

THE RAIDERS OF DUNE SEA – SAMPLE PROLOGUE QUEST

DestinyQuest is an exciting solo roleplaying game that puts *you* in charge of the action. As you guide your hero through each epic adventure, you will be choosing the dangers that they face, the monsters that they fight and the treasures that they find. Every decision that you make will have an impact on the story and, ultimately, the fate of your hero.

The following pages provide a quick start guide to the DestinyQuest game system so that you can get up and running with your first adventure as soon as possible! This sample also features the prologue quest from *The Raiders of Dune Sea*.

QUICK START RULES

You will need:

- A handful of six-sided dice
- The hero sheet (this can be downloaded from the official website: www.destiny-quest.com)
- A pencil and eraser

Hero attributes

Every hero has five key attributes that determine their strengths and weaknesses:

Speed (Sp): The higher a hero's *speed* score, the more likely they are to score a hit against their opponent. A hero who puts points into *speed* can easily bring down stronger enemies thanks to their lightning-fast reflexes.

Brawn (Br): This score represents your hero's strength and muscle power. A hero with high *brawn* will be able to hit harder in combat, striking through their opponent's armour and dealing fatal blows.

Magic (Ma): By mastering the demonic powers of the Shroud, a hero can command devastating spells and summon fiendish monsters. will boost their *magic* score, granting them even deadlier powers to smite their foes.

Armour (Ar): Whenever a hero is hit in combat, by weapons or spells, they take damage. Wearing armour can help your hero to survive longer by absorbing some of this damage.

Health: This is your hero's life force. When *health* reaches zero, your hero is dead – so, it goes without saying that you should keep a very close eye on it!

Every hero begins their adventures with a zero score for *brawn*, *magic*, *speed* and *armour*. These attributes will be boosted throughout the course of your adventures as you equip items to your hero. All starting heroes begin with **30 health**.

Combat

Combat consists of a number of *combat rounds*. In each round of combat you roll dice to determine who hits who and who takes damage. (Note: A die is considered to be a standard 6-sided dice.) Once damage has been applied, a new combat round starts. Combat continues until either your hero or their opponent is defeated.

In each combat round:

1. Roll *2 dice* for your hero and add their current *speed* score to the total. This is your hero's **attack speed**.
2. Roll another *2 dice* for your opponent and add their *speed* score to the total. This is their **attack speed**.
3. The combatant with the highest attack speed wins the combat round. If both scores are the same, it is a stand off – the combat round ends (see step 7) and a new one begins.

4. The winner of the round rolls *1 die* and adds either their *brawn* score or their *magic* score to the total, whichever is highest. (Note: Monsters will only have one or the other, not both.) This will give you a **damage score**.

5. The loser of the round subtracts their *armour* value from the damage score. Any remaining damage is then deducted from their *health*. (If the damage score was 8 and the loser had an *armour* of 2, they would take 6 health damage.)

6. If this damage takes your hero's or your opponent's *health* to zero, they are defeated and the combat automatically ends. If both combatants have *health* remaining, then the combat continues.

7. At the end of each combat round, any damage from passive effects (such as *bleed* and *thorns*) are applied to any affected combatants. This damage occurs simultaneously. If you and your opponent still have *health* remaining, then a new combat round begins. Return to step 1.

Restoring health and attributes

Once you have defeated an enemy, your hero's *health* and any other attributes that have been affected by special attacks or abilities are **immediately restored** back to their normal values (unless otherwise stated in the text).

Fighting multiple opponents

In some combats you will be fighting more than one opponent. When faced with multiple opponents, combat follows the same rules as for single combat – the only difference is that, at the start of each combat round, you must choose which opponent you will be attacking.

You must then roll against their *speed* score. If you win the round, you must direct your damage against your chosen opponent (or multiple opponents if you have an ability that lets you do so). If you lose the round, only your chosen opponent will strike back against you (unless otherwise stated in the text). All opponents must be defeated to win the combat.

Using special abilities in combat

There are four main types of special ability. These are: speed (sp), combat (co), modifier (mo), and passive (pa) abilities.

Speed (sp): These abilities can be used at the start of a combat round (during steps 1 and 2), and will usually influence how many dice you can roll or reduce the number of dice that your opponent can roll for speed. You can only use one speed ability per combat round.

Combat (co): These abilities are used either before or after you or your opponent roll for damage (during step 4). Usually these abilities will increase the number of dice you can roll, or allow you to block or dodge your opponent's attacks. You can only use one combat ability per combat round.

Modifier (mo): Modifier abilities allow you to boost your attribute scores or influence dice that you have already rolled. You can use as many different modifier abilities as you wish during a combat round. Modifier abilities can be used at any time, as per their description.

Passive (pa): Passive abilities are typically applied at the end of a combat round (during step 7), once you or your opponent has taken health damage. Abilities such as *bleed* and *thorns* are passive abilities. These abilities happen automatically, based on their description.

Ability descriptions are provided in the special glossary at the end of this document.

Using backpack items in combat

The outcome of many a combat can be decided by the clever use of backpack items, such as potions and elixirs. From restoring lost *health* to boosting your *speed*, never underestimate how useful these items can be in turning the tide of battle. However, you can only use one backpack item per combat round so choose wisely! Also note that every useable backpack item

has a number of charges. Once these have been used up, they are gone forever.

Money pouch

The main currency in Khitesh is the silver sol. These coins can be used to purchase potions and other special items whenever you visit a town, village or camp. **Your hero begins their adventure with 30 silver.**

Taking challenge tests

Occasionally, during your travels, you will be asked to take a challenge test using one of your attributes (such as *speed* or *brawn*). Each challenge is given a number. For example:

	Speed
Climb the cliff face	9

To take a challenge test, simply roll 2 dice and add your hero's attribute score to the result. If the total is the same as or higher than the given number, then you have succeeded. For example, if you had a *speed* of 4 and rolled a [2] and a [3], then you would have a total of 9. This means your hero would have successfully completed the above challenge.

Now, you are ready to start your adventure...

PROLOGUE: CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

'So let's get this straight.' You lean your elbows on the table, arms crossed, and narrow your eyes at the woman. 'You're here to kill me. For a crime I've yet to commit.'

The assassin nods curtly, as if such a notion is not so out of the ordinary.

You take a moment to let your own words sink in. 'Well, I gotta hand it to you. That's a new one on me.'

Her face remains impassive. 'You're taking it well, considering.'

You grimace at the compliment. 'And you're just gonna do it, right here and now?'

'No better time.'

'Time. Yeah.' You slouch back in the chair, dropping a hand into your lap. Inching it towards the handle of your scabbarded sword.

As crazed gun-toting loons go, she was not your usual suspect. You can tell by the way she holds the flintlock it's for show and nothing else. The magic around her is palpable though. Call it a special gift you have, an eye for the glimmer that betrays a magic user.

'And you ain't gonna tell me what I do that's so terrible?'

She shakes her head. 'It's yet to happen. Knowledge of the act isn't going to help you.'

'I'll take it to my grave then. Come on, give me something at least.'

'The guilty have no rights.'

You suck at your teeth. 'Hmm, not exactly fair though, is it? Playing judge, jury and executioner, and I have no say in how this is gonna go.'

The woman is silent.

Time for a change of tact. 'So, am I what you expected?'

She studies you thoughtfully. 'I thought you'd be harder to find,' she states flatly, disappointment drawn across her hard features.

'Yeah, me too.'

If you'd seen this one coming, you'd have known she was trouble. You've learnt to read people well on the road. Part and parcel of staying alive. The dusty coat, that's her obvious camouflage. But underneath, the green-dyed leathers don't have a speck of dirt on them. Her tanned face is too clean. No stink of the road. This one is just slumming it like an actor might take on a role. She ain't lived it. That you can tell.

Besides, no road traveller would so brazenly display such finery. The emerald at her throat and a similar chunk in the band on her middle finger, tapping now on the table top. You find yourself appraising them greedily. Force of habit.

Probably enough to buy this whole damn stink-hole.

But it's the glow that really has your attention. That green flicker that moves the air around her.

You glance down at the barrel of the pistol, still pointed at your chest. 'You don't really need that, do you? Not someone of your talents.'

The woman shifts slightly in the chair, her body masking her intent from the rest of the taproom. 'I need you to know I'm serious. What else am I going to do, point at you with my pinkie?'

'A fair point.'

'And I don't want you doing anything stupid.'

That draws another indignant snort. 'But you can tell the future. Surely, you gotta know what I'm gonna do next?'

The woman sneers. Clearly such games are beneath her. 'You could flip this table, hope it creates enough distraction to reach for that sword. Or the knife in your boot. Else you could just go for the draw and hope you're quicker. Blade against my pistol. Neither will end well for you.'

Damn, she was good.

Your hand ceases its steady crawl to your sword.

'On the table. Both of them. Where I can see them.'

You oblige with a heavy sigh, hands flat against the sticky wood. 'Can I at least pour myself a drink? You know, toast the moment. The moment of my death.'

You take her silence for approval. As you lift the jug and pour a cup of ale, you let your eyes move steadily across the taproom, weighing up any slim opportunities. Quiet night for this frontier town. No rowdy drunks or unwashed pioneers, telling fanciful tales of monsters and gold. Not here. Just a sleeping dog stretched out by the fire. Two old timers playing cards with a bottle of whiskey. A dusty traveller at the bar swapping tales with the bar man. A quiet night.

As you raise your cup to your lips, your gaze settles briefly on the taproom door, wondering what is holding the others up. They were option three. After that, you're plain out of options.

Hold her attention. Keep talking.

'Cheers.' You tip back the cup, swallowing the contents, then slam the cup back on the table. The woman doesn't even flinch. You wipe the froth from your mouth with the back of your hand.

'You're not the first are you, to try this?' You wag a finger at her playfully.

The woman tilts her head, her interest piqued.

'Back when I was a kid. Someone like you – with the green glow about them. The magic. Yeah, I saw them. Actually did me a favour back then. Saved my life. But maybe they were there to kill me too. Just like you.'

The woman cocks an eyebrow. 'Go on.'

It's not a story you've been inclined to share with anyone else before, not even Harmon and he's been like a father to you. No, the past is something you like to keep locked away. A dark piece of you that never needs to see the light.

But things change. Turns out an assassin with a gun trained on your chest can be a surprisingly forceful incentive. You pour another cup of ale, your hand shaking. It's never done that before. Not since the orphanage...

Hell, the past was coming back. It was a bad thing, twisting inside your gut. But needs must.

Hold her attention. Keep talking.

'I was twelve, I think. It was an autumn day...'

The wagon bounced and clattered along the dusty track, passing trees of vivid red and pumpkin orange, bright through the early morning mist that still clung stubbornly to the landscape. The knight had left you a few hours before. A young man, four years your elder, handsome and with an easy confidence that made you sour with jealousy. He was heading out east, still a month or two of travel ahead, to a place called Tithebury Cross. He was going to become an apprentice. To somebody real important. Oh he was proud of that. Fresh out of the academy, clad in fine armour with a family crest vividly emblazoned on the scabbard of his blade. He had a noble air. A young man starting out on a new adventure, blessed with every advantage in life that you had sorely lacked. You were relieved at his leaving, yet saddened also – as his many stories had kindled something inside of you, a longing for a better life, and in his absence that sudden longing was already fading to embers.

The other two boys were still talking about the knight. Young Eddie was using a wooden sword to imagine some fight with a fearsome monster. Wills was urging him on, back propped up against a basket of clothing, his knife cutting strips off a piece of bark.

He catches you looking at him and quickly frowns.

‘Hey, you’re not gonna mess up today are you? Master only keeps you on cos o’ that talent you got. Not much use for you if you can’t even do that.’

You pick up a juggling ball and throw it in his direction. Your aim is perfect, despite the rocking of the wagon, forcing him to raise an arm to deflect it. ‘Shut up, Wills. I’ll do my part.’

‘You better,’ he grimaces. ‘You know what’ll happen if you get on the wrong side of Gimbal.’ He makes a stabbing motion with his knife.

The wagon gives a sudden lurch, rattling your teeth. The iron-shod wheels are now clattering against stonework. You crawl past a clutter of boxes to reach one of the grimy windows. Pressed close to the glass, you look out on a winding river and patchwork fields stretching away into the curling fog. The village is close now and the familiar feeling of nervousness begins to churn your stomach. Always the same before a performance. And

worse afterwards, when the magic is spent.

You hear your master, Gimbal, calling and hooting from the seat of the wagon. A few moments later and you are passing farmers waving from the fields. A woman in a blue cotton dress looks up from her milking. The goat bleats, chin whiskers trembling. Children start to run alongside the wagon, barefoot and cheering excitedly. Out here, in the great wide nowhere, the arrival of a group of entertainers is a rare occurrence, a celebration. You allow yourself a smile. Perhaps this is how a knight must feel, returning home from a grand adventure.

‘Stupid fools,’ glowers Wills, his mouth all worked up in an ugly leer. He shoves you out of the way to get a better look. ‘They don’t see what’s coming. Like sheep for the slaughter!’

He was great at ruining the moment.

This was Boggart’s Hill, a small village nestled around its namesake, a craggy hill of moss and rock where a wooden church building loomed high on its summit, made dark against the white tumbling cloud. After more than a year on the road, one village has become much like the rest. A dozen or so homes cluttered around a square. Some farm buildings set away in the fields, a tavern or coaching inn taking prominence by the roadside.

Gimbal was good at choosing his targets. This little village had no inkling of real magic. They were a simple folk, dedicated to their work and their faith. The church was evidence of that, presiding over the village from its lofty peak like a priest at his pulpit. You shiver at the thought, the memories of the church orphanage still haunting your waking hours and turning sleep into feverish nightmares. An irony then that you will be acting out the part of their most revered idol.

By afternoon, storm clouds have started to gather, but the village-folk are unperturbed. Gimbal’s juggling and card tricks keep the children and adults spellbound, while you and the other boys set up the stage and prepare the props. Food and drink is offered freely and in abundance – goat’s milk and freshly-baked bread, still warm, with honey and berries. A basket of sweet cakes follow. You filch some away in the back of the wagon,

ready for the journey ahead. Gimbal makes it a rule that you never stay over. Too much danger of getting caught. 'In and out', he says, with a knowing wink. 'Quick. Like a knife to the heart.'

A young girl hands you a garland of flowers, cheeks flushed red. Her friends watch and giggle. You graciously accept the gift, smelling the sweet fragrance of maple and lemon. Then, later when she is gone, Wills rips the garland from around your neck and tramples it into the dirt laughing.

The show runs slickly as always. Gimbal makes a fine narrator, his voice a well-tuned instrument for invoking excitement and mystery. The play is one you have performed many times before: the ascension of Judah. You've never cared for books or teachings – all you know is what Gimbal has told you, through the words of his play. Judah was the devoted messenger of the One God, sent down from the heavens to spread the holy word. He had travelled east with seven angels to fight the demons of the heathen lands, but there he had been captured and nailed to a Mordland cross.

If Wills had the chance, you're almost sure he would gladly have used real nails. But instead he makes the motions of tapping them through the palms of your hands as you stand against the wooden cross, arms outstretched by your sides. He makes a good Mordland guard, all ugly and sneering. You doubt there is little acting there. Meanwhile, Gimbal has the audience hanging on his every word, beckoning them nearer to the stage with his hushed and dramatic tones. Women hold their wide-eyed children close, while menfolk mutter and grumble at the unfairness of it all. A few hands stray to their own crosses. Each and every one of them unwitting victims.

Unseen, like a ghost, young Eddie moves between their vacant homes, his fast fingers finding coins and valuables alike – what little these simple folk have – and stuffing them into his bags, and many hidden pockets.

Victims. Just like the last village, and the one before that...

You look down at them from the elevated stage, with dirty white robes flapping around your bare legs, body held rigid against the cross of wood. Above you the angry heavens broil and threaten a storm. Perhaps a

sign of the One God's incoming rage, his own review of this mummer's mockery. Wills steps to the side, ready to pull the painted screen across the stage, to prepare for the grand finale. Your great magic trick.

You take a deep breath, steeling yourself for what is to come. Closing your eyes, you picture the side of the wagon. Every detail meticulously memorised. The gaudy lettering curling across the panels, spelling 'Gimbal's Tricks and Miracles'. Places where the old lettering can still be seen, but only if you look hard enough. Every detail. The chipped paint. The notches in the wood. The rotten slats and the mud-spattered wheels. The lead-framed window. A chip in the glass.

You have to see everything as if it was real. As if it was right there, in front of you.

The magic starts to pull.

Wait, not yet. Not until your cue...

You open your eyes.

It is then that you see the three riders, guiding their horses carefully around the crowd, shadowed faces turned to the stage. A shiver runs along your spine, followed by a queasy and unsettling fear.

There is no mistaking their professions. One wears a battered hat and long-tailed coat, a brace of flintlock pistols visible against his chest. A witchfinder – a hunter of the church, dedicated to rooting out evil doers and the misuse of magic. Beside him, two devout acolytes, their faces hidden by the cowls of their riding cloaks. One a woman, sitting straight-backed and proud atop her pale horse. Crosses and talismans flash about their necks, and holy sigils burn in the glittering thread that trace bright patterns across their robes.

'Then behold, for Judah did speak to his betrayer,' Gimbal sweeps a hand across the captive crowd. 'With words of forgiveness, and then a prayer.'

You feel your stomach tightening. 'Wills,' you hiss between your clenched teeth. 'We have to stop. We have to...'

Your words are lost to a rumble of thunder. Rain spatters against the wooden stage.

'Wills!'

The boy starts to drag the painted screen across the stage.

'And Judah, faithful Judah, did rise up then, way up high!' Gimbal throws his arms up to the darkening storm clouds, head tipped back, his body shaking and trembling with divine rapture. 'Rising up to his father, O' bright heaven in the sky.'

'Do your job, loser,' growls Wills, as the screen finally obscures you from sight.

It was time.

But you are panicking. The witchfinder and the acolytes are disciples of the church and you have already learned what punishments they can hand out to those who foolishly display their magic unchecked. For them magic is an evil thing, to be punished or locked away. At least, that is what the harsh beatings at the orphanage had taught you.

You close your eyes, trying to calm yourself. Picture the wagon. Every detail. The gaudy lettering curling across the panels...

'And then in a burst of the purest white.' Gimbal's voice booms loud, competing against the thunder and hiss of rain. 'He vanished then. Gone from sight!'

...the chipped paint. The notches in the wood. The rotten slats and the mud-spattered wheels...

'Behold, the One God's true miracle!'

...lead-framed window. A chip in the glass.

The magic pulls you.

It is a sickening lurch through green space. Spots flicker before your eyes, burning like suns. A flash and then you are stumbling dizzily into the side of the wagon, out of sight of the distant crowd. You drop to your knees, the stunned cries of the audience carrying on the wind. Then the nausea hits. You throw up your guts, retching painfully as you grip your aching stomach.

There is rapturous applause.

For those simple onlookers, it would have been a miracle. When the screen was pulled back, the cross would have been empty. You had

vanished, just like their beloved Judah. Gimbal will have taken his customary bow, and then with greedy eyes, tipped his dirt-stained hat, ready to receive the crowd's grateful blessings.

Just like the last village, and the one before that. Hands would gladly find their purses. Coins and other gifts quickly filling the hat. Some of the devout may even have fallen to their knees, crying out prayers to their One God. Through it all, Gimbal would be licking his lips with glee. A fine ending to a fine performance.

A shadow passes over you. Then a hand slaps down hard on your shoulder, fingers closing and gripping like iron. The creak of leather and smell of sulphur. You look up fearfully into the eyes of the witchfinder, burning bright beneath the brim of his hat.

Before you can protest or beg for forgiveness, you are being dragged through the mud. Desperately, you kick and struggle. Legs scramble for purchase, hands grasping futilely for something to slow your progress. But with a strength that belies his narrow frame, the witchfinder hauls you past the stunned faces of the crowd.

You cry out for Gimbal, turning your head to try and see onto the stage. One of the acolytes blocks your view, walking beside you – muttering a prayer. Fingers worry at the beads and cross around their neck.

'A demon has taken hold of this infidel,' the witchfinder snarls, spittle flying from his lips. 'And the demon will be exorcised, in the light of the One God!'

Gasps and cries from the villagers. A child has started to cry. Dogs barking. You see the face of the girl who handed you the garland. Her expression is one of disgust. She throws the first stone.

More follow. Cutting and bruising, and dragging screams of pain.

The witchfinder does not slow, pulling you past mossy rocks and simple graves, marked by stones and wooden crosses. You are ascending the hill towards the looming presence of the church.

'Please,' you beg. Rain washes blood down your face. You choke on your next words.

'Do not speak to me, demon,' growls the witchfinder. 'Your

reckoning is here.'

Doors are kicked open. You smell tallow and incense. Booted feet creak on wood. A new and agonising pain assaults you, like a thousand pins stabbing into your skin.

'Yes, demon,' snaps a woman's voice. 'See how the holy word mocks your power.'

You are dragged past vacant wooden pews to the foot of an altar. The stone shimmers before your blurred vision, the holy sigils dancing and writhing, burning through your eyes and into your skull. It takes a moment before you realise the maddened screams are your own.

'Repent, demon. Repent your sins.' The witchfinder clasps the back of your head and forces it closer to the altar. Other voices are raised in prayer. A woman's and a man's. You sense the two acolytes standing behind you.

'Repent or else we will cut the demon out of you, infidel!' You hear steel being drawn.

From somewhere deep within you, a raging anger begins to rise, ripping through the pain and issuing forth from between bloodied lips. 'Never! I will never bow to your god!'

The sigils burn ever brighter, but they are awash now in a green flickering light. For a moment you are convinced it is emanating from your own broken body – but there is a sudden thunderous boom to your left, a scuff of boots. The pressure leaves the back of your head, where the witchfinder's fingers had once clasped you tightly.

You manage to turn your aching body, to see a figure stumbling through a whirling cloud of green fire. The magical flames lick and writhe about their body, a lean shape of muscle, swathed in silken strands of cloth. Two eyes, dazzling like emeralds, shine brighter than the surrounding flame. Knives spin into their hands. The witchfinder is already on his knees, a hole blown clean through his body.

One of the acolytes hurls a spell – a white bolt of light that pierces through the green flame and slams into the stranger. They stagger backwards, the green fire that once surrounded them now dimming to a

flicker.

You take a breath, sucking in the sulphurous air.

Then you are running. And you don't look back.

White robes, wet with rain and blood, slap around your legs. The pain from your cuts and the magic of your aggressors only fuels your panic, driving you past the graves and rain-slick stones. Villagers hurry out of your way, fearful of the apparition that you have now become, a crazed looking lunatic, desperate to escape.

The stage is gone. The wagon too. So much for the loyalty of Gimbal and his gang.

You run, and run. And do not look back.

Alone and afraid into the big, wide no-where.

You trace the rim of your cup with a finger. 'Happened just as I told it. I ran and ran, and didn't look back. Never touched the magic since. Well, not that kind of magic. Figure I'm better off without it.' You glance up at the woman sat across from you. Since mentioning the stranger, she has appeared increasingly agitated.

'Who was it?' she demands, almost shouting. Realising she may have drawn attention to herself, she drops her voice and repeats the question.

'I don't know.' You shrug your shoulders. 'Thought I owed them a favour for what they did. But now... I'm not so sure.' Your eyes flicker across the green light surrounding the woman. Was the stranger that day somehow linked to this female assassin?

The woman raises the flintlock, the corners of her mouth twisting into something ugly, something you'd only ever seen on Wills. A real evil sneer.

You settle back with a sigh. 'Well, you found me. So guess you better get on with it.' Your hands shift to the table edge. You tense, ready to spring into action.

'This is for Cronus,' the woman spits.

At that instant, the door of the taproom bursts open. A woman steps through the whirling cloud of dust. 'Howdy,' she calls.

Turn to 1 to begin the first stage of your adventure.

The gun blast is loud, setting your ears to ringing.

Blood and bone explode in a crimson miasma. The assassin rocks in her chair, then slumps forward, the back of her head a pulpy mess.

You wipe something bloody from your face. 'Guess you didn't see that one coming, did you?' You grin at the assassin's corpse. 'Thanks Sahna.'

The woman snorts. A man follows her into the taproom, big and burly, with bushy black hair and a tangled beard to match. Harmon.

He nods to you and then eyes the rest of the taproom warily. The dog has bolted behind the counter, where the bar man is stood rigid, eyes wide. The traveller has his elbows against the bar, hand resting on the pommel of his sword. The two old timers continue to play cards, seemingly unconcerned by anything that has transpired.

'What kept you?' you ask as you snatch up your backpack and hat.

'Ran into one of those ourselves,' says Sahna, kicking the assassin's chair. 'Fool tried to take us both on.'

The bar man waves a hand for attention. 'Look, I don't want no trouble you hear. This is an honest establishment.'

Sahna holsters her flintlock. 'Relax. Trouble has come and gone.'

'And this is for the mess.' Harmon reaches into a pouch at his belt and flips a large coin onto the bar – a glittering gold and platinum piece. You see Sahna's eyes widen for a second, then her customary steely mask returns.

The bar man snatches up the coin, testing it between his teeth. He looks equally surprised as he turns it over in his hands, realising it is real.

'Come on, we're riding out,' Sahna scowls.

'Now?' You adjust your hat, pushing the brim up to your hairline. 'I thought...'

'Change of plan.' She turns and leaves.

You move to follow, then check yourself. Quickly, you step back to the table and grab the assassin's hand. 'Figure you owe me one.' You slip the ring loose and push it onto one of your own fingers. Then you follow the others out into the swirling dust.

PROLOGUE QUEST: LEFT FOR DEAD

A hot wind blasts through the ragtag town, throwing up sand and dirt into the air. Your horse wickers, skittering away as you struggle to tighten the saddle straps. Once again you find yourself questioning Sahna's decision to leave.

'We could wait for this storm to blow itself out,' you shout over the howling gale. 'A few hours won't hurt us, though I'd prefer another good night with a roof over my head.'

Sahna is oddly silent as she secures her pack and belongings to her own mount.

'Orders are orders,' grunts Harmon with a shrug, his slumped demeanour suggesting he is less than enamoured with the decision. 'Maybe we'll outpace it.' He pulls a neckerchief over his nose, then drags himself into the saddle.

Both Sahna and Harmon have been like family to you, ever since you met the company of mercenaries on the road – back when you were on the run all those years ago. They never needed to take you on, but they did. There was fifteen in the company then, all hardened warriors, their scars and injuries telling numerous tales of battle and daring escapades. Sahna was their leader and always had been, commanding her men through respect earned in battle, and a shrewd mind for finding work and keeping the company solvent. She took some pity on your situation, ragged and desperate as you were, so agreed to give you a chance. The mundane tasks were all yours, mending tack, repairing shirts, cleaning food dishes, picking rocks from hooves – not a glamorous profession, but you were happy to feel a part of something at last, and to have a bed and supper to look forward to every evening.

Harmon was the first to take a shine to you. Started training you with the sword and dagger. You discovered quite quickly that you had an aptitude for it – and even magic, although you were still fearful of exploring that side of yourself, after what happened in the church. The

company's mage, Hastings, believed you had great potential but you often shied away from his lessons and failed to practise as often as you should, preferring to spar and train with real weapons.

The company had grown quickly over the years, drawing in various misfits and failures, thieves and killers. Some of the old guard were wary of the new, believing they lacked the discipline and honour that they themselves strived to uphold, even as a bunch of sell swords. Unfortunately, Sahna seemed indifferent to the complaints and grumblings of her advisors, and argued that strength of numbers was essential for securing the high-priced contracts. The work was not to everyone's tastes – got real bloody at times, yet the money and the pleasures that it bought could ease a conscience. The grumbles never went away however, and many of Sahna's most trusted men left the company, Hastings included. Harmon threatened the same, but you knew he would never leave. Him and Sahna had been together since the start. They were blood brothers, they would often joke. And as long as both were in your world, you were happy and content.

Then came the betrayal. Happened in the city of Kiln and that's where things went bad quick. Should have been an easy job for a band of thugs, to steal into a man's estate – rich and powerful, with ties to the criminal elite – and get him to sign a confession. Of course, he weren't gonna do that willingly, so a few threats and beatings, a knife held to his wife's and kids' throats, was probably all the incentive he needed. But someone had tipped him off. The estate was teeming with guards. The company got ambushed and it was a blood bath. You were lucky to have escaped, and you owe Harmon for that – for saving your life and getting you out to safety. When you regrouped later, there was only Sahna and one other company member alive, Pernik. There may have been others, but in the chaos it was every man for himself.

And so you have travelled south – as far south as the land will take you, away from the cities and towns where there is a steep price for your heads, especially Sahna. The Outlaw Queen. She kinda liked the name, truth be told. And you liked her new look too. The long brown locks of hair

were all shorn away to leave her shaven-headed. 'Reborn,' she said. With a hint of bitterness.

Life on the road was never easy. Pernik had perished in an attack by goblins. A poisoned arrow and there was no bringing him back. So that had left the three of you – an odd family, but a family all the same – headed now for the desert lands of Khitesh, to start a new life.

'Think of tomorrow, instead of just today,' Harmon was always saying. 'Live for the future.'

If this is what the future looked like, you were not so sure it was a good thing.

The wind continues to pummel you with its fists, the stinging dust coating every inch of you –scratching at your eyes, nose, hair, mouth. You quickly perform a last check of your gear, eager now to get going and leave this whirling maelstrom behind.

You currently have the following items equipped:

Merc leathers

(chest)

+1 armour

Rusty spurs

(feet)

+1 speed

You also have your short sword, bone-handled and inscribed with your initials (a gift from Harmon and one you have always treasured) and the mysterious ring, filched from the assassin. The runic band glows with a soft green light, suggesting that it has magical properties. Add the following items to your hero sheet:

Sell sword

(main hand: sword)

+1 brawn

Timekeeper

(ring)

+1 magic

Ability: sixth sense

Once your hero sheet has been updated, it is time to mount up and head out into the dust-shrouded wilderness. Turn to 11.

2

Brightness. Sunlight. Something tapping at your chest. Eyelids flutter as you allow the light to gradually invade your private darkness – a place heavy with the stink of sea salt and the wash of the sea.

And memories of cliff tops and bloodied hands.

Your eyes adjust, bringing blurred shapes into focus. A seagull stands perched on your chest, pecking diligently at a loose thread. Above you the sun shines down from a clear blue sky, bright and warm on your face.

You struggle to rise, the sudden movement sending the seagull flapping away with a piercing shriek. Pain stabs along your side, but it is the dull ache of a bruised rib, nothing more.

You should be dead. By all accounts, such a fall should have shattered every bone in your body. You remember the lancing pain, the burning fire that wracked your very soul. It had been real. Of that you are certain. But even now it all feels hazy, flickering at the edge of memory. A half-remembered dream.

You sit up, aware that you are surrounded by broken wreckage. The prow of a ship lies in fractured shards at your feet, the figurehead rising up before you like some angelic guardian. Alas, the visage is scaled and monstrous, jaws open wide, hissing its rage at the broken beach.

You quickly inspect your body. Clothing is ripped and bloody, yet the exposed skin beneath is smooth, without blemish. You lift your hands, turning them over in the bright sunlight. Dusty and blackened from the sand and shale, but the fists you make feel strong. No broken fingers.

This isn't the first time you have experienced powers of miraculous healing. The life of a mercenary has brought its fair share of cuts and bruises. Even deep wounds, ones that had poor Harmon shaking his head and fearing the worst, talking of gods and giving prayer, like the doting father-figure he was, even those healed with barely a scar, defying the odds and amazing the company's surgeon. Like all magic, you have never wanted to dwell on such mysteries. It had always been a lucky boon, and you were grateful of it.

Today, you are less sure. You shield your eyes against the sun's glare and look up towards that distant cliff top. Your old life ended there, when Sahna took a blade to Harmon. Two of your most trusted friends. Family. And something had come between them – something that had ruined everything and stolen the life you once knew.

And Sahna had pushed you away...

Today you are less sure if living is the better option.

Your thoughts scatter upon hearing a noise behind you. A warbling cry followed by snuffling breaths. Carefully, you slide over onto your stomach, wincing as the hard shale digs and cuts. Peering over the scattered debris, you see two creatures standing by the shore, white foam surging around their webbed feet. They look like giant toads, hunched back with large warty heads. One holds a crude spear and is shaking it at their smaller companion, gargling orders. The other is holding a stone, using it to try and smash open the lock of an iron footlocker. Evidently these creatures are scavengers looking for valuables and are intent on finding out what is inside their latest find.

Will you:

Stay hidden and hope they move away? 32

Draw your sword and attack? 18

3

Sahna's story of treasure on this beach was probably a lie – just a tale to lure both yourself and Harmon to the clifftop. Even so, if there was any hint of truth to the rumour, it's clear that anything of value on this beach has already been scavenged by those creatures or washed back out into the churning waves. Your own explorations find only rotted wood, a few rusted blades, tattered sail cloth and the odd snapping sea crab.

As you progress along the beach, the wind gathers momentum, battering against you and throwing high waves shattering against the black rocks. Keen to leave this exposed setting, you quicken your pace. After half an hour of clambering your way past the debris, the cliff to your right

sweeps in to form a high promontory. The wind-sheared sides look almost impossible to climb, adding to your fears that you might be trapped here on this bleak coastal strip. Thankfully, as you near the rock, you spot a jagged fissure in its side that might lead into a cave and a way through. There are fish bones scattered on the shale outside. And a few that might be human.

Perhaps there is another option...

You explore along the length of the promontory, heading out towards the iron-grey sea. Where the waves and wind vent their fury against the coastline, the rock has weathered, forming a natural archway. Stones and boulders lie beneath, swathed in vines of seaweed. It could be a dangerous crossing, especially with the waves battering against the rocks, but at least it offers an alternate way through.

Will you:

Explore inside the fissure? 9

Clamber across the rocks? 26

4

You surprise everyone, Sahna included, by drawing your blade and setting spurs to your horse. With a holler, you ride straight at Red Dawson, who is forced to stumble out of your way, an incredulous expression of shock on his face. One of his men tries to slash you with his sword, but his aim is clumsy, no doubt a combination of drink and his desire not to be trampled over. You deflect the attack easily and break through, galloping away at breakneck speed. A quick glance over your shoulder confirms that Sahna and Harmon are in close pursuit, leaving Dawson's men flailing around in a cloud of dust. You hear Dawson shouting something, no doubt spitting with rage – but the words are lost amidst the thunder of hooves and the pounding of blood in your ears.

You ride hard for a good mile or more, before you rein in and look back along the track. Your heightened elevation gives a good view of the track stretching behind you, even in the fading light. There appears to be

no sign of pursuit, although some gut instinct tells you that it's probably not the last you've seen of Red Dawson and his men. (Record the keyword *desperado* on your hero sheet.) Turn to 30.

5

You draw your weapon and hold it to the man's throat. For a second, he looks afraid, eyes crossed as he fixes on the sharp end of your blade. Then he leaps back with a scowl, tugging his own rust-spattered sword from its sheath. 'Yer crazy,' he howls. 'Spill blood over a horse? I'll show yer then!'

It is time to fight:

	Speed	Brawn	Armour	Health
Frontiersman	1	1	2	16

Once the frontiersman has been reduced to 5 *health* or less, turn to 36.

6

Worried that the smaller creature might be running to fetch aide, you decide to sprint after it, ignoring the larger wreekin with the spear. You find yourself slipping and sliding on the loose shale, the aches and pains from your fall still inhibiting your movement.

In order to catch up with the creature, you will need to succeed at the following challenge:

	Speed
Beach chase	8

(Remember, when taking challenge tests roll 2 dice and add your ability score to the total. If the total is the same as or higher than the given number for the challenge, then you have succeeded.) If you succeed at the challenge, turn to 34. Otherwise, turn to 12.

7

You are not alone in the cave. A group of wreekin are crouched around a fishing net, warbling to each other as they search through the assortment of junk that is caught up inside. Their heads snap round as you enter, their wide mouths gagging open in surprise.

The largest creature recovers first. Clad in a cloak of kelp and bones, you assume this one to be a leader of some sort. It croaks a series of commands to its companions and ushers them towards another crack in the cave wall. The two smaller creatures snatch up the net and scurry into this second fissure, the junk rattling and bouncing as it hits the narrow walls.

The leader turns back to face you. With a throaty hiss he starts to advance, magic sparking from his spindly fingers. Clearly this creature has some basic mastery of the arcane arts, no doubt augmented by the glowing runes etched into the bones of his cloak. You draw your weapon and prepare to fight:

	Speed	Magic	Armour	Health
Shaman	1	1	0	15

Special abilities

* Healing surge: If the shaman has suffered health damage, roll a die at the end of each combat round. On a roll of [6] the shaman restores 2 *health*. This ability cannot take the shaman above its starting *health* of 15.

If you manage to defeat this magic-wielding toad, turn to 16.

8

'I got a lead back in town. There's a beach not far, set beside the Cripple's Fingers. Rough seas and plenty of wrecks. Beach apparently littered with junk.'

'We're scavenging a beach?' asks Harmon incredulously. 'Is that what we've become now?'

Sahna turns in her saddle to look at him, the fading light picking out the jagged scar that runs from eye to cheek bone. 'Apparently, there's word that a merchant ship didn't make it to Stone Cross. Chances are it ran afoul of the rocks there. Could be easy pickings.'

'But why the rush?' asks Harmon, his eyes shifting to the darkening skies. 'Could just have easily set out at first light. Fully provisioned and everything.'

'Oh, come on. Where's your spirit of adventure?' Sahna frowns, shaking her head. 'We can camp out on the beach. Less than an hour's ride. Better than risking our heads by sticking around town.'

Harmon looks anything but convinced. 'If you says so,' he sighs.

If you would like to converse further, return to 11. Otherwise, turn to 13.

9

You squeeze through the narrow opening to emerge in a small cave. The pockmarked walls rise up to an open ceiling, where you can see a blue circle of sky. It would not be difficult to use the natural hand and footholds to climb up and reach the clifftops above.

If you have the keyword *hollow*, turn to 31. Otherwise, turn to 7.

10

You smash aside the creature's shield and deliver a killing blow. With the runner dead, you hope have managed to prevent more of the creatures from becoming aware of your presence.

You may now help yourself to the following item:

Briny beads
(necklace)
+1 magic
Ability: charm

You look back the way you came and are relieved to discover there is no

sign of the Wreekin with the spear. Perhaps it decided not to pursue you or is still searching amongst the maze of wreckage. You have no intention of waiting around and so resume your trek along the junk beach. Turn to 3.

11

Putting spurs to your horse, you follow the others through the stinging dust cloud. The low-slung buildings of the town waver like shadows, then finally give way to open country. You can barely see the track you should be following, and instead rely on Sahna and Harmon to lead the way, heads bowed to the blasting currents.

As Harmon predicted, the storm is soon at your back, and ahead of you the wild country sweeps away into weathered hills, wind pushing through the tall scraggly grass. Above you, the wide sky is a vivid yellow, clouds swirling thick across that great expanse. On the horizon a hint of crimson as the sun begins to sink low towards the distant mountains. You guess there may be only a few hours of daylight left.

You slow the horses to a canter, picking your way around the rocks that litter the dusty track. There is a heavy silence, broken only by the jingle of harness and clop of hooves.

Will you:

Talk to Sahna about the mysterious assassins?	22
Talk to Harmon about the mysterious assassins?	15
Ask Sahna about where you are headed?	8

12

Adrenaline pushes you forward, driving you up and over the wreckage in pursuit of the small creature. However, just as you are about to take a swipe at its back, the creature gives a croaking yelp and dodges to the side. You skid to a halt, turning to see the Wreekin scurrying inside the shattered hull of some unfortunate sea vessel. The opening is too small for you to follow and by the time you have made your way around the obstruction, the creature has long gone.

You look back the way you came, and find some comfort in the knowledge that the larger Wreekin has not pursued you. Record the keyword *hollow* on your hero sheet, then turn to 3.

13

The land rises steeply, taking you up into boulder-strewn hills. You pass a rundown shack, the roof fallen in and the door off its hinges. A rusty knife is stuck in one of the panels. Riding onwards, you pass what remains of another, burnt to just a few blackened posts. Sahna doesn't slow, keeping her attention focused on the winding track.

A little further on and you catch the scent of wood smoke. The sides of the track have become walls of dusty rock, rising high in ribbed formations. Sahna's hand drops to the handle of her blade. You slow your horse, warily eyeing the tops of the canyon, expecting an ambush.

You round a corner to find that the rock walls have opened out into a round basin. A number of tents are set up amongst the ruins of a stone building. A fire crackles at the centre of the camp, sending a column of smoke rising up through the dusty air.

There must be a dozen men in all. Some around the fire and others hugging the lengthening shadows. You hear laughter and spirited talk, the clinking of bottles. A group have already moved to block your way. Sahna reins in her horse, eyeing up the welcoming committee with a scowl.

One of the men, a big hulking fellow in a thick sheepskin coat, steps forward, fingers tucked into his sword belt. He has a bright red shock of beard and tattoos painted across his bald scalp. You assume he is the bandit leader. Behind him, another four men take up positions with swords drawn. They sway a little with drink. One still has a bottle held loosely in one hand. Guess they weren't expecting guests at this late hour.

'You're blocking our way,' says Sahna, cutting right to the chase. 'Care to remove yourselves, before one of you gets hurt?'

The Red Beard makes a show of rocking back on his heels, playacting his surprise. There are some nervous chuckles from his men.

'Well, well. We do love a spirited lady.'

'I ain't no lady,' Sahna spits.

'And I ain't no fool. Allow me to introduce myself. Name's Red Dawson. Maybes you heard of me?'

Sahna is quick to shake her head. You glance at Harmon who blows out his cheeks and shrugs his shoulders.

Dawson grumbles something into his beard. 'In that case, you won't know I'm the decent sort then. Like to avoid bloodshed if I can and keep things honest.'

A few more men have broken away from the camp and are sauntering over. From their mean expressions and readiness to draw blades, you suspect that avoiding bloodshed is the last thing on their minds. One of them suddenly stops dead in his tracks.

'Sahna?'

You look closer at the man, a thin and ragged figure with greasy locks of hair hanging across a weasel-like face.

'Merik,' says Sahna, with no hint of gladness.

He was one of Sahna's old guard – a veteran of the company – and who left shortly before things went bad. Sahna had always wondered if he had been behind the betrayal. However, there is no sign of guilt or wariness in the man's widening grin. He looks around at the men.

'This is Sahna. She the one I told you about – the real deal.'

'A pleasure,' scowls Dawson.

'How you been, Sahna?' Merik is still grinning like a fool. 'Where's the others?' He glances around, as if twenty or so men might suddenly appear from behind the rocks.

'Dead,' says Sahna. 'Now, can we dispense with this nonsense and all move along.'

Dawson clicks his fingers. 'Exactly. A woman who knows her mind. Now, likes I said, I'm a reasonable man. So call it ten shiny coins, whatever you're packing – Valeron gold, southern silver, we ain't fussed around here. Ten coins each is the price for this road, then you can go abouts your merry business.'

Sahna makes a sign to you and Harmon, a swift motion with her hand, fingers rubbing along the side of her cheek. Yourself and Harmon read it immediately – a signal to get ready to ride. Sahna evidently plans on charging through the gathered men, and based on their drunken swaying and lack of firearms, it could just work.

To your surprise however, Harmon speaks up. ‘Very well then. Let’s just pay up and be done with it,’ he grumbles. ‘I’m tired and not interested in more fighting tonight.’

Sahna shoots him a look that could strip bark. ‘Real desperate to part with that money of yours, Harm.’

The warrior holds her gaze. ‘Look, I just don’t want any trouble, alright?’

Will you:

- | | |
|--|----|
| Follow Sahna’s plan and ride through the men? | 4 |
| Agree with Harmon and hand over 10 silver? | 24 |

14

The wind roars in your ears, waves buffeting you this way and that. Fists the size of boulders whip through the air, smashing up dust and causing the very ground to buck and shake beneath your feet. For what feels like an age, you are simply trying to survive, deflecting blows and hacking away at the snapping vines. The odds are stacked against you, and yet the unfairness of your predicament only fuels your anger, making you fight with a frenzied strength – a determination to survive. With it comes the sudden realisation that you are actually starting to beat these magical guardians back. Perhaps the forces that bind them to this place are ancient and weak.

Hope gives you renewed momentum, allowing you to break free of the vines and hack them to quivering pieces. The stone guardian is slow and, despite the slipperiness of the sea-buffed rocks, you are able to outmaneuver it, giving you chance to search for a weakness. Stepping behind the elemental, you discover a glimmer of magic seeping between

the barnacled boulders that fashion its body. With a final cry of anger, you stab your weapon into that glowing space – exploding the creature into tumbling clouds of dust.

Bruised and bleeding, you find yourself alone on the rock shelf, surrounded by the broken remains of the magical guardians. Amongst the rock and tangled weeds, some valuable items glimmer back at you, surrounded by the tell-tale glow of magic.

You may now take any/all of the following items:

Saline shard (left hand: dagger) +1 brawn	Storm sleeves (gloves) +1 speed Ability: charm	Healing salve (2 uses) (backpack) Use any time in combat to restore 3 <i>health</i>
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You also find 20 silver pieces scattered over the rocks. Once you have updated your hero sheet, turn to 29.

15

Harmon scratches at his tangled thatch of hair. ‘Didn’t seem your usual assassin, if you ask me. Not saying they were skilled like, but they had some magic. Something I ain’t seen before.’ The burly warrior continues to scratch, his face all screwed up with thought. ‘Took a swing at him, right on target. Fast and strong enough to take anyone’s head off. Then there was this blur, a sort of light. I felt like I was moving slow, something holding on to me and pulling. He dodged around my blade like I was some rookie on the training ground.’ He shrugs his shoulders. ‘Didn’t matter anyways. Sahna stuck him good and proper.’

‘Mine mentioned a name. Cronus. You ever heard that before?’

Harmon wrinkles his nose, then shakes his head. ‘Nah, sounds like a disease.’ He laughs, a deep booming rumble that always manages to put you at ease. ‘Don’t dwell on it, son. What’s done is done.’

You nod your head and smile, feeding him his favourite quote.

'Live for the future, right?'

He beams at you with yellowed teeth. 'That's my boy!'

If you would like to converse further, return to 11. Otherwise, turn to 13.

16

You duck beneath the flashing bolts of magic to close with your opponent. The shaman fumbles at his belt for a knife, but he is too slow. Your sword cuts the creature down, spraying blue blood across the walls of the cave.

For defeating the shaman, you have now gained the following item:

Seaweed shawl

(cloak)

+2 health

Ability: heal

Scattered across the floor of the cave are some grime-covered coins. You stoop to pick them up (you have gained 5 silver), then stalk over to the second fissure. The way ahead is low and narrow, and winds away into an impenetrable darkness. Without a source of light, you decide not to venture further into this Wreekin nest. Instead, you circle around the cave until you find a suitable pathway of ascent, then begin your climb to the daylight above. Turn to 19.

17

You battle against the tide, kicking with all your strength to stay on course and avoid the rocks. Determination pays off and you finally reach the rowing boat. With a final effort, you drag yourself into the boat, body trembling from your exertions.

After taking a moment to catch your breath, you wipe the wet hair from your eyes then set about searching the vessel. Opening up the sacks, you stagger back, covering your nose from the rotted stench of spoiled

provisions – bread, fish and other meat. There is nothing worth salvaging. Instead, you turn your attention to a canvas bag snagged underneath one of the seats.

Inside, there is a soggy sheet of parchment, a rusted blade of poor workmanship, and a coil of rope. You take the parchment and carefully peel it open, careful not to rip it. You are thankful that the inked image that has been scrawled onto the parchment is still intelligible, despite being blotched by the sea water. The image shows a length of coastline, some rock formations and a cave that has been marked by a large 'X'. Treasure perhaps, or something else? You pocket the map (make a note of the keyword *plunder* on your hero sheet). If you wish, you may also take the *rope* (this takes up one backpack slot). With little else of interest on the boat, you dive back into the water and swim to shore. Turn to 19.

18

Carefully, you push yourself up and begin moving towards the creatures, using the wreckage to shield your advance. As you get closer, you draw your sword and prepare to ambush them. Unfortunately, your boots slip on the shale. You momentarily lose your balance, knocking into a plank of wood. The two creatures snap to attention, turning their bulbous heads to face you. The larger wreekin with the spear gargles something, pointing down the beach, then advances with his spear levelled towards you. The smaller creature scampers away, springing agilely over the scattered wreckage.

Will you:

Stay and fight the wreekin with the spear? 25

Chase after the fleeing wreekin? 6

19

By the time you have made it back up to the clifftop, your clothes are dirt-stained and ripped, skin scuffed and cut in a hundred places. The wounds do not concern you, your appearance even less so, but the sting of

betrayal still hurts, dragging both curses and tears in equal measure.

Now a ragged and solitary figure, you stagger back along the edge of the cliff, following the irregular shape of the wind-blasted coastline. Perhaps you will find a grave, or some other remnant of what happened that fateful evening. It all feels like a dream now; something obscure that refuses to be reflected upon by a rational mind.

You stumble on alone, with only your thoughts and the rumbling of the ocean for company. That is until you sight the crows, a group of them gathered together like a black carpet on the ground. As you approach, they immediately scatter, taking to wing with a chorus of shrieks.

And then you see the body. A bloody shape amongst the scraggly grass. Stubborn flies still crawl and buzz around the grisly remains, even when you are standing over it, teeth gritted against the sour stench.

‘Harmon...’

The skin is mottled and grey, the blood turned black and viscous. She didn’t even bury him. Just left him out here, a feast for crows. The weight of that realisation drags you to your knees. ‘I’m sorry,’ you rasp, forcing the words past the nausea and grief. ‘I should have seen it. Should have seen it coming.’ Ever since heading south, Sahna had become more and more paranoid, trusting no-one and questioning every decision. The assassins must have spooked her, even more than she let on. And that must have been her final trigger, to cut off all ties and go it alone. Destroy all trace of her old life.

‘No...’ You shake your head bitterly. There has to be more to it, and you are determined to find answers – to understand how someone you trusted could betray you and kill your best friend. Only friend.

The ground is dry and hard, and resists your attempts to scratch out a grave. Instead, you occupy yourself by collecting the nearby rocks and stacking them to form a simple cairn. You feel it is the least you can do to mark Harmon’s last resting place. A great warrior. A good man. A father.

You say no prayers or final words. That is for the crows, still cawing and reeling overhead. Just a nod of the head, then you turn away and start

down the hillside towards the dusty track. Turn to 23.

20

The Wreekin is able to move quickly over the shale, its large webbed feet helping to maintain its balance. By contrast, you find yourself slipping and sliding across the sea-slick rocks, many of your attacks missing their mark. Thankfully, your years of combat experience prove the deciding factor, as you parry the creature’s obvious attacks and press home your advantage. The battle is soon won and the toad-like creature is lying dead at your feet, the sea foam bubbling around the corpse.

You may now help yourself to the following item:

Salt spear

(main hand: spear)

+1 brawn

Ability: first cut

Concerned that the other Wreekin may have gone to fetch aide, you spare no time in continuing along the beach, eyes warily scanning the wreckage for further signs of danger. Record the keyword *hollow* on your hero sheet, then turn to 3.

21

The tide is fast and unrelenting, battering you off course and into a fist of broken rocks. The sharp and ragged edges cut at you, turning the waters crimson with blood. As you continue to struggle, a dark shape surges beneath the waves, evidently drawn to these waters by your frantic motions and the scent of blood. The body circles around you several times, before sweeping in at speed, a triangular fin breaking above the waters. Desperately you tug your weapon loose, treading water as a huge maw of jagged teeth suddenly rises up to engulf you.

It is time to battle this fearsome predator:

	Speed	Brawn	Armour	Health
Shark	2	1	0	16

Special abilities

* Stone jaws: At the end of each combat round, your hero must suffer 2 damage, ignoring *armour* from the sharp rocks.

Once the shark's *health* has been reduced to 7 or less, turn to 28.

22

Sahna snorts as soon as you mention the assassins. 'Thought they could get the bounty on us, that's all,' she says nonchalantly. 'Been plenty of those. But gonna take more than that to best the Outlaw Queen.' She gives you a sideways glance, her lips twitching into a ghost of a smile – but it is quickly gone, dropping back into her customary scowl. Her gaze shifts back to the track.

'I don't think they were bounty hunters,' you say, mulling over the scene in the taproom. 'The woman mentioned some crime, some act that I was guilty of – but that I hadn't even done yet. Like she saw the future and decided to punish me.' You can't help but chuckle at the notion. 'Sounds crazy, doesn't it?' You look to Sahna, hoping she will agree.

'The one we killed didn't get chance to talk any nonsense.' Sahna works her mouth, then spits into the dust. 'The words of a killer are rarely worth lending weight to.'

If you would like to converse further, return to 11. Otherwise, turn to 13.

23

The sun continues to beat down, baking the rocks and dust underfoot. By evening you are ascending into the mountains, grateful for the cooler air and the bite of the wind. You forgo a fire and get little sleep that night, your hunger-riddled dreams frequently interrupted by the barking and howls of prairie dogs. By dawn you are back on the track, following it down

from the craggy mountains and into a boulder-choked valley. Your mouth is parched and your feet sore, boot leather worn thin. A lone wolf follows you for several miles, skulking along through the rippling haze. Perhaps waiting for you to falter, so it can get its next meal.

By afternoon you are relieved to stumble on a tiny farmstead, where the family are kind enough to provide you with clean clothes and a helping of stew. They watch you warily, perhaps a little afraid of strangers – and with good reason. No doubt you must have made a pretty sight, dusted up in tatters like some vagabond.

They inform you that there is a town at the edge of the valley. Thunder Creek. You should make it by nightfall. Thanking them for their generosity, you head back out onto the track. With your strength and spirits renewed you make good time and reach the outskirts of the town well before evening. Thunder Creek turns out to be a sizeable settlement, built on two sides of a river flowing down from the mountains. A wooden bridge spans the churning waters, providing what you guess is the only safe fording point for several miles.

As you make your way down the quiet main street, dirt crunching beneath your boot heels, you spot a man saddling up a horse. You recognize the chestnut courser, with a white blaze on its nose. Your horse.

The man is scruffy looking, with lank blonde hair that hangs over a narrow face and crooked nose. He glares at you as you approach, his tongue working the side of his mouth.

'That's my horse,' you declare.

'The hell it is.' He spits at your feet. 'Move along yer nut job.'

'Where'd you find her?' You pat the horse's rump.

'Bought her. She's mine.' The man snorts, then turns his attention back to fastening up the straps.

'Sahna... was it a woman? Did a woman sell this to you?'

The man nods.

'When?'

'Full of questions ain't yer? A day ago. She looked in a hurry. Not one for talking.'

'Sounds like Sahna,' you nod.

'Look, I ain't interested in any lovers' spat.' His hand drops to the pommel of his sword. 'Now beat it or else.'

'What would you sell her for?'

His eyebrows lift with sudden interest. 'Twenty silver. No less.' You notice his eyes flick to the nearby tavern, where you hear fiddle playing and rowdy laughter. No doubt he hopes to sink the money on more drink – you can smell it on him, as well as the dried vomit on his ragged shirt.

Will you:

Intimidate the man into handing back the horse?	5
Pay the twenty silver and avoid trouble?	33

24

You reach into your own money pouch and retrieve a handful of silver. With a pained grimace, you offer it out to Dawson and his men. 'Take it,' you say. You give Harmon a sideways glance. He nods to you in thanks. You're not sure you completely agree with surrendering and handing over your hand-earned money, but risking a messy fight with these bandits is probably not worth the bother. However, when your eyes flick to Sahna, you see only rage in her eyes, her teeth clenched, body shaking.

'Well, looks like your two lap dogs know how to play,' grins Dawson. He gestures to two of his men to move forward to take the money. You keep your gaze fixed on Sahna, worried that she might do something stupid and draw steel after all – but you are relieved when she grudgingly fishes into her own pouch and spills the coins into the dust.

'I'm a man of my word,' says Dawson, moving aside and sweeping his arm out to indicate the track ahead. 'You got permission to leave.'

The bandit leader has barely finished before Sahna is snapping her reins and heeling her horse past the men. She does not look back at you and Harmon, and even once you are away from the camp and galloping through the dusty canyons once more, she does not offer up a word on

the matter, even after you venture a nervous apology. (Deduct ten silver from your hero sheet.) Turn to 30.

25

You are doubtful that you would be able to catch the fleeing wreekin, so decide to focus your attention on the more immediate threat. The larger wreekin issues a wet warbling cry, then charges in, drool dribbling from its rubbery lips.

It is time to fight:

	Speed	Brawn	Armour	Health
Wreekin	1	1	1	18

Special abilities

* Shifting stones: the shale by the water's edge is slippery, making it difficult to maintain your balance. If you roll a double for your hero's attack speed, you automatically lose the round.

If you manage to defeat your agile opponent, turn to 20. (Remember, if you are defeated in combat then you can repeat the combat again.)

26

The wind and sea seem determined to thwart your progress, beating against you with stinging waves of salt spray. Frantically you make your way across the rocks, crawling on all fours to avoid slipping on the wet stone. In places the vines of seaweed have constricted around the jumbled mass of boulders, providing makeshift rope ladders to help you navigate some of the larger obstructions.

Just as you are pulling yourself up a tangle of weeds, you are shocked when they shiver in your grip and then start to move. You quickly let go, dropping back onto the rock shelf below. A sibilant hissing fills your

ears as they continue to slither and slide like snakes, imbued by some strange power.

You back away, becoming aware of further movement at the corners of your vision. The rocks either side of you have begun to lift up, tumbling over each other as they clash together, filling the air with clouds of stone dust. One after another, the rocks lock into place, slowly forming the shape of a hulking giant.

It is an effort to tear your gaze away from the massive guardian, but the vines have now managed to wind themselves into a single serpent-like body, fashioned from kelp and weed. They slither towards you, the fronds feeling their way like fingers. You stand shaking, rooted with fear, your eyes darting from one danger to the next. Then a wave crashes over the promontory, sending you reeling back against the stone arch. By the time you have regained your senses, the vines have wrapped themselves around your legs, tightening their coils into a crushing grip. Above you, the stone giant looms large, a blackness against the azure blue sky.

You have no choice but to fight these two monstrous adversaries:

	Speed	Brawn	Armour	Health
Flotsam	1	1	1	14
Jetsam	2	0	0	10

Special abilities

* Boulder dash: At the end of each combat round that Flotsam is still alive, he increases his *brawn* by 1.

* Entangling weeds: At the end of each combat round that Jetsam is still alive, your hero must suffer 2 damage, ignoring *armour*.

Remember, when fighting multiple opponents, you choose which opponent to attack in each combat round and roll against their *speed*. If you win the round you apply your damage to that opponent. If you lose the round, only your chosen opponent will strike back against you.

If you manage to defeat both of these magical guardians, turn to 14. You may leave this combat at any time by hacking your way free and returning to the beach. The guardians will not follow – and you will be able to explore the fissure instead. Turn to 9.

27

You edge closer to Harmon, dropping your voice to avoid being overheard. ‘Hey, do you think Sahna is acting a little, you know... odd?’. Having known Sahna for many years, you have become accustomed to her demeanor. Yes, at times she can be taciturn and blunt, and rarely wastes words on small talk, but her sudden decision to ride out of town seems out of character. Sahna is a planner, who rarely does anything on a whim.

Harmon rubs his jaw as he scrutinizes Sahna, riding a few horse-lengths ahead. ‘Think those assassins might have spooked her a little. She was already kinda edgy. A few days in town and I saw it was wearing thin. Guess she just needed to get back out here, away from people. That price on her head is a heavy burden. She don’t talk about it but I know it worries her.’

If you would like to converse further, return to 11. Otherwise, turn to 13.

28

The shark’s powerful body thrashes back and forth as its jaws seek to get a hold of you. Somehow, you are able to maintain a grip around its neck, stabbing with your weapon until the waters bubble a crimson haze. It isn’t long before your strength finally gives out. The shark breaks free and retreats out of range, its sleek body cutting through the gloom.

Frantically, you kick back to the surface, coughing and choking as you break above the waves. After sucking hungrily at the briny air, you submerge again ready for the counterattack. Thankfully it appears that the shark has fled, heading back out to deeper waters.

Cut and bleeding, you drag yourself out of the churning tide and lie panting on the shale. After taking a moment to recover, you run a check

of your belongings and discover a rip in your backpack. (You must now lose one backpack item.) Not wishing to spend a moment longer on this unforgiving stretch of coastline, you stagger to your feet and make for the cliffs. Turn to 19.

29

You cross beneath the promontory to find yourself on another shale beach, stretching away into a salty haze. Here the waves seem even more restless, kicking angrily at the shoreline, where sharp rocks claw their way through the foam.

Thankfully, the cliff range is less steep here and a tumble of rocks provides a natural staircase back up to the mainland. With a sigh of relief, you turn and give the ocean a final contemptuous glance. It is then that you spot the wreck of a rowing boat about thirty metres off shore, snagged between two fingers of rock. There looks to be some hessian sacks and other objects still heaped inside.

The tide is rushing in, the wind knocking the tops of the waves as they hurtle inland. You have no doubt that the current is strong and the sharp rocks, masked by the sea, would be dangerous to anyone attempting the swim. And yet, you find yourself still contemplating the challenge.

Will you:

- | | |
|---|----|
| Attempt to swim out to the boat | 37 |
| Leave the beach and return to the clifftop | 19 |

30

The sun burns on the horizon, casting bloody hues against a copper sky. The air has turned salty, carrying with it the rise and sighs of the sea. After hitching your horses to a wind-parched tree, you follow Sahna to the cliff edge. Below you, a black shale beach stretches in a wide crescent beside a restless sea. Waves kick at the shore and foam around the sharp and misshapen rocks that cut jaggedly at the sky. The Cripple's Fingers. Many a

sea captain's worst nightmare. And the evidence of such fear can be witnessed along the beach, where broken masts, netting, wrecked sailing boats, and sun-bleached skulls litter the loose shale.

'Why, what a lovely place you brought us to,' says Harmon with a snort.

Sahna pushes up her hat with a finger, her steely eyes made golden by the light. 'We've seen worse on our travels, Harmon. Seen a lot you and I.'

'We sure have,' he nods, rubbing the back of his neck.

'So you gotta know something, Bert.' Sahna's voice breaks on the words, but she takes a deep breath to recover. 'Pains me to do this, but you know why. Exactly why.'

You glance over with a frown, curious as to what Sahna is getting at. Steel glistens as she slides a knife from her sleeve into the palm of her hand.

'No!' You cry out, but the sudden shock holds you rigid – frozen in place, as you watch her plunge it into Harmon's stomach. Once. Twice. A third time. And she leaves it there. He looks down at the protruding blade dumbly then back at Sahna. Blood froths from the corners of his lips.

'Sahna...' You back away, horrified by what has transpired. Your brain struggles to comprehend the actions of someone you trusted. Someone who had taken you in when no one else cared. She turns on you. There is no emotion on that face. A face you have seen in battle so many times. Etched with scars and hard lines, chiselled as if from stone. The face of a killer.

She steps forward, placing a bloodied hand to each of your shoulders and pushes.

Your feet scabble at the cliff edge, dislodging stones and sending them tumbling to the beach below. Desperately, you reach out to grab her arms. Hoping in those last moments that she will somehow renounce her actions, snatch you up and pull you back to safety. But she steps away and turns her back on you.

And you are falling into space.

The wind whips around you, lashing at your clothes. Then it's rock and wood, and the crushing impact of your body slamming against something hard and unforgiving. Pain shoots up along your spine, bursting in a wave of crimson fire. The last thing you see is that dark cliff top, so high and far above you – and then you are sinking into that fire of pain. Consumed by it until nothing else remains. Turn to 2.

31

A quick scan of the cave confirms that it is empty, save for a fishing net sprawled across the rocks. An assortment of junk is bunched up between the frayed meshwork. Clearly someone – or something – abandoned this net, perhaps in a hurry.

Will you:

Search through the netting?	35
Climb out of the cave	19

32

The Wreekin haven't spotted you, so you decide to remain hidden and watch. The smaller one now has the locker in both hands and is smashing it repeatedly against a larger rock. The rusted iron becomes scratched and dented, but continues to thwart the creature's attempts to break it open. The larger Wreekin gives some croaking command, pointing further down the beach – and together they waddle away, leaving the battered locker discarded on the beach. You wait until the two creatures are out of sight, then carefully pick your way over to the footlocker. Lifting it up, you are immediately intrigued to hear something rattling around inside. Sadly the lock has been damaged and you have no hope of picking it open. You'll need sturdier tools.

If you decide to take the footlocker then record the keyword *junk* on your hero sheet and add the footlocker to your backpack. Turn to 3.

33

The man's face splits into a wide grin as you count out the silver. 'Good, good. Pleasure doing business with yer.' He hands over the reins. 'Was she something special, that woman yer talked about?'

You are quick to shake your head. 'Just an old acquaintance.'

He snorts, looking less than convinced. 'Well, watch yerself with that one. Had a right mean look to her.'

'I'll do my best.'

'Yeah, sure.' The man licks his fingers, then smooths down his tangled fringe. 'Well, enough talk, nut job. I gots me a night o' fun ahead.' He hawks some spittle into the dust, then wanders away towards the tavern. 'Have a good 'un.'

'You too.'

The horse wickers, nuzzling against your chest. You allow yourself a contented smile, happy to be reunited with at least one thing from your previous life. 'How you doing, Betsy? Ready for an adventure?'

Remove 20 silver from your hero sheet. Now that you have been reunited with your mount, you have completed this small sample quest and are ready for your grand adventure! Well done!

34

Adrenaline pushes you forward, driving you up and over the wreckage in pursuit of the small creature. You quickly gain on its advantage and soon have the Wreekin cornered against the shattered hull of a sea vessel. The creature warbles something from between its rubbery lips, then grabs a nearby plank of wood, brandishing it as both a shield and a club.

It is time to fight:

	Speed	Brawn	Armour	Health
Runner	1	1	2	12

Special abilities

* Broken shield: once the runner has been reduced to 8 *health* or less, the

wooden shield is broken. The runner's *brawn* and *armour* is reduced to zero for the remainder of the combat.

If you manage to defeat this slippery opponent, turn to 10. (Remember, if you are defeated in combat then you can repeat the combat again.)

35

You cut away at the net to speed up your exploration. Most of the haul is useless junk, mostly rotted fragments of wood, rusted iron, seaweed and rocks. However, you do manage to recover some items of worth – a dented helm that might still be serviceable and a pair of black leather gloves, stained with rings of seawater.

If you wish, you may take any/all of the following items:

Reaver's helm

(head)

+1 armour

Brackish leathers

(gloves)

+1 speed

You also find a few grime-covered coins scattered across the rocks. (You have gained 5 silver.) With little else of interest in the cave, you decide to climb up to the clifftops above. Turn to 19.

36

After only a few nicks and cuts, the man drops his blade and raises his hands in surrender. 'Take the bloomin' horse,' he sniffs. 'Yer crazy, yer know that? Real nut job.'

You nod, lowering your weapon. 'So I've been told.' You take up the reins, watching as the man stumbles away down the street, still muttering and cursing to himself.

The horse wickers, nuzzling against your chest. You allow yourself a contented smile, happy to be reunited with at least one thing from your previous life. 'How you doing, Betsy? Ready for an adventure?'

Record the keyword *dauntless* on your hero sheet. Now that you have been reunited with your mount, you have completed this small sample quest and are ready for your grand adventure! Well done!

37

As you predicted the currents are fast and strong, and you are constantly being knocked back or towed off course. You will need to complete the following challenge test:

Brawn

Swim for it

9

(Remember, when taking challenge tests roll 2 dice and add your ability score to the total. If the total is the same as or higher than the given number for the challenge, then you have succeeded.) If you succeed at the challenge, turn to 17. Otherwise, turn to 21.

GLOSSARY OF SPECIAL ABILITIES

Charm (mo): You may reroll one of your hero's dice any time during a combat. You must accept the result of the second roll. If you have multiple items with the *charm* ability, each one gives you a reroll.

First cut (pa): Before the first combat round you can automatically inflict 1 damage to an opponent of your choosing, ignoring *armour*.

Heal (mo): You can cast this spell any time in combat to automatically heal yourself for 4 *health*.

Sixth sense (mo): Use any time in combat to change an opponent's [6] result to a [1].