of stone lie scattered across the floor, one fragment displaying the remains of a face – a child's innocent smile beaming back at you. Gouges have been taken out of the walls and in some places parallel grooves rip through the stonework, as if some clawed beast was venting its fury.

Fetch leans over to retrieve a piece of parchment from the stone dust. As he unravels it, the thin and rotted reed-paper comes apart in his hands. He tosses the pieces away with a sigh.

'I think the map was a lie,' you grimace, stepping around the broken statues. 'This was not Garriot's tomb.'

From the darkness an almost imperceptible sigh. You turn when a cold breeze suddenly plays across your neck, prickling the skin. Then a flicker of light at the edge of your vision.

'What point... what point in teaching.'

A spectral voice, dry and withered with age. There is another flicker, then the room is suddenly washed in a phantom glow, spilling across the floor to form tables littered with scrolls and books, trunks and a makeshift bed. The statues are now remade, their sparkling forms displaying a woman and her two children: a boy and a girl.

'A foolish endeavour.'

A ghostly figure paces back and forth, seemingly impervious to your presence – an old balding man dressed in pale robes. A pair of spectacles rest on the end of his hooked nose.

'But no one listens to me. Not even Ibrahim.'

You step out of the man's path as he breezes past you, his body as insubstantial as a ghost. He clutches something in his hands – a small box – which he appears to be talking into.

'How can one speed up the building blocks of civilisation. We are like gods to these primitive savages. Too easy to meddle and intervene, as if anything we do could stave off the inevitable. A fresh start, that's what he hopes for, what the others strive for. But better to keep these people in ignorance.'

The man stops, casting his eyes towards the statues. 'There is a welcome bliss in ignorance,' he continues. 'My own world was built on a lie. All of it a lie. But when the veil is lifted, taken away...' He pauses to take a long, wavering breath. 'I digress. The same corruption is here. The virus. Did we bring it with us? Are we the hosts or is each of these dimensions afflicted with the same malady?'

The magic starts to flicker, the phantasmal scene wavering and distorting. The man resumes his pacing, moving towards one of the tables. 'I long for peace. But there is one last thing I must do. I cannot turn away from this. I must study the virus closer...'

The man leans over a table, his hand pushing aside piles of parchment as if searching for something. Then the scene is gone, sighing out of reality – leaving you staring at broken stone and dust.

Your eyes drift to Fetch, confused and looking for answers.

‘An echo of the past,’ he whispers.

‘He mentioned a virus.’

‘Probably referring to the shroud.’ Fetch shrugs his shoulders then starts towards another passageway, which angles away into darkness. ‘He was just as aware of the taint as we are. Come, perhaps we might discover his fate.’ Turn to 853.

862

The air becomes thick and cloying, carrying with it a charnel stink. Navigating the tight confines of the tunnel quickly becomes a challenge, the sloping ceiling forcing you to stoop, shoulders brushing against the uneven walls. After a tiring descent, the tunnel widens into a natural cave, its ceiling webbed with thorny roots.

Across the centre of the cavern, a series of glowing circles have been marked into the dark earth. Where their curving script intersects stands a creature of purest light, shining so bright as to make looking upon them painful.

You hear a series of chimes and peals, an almost musical cascade of sounds. They appear to be coming from the creature – perhaps some attempt at communication. You take a step towards the nearest circle, but Fetch puts an arm out to stop you.

‘These are warding circles,’ he hisses. ‘Can’t you see, they were laid here to entrap this creature.’ He nods towards another opening at the opposite side of the cavern. ‘I suggest we continue, lest we unleash further evil.’

Will you:

Try and free the creature?

856

Leave the creature imprisoned?

850



863

The thieves' weapons and armour glow with enchantments, as do many of the trinkets packed into their bags. You have gained a *minor artefact* (this is a backpack item and takes up one slot), 10 silver and one of the following items:

Burglar's blade (main hand: sword) +1 speed 2 brawn Ability: bleed, immobilise	Raider's shadow (head) +1 speed +1 brawn Ability: steal, charm	Kiss of betrayal (main hand: dagger) +1 speed +2 brawn Ability: first blood
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You may now restore your *health* and attributes, then turn to 861.

864

You hurry down the passageway, the stench of decay becoming ever more prevalent – forcing you to struggle for breath. As you descend deeper, you notice the walls have become scabbed with black mould. In places, the mould is bubbling as if heated by some unseen source, leaking its foul vapour into the air.

Eventually, even the floor underfoot squelches beneath your boot heels, the whole tunnel now covered in the strange black growth. It is hard to shake the disconcerting feeling that you are headed inside some giant organism – the virulent decay around you seemingly pulsing with a life of its own. Turn to 857.

865

Each blow from this demonic entity sends searing agony lancing through your mind, sapping at your strength and will. You can see that Fetch is similarly affected, many of his attacks missing their mark as he staggers under the onslaught.

It is difficult to tell if you are harming the beast, as your blows simply pass through its incorporeal form, trailing sparks of magic instead of blood. Nevertheless, you maintain your barrage and – at last – your perseverance pays off. A lucky blow appears to connect with something vital, shattering the creature into a host of spinning shards. You draw back, shielding your face as the glass fragments fly up into the air. But instead of raining down around you, they hang suspended – and within their many faces you see a demonic visage staring back at you, its shrill laughter stabbing at your mind.

With teeth gritted against the pain, you throw yourself forward once again, looking to smash the fragments apart and silence their torment. It is time to fight:

	Speed	Magic	Armour	Health
Fractured mind	9	4	5	25
Fractured mind	9	4	5	25
Fractured mind	9	4	5	25
Fractured mind	9	4	5	25

Special abilities

- Mind splinters: Each time a fractured mind takes health damage from your damage score or damage dice, you take 2 damage in return, ignoring *armour*.
- Magic mirrors: Your opponents are immune to *bleed* and *toxic blades*.

If you defeat these haunting reflections, turn to 851. If you are defeated, then you may restore your hero and return to 853.

866

The corrupted flesh recedes, dragging its bulk back through the rift. In its wake, a man is left lying amidst the bloodied secretions, naked as a new born. A bright and shadowy aura pulses around him, hinting at a power that seems at odds with the frailty of his physical form.

He staggers, struggling to stand, his clouded eyes looking around the cavern as if for the first time. You have no doubt that this was the man you saw in the spirit echoes, who has been trying to communicate with you.

‘Azimus...’ he gasps, his voice breaking.

His hands reach out towards the glowing spectre of light.

A soft cadence spills from the creature, rising and falling in some unintelligible communication. Perhaps the man understands this creature, for a smile breaks across his face. ‘Yes,’ he whispers. ‘It is time. I understand now.’ He raises a hand, the bloodied flesh distorting itself into a blade suffused with dark light. They step closer until they are almost touching, one of shadow and the other of light.

Then – like some fatal embrace – they plunge their blades into each other’s hearts.

‘No!’ you reach out towards the man, looking to pull him away, but a

blinding flash sends you staggering backwards. Fetch catches you, helping you to right yourself.

‘Do not intervene!’ he hisses.

The glow continues to brighten, the two figures now little more than silhouettes – merging together, falling into one another, until the light and shadow are one.

‘I understand now,’ whispers a voice. ‘*The alpha and the omega.*’

The once blinding radiance quickly starts to dim, seemingly drawn into the pulsing greyness of their union.

‘*Power. I see it. The enigma... the code.*’

The grey matter spreads out, forming a web across the rift, crisscrossing it in a complex weave.

‘They’re closing the rift,’ Fetch wheezes. ‘A union of magic.’

You realise he is right. Like the stitches that might bind a wound, the strands have now come together, pulling on the very fabric of reality – wrenching the opposing sides of the rift together. The dark light flickers as the greyness fades into it, eating away at the corruption, until there is nothing left but a chill emptiness.

There is no sign of the rift – nor of the man or the demon. Whatever magic they were able to weave appears to have healed this place. You can already feel the heaviness starting to lift, the cloying stink of decay fading away as if carried on a wind. Turn to 844.

867

The battle is soon won. However, as the last of the skeletons is blasted to dust, the purple mist draws back with a sucking gasp, then quickly melds itself into the menacing shape of a shadow-robed mage. Dark magics crackle along skeletal fingers as a deep and chilling laughter echoes along the passage. It is time to fight:

	Speed	Magic	Armour	Health
Shadow lich	10	(*)	7	120

Special abilities

- Choking grasp: (*) Instead of rolling for a damage score, the shadow lich inflicts one damage die to your hero, ignoring *armour*. If the die result is a  or a  (after any modifiers/rerolls have been applied) then the lich rolls an extra damage die. This continues as long as a  or  is rolled.

- **Leeching touch:** Once the shadow lich is reduced to 40 *health* or less, *choking grasp* is replaced by *leeching strike*. This inflicts one damage die to your hero, ignoring *armour*, and heals the lich for the same amount.

If you defeat this deadly entity, then turn to 872. If you are defeated, then you may restore your hero and return to 859.

868

The beast represents an almost insurmountable challenge, its body growing bigger by the second. But the sight of the man trapped within its malign form urges you onwards. It is time to fight:

	Speed	Brawn	Armour	Health
Flesh demon	10	7	7	140

Special abilities

- **Creeping flesh:** The flesh demon heals 4 *health* at the end of each combat round. Once the demon is reduced to zero *health*, this ability no longer applies. (Note: This cannot take the demon above its starting *health* of 140.)
- **Monstrous magnitude:** At the end of the third combat round, the flesh demon will increase its *brawn* by 3. At the end of the sixth combat round, the flesh demon will increase its *armour* by 3. At the end of the twelfth combat round, the damage of *swarming tentacles* is increased by 1.
- **Swarming tentacles:** At the end of each combat round, your hero must take 3 damage, ignoring *armour*.

If you defeat this demonic entity, turn to 874.

869

As the last of your adversaries fall, the corpulent mass of flesh rises up off its throne of bones, mouth sagging open to issue a wet-sounding squeal. From what you can discern of its features, beneath all the pus and flab, you'd hazard a guess that this was once a female sandlin – perhaps a ruler of this tribe. Clearly some terrible affliction now has a hold of her; one that perhaps has marked her for greatness amongst the other sandlins.

You grimace at the sickly stench rising up off the creature as she waddles

towards you, her misshapen hands making no move to grab a weapon or summon a spell. It would appear that the creature's bloated and infected flesh is her greatest weapon. It is time to fight:

	Speed	Magic	Armour	Health
Matriarch	10	5	6	100

Special abilities

- **Corpulent ooze:** Each time the matriarch takes health damage from your damage score or damage dice, the damage of *vaporous mist* is increased by 1.
- **Vaporous mist:** At the end of each combat round, you must take 1 damage, ignoring *armour*.

If you defeat this diseased monstrosity, then turn to 846. If you are defeated, then you may restore your hero and return to 858.

870

The demon explodes into motes of dark light, which quickly dissipate – leaving you a clear view of the second circle, which is now aglow with magic. Each rune around its perimeter ignites with a shadowy fire, until the air is distorted by a shimmering haze.

The air grows cold, like a freezing northern winter – your gasping breaths forming clouds as the chill intensifies.

Then out of the icy flames bounds an unnatural creature, its barrel-shaped body covered in ridged plates, spiked by a profusion of shadowy thorns. The cavern rings with its bellowing roar as it lowers its horned head and charges towards you. It is time to fight:

	Speed	Magic	Armour	Health
Inner guardian	9	6	8	60

Special abilities

- **Avalanche charge:** The guardian rolls 3 dice for its attack speed in every odd numbered combat round.
- **Gloom spikes:** Each time your damage score or damage dice inflicts health damage to the guardian, you must take damage in return equal to the current *anguish hex* total, ignoring *armour*.

If you defeat this magical protector, then proceed to the next encounter with your remaining *health*, attributes and *anguish hex* total. Turn to 860. If you are defeated, then you may restore your hero and return to 856.

871

On returning to your father's repository, you find yourself still baffled and awed by what you have witnessed. You do not speak of it to the others – and Fetch seems equally reticent to revisit the experience.

You find Kay still diligently working on the Lamuri artefacts, painstakingly piecing together their fragments. It would appear she has made some headway into the puzzle. She peers over her spectacles as you approach.

'Well, care to explain where you have been?' she asks with a disapproving frown.

You give a sigh, dropping into the seat opposite.

'Well?'

You brush your hand over the nearest tablet, your fingers tracing across the delicate script etched into its surface.

After a silence, you meet her gaze, realising she is still awaiting an answer. With effort, you clear your throat and speak. 'I want you to teach me... more...' You gesture to the disarray of ancient tablets. 'I feel like a child sometimes. Grasping for answers but never getting them. Ignorant of everything.'

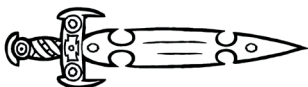
Kay leans back in mock surprise. 'You want to become a scholar now?'

You offer her a wry smile. 'Is that such a hopeless challenge?'

'Oh, no!' She claps her hands together excitedly. 'You'll be learning from the best, my dear. Yes, yes, a splendid idea. Just think what knowledge we can unlock together.' She lifts up one of the stones, caressing it almost lovingly. 'The ancients had such wisdom. It would be foolish to think that we could know everything. Sometimes, to achieve enlightenment we have to recognise our shortcomings. Understand that we are, indeed, ignorant.'

You nod, then return your gaze to the incomplete puzzle, which is still missing many of its pieces. You rub your hands together, now eager for the challenge. 'Right then. Let's get started.'

Return to the quest map to continue your adventure.



872

The lich's magics are powerful, but your shadowy opponent is hard-pressed to defend itself from your endless barrage of attacks. As you deliver the final death blow, the mist comes undone – a distant scream reverberating from the dark. Then there is silence.

Fetch wafts away the last of the mystic haze, a scowl still drawn across his ruined features.

You walk over to the remains of the skeletal thieves, intrigued as to the treasures that they were so keen to escape with. If you are a warrior, turn to 855. If you are a mage, turn to 845. If you are a rogue, turn to 863.

873

Unperturbed by the size and horror of the flesh abomination, the light-demon throws itself forward in a screeching din of noise, its bladed limbs stabbing and cutting at the thick flesh. Bloody ichor sprays from deep and terrible wounds, but as quickly as they are made they are gone – the flesh stitching itself back together again.

'We have to stop this thing,' you gasp. But you cannot move. Rooted to the spot by fear and revulsion at the power of this entity.

Fetch spins his blades, then in a burst of green light he is gone – reappearing an instant later at the demon's side. His own swords cut a bright latticework, slashing at the growth and causing its vast bulk to shudder.

Tentacles whip through the air, their suckered lengths looking to latch onto you. Their threat is enough to finally break you from inaction. With a cry of defiance, you wade into the fray, your weapons and magic now lending their own fury to the battle. It is time to fight:

	Speed	Brawn	Armour	Health
Flesh demon	10	7	7	140

Special abilities

- Creeping flesh: The flesh demon heals 4 *health* at the end of each combat round. Once the demon is reduced to zero *health*, this ability no longer applies. (Note: This cannot take the demon above its starting *health* of 140.)
- Monstrous magnitude: At the end of the third combat round, the flesh demon will increase its *brawn* by 3. At the end of the sixth combat round, the flesh demon will increase its *armour* by 3. At the end of the

twelfth combat round, the damage of *swarming tentacles* is increased by 1.

- **Swarming tentacles:** At the end of each combat round, your hero must take 3 damage, ignoring *armour*.
- **Avenging angel:** Azimus adds 1 to each die you roll for your damage score.

If you defeat this demonic entity, turn to 866.

874

The corrupted flesh recedes, dragging its bulk back through the rift. In its wake, a man is left lying amidst the bloodied secretions, naked as a new born. A bright and shadowy aura pulses around him, hinting at a power that seems at odds with the frailty of his physical form.

He staggers, struggling to stand, his clouded eyes looking around the cavern as if for the first time. You have no doubt that this was the man you saw in the spirit echoes, who has been trying to communicate with you.

‘Azimus...’ he gasps, his voice breaking.

His hands reach out towards you, but his expression of hope is quickly quashed. A scowl turns his lips. Bitter. Angry. His eyes drop to your weapons, still dripping with the filth of the beast you have vanquished.

‘You should not have come here,’ he whispers. ‘But I am grateful all the same.’

Before you can respond, the man quickly closes the distance between you and slaps a hand around your wrist. You flinch at his touch, an abyssal chill rushing through your body. Fearful of what he may be doing, you try and pull away but his grip is like iron.

‘You can win,’ he gasps. ‘You can still win... if you meet it on the same terms.’

The chillness rushes into the pit of your stomach, broiling amidst the dark magic that churns within you, strengthening it – suffusing you in the same violet glow that surrounds the man.

You have gained the following special ability:

Trojan exploit (wa): Raise your *brawn* or *magic* by 2 for one combat round and gain a *charm* special ability. (Note: The *charm* ability is lost at the end of the combat.). This ability costs 4 *health* to use.

You drink in the magic that now floods through you, relishing in its power. ‘More...’ you gasp.

The man meets your eager gaze, a frown now creasing his brow. 'Seek ascension,' he whispers.

You shake your head in confusion. 'What...?'

With a scowl he pulls hard on your arm, driving your weapon deep into his chest.

'NO!' You try and wrench the blade free, but once again you cannot break the hold the man has over you. He pushes it deeper, twisting – a black blood bubbling from the corners of his lips.

'Ascension...' he rasps.

The man slides back, falling to his knees. Blood pumps across his aged and withered flesh, coating his outstretched palms, spilling between his fingers. And he is laughing. A wracking, wheezing laughter.

The glow that once enveloped him fades – and with it, whatever power this strange entity once possessed. As the last of the light dissipates, you find yourself looking upon a desiccated skeleton, its skull grinning back at you. Then the bones tumble to the ground, crumbling to dust.

You lift up your weapon, seeing the man's blood still coating it.

'Was that Garriot?' you ask in a trembling breath.

Fetch steps warily around the dusty remains. 'Whatever it was, it's now found peace.'

He approaches the rift, its dark form still hanging above the cavern floor. 'This is dangerous,' he says, eyes glinting beneath his hood. 'Your father has supplies of black powder, packed into barrels. We can blow this place and I suggest we do just that. Fill these caves with rubble. At least then, we can stop others falling foul of this curse. Stop the demons from getting out.'

You find yourself drawn once again to the power of the rift – even though you know it is an evil thing, a gateway to the world between worlds. 'Yes,' you gasp, struggling to pull away from its lure. 'This place should be brought to ruin.' Turn to 871.