

Heart of Keros

Text, rules, and design by David M. Donachie, Jan 2024
This is a previously unpublished game

Let's begin

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

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

You are prepared for a trip, so also have:

- 3 **rations**

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

Skills

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

(Note: This adventure is set at sea, so the Swimming talent may be useful)

If you want to read the longer rules, check over the page for the GNAT Quickstart Rules.

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

GNAT Quickstart Rules

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

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

Talent and Vitality

Testing Talent

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

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

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

Skills

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

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

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

Vitality

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

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

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

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

Spells

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

Fortune

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

Combat

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

Many combats involve a penalty, to represent the strength of the opponent, and

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

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

Weapons, Shields, and Armour

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Advantage and Disadvantage

When you fight with a distinct advantage — such as when you are flying and

your target is not — you have *Advantage*; you may re-roll any one dice, taking the second result. You make this re-roll after any other re-rolls (e.g. from a two-handed weapon).

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

Equipment

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

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

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

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

Keywords and Titles

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

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

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

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

Experience

If you are successful in your adventures, you will be awarded one or more

Experience Points (xp). You can spend these points to increase your abilities as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

End of Adventure

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

I.

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

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

You are grown now, and have left your own birthplace in search of one of those fortunes. Your travels have brought you to the restless waters of the Circle Sea, in search of a treasure said to lie on the forgotten island of Keros.

You are not a sailor.

This is probably something you should have said to yourself before you decided to undertake a boat journey into the Circle Sea. You could have approached any of the captains of the big boats docked at Marinth harbour and struck a deal — your knowledge of the lost treasure for passage and a share of the reward. You could have at the very least hired a small crew for cash along with a boat for them to sail.

Instead, you believed the old fisherman Cato when he said he could take you right to Keros for a mere handful of gold. His little boat, Solstice, looked a little rickety, it's true, but you were sure that Cato must know what he was doing, and climbed eagerly aboard.

You aren't so eager now.

Desperately, you shovel water from the bottom of the boat, scooping it up in a slopping leather bucket and hurling it over the side as the Solstice tosses and plunges through the breaking storm. Cato has lashed himself to the tiller, and is being flung from side to side with every smashing wave.

"Bail! Bail!"

You slip on the sodden planks and plunge into the flooded keel, the shock of the cold water driving the breath from your lungs. It seems like death, but it's actually the only thing that saves you when one even more massive wave slams into the side of the boat and sends it skimming across the churning sea like a thrown stone. The mast cracks, the planks heave, the ropes snap, and poor Cato is sent screaming overboard.

Then the bottom of the boat smacks into your head like the blow of a hammer and you know no more ... [Turn to 60](#)

2.

The Solstice may have been a fishing boat, but Cato didn't bring nets or rods or lines — and you aren't a cormorant trainer — so your only choice is to get right into the middle of the shoal and try your best to scoop them out.

Test Larceny (if you don't have Larceny, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you have a **Net**, you can add +1. If you fail, you catch nothing, and there's no choice but to move on to the [southern \(turn to 10\)](#) or [central \(turn to 76\)](#) islands. Otherwise, read on.

You plough into the shoal, scattering tiny fish and angry cormorants in every direction. You ship the oars and grab at the water before the fish can get away. It's a frankly ridiculous plan, but you actually manage to pull out a handful of wriggling sprats. (These count as a **ration**).

You wolf down one of the fish. It's fresh but incredibly salty! If you eat more, you can *Heal 1 Vitality*, but you must also *drink one portion of water*. If you don't, you *Lose 1 Talent*.

The fish vanish into the depths, and the cormorants go back to their rocks to sulk, so you steer the boat back to more open water and set your course for land.

- » To land on the central island, [turn to 76](#)
- » To land on the southern island, [turn to 10](#)

3.

You cast around the edge of the burnt woodland, even as the crashing sound grows louder. There must be a trail leading to the ruins you saw ... mustn't there?

Test Tracking (if you don't have Tracking, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you pass, [turn to 6](#) now. Otherwise, read on.

You are still desperately searching for a way through the woods, when a terrible squeal echoes across the island, filling you with terror. Whatever is coming, is here, now!

You [flee \(turn to 22\)](#).

4.

Beyond the scrawny trees, the islet rises up into a bare shelf of rock above a wave-worn cliffside. Raucous gulls wheel and cry below your feet as you venture to the edge, kneeling down amongst the stones against the fear of vertigo.

The Circle Sea spreads out before you, a wrinkled blanket of blue-grey under the westerling sun, and it is not empty! Shading your eyes you make out a scatter of islands lying low amongst the waves, at least three large ones, lying roughly in a line from right to left — north to south — and more shoals and islets than you can easily count through the sun's glare.

Is one of these Keros? Are all of them? The rumours you followed just spoke of *an* island, three days sail beyond Marinth. Is this even the right place?

You cautiously shade your eyes again. There's a glimmer of light from one of the islands, the centre one of the chain of three, and a smudge of green or grey about the northern one. The third, southern one, has clouds trailing downwind of it. If you have the **dead hermit's map** [turn to 94](#) now.

Otherwise, it's time to set a course. Each of the islands looks like they are hours apart at a speed you think you can manage, so you should carefully choose which to head for.

- » [Set course for the north \(leftmost\) island \(turn to 50\).](#)
- » [Set course for the middle island \(turn to 47\).](#)
- » [Set course for the south \(rightmost\) island \(turn to 8\).](#)

5.

There's no easy way to climb the snake statue. The coils of stone are slick with moss and back-spray, and the gaping jaws from which the water pours jut out well over the pool. Going up is a fool's errand, and likely to get you killed.

If you prefer not to try you can [head back to your boat \(turn to 20\)](#).

To attempt the climb, *Test climbing at -2* (if you don't have climbing, *Test your Talent at -4*) twice. If you fail, you fall from the stone into the pool below — *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you hit the rocks — [turn to 70](#) now. If not, you land in the water instead, and can choose whether to repeat the attempt, or give up.

6.

Gain the keyword *Swash*

You find a trail leading through the charred wood, marked by white ash that stands out starkly against the burnt soil and the burnt trees. The air here is full of char, and every surface radiates a sullen and unrelenting heat.

Test your Talent. If you fail, you must *drink a portion of water*. If you cannot, or choose not to do so, *Lose 1 Talent*

The trail leads into the heart of the wood, a creaking and rustling place, where the dead branches seem to be in constant motion, one against the other. In the centre is a tower, as pale as the path. You think for a moment that it is cut from marble, but the white comes away at your touch — just ash settled thickly on grey stone.

Within, the heat is only slightly muted — the stones themselves are warm. The tower roof has fallen in, leaving a floor coated in sooty rubble, but a partial flight of stone steps still leads to the upper parts. You guess that this was once some sort of watchtower.

A shield, a staff, and a trident are mounted on the wall opposite the tower's door, both blackened by fire. You can take the **blackened shield** and **sooty trident** (a *long weapon*), if you wish — both items are *heavy*. The staff has been blackened by fire, it's no use as a weapon, but it still makes for a **stout stick** if you want one.

In front of the three weapons is a large block of stone, that puts you in mind of a temple's altar, except that the block has been pushed to one side. Where you think it should have stood, a shallow pit is cut into the floor, though it contains nothing but ash and char.

Now you have a choice:

- » [Climb the broken steps \(turn to 11\).](#)
- » [Leave the tower \(turn to 42\).](#)

7.

You raise the sail and head out into the open ocean between the northern and central islands, then lean back in the stern, tucking the rudder beneath your arm as you saw Cato do in the calm seas outside of Marinth. You are still no sailor, and have to constantly adjust your course to keep the prow pointed the way you want — even so you find yourself dozing.

You are woken by the splash of water, and glimpse a dark shape dive into the sea only a yard away. There are seals on every side of the boat, diving and breaching and tumbling through the waves, keeping pace.

If you have a **spear, harpoon** or similar *long weapon*, you can try to [hunt the seals \(turn to 98\)](#).

If not, you simply lean back against the stern and enjoy their company for what it is, until eventually the whole bob of them scatter off back the way they came.

- » To land on the northern island, [turn to 41](#).
- » To land on the central island, [turn to 76](#).

8.

You return to the Solstice and line it up as best you can with the southern island, aiming at the distant smudge of land.

You thought the previous crossing was hard work, but this is far harder. No matter how hard you haul on the oars, the open gap of water never seems to close, and the distant shadow grows no closer.

It's hard to keep going. The lure of treasure isn't enough. It would be easy just to let go of the oars and drift ...

You snap yourself awake and haul on the oars with renewed fury, roaring out your determination with each stroke until your throat grows raw with the effort. You badly want a mouthful of water, but your flask is less than half full.

You must *drink a portion of water*. If you cannot, or choose not to do so, *Lose 1 Talent*.

Eventually the island [draws closer \(turn to 10\)](#).

9.

If you have the **merrow's pearl** [turn to 87](#) now. Alternatively, if you have some means of resurrection from another game, follow those instructions now. Otherwise, read on.

In an instant, you are over the side of the boat. You claw at the wood, trying to pull yourself back, but your numb fingers slide free as you sink into the freezing water, down and down into the cold and the dark ...

THE GAME ENDS HERE

10.

If you have the keyword *Seasnake* [turn to 57](#) now.

As you approach the shore of the southern island you hear the musical splash of falling water. Not the crash and suck of waves, but an actual stream! Surely *this* is Keros.

You row along the sandy shore until the river comes into view. The centre of the island is high and rocky, thick with ferns and bushes. You can see the bright glint of a waterfall at the edge, where water tumbles down into some unseen pool, before splitting into a hundred braided rivulets that cut down through the sand and out into the sea. The wash creates a wide shelf of rills and sparkling water where it's easy to draw up your boat.

You rush to the stream, eager to slake your thirst, but the water is brackish, tainted by the inrush of the sea, and you spit it out in disgust. You are going to have to head inland if you want to fill your flask.

You can see that the stream emerges from a narrow defile cut through the cliff, it looks like quite a scramble, especially since you lost your boots in the storm. It might be possible to find an easier way to climb somewhere else.

- » To forge up the stream and through the defile [turn to 92](#).
- » To search for another way [turn to 29](#).
- » To drink the water anyway, [turn to 44](#).
- » If you prefer to put back out to sea, [turn to 20](#).

II.

You make your way up the broken steps, wrapping your hands in strips torn from your salt-stained clothing to avoid burning them on the hot rocks. Ash crunches under your feet, as slick as grease on a pan.

Test Climbing (if you don't have Climbing, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you fail, *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour* as you slip and plummet down the steps. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you fall from the steps to your death, slamming fatally into the ashy ground — [turn to 70](#) now.

The steps end at least ten feet short of where the tower's roof probably was, but it's still high enough to give you a view right out across the island and beyond. You see the dark shapes of the islands to the north and south, and then two more, far to the east — one dark, one lighter.

Between you and those other islands is an expanse of rough and churning water, flecked with whitecaps and foam. It's some sort of labyrinth of shoals; a treacherous barrier walling off the further isles.

If you have the **merrow's pearl**, and wish to uncover it at the top of the tower, [turn to 55](#).

Once you are done here, there is nowhere to go but [down \(turn to 42\)](#).

II.

You draw your boat up to the burning isle once more. The wall of fire has returned, and recommenced its endless spinning, but no gap appears. It seems the island of fire is closed to you now.

- To set your course north, [turn to 49](#)
- To set your course south, [turn to 62](#)
- If you have the keyword *Shore* and wish to chart a different course [turn to 72](#)

Alternatively, if you have the keyword *Sail* and at least four portions of water in your flask, you could set sail for Marinth — if you think you have found what you came for — and [leave these cursed isles behind \(turn to 100\)](#).

I3.

You approach the spirit of Morganthos, and say, "I know where the treasure is."

"Then tell me."

You must now choose where you believe the treasure is hidden. Make a note of your guess: the altar, the tomb, the anchor, or the window.

Then, [turn to 34](#) to see if you were correct.

I4.

The whispering voices draw you inexorably down to the sunken level, until you are standing before the pillar of swirling mist. You see shapes forming in the vapour, faces and limbs, all joined together in a foul commingling of phantom bodies.

One face seems to focus on you. A sorcerous rune is branded into its misty forehead.

Oh, but you are a live one, the face says, in a chorus of overlaid voices. *For so long we have had nothing here to work with but bones and dead flesh to make our creations.*

You feel ghostly fingers caressing your flesh, making changes.

Ahh but we have no living beings to merge you with. How sad. We must content ourselves with such limited things ...

A second voice interjects, pushing aside the first, *No! We can combine bones and living tissue, spirit and un-spirit!*

The voices fall to arguing and their hypnotic grip on you fades enough for you to break free. You back away, then turn to flee.

You have been changed. Mark the **changing curse** in your inventory. It cannot be removed unless you find a way to lift a curse. While you have the curse you add +2 in every combat, but your Talent is permanently reduced by one. When the curse is lifted, these effects are reversed.

You burst out of the rotting doors to find the mausoleum surrounded by pale men emerging from the fog. They are loose-limbed and bone-white, as if they have just been left behind by the tide. They turn towards you together, like puppets on strings.

[Turn to 77](#)

15.

You pull of your salt-stiff outer layers and hurl yourself into the whirlpool, aiming to drop down the shaft arrow-straight like Senharrim in the sagas.

Test Swimming (if you don't have *Swimming*, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you fail, [turn to 53](#) now. Otherwise, read on.

The cold of the water hits you like a hammer blow, knocking the breath from your lungs. Silver fish, knife-fast, boil from the water all around you, battering into you like heavy rain, but you push away into the funnel of air and go down, down, into the depths.

The light recedes above you, snatched away by the surging water. Everything goes dark, and you just have time to think *I've killed myself*, before a fierce eddy thrusts you downwards into breathable air.

Wait. *Breathable?*

A dim light creeps over you, issuing from a drifting jellyfish globe. By its glow you make out a coterie of scale-clad figures, who float just outside the walls of the large bubble that you are apparently suspended in. They have the heads and limbs of men and women, but the tails and fins of fish. Their skins glisten silver and green, like mail.

One of them, her brow encircled by a band of sea-silver, leans her face through the bubble wall and into the air.

"That was foolish and brave, groundling. One false move and you'd have joined the rest of your kin."

She makes a languid gesture towards the sea floor, and you are shocked to see that the white sands are strewn with bones.

"My sisters and I admire bravery and foolishness. How shall we reward you? Will you take a gift, or ask a question?"

- » [Accept a gift \(turn to 38\)](#).
- » [Ask a question \(turn to 85\)](#).

16.

Gain the keyword *Sea*.

Then, if you have the keyword *Sail*, [turn to 30](#) now. Otherwise, read on.

Beyond the shoals, is calm water, deep and rolling. Sunlight sparkles from the wave crests, highlighting the places where currents mix. The shoals lie to the east, blocking the way to the other islands, and you have no desire to risk them a second time.

Standing up on the thwarts, with the mast to steady you and a hand to shade your eyes, you spy two more islands. One to the north, one to the south. The northern island is hard to make out, partially hidden by a bank of mist, but it definitely has a reddish tinge to it. The southern is clearer, but also more distant, so its bluish silhouette gives away few details.

Either of these islands could be Keros, the place you came to sea to seek. Maybe one of them will also offer you a route home?

With a groan, you pick up the oars and start to row once more. Your hands are getting as calloused as those of a real fisherman, but with both food and water in short supply you feel more like a stranded fish baking in the ocean glare.

You must *drink a portion of water*. If you cannot, or choose not to do so, *Take one Wound, ignoring armour*. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you perish of thirst while still surrounded by water. Listless and addled, you allow the Solstice to drift, till the deep currents of the Circle Sea pull you into their spiralling gyre, there to drift through the seasons till the little boat finally slips beneath the waves — [turn to 70](#) now.

- » To land on the northern island, [turn to 31](#).
- » To land on the southern island, [turn to 51](#).

17.

You sprint back to the desolate harbour, just ahead of the pursuing pale men. To your immense relief, the Solstice is where you left her, and you waste no time in casting off and putting back to sea.

The creatures do not pursue.

[Turn to 16](#)

18.

Glittering water extends before you, behind, and on every side, heaving and mounding under the burning sun. The same sun beats down on your weary back, squeezing sweat from your pores, and then drying it stiff on your skin. Your mouth is dry too. Already your tongue feels swollen with thirst.

You must *drink a portion of water*. If you cannot, or choose not to do so, *Lose 1 Talent*.

Eventually you reach a small island. Actually, more an *islet*, it's not large enough to qualify for any better name. A strip of gravel shore slopes up into a jumble of sea-slick rocks, and then a few scrubby trees appear to screen a higher shelf of rock.

It's meagre enough a respite, but it's also the only shade for leagues in any direction, so you gratefully beach the Solstice on the gravel and clamber out, every muscle aching as you pull the boat clear of the water and limp to the tree-line.

Beneath the trees there is a little cover, a little shadow, and a lot of sea-bleached driftwood tangled in the sandy grasses. Close up, you realise that the trees are dead, but surely there must have once been water here, somehow.

- » [Rest beneath the trees \(turn to 81\)](#).
- » [Dig desperately for water \(turn to 96\)](#).
- » [Clamber to the top of the islet \(turn to 4\)](#).
- » [Search the foreshore \(turn to 19\)](#).

19.

You turn back to the rocky shore, and pick your way amongst the slick weed and restless water. The sun beats down on your back, glinting sharply from the waves and wringing sweat from your brow.

Test Search (if you don't have Search, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you fail, you must *drink a portion of water*. If you cannot, or choose not to do so, *Lose 1 Talent*.

If you pass, you spot something interesting amongst the rocks. You take it for a piece of driftwood at first, but when you unwedge it from the stones it proves to be a **harpoon** (a *long weapon*), with a barbed ivory head and a shaft roughened by barnacles. You can take it if you wish.

Either way, you've had enough of the blistering sun, and you [retreat to the tree-line \(turn to 81\)](#).

20.

You return to your boat.

If you have a **stout stick** and some **rope**, and have not yet fixed the sail on your boat, you can do it now, lashing the stick and rope to the broken mast. If you do, gain the keyword *Sail* and remove the stick and rope from your inventory.

When you are done with your boat work, if any, you row back down the channel and set off.

- » To head to the central island, [turn to 62](#)
- » If you have the keyword *Shore* and feel you are ready to chart a different course [turn to 72](#)

Alternatively, if you have the keyword *Sail* and at least four portions of water in your flask, you could set sail for Marinth — if you think you have found what you came for — and [leave these cursed isles behind \(turn to 100\)](#).

21.

You raise the little sail and head into the gulf between the central and southern islands. The sea here is dotted with outcrops, but the black stones are far apart, easy to avoid, and so wave-washed that there's nothing to gain by getting close. In any case, you aren't really sure how to stop the boat other than by letting go of the ropes and waiting for it to do it by itself.

Flocks of cormorants dry their wings on the rocks, holding them out like crooked flags in the sun. You can see more birds diving for fish, emerging from the depths with silver flashes in their beaks.

If you want to try and catch some for themselves, [turn to 2](#). If not, you hold your course till land comes into view.

- » To land on the central island, [turn to 76](#)
- » To land on the southern island, [turn to 10](#)

22.

You bolt for the sea, but the wall of fire throws you back, scorching the air.

As you stumble away, hands raised against the heat, a huge boar smashes its way free of the charcoal trees. It is soot black, with eyes and bristles as red as fire. When it paws the ground it throws up clouds of ash, and when it snorts, flames blow from its nostrils.

You look around, desperate for a way to escape, but are trapped between the beast and the inferno. It charges, belching fire — you have no choice but to fight.

Fight three rounds at -4. *Fireball* is ineffective in this fight. If you are carrying the **blackened shield** you gain +2. If you have a *long weapon* (such as a spear) you gain +1.

After the first round, you may *Flee* by *Losing 1 Talent*. if you choose to do so, you run into the woods, [turn to 6](#).

If you survive the fight, [turn to 56](#). If not, you are trampled beneath the boar's feet and gored by it's claws, before it starts to chew ... [turn to 70](#) now.

23.

You go on the offence, leaping to attack the beast before it can charge towards you. It squeals in what you think is outrage and wheels to attack.

Fight three rounds at -3. *Fireball* is ineffective in this fight. If you are carrying the **blackened shield** you gain +2, and if you also have a *long weapon* (such as a spear), gain a further +1. If you have a **bow** or a similar *ranged weapon* you can claim a further +1 on the first round.

If you survive the fight, [turn to 56](#). If not, you are trampled beneath the boar's feet and gored by it's claws, before it starts to chew ... [turn to 70](#) now.

24.

The interior of the temple is a gloomy colonnade of pillars leading to an open apse. Thick skeins of honeysuckle wind around the pillars, half growing, half dead. A single intact window looms above a bare altar stone, its panes glowing rich and red in the slanting sunlight.

To either side, rows of stone sarcophagi lie end to end against the walls, their lids carved with reclining figures. Overhead, the roof is broken in a dozen places, so that spears of light lance down through the dusty air, but rusting chains still suspend a massive anchor above the nave, its tines glinting with the dull gleam of old gold.

If you have the keyword *Somnolence*, you have dreamt of this place. You recognise the window, the pillars ... If you have the **dead hermit's map** then you remember a message written on it ...

When you step forward towards the nave, blue flames shoot up from the ground!

You back-peddle in alarm as a spectral figure rises from the ground, grabbing for your weapons, but the figure raises its hands placatingly.

"Hold stranger, you have nothing to fear. I am not like my grave-robbing kin on Telos. The war drove them mad, but I endure."

You cautiously lower your weapons, a little, but keep your distance.

"Who are you, shade?" you ask.

"Morganthos, High Priest of Atros, or I was once. When I lived, I led my priests to these isolated isles in the hope that we could hide from the war. We could not. Those of us who did not perish outright, went insane, each in their own particular ways. Now I am a guardian spirit, protecting our great treasure until one comes who is destined to recover it."

You think quickly. "I am that one."

"Are you?" The shade seems thoughtful. *"If that is truly so, you will know its hiding place."* He makes a gesture that takes in the entire temple interior. *"Tell me, then."*

You follow the gesture ... there are so many options! Fighting the ghost would be pointless, and casting a *View* spell too obvious. You are going to have to guess where the treasure is, and you'd better get it right!

- » If you are ready to guess, [turn to 13](#).
- » If you'd like to examine the altar first, [turn to 90](#).
- » If you'd like to examine the sarcophagi, [turn to 58](#).
- » If you'd like to examine the intact window, [turn to 74](#).
- » If you'd like to examine the hanging anchor, [turn to 95](#).

25.

You crouch down and ease yourself into the hole under the tree. It's barely big enough for you to stay on your feet. The root filled roof brushes your hair, and your shoulders shake dirt loose from the walls.

Are you simply wedging yourself into a hole?

To your relief, the claustrophobic passage opens up into a chamber. Limb-thick roots twist and knot to make up the arched ceiling and walls. The floor dips away, and in its centre is a limpid pool of fresh water! You scramble down, eager to slake your thirst, before noticing the enormous toad which squats, eyes closed, in the centre of the pool. Caution wars with thirst. You need to drink, but you had to leave your armour outside ... You edge closer, and see that the toad appears to be sitting on some sort of platform, a carved block of greenish stone mostly submerged in the water. There's no way of extracting it without rousing the toad.

If you want to attack the toad, [turn to 63](#).

If you'd rather just get to the water: *Test Stealth* (if you don't have Stealth, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you fail, [turn to 63](#) anyway. If you succeed, you manage to reach the water without rousing the toad. Greedily, you cup water from the pool — it's dark with tannins, but fresh! *Restore 2 Talent*. The pool is shallower than you thought, mostly a toad-hole rather than a spring, but there's enough left once you've drunk your fill to add two portions to your **water flask**.

Once you are done here, you scramble back up the hole, recover your gear, and [head back to your boat \(turn to 32\)](#).

26.

The interior of the ruin is thick with weeds. Yellow-flowered gorse and purple heather crowd the shadows, filling the air with a heady soporific scent. You expect to see bees, flitting from flower to flower, but nothing stirs other than the restless ocean wind.

The far wall is still half-covered with plaster, and decorated with some sort of abstract design of circles and lines. You assume that it must be some sort of magical ritual, or a work of art. Looking closer you realise that there are words marked next to the various shapes. The script is old and blurred by exposure, but you might be able to translate them.

Test Linguistics (if you don't have Linguistics, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you have the **dead hermit's map**, add +2. If you pass, [turn to 68](#) now.

If you fail, you can make no sense of the old marks. [Return to 75](#).

27.

The tunnel beneath the serpent statue is so narrow that you almost have to move sideways to pass down it. Luckily, the stone walls are as slick with moisture, so that you can slide along them as if they were ice. It's a somewhat uneasy mode of passage, and you wonder what sort of creature might have worn the walls so smooth.

Soon the sunlight falling through the entrance fades away, and you are left in absolute blackness.

If you have a **torch**, another source of light (such as a *lantern*), or carry the **merrow's pearl**, you can find your way easily enough. Similarly, if you successfully cast a *View* spell, you are unaffected by the darkness. If you have none of these things you must *Test Tracking* (if you don't have Tracking, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you fail, *Lose 1 Talent* as you blunder through the stone labyrinth.

If you have the keyword *Seasnake*, [turn to 97](#) now.

Eventually you see sunlight ahead, accompanied by the roar of falling water. The passage emerges into a half-lit cavern, shaped a little like a pouring cup, with a scooped out centre and a channel leading from it to the opening where the sun shines through.

The channel is full of rushing water, as is the cupped out area. In the centre of the pool, a spike of crystal thrusts out of the ground, and in some way it appears to be the source of the water. You can't quite make out how, since your view is blocked by a giant emerald-green serpent coiled loosely around the crystal.

It looks like you can safely fill your **water flask** (to 5 portions) without disturbing the snake, but reaching the gem will require a fight.

You quickly fill your flask (set the portions to maximum, and *Restore 2 Talent*) and then consider your options:

- » [Attack the snake \(turn to 69\).](#)
- » [Go back to your boat \(turn to 20\).](#)

28.

Outside, the sun is setting. The declining rays outline the other islands with fire, so that they are all visible from where you stand despite the distance.

Night falls. The only sounds are the slow swell of the sea on the shore, and the restless cry of gulls out on the water. When you sleep, you dream that you are rocking on the waves, while a giant figure wades past, dragging a storm behind him on an anchor chain ...

When you wake, the island is still at peace. You do not return to the temple, but when you follow the path to its end you find a scatter of outbuildings, all in ruin. Amongst the sand-grass and primrose, you find rope, wood, and tools, all you need to repair your sail and mast. There's even water, dripping slowly but steadily into the basin of a mossy shrine.

It's time to go home.

[Turn to 100.](#)

29.

You trudge along the tideline, fans of pale sand spilling softly under each footstep. The cliff face screening off the central island glitters in the sunlight, filled with flecks of mica. Lush green ferns trail loosely from the clifftop, safely out of reach unless you wish to climb the rocks.

Test Search (if you don't have Search, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you fail, you become exhausted. You must *drink a portion of water*. If you cannot, or choose not to do so, *Lose 1 Talent*.

After some time, you come to a place where a figure is carved directly into the rock face — not a person, but a rearing serpent with a flaring hood and hollow eyes. The serpent's stone coils frame a narrow doorway that appears to lead directly into the cliff. It's the only opening you've seen other than the crack the river was issuing from.

You have a choice:

- » To enter the doorway, [turn to 27](#).
- » To climb the cliff face, [turn to 86](#).
- » To return to the river and head up it, [turn to 92](#).
- » If you prefer to put back out to sea, [turn to 20](#).

30.

Beyond the shoals, is calm water, deep and rolling. Sunlight sparkles from the wave crests, highlighting the places where currents mix. The shoals lie to the east, blocking the way to the other islands, and you have no desire to risk them a second time.

Standing up on the thwarts, with the mast to steady you and a hand to shade your eyes, you spy two more islands. One to the north, one to the south. The northern island is hard to make out, partially hidden by a bank of mist, but it definitely has a reddish tinge to it. The southern is clearer, but also more distant, so its bluish silhouette gives away few details.

You turn the boat towards one of the distant islands and pull the sail tight as you pick up speed. Surely Keros must be close.

- » To head for the northern island, [turn to 31](#).
- » To head for the southern island, [turn to 51](#).

31.

Beyond the narrow harbour, the island is all bare red rock and sea mist, which clings to the wet stones like the lingering trace of winter breath. The sun, which has beat down on you mercilessly since you left Marinth, is shrouded here. You suspect the touch of some ancient magical protection.

If you have the keyword *Salinity*, [turn to 73](#) now.

A collection of low buildings, single-story constructions with whitewashed walls and steeply pitched rooftops, clusters at the centre of the island, while a single larger building with a domed roof perches on a low hill, where the mist is thickest.

- » [Investigate the buildings \(turn to 39\)](#).
- » [Investigate the domed structure \(turn to 78\)](#).
- » [Return to the harbour and your boat \(turn to 46\)](#).

32.

You return to your boat.

If you have a **stout stick** and some **rope**, and have not yet fixed the sail on your boat, you can do it now, lashing the stick and rope to the broken mast. If you do, gain the keyword *Sail* and remove the stick and rope from your inventory.

When you are done with your boat work, if any, you row back down the channel and set off.

- » To head to the central island, [turn to 49](#)
- » If you have the keyword *Shore* and feel you are ready to chart a different course [turn to 72](#)

Alternatively, if you have the keyword *Sail* and at least four portions of water in your flask, you could set sail for Marinth — if you think you have found what you came for — and [leave these cursed isles behind \(turn to 100\)](#).

33.

You don't really know how to row, but you settle down with your back to the bow the way you saw Cato do it in Marinth harbour. It's slow progress, and you can't really see where you are going, but the constant calling of the gulls guides you towards a spot in the open sea where dozens of them have gathered, circling, diving, bobbing on the waves.

In the middle of the ring of birds, the water seems to drop away, like a sink emptying into a plughole. The sides of the whirlpool glitter and flash with tiny fish, so thick that the gulls seem to be able to pluck them straight from the water while still on the wing.

If you have the *Naturalist* skill, [turn to 82](#) now.

Otherwise, you can either [row on \(turn to 18\)](#), [try to catch a gull \(turn to 35\)](#), or, if you feel sufficiently desperate, [throw yourself over the side into the whirlpool \(turn to 15\)](#).

34

If you guessed that the treasure was hidden beneath the altar, [turn to 79](#) now. If not, read on.

You see at once by the expression on the ghost's face that you have guessed wrong.

"How sad, no more than another thief. Once more, I must endure."

You cannot fight this guardian spirit, your only chance is to persuade him that, even though you guessed wrong, you are still to be trusted with the treasure.

Test Diplomacy (if you don't have Diplomacy, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you have the **dead hermit's amulet** you can add +2 — the sight of Atros's anchor around your neck helps to persuade the spirit that you are of the faithful. If you fail, you have lost your chance at the treasure of Keros. You must take whatever else you have recovered and leave — [turn to 28](#) now.

If you pass, Morganthos seems persuaded. He turns away from you towards the altar, and you realise that the treasure must be hidden there. [Turn to 79](#).

35

You decide to try and catch one of the gulls. It would be a little meat, and a little fluid too — if you can bring yourself to drink its blood — but it's no easy task. Your boat wallows in the water, and it's hard enough to keep it from being sucked into the whirlpool, never mind catch up with a seagull. Still, you are desperate!

Test naturalist at -3 (if you don't have naturalist, *Test your Talent at -5*). If you have a **net** (from a previous adventure) add +2. If you pass, you manage to catch one of the gulls! Gain a **ration** and *Restore 1 Talent*. If you *fumble* the roll, then you are so soaked in the hunting attempt that you *Lose 1 Talent* instead.

By the time your hunt is done, the swirling fish have scattered, the whirlpool has slackened away, and the gulls take to the wing, wheeling off in the direction of a vague shadow on the distant sea.

You decide to [follow \(turn to 18\)](#).

36.



If the checkbox above is ticked, you have already investigated the well. Skip to the end of this section and choose another option. Otherwise, check the box, and read on.

You rush to the well. A sun-bleached bucket lies on its side amongst the salt-grass, a frayed coil of rope still knotted to the handle.

You drop the bucket down the shaft until you hear a splash and then haul it back up, hand over hand. It's hard work, but you can already imagine the cool clear taste ...

At last the bucket comes up, sloshing water and you eagerly cup your hands and slurp it up — before spitting it out in disgust!

Salt! The water is salt!

You try to clear the salt taste, but your mouth is too dry, your lips already split and parched. You are desperate to take a gulp of water from your flask. You must *drink a portion of water*. If you can't, or choose not to do so, *Lose 1 Talent*.

You look around in disgust. Is everything here tainted?

You can take the **rope** (heavy, +1 climbing) if you wish. Then:

- To investigate the ruins [turn to 75](#)
- To trudge inland towards the immense tree [turn to 65](#)
- To give up and return to the Solstice [turn to 32](#)

37.

Your leap carries you clear through the gap, and onto the soft black sand beyond. The ground slides and slips beneath your feet, but you keep your balance, and scramble clear before the leading edge of the wall sweeps up and seals your way out beyond a roaring curtain of flame.

[Turn to 52](#)

38.

You almost don't dare open your mouth, in case you drown, but you take the risk.

"A gift"

The merrow smiles, revealing needle-sharp teeth. "So be it."

One of the drifting attendants hands her a bundle wrapped in seaweed. She picks it apart with her long scaly fingers, revealing a gently glowing yellow pearl the size of a plumb. You catch it quickly in your cupped hands as she lets it free.

"The light of this pearl may guide you, if you take it to right place, but be careful, it will only aid you once."

You tuck the **merrow's pearl** carefully into an inner pocket.

"Thank you!"

The merrow inclines her head, but she is already retreating into the darkness of the ocean, her attendants vanishing into the depths with a lazy flick of their tails.

"Wait!" you cry out, "how will I get back to the surface!"

As if in answer, the bubble bursts, and you find yourself catapulted up into the shock of pressure and freezing water. *Test Swimming* (if you don't have *Swimming*, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you fail, *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you drown within sight of the surface — [turn to 70](#) now.

Otherwise, you surge upwards before bursting into the air a few yards from your drifting boat. You clamber over the side, lying in the sloshing keel until you can regain your breath. When you are recovered, you clamber painfully to the oars and [move on \(turn to 18\)](#).

39.

You trudge across the slick red rocks towards the buildings at the centre of the island. Mist swirls around you with every step, rendering the whole world pale and uncertain. You can hear the crashing of the waves on the distant shore, but you can't see them.

Shapes loom out of the grey. You took them for houses when you saw them from the shore, but now, with a chill, you realise that they are tombs! Walls of drystone, roughly whitewashed, crouch beneath steeply canted rooftops of mist-slick slate. The tombs have no doors, just gaping openings like the blank eye sockets of skulls. Everything is silent. Nothing moves but the mist; no birds sing.

You have a bad feeling about this place.

- » To return to the shore, [turn to 45](#).
- » To look inside the tombs, [turn to 64](#).
- » To make your way up to the larger structure, [turn to 78](#).
- » If you have, and successfully cast, the *View* spell, [turn to 54](#).

40.

You plunge straight into the tree line, staying low and slow so that whatever is in there doesn't sense you.

The bare thorn branches of the trees prove to be as fragile as charcoal sticks. They collapse into ash as you brush against them, staining your skin and hair as black as coal. There are no leaves left on these trees, but they block out the sun in a haze of drifting dust.

You hear a snuffling through the trees, and stop still. You spot a shape moving beyond the charred trunks, a monstrous boar, black and red and as large as a horse. A cloud of smoke drifts after it as it roots through the dirt, and dull flashes of flame snort from its questing muzzle.

You have no desire to see it any closer, but it's coming your way!

Test Stealth (if you don't have *Stealth*, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you pass, you slip quietly away from the beast until you reach a [small trail \(turn to 6\)](#).

If you fail, the monster senses you, head up, and moves towards you. You can [run for the shore \(turn to 22\)](#), or [ambush it \(turn to 23\)](#).

41.

You draw close to the northernmost island, half standing in the boat to get a better view.

The shore here is steep and rocky, rising sharply up from the restless waves, which foam and churn against the boulders. You can see wiry grass, short and wind-blown, overhanging the edge, and what appears to be a single massive tree crowning the island, tall enough that you are looking *up* at its canopy even while still out to sea!

Landing looks like it might be risky. You will have to drive straight for a narrow channel and hope not to smash the boat on the rocks. But this could be Keros, the island you came to seek, and if it is, perhaps it will offer you a way home, as well as treasure.

- » To attempt to make the shore [turn to 88](#).
- » To head to the central island instead [turn to 49](#).
- » If you have the keyword *Shore* and wish to chart a different course [turn to 72](#).

Alternatively, if you have the keyword *Sail* and at least four portions of water in your flask, you could set sail for Marinth — if you think you have found what you came for — and [leave these cursed isles behind \(turn to 100\)](#).

42.

If you have the keyword *Solar*, there is nothing to find outside the tower but the ash path back to the shore. [Turn to 93](#) now. Otherwise, read on.

As you step out of the tower, you are brought up short by the sight of an enormous boar barely three yards away down the path. Its skin is as black as the charcoal trees, with eyes and bristles as red as fire. When it paws the ground it throws up clouds of ash, and when it snorts, flames blow from its nostrils.

The fiery boar lowers its head and prepares to charge you, there's no choice but to fight!

Fight three rounds at -4. Fireball is ineffective in this fight. If you are carrying the **blackened shield** you gain +2. If you have a *long weapon* (such as a spear) you gain +1.

If you survive the fight, [turn to 56](#). If not, you are trampled beneath the boar's feet and gored by its claws, before it starts to chew ... [turn to 70](#) now.

43

There's no easy way to climb the snake statue. The coils of stone are slick with moss and back-spray, and the gaping jaws from which the water pours jut out well over the pool. Going up is a fool's errand, and likely to get you killed.

If you prefer not to try you can [head back to your boat \(turn to 20\)](#).

To attempt the climb, *Test climbing at -2* (if you don't have climbing, *Test your Talent at -4*) twice. If you fail, you fall from the stone into the pool below — *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you hit the rocks — [turn to 70](#) now. If not, you land in the water instead, and can choose whether to repeat the attempt, or give up.

If you succeed, you splash through the rushing water, and emerge into a half-lit cavern, shaped a little like a pouring cup, with a scooped out centre and a channel leading from it to the opening where the sun shines through.

The channel is full of rushing water, as is the cupped out area. In the centre of the pool, a spike of crystal thrusts out of the ground, and in some way it appears to be the source of the water. You can't quite make out how, since your view is blocked by a giant emerald-green serpent coiled loosely around the crystal. There is no way to reach the crystal without disturbing the snake, but you can dive down to the pool and return to the shore easily enough.

- » [Attack the snake \(turn to 69\)](#).
- » [Go back to your boat \(turn to 20\)](#).

44

Thirst overcomes you. You fall to your knees amongst the trickling water and gulp it down, spilling sand and water everywhere.

For a moment, you feel blessedly refreshed.

It doesn't last. Soon your stomach clenches, your heart pounds, and your mouth gets bone dry. You drank, but it only made your thirst worse!

Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour. You must *drink a portion of water* (real fresh water from your flask) or take a second wound! If either wound reduces you to zero Vitality you perish, poisoned by the salt water — [turn to 70](#) now.

If you survive, [return to 10](#) and pick another option.

45.

You decide to listen to your bad feeling, and head back to the shore. Picking your way back through the ever-thickening mist.

You've made it about halfway, when you become aware of movement in the mist at your back. For a moment you think it's only your own shadow, cast back into the fog by the unseen sun, but then you make out pale figures, more than one of them, scuttling in pursuit like pallid spiders with broken limbs.

Whatever they are, you feel sure you don't want them to catch you!

- » If you want to hide, and slip away, [turn to 83](#).
- » If you want to run, [turn to 77](#).
- » If you have, and successfully cast, *Fly* or *Teleport*, you make it straight to the shore, [turn to 17](#).

46.

You hurry back to the desolate harbour, and turn the Solstice back to sea.

If you have a **stout stick** and some **rope**, and have not yet fixed the sail on your boat, you can do it now, lashing the stick and rope to the broken mast. If you do, gain the keyword *Sail* and remove the stick and rope from your inventory.

When you are done with your boat work, if any, you row quickly out of the harbour and set off. There's only one place to go, the [other island to the east of the deadly shoals \(turn to 16\)](#).

Alternatively, if you have the keyword *Sail* and at least four portions of water in your flask, you could set sail for Marinth — if you think you have found what you came for — and [leave these cursed isles behind \(turn to 100\)](#).

47.

You return to the Solstice and line it up as best you can with the central island, pointing the bow at the faint flicker of light.

You put your hands to the oars and row, dreaming of the welcome that awaits you. Light means people, hearths, campfires, lanterns, candles. Fresh food, not rations near-spoilt by salt. Clean water! A change of clothes would be most welcome too.

Hope only goes so far.

Soon your muscles start to ache, your hands rub raw on the oars, your throat grows raw with the effort. You badly want a mouthful of water, but your flask is less than half full.

You must *drink a portion of water*. If you cannot, or choose not to do so, *Lose 1 Talent*.

Eventually the island [draws closer \(turn to 76\)](#).

48.

Gain the keyword *Sea*

When the squalls finally blow themselves out, you find yourself, bruised, battered, but alive, drifting near the shore of a low-lying island dotted with single-story structures. You can see dark rooftops of steeply-sloping slate, and pale splashes of whitewash in the washed-out light. The stones of the island are red.

A little way along the shore are the remains of a small harbour, a narrow inlet with a stone jetty running along one side. It looks like your luck is still with you.

You decide to land.

[Turn to 31](#).

49.

If you have the keyword *Sail*, this is an easy crossing, [Turn to 7](#) now. Otherwise, read on.

Another gulf of open ocean yawns before you, restless and deep. Rolling waves slap constantly against the side of the boat, turning you ever off-course, so that you have to work twice as hard to keep the bow pointed true.

Once, when you turn around to check your course, you see black eyes watching you from the grey water — a seal, poking up its head as you approach. Soon there are more seals, diving and breaching and twisting on each side of you, ever out of reach. You wish you could hunt them, for meat and moisture, but they faster and more nimble than you.

You must *drink a portion of water*. If you cannot, or choose not to do so, *Take one Wound, ignoring armour*. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you perish of thirst while still surrounded by water. Listless and addled, you allow the Solstice to drift, till the deep currents of the Circle Sea pull you into their spiralling gyre, there to drift through the seasons till the little boat finally slips beneath the waves — [turn to 70](#) now.

- » To land on the northern island, [turn to 41](#).
- » To land on the central island, [turn to 76](#).

50.

You return to the Solstice and line it up as best you can with the northern island, then put your back to the prow and haul out.

It seems easy going at first. Your mind conjures pictures of what might await at your destination. You saw green, and that means plants, trees, shade, water — a bigger island than the little rock you set out from. Surely that means it must be Keros, you'll find water *and* treasure, and from there the course back to Marinth will surely be clear.

Daydreaming only goes so far.

Soon your muscles start to ache, your hands rub raw on the oars, your throat grows raw with the effort. You badly want a mouthful of water, but your flask is less than half full.

You must *drink a portion of water*. If you cannot, or choose not to do so, *Lose 1 Talent*.

Eventually the island [draws closer \(turn to 41\)](#).

51.

As you draw close to the southern island, your heart lifts. You can see gently a sloping beach, a green fuzz of trees, lush grass, and upstanding walls. It looks *settled*, welcoming.

You draw the Solstice up onto the beach and climb out. An overgrown path, sprinkled with white daisies, winds into a thick tangle of buckthorn bushes, which arch overhead to form a gloomy tunnel. You enter cautiously, appreciating the sudden chill as a respite from the endless ocean sun. The thick spines creak and squeak in the breeze, rubbing against each other like the legs of restless crickets. The noise sets your teeth on edge, expecting an ambush at any moment, but you pass safely through the tunnel and out the other side.

Now you are amongst proper trees, on a grassy trail that winds across the island towards the structure you saw from the sea. A little way along, a stone pillar leans against the trunk of a tree. An anchor and a ring of thunderbolts are carved into its mossy side. You recognise the emblem of Atros, the god of storms. Atros perished in the wizard's war, that much is well known, but you are pretty sure these ruins predate that catastrophe.

Soon the building itself comes into view, and as you were starting to suspect, it is a ruined temple, its soaring walls now overgrown and stained with lichen. There is a single tower, a broad arched doorway, and tall windows that probably once held stained glass. Now the tower is broken, the arch is doorless, and the windows are broken. It is a sad remnant of the past.

The trail continues into the depths of the wood, but you are convinced that your goal lies inside.

[Turn to 24.](#)

52.

You are standing on a beach of black sand, that slopes up gently towards a wall of dark trees. Looking closer you see that the trees themselves are burnt, and that the sand is ash, blown every which way by the circling flames.

Heat beats at you, you can't stay here.

You hurry to the trees, searching for some sign of the ruin you saw from the sea. It seemed clear from the water, but the charcoal boughs hide it from view. You cast about, and are brought up short by the sound of snapping branches, as if something huge is moving around deep within the trees.

You should [run now \(turn to 40\)](#), but you could delay and [search for a trail \(turn to 3\)](#), or [flee for the shore \(turn to 22\)](#).

53.

The cold of the water hits you like a hammer blow, knocking the breath from your lungs. Silver fish, knife-fast, boil from the water all around you, battering into like rain. You try to swim *down* the side of the whirlpool, like you might dive down a waterfall, but it's impossible.

Instead of swimming into the depths of the sea, you are swatted aside by the swirling water and straight into the churning shoal.

The tiny fish scatter in every direction, likely taking you for a diving seal or a breaching whale. The whirlpool collapses in a spray of foam, and you are pummelled by hungry gulls chasing the fish.

You gasp, inhaling water ...

Test Swimming at +2 (if you don't have swimming, *Test your Talent*). If you fail, *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you drown, spiralling down into the numbing depths just feet from your boat — [turn to 70](#) now.

Otherwise, you surge upwards before bursting into the air a few yards from your drifting boat. You clamber over the side, lying in the sloshing keel until you can regain your breath. When you are recovered, you clamber painfully to the oars and [move on \(turn to 18\)](#).

54.

You invoke the spell's magic, and allow your senses to expand around you, even as your normal vision fades.

Your awareness brushes across the lines of tombs, touching on crumbling walls and time-holed rooves. In all of the expanse you sense no life, not a gull, or even a blade of grass.

Slowly something else impinges on your expanded consciousness — *hatred*, burning knots of hatred, dozens of them, hundreds of them, lurking in the nooks and crevices of the tombs. Baleful presences just waiting for you to come close enough to devour!

You have to get out now!

You scramble away from the tombs, heading back to the shore. Behind you, pale shapes emerge from the tombs, their limbs crooked and loose, like corpses exhumed from the depths of the sea, but you have a clear head start on them. Even when your bare feet slip and slide on the slick rock, you stay well ahead of the awkward forms.

Abruptly sunlight returns, as you burst from the embrace of the fog and out on the dock. To your immense relief, the Solstice is where you left her, and you waste no time in casting off and putting back to sea.

The creatures do not pursue.

[Turn to 16](#)

55.

Gain the keywords *Shore* and *Sea*

You unwrap the merrow's pearl and hold it up to the sunlight over the tower. The stone seems to drink in the light, growing blindingly bright in your hand. Then the light lances out like the beam of a bullseye lantern, sweeping across the distant shoals. The light traces a path, a safe route through the reefs that you commit hastily to memory.

The light fades, and the pearl loses its lustre, crumbling in your grip as if it has turned to chalk. (Remove the **merrow's pearl** from your inventory).

There's clearly nothing more to do here than [head down and out of the tower \(turn to 42\)](#).

56.

Gain the keyword *Solar*

Somehow, the boar lies dead at your feet, its coal-black hide pinging and cracking as it cools. As the fire within its heart flickers out, so does the flaming wall that surrounds the island. The wall of fire wavers, and becomes a wall of sparks, that drift slowly out to sea before vanishing into the water.

With the flames gone, you see the faithful shadow of the Solstice bobbing just off the shore. You are free to leave.

Before going, you help yourself to the **fire boar's tusks**, wondering if these might be the treasure you came to sea in search of.

You may *Rest*, *Restore 2 Talent*, and *Gain 1 Experience* (because you have gained experience, you may also *Regain 1 Fortune*). If eat a **ration** you may also *Heal 1 Vitality*. If you drink a portion of water you may *Restore 2 additional Talent*.

You decide that you should probably [return to your boat \(turn to 93\)](#) before the flames rekindle themselves, but still ... if you have not been to the ruins you could still [check them \(turn to 6\)](#).

57.

You draw your boat up to the island of the serpent once more. It's easy enough to return to the shore and scoop *two portions of water* from the stream, but there is nothing more to do here.

- » To head for the central island, [turn to 62](#).
- » If you have the keyword *Shore* and wish to chart a different course [turn to 72](#).

Alternatively, if you have the keyword *Sail* and at least four portions of water in your flask, you could set sail for Marinth — if you think you have found what you came for — and [leave these cursed isles behind \(turn to 100\)](#).

58.

A dozen tombs line the nave of the temple, six on each side. The stone sarcophagi are raised on plinths, and each bears the carved effigy of a reclining priest, eyes closed and hands clasped around the decorative anchors that lie flat on their chests. They are so arranged that the stone faces of the priests are level with your chest, so that you are naturally inclined to bow your own head to look upon them.

A dozen stone coffins offer ample room to hide a treasure, even a very large one, but you suspect the ghost would want you to be more specific. Looking from tomb to tomb you note that the sides of many show scratches, as if their heavy lids had been heaved off and then shoved back on.

If you have the keyword *Salt*, you recall another place where you saw twelve priests, which might explain the scratches and tell you whether the treasure is here or not.

If you have the **dead hermit's map**, you can [check it now \(turn to 66\)](#).

There are names on the tombs. Most mean nothing to you, but one catches your eye: Morganthos, the same name given by the ghost. Of course, perhaps there have been many Morganthoses over the years, but if this is the grave of the high priest himself, then what better place for the treasure to be hidden?

- » If you are ready to guess the location, [turn to 13](#).
- » To examine the window instead, [turn to 74](#).
- » To examine the altar, [turn to 90](#).
- » To examine the hanging anchor, [turn to 95](#).

59.

You almost make it, landing heavily on the black sand of the shore, but as you try to struggle to your feet, the leading edge of the fire clips your leg, searing you with agony.

Take 1 Wound. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you are consumed by the flames, burning up only feet from the water — [turn to 70](#) now.

Otherwise, you crawl to your feet and [look around \(turn to 52\)](#).

60.

Blue, all you can see is blue.

A white dot drifts past. Knife-point wings cut the wind, turning and turning in a widening gyre, and you realise that you are lying on your back, staring upwards into the arch of the ocean sky. It's actually quite relaxing: the sighing wing, the circling gulls, the water lapping gently at your cheek ...

Wait, water?!

You jerk upright, and see that the boat is half full of water. There's no sign of Cato, no sign of land, but at least you still have the **leather bucket**.

You grab the bucket and bail for your life. Luckily the sea is calm, and without a constant influx of new water, you manage to get the level down to something that doesn't look like the Solstice is just about to sink — though you are *not a sailor!*

You sink back onto one of the boards that run across the ship and take stock. Your pack was wedged safely in the locker at the front of the boat (*the bows?*), so your gear is soaked but otherwise intact, but you have very little water. It's not enough to get you home, and even if you knew which way led to land, the mast is cracked. If you raise the sail it will surely snap.

It's hopeless. You are doomed.

You despair ...

You have a **water flask** containing two portions of fresh water. When instructed to drink water, reduce the amount of water in the flask by one portion. You can choose not to drink, but will suffer a consequence — sometimes it will be better to save water for later.

A raucous cry rouses you from your misery. The gull you saw before swoops low over your head, skimming the water with its wingtips, before flapping its way into the distance. Following its flight, you see a circling cloud of gulls off in the distance, and some way to the right, a shadow on the green horizon that might be an island.

You check the rudder and the oars. It will be a struggle to set a course, but you think you could make it to one place or the other, the question is, which?

- » [Set course for the gulls \(turn to 33\).](#)
- » [Set course for the shadow \(turn to 84\).](#)

61.

Something strikes you about the plant life, it's all salt-tolerant: marram grass and sea-orchids, yellow wizard's eye and spiky iceflower. These aren't plants that grow where there is fresh water, which means the well is probably brackish at best.

In fact, the only plant around here that looks like it's growing on fresh water is the tree itself.

- » [Investigate the largest ruin \(turn to 26\).](#)
- » [Head to the well for water \(turn to 36\).](#)
- » [Follow the road \(turn to 65\).](#)
- » [Give up and return to the Solstice \(turn to 32\).](#)

62.

If you have the keyword *Sail*, this is an easy crossing, [Turn to 21](#) now. Otherwise, read on.

You put the Solstice back out to sea, heading into the gulf between the central and southern islands. The sea here is dotted with outcrops, but the black stones are far apart, easy to avoid, and so wave-washed that there's nothing to gain by getting close.

You must *drink a portion of water*. If you cannot, or choose not to do so, *Take one Wound, ignoring armour*. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you perish of thirst while still surrounded by water. Listless and addled, you allow the Solstice to drift, till the deep currents of the Circle Sea pull you into their spiralling gyre, there to drift through the seasons till the little boat finally slips beneath the waves — [turn to 70](#) now.

The distant splash of water catches your attention. Black cormorants are diving into the water, emerging with the silver flash of small fish in their beaks. Other birds dry their wings on rock perches, holding them out like crooked flags so that the sun catches them.

If you want to try your hand at catching your own fish, [turn to 2](#) now. If not, you hold your course till land comes into view.

- » To land on the central island, [turn to 76](#)
- » To land on the southern island, [turn to 10](#)

63.

Baleful yellow eyes flick open, and the toad powers forward on its stubby legs, trying its best to swallow you! *Fight one round at -1*. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, the toad swallows you up in a single gulp, squeezing you to death as you are pulled into its gullet — [turn to 70](#) now.

One the toad is driven off you scoop as much of the water into your flask as you can (gain two portions of water) and then drag the stone to the surface to examine.

It is a heavy tablet, carved from some sort of marbled greenish stone. Runes are marked into its surface, but you can't tell if they are the elements of some spell or a message left by some long-dead priest. Is this the treasure of Keros? It could be, but you can't tell for sure. Either way, you can add the **greenstone tablet** (heavy) to your inventory.

You may *Rest*, and *Gain 1 Experience* (because you have gained experience, you may also *Regain 1 Fortune*). If eat a **ration** you may also *Heal 1 Vitality*, and if you also drink a portion of water you may *Restore 2 Talent*.

When you are done, you gather your belongings and [return to the shore \(turn to 32\)](#).

64.

You duck into the windowless interior of one of the tombs. There are no coffins within, only tumbled heaps of stones that might mark the location of graves. Picking through the rubble you find a coil of **rope** (+1 climbing, heavy), a rusted **knife** (a *one-handed* weapon), and a burnt out **torch**, all three items strike you as more rubbish than grave goods. You are still trying to work out if the stones might have been piled up like this intentionally, when a sound makes you turn.

A figure is standing in the doorway!

Pale and naked, like a corpse dragged from the depth of the ocean, it sags in the doorway, loose-limbed, like a puppet with its strings cut, before springing suddenly to life. It bursts into the tomb, snapping at you with its blind head.

Fight one round at -1. If you are wearing heavy armour you can add +1, as the pale man's teeth skitter bluntly from the plates. If you lose, the creature drags you to the back of the tomb and slowly piles rocks over your body — just another corpse on an island of corpses — [turn to 70](#) now.

If you win, you burst out of the tomb just in time to see a dozen more pallid forms emerge from their tombs, casting their heads to catch your scent.

[Turn to 77](#).

65.

You make your way inland, which means crossing lines of sand dunes thick with spiny marram grass. Here and there the salt-white corpses of desiccated fish, cast up by storm waves, lie half-buried in the sandy soil.

Test Tracking at +1 (if you don't have Tracking, Test your Talent at -1). If you fail, *Take 1 Wound*, as the sharp grass slashes and lacerates your bare feet and arms.

Soon you are beneath the trees spreading branches. The shadows are cool, and the ground is covered in a soft blanket of fallen leaves and moss. It makes a pleasant change from sharp grass and gritty sand.

The tree trunk, when you finally reach it, must be twenty feet across, if it isn't more. Old sagging ropes are lopped around it, tied with knotted hanks of coloured cloth. You clasp your hands, honouring whatever spirit the ropes were left for, then take a closer look. There are traces of tar between the fibres of the rope, so it probably came from a ship. Is this the marker for the treasure of Keros? It might be.

You look around for some sort of structure, a wizard's tower, a dungeon redoubt concealed beneath the shaded soil, or a concealed dimension beyond a magical gate — there's no sign of anything except fallen branches, though you can take a **stout stick** to use as a weapon if you wish.

The only thing you find is a low, narrow hole, angling in between two of the trees enormous bucked roots. It looks like some sort of animal den. You could get inside if you stripped off your armour, but even then it would be a tight squeeze.

If you want to crawl into the hole, remove any armour or shield you are carrying — they will remain here until you return — and [turn to 25](#).

The only other option is to [return to the shore \(turn to 32\)](#).

66.

Under the Stone, that's what the dead hermit's map said, the smeared text surely relating to this island.

It must mean, under the *altar*! Or ... it could mean under the *tombs* — they are stone too, and a more plausible hiding place than the altar stone. Either way, you are sure it's a clue to the location of the treasure.

- » [Examine the altar \(turn to 90\)](#).
- » [Take a closer look at the sarcophagi \(turn to 58\)](#).

67.

A sudden memory — a wizened old man who rode a hay cart with you on the high road west of Treysham. He told you a story passed down from his father's father. His ancestor saved a wizard before the war, and was taught a counter-charm in return. What were the words? *anal nathrak, uthvas bethud ...*

You try to speak, but your lips won't move! You are already on the steps into the pit ...

Test your Talent or spend one *Fortune*. If you fail, the words draw you in — [turn to 14](#) now. If you succeed you force out the words and the mind-shackles break.

You stagger back from the whirling pillar of mist. The cloud is full of screaming faces that lunge and snap at you, but you are away up the steps and out of the door before they can catch you.

Stay ... the whispers hiss, Join us ...

You burst out of the rotting doors to find the mausoleum surrounded by pale men emerging from the fog. They are loose-limbed and bone-white, as if they have just been left behind by the tide. They turn towards you together, like puppets on strings.

[Turn to 77](#)

68.

Gain the keyword *Shore*

You trace the words with your finger, running it over the old plaster. The script is antique, but you remember it from your the village shrine, the names of the little gods were marked out in the same spidery letters.

The words are names, and the shapes are islands, rocks, currents, winds. It's a sailor's map. You pick out the island where you are standing, the northernmost of five. It's labelled *Gisheren* — Cedarwood Island.

You check the others. The central island is labelled "Fire", the southern "Serpent". Two more islands lie to the east, beyond an area of shoals. The label here is "Keros", but you can't tell which of the two islands it is supposed to apply too, the north or the south.

If you have the **merrow's pearl** and wish to expose it to the light here, [turn to 80](#). Otherwise you [head back into the ruins \(turn to 75\)](#).

69.

You wade into the attack. *Fight 3 rounds*. Each failed round inflicts two wounds instead of one due to the serpent's venom (unless you are immune to poison). If you have a shield, or a long weapon, add +1. If you lose, the snake swallows your body and coils back around the stone — [turn to 70](#) now.

If you defeat the serpent, gain the keyword *Seasnake*.

You clamber over the serpent's corpse and wade into the pool to take a closer look at the crystal. You see that the water appears to well from the base of the crystal. If you were to break it off, maybe the water would slow to a trickle and you could take it with you — or maybe it would simply flood you right out of the cave. Maybe this is the treasure of Keros, or maybe not.

Test Occult or Larceny, your choice. If you have neither, *Test your Talent at -2*. If you fail, you can't manage to safely recover the crystal, and have to [return to the Solstice instead \(turn to 20\)](#).

If you succeed, you conceive of a way to remove the crystal from its plinth without instantly drowning yourself. You may add the **water crystal** (heavy) to your inventory. The next two times you need to drink water, you can sup from the crystal instead of your flask.

You may *Rest*. *Gain 1 Experience* (because you have gained experience, you may also *Regain 1 Fortune*). If eat a **ration** you may also *Heal 1 Vitality*.

When you are done, you [return to your boat \(turn to 20\)](#).

70.

If you have the **merrow's pearl** or the **hermit's locket** [turn to 87](#) now.

Alternatively, if you have some means of resurrection from another game, follow those instructions now. Otherwise, read on.

You have perished in the depths of the Circle Sea, unremembered. Your spirit doomed to drift in the endless circling currents.

THE GAME ENDS HERE

71.

You dive off the fern-shrouded clifftop, down into the foaming pool, hitting the water in a clean fountain of spray.

Immediately the current snatches at you, threatening to drag you down. *Test Swimming* (if you don't have Swimming, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you fail, *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you are drowned in the depths of the churning pool, unable to reach the surface — [turn to 70](#) now.

You struggle to the side of the pool, soaked and exhausted, but there is no time to rest. No sooner have you reached land, than you hear an even more massive splash behind you! You turn just in time to see an enormous green serpent drop from the statue's mouth, and ride the waterfall down into the pool.

You scramble out, grabbing for your weapons just in time to defend yourself as the snake bursts out of the water to attack you.

Fight 3 rounds. Each failed round inflicts two wounds instead of one due to the serpent's venom (unless you are immune to poison). If you have a shield, or a long weapon, add +1. If you lose, the snake swallows your body and returns to its lair — [turn to 70](#) now.

If you defeat the serpent, gain the keyword *Seasnake*.

Panting with the relief of victory you stumble back to the pool and finally slake your thirst. There's enough water to fill your **water flask** entirely. *Restore 2 Talent*.

Looking up, you wonder about the hole the snake came out of. Getting in there would be a big risk, but maybe the creature was the guardian of Keros?

- » If you want to attempt the climb, [turn to 5](#)
- » If you want to return to the Solstice, [turn to 20](#)

72.

You steer the Solstice east, leaving the three islands behind.

Dark clouds roll up from the south, and you fear that another storm might be about to do the same to you as it did to Cato, but it is only a series of squalls — more than enough to soak you to the skin as they burst, one after another, over your head.

You grab the **leather bucket** and try to catch the rain. *Test your Talent*. If you pass, you manage to get enough water to add one portion to your **water flask**

The crash of waves cuts through the rain. Looking ahead, you see the flash and roll of whitecaps breaking, and realise that you are in the middle of a vast expanse of shoals, all ready to dash the bottom out of the boat and sink you to the depths.

If you have the keyword *Sea*, then you follow the route that you already charted, though it's difficult going. [Turn to 16](#) now.

Waves crash, spray fountains into the air, crashing into the rain before scattering across the water. The boat lurches on the heaving sea, scraping alarmingly against the rocks, and it's all you can do to cling to the rudder.

Test your Talent at -2. If you fail, *Take 1 Wound*. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you are flung from the boat into the ocean, dashes against the blood-dark stones, and drowned into the sea — [turn to 70](#) now.

If you survive, you manage to hang on through the rain and the surging sea until you run the gauntlet of the shoals and [emerge into open water \(turn to 48\)](#).

73.

You recognise the red stones and cold waters of this island as the place of the merrow's warning, the place of the pale men. It might be wise to [leave now \(turn to 46\)](#).

Then again, the merrow could not tell you that this was not Keros. Perhaps the pale men, whatever they are, guard the treasure that you left Marinth to seek? If you want to find out, [return to 31](#) and choose an option there.

74.

The stained glass window lies at the very back of the apse, a tall window set into the intact back wall of the temple, a little way beyond the altar. If you have the keyword *Somnolence*, you have seen this window in a dream.

Deep red panes frame the figure of a bearded giant carrying an anchor on a chain. Blue lightning bolts descend from grey clouds depicted across the top, while white-capped waves rise as high as the giant's knees. A little boat rides the wave crests. When you look closely you see that the boat appears to be carrying a golden chest ...

You assume that the giant is Atros, the temple's dead god. The window is stylised, and yet somehow extraordinarily lifelike. You can almost see the waves moves, the lightning flash, and the anchor swing.

You suspect that magic is at work. After all, this window is intact while all the others are just empty frames. You've heard stories of treasure being hidden in enchanted paintings, why not in an enchanted window?

- » If you are ready to guess the location, [turn to 13](#).
- » To examine the altar instead, [turn to 90](#).
- » To examine the sarcophagi, [turn to 58](#).
- » To examine the hanging anchor, [turn to 95](#).

75.

You pick your way cautiously amongst the ruins. Sand-drifts cover the old stones, saltgrass tufts nodding in the breeze. The shadow of the enormous tree covers most of the space between the walls, marking out the remnants of buildings, and what might be some sort of avenue marked out with boulders. If it *is* a road, it appears to lead straight towards the tree.

None of the structures have rooves, let alone doors or furnishings, but one still has walls that reach higher than your head, and an arch where a door might once have been.

Test Naturalist (if you don't have *Naturalist*, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you pass, [turn to 61](#) now.

- » [Investigate the largest ruin \(turn to 26\)](#).
- » [Head to the well for water \(turn to 36\)](#).
- » [Follow the road \(turn to 65\)](#).
- » [Give up and return to the Solstice \(turn to 32\)](#).

76.

If you have the keyword *Solar* [turn to 12](#) now.

Red light flickers on the water as you draw close to the island. You turn around on the thwarts and find yourself confronted by a wall of flame!

A literal wall of flame, leaping high all the way around the circumference of the island, like a city wall wrought from fire. You can feel the furnace heat of it on your face and arms, even with clear water still between you and the island.

Then, for a moment, the flames die back, and you can see a black shore, rising inland towards a line of dark trees, and beyond them some sort of structure. Less than a minute later, the flames sweep back across your view, and you realise that the whole wall of fire is *rotating*, spinning its way around the edge of the island so that the singular gap in it keeps in constant motion.

You might be able to make it through, if you bring the boat close and then leap just as the gap reaches you. If not, your only option will be to turn your back and row on to one of the other islands you spied before.

Is this Keros? Surely a place so magically protected must hold great treasure, and perhaps a way home?

- » To attempt to leap the flames [turn to 99](#)
- » To head to the northern island instead [turn to 49](#)
- » To head to the southern island instead [turn to 62](#)
- » If you can cast either *fly* or *teleport* and wish to use them to pass the wall [turn to 52](#)
- » If you have the keyword *Shore* and wish to chart a different course [turn to 72](#)

Alternatively, if you have the keyword *Sail* and at least four portions of water in your flask, you could set sail for Marinth — if you think you have found what you came for — and [leave these cursed isles behind \(turn to 100\)](#).

77.

You break into a run, scrambling over the fog-slick rocks, your bare feet slipping and skidding with every step. The pale men rush after you, skittering across the stones on both hands and feet, their pallid bodies as loosely jointed as puppets.

Test your Talent at -3. If you pass, you manage to outdistance the creatures, [turn to 17](#) now.

If you fail, the leading creatures close the gap. Lurching to their feet, they swipe at you with their overlong arms, and you see that they are nothing but simulacra of people, grotesque parodies strung together from unearthed bones and salt-dried flesh.

Fight two rounds at -2, shields count double. If you are wearing light or medium armour, add another +1, but if you are wearing heavy armour take an additional -1, as the weight slows you down. If you lose, the creatures drag you back to their tomb lairs, to use your body as raw parts for more of their kind — [turn to 70](#) now.

If you win, you manage to break free. [Turn to 17](#).

78.

You find a path that winds its way towards the domed building on the hill. Steps cut directly into the old red rock guide you towards a structure you can barely see, the mist is so thick, that you are certain you'd probably walk straight off a cliff if it wasn't for the path.

An archway suddenly looms out of the fog, massy and red, the blocks that make it up were clearly cut from the island's bedrock. The building's domed roof is only just visible through the mist, which seems to spiral around — is it *out of* — the corroded copper that caps the building.

There are doors in the archway, but they hang loosely on rusted hinges, the old wood bleached white by sun and wind, your only indication that the fog bank here isn't a permanent feature. A dark corridor yawns beyond them. You check as best you can to either side, but there appears to be no other entrance and nothing else to see on the hill.

Even so, you hesitate on the doorstep, struck by a premonition of danger.

- » [Enter the structure \(turn to 91\).](#)
- » [Head for the buildings in the middle of the island instead \(turn to 39\).](#)
- » [Return to the shore \(turn to 46\).](#)

79.

"The treasure is under the altar," you say, "most sacred to Atros."

Morganthos replies, "*Show me.*"

You put your shoulder to the altar stone and push with all your might, trusting that you are not just dashing yourself against a solid rock. To your relief the stone slowly starts to move, pivoting on some unseen hinge, so that it rotates to the right.

The pivoting stone reveals a shallow pit, and inside that a verdigris-stained copper box.

You kneel beside the box and ease it open. Inside is a bundle of old cloth, and inside *that* a limb-thick parchment scroll. You lift it out and unroll it, hoping to see gemstones, gold coins, or magical runes, but it is only words, written words.

"*The great treasure of Keros,*" Morganthos intones sepulchrally, "*the holy teachings of Atros, the very first copy, scribed in the prophet's hand. We took them from the high temple in Atkhara when we fled, and sacrificed everything to keep them safe. Take them now with my blessing, and return them to the faithful.*"

Morganthos' voice fades as he speaks, as does his spectral image. His long guardianship is finally done, and you don't have the heart to tell him that his god is dead, and his church no more than a clearing house for minor blessings and holy water. You take the **teachings of atros** for whatever they might be worth.

You have found the treasure of Keros, even if it isn't quite what you expected. *Gain 2 Experience and Restore your Talent and Vitality* (because you have gained experience, you may also *Regain 1 Fortune*).

[Turn to 28.](#)

80.

You carefully unwrap the yellow pearl, and hold it up to catch the light. It glows gently in the tree-shadow, like a candle flame in a dark chamber — but only for a moment. The inner light flickers, fades, and goes out. The pearl loses its lustre, crumbling in your grip as if it has turned to chalk. (Remove the **merrow's pearl** from your inventory).

There is nothing more to do here, so you [head back into the ruins \(turn to 75\)](#).

81.

Gain the keyword *Somnolence*

You put your back to one of the scrawny tree trunks, and allow your eyes to close, listening to the creak of the branches overhead, and the distant shrieking of the gulls. You don't intend to sleep, but at some point you slip into an uneasy dream.

Cowled figures are moving slowly through a high-vaulted hall, a line of flaring candle-flames swaying from side to side in the darkness. You are one of them. You bear something in your arms, a wrapped bundle of vital importance. Voices chant from the shadows around you, and somehow you understand that this is a religious ritual, a thing of the past times before the war. A dim window, inlaid with panes stained red and blue, appears before the column of priests, to one side, an altar of white stone. The figures circle you as you kneel to place your burden into a metal box, then close the lid. There is a moment of disorientation, and now box and treasure alike are gone, consigned to their hiding place.

You wake with the sun in your eyes. Sand flies creep along the small hairs on your bare arms. You aren't sure how long you have slept, but you are hungry and thirsty. You delve into your salt-stiff pack to see what you can eat.

You may Rest. If you also consume one **ration** you may Heal 1 Vitality. If you drink one portion of water, you may also Restore 2 Talent.

Once you have rested you can [dig for water \(turn to 96\)](#), or [head to the top of the island \(turn to 4\)](#).

82.

You've heard of this! The Ravag, otherwise known as the Merrow's Storm. You've heard stories that these fish follow the submerged caravans of merrow nobles, as gulls follow fisherman. When their shoals are disturbed they form underwater tornadoes to escape their predators, that reach all the way to the depths where the merfolk live.

There's a song, the Saga of Senharrim, you heard as a child, where the hero leaps into a whirlpool and meets a merrow queen. Perhaps the same would happen if you threw yourself in?

You can [row on \(turn to 18\)](#), [try to catch a gull \(turn to 35\)](#), or, if you feel like Senharrim, [throw yourself over the side into the whirlpool \(turn to 15\)](#).

83.

Test Stealth (if you don't have Stealth, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you fail, the creatures sniff you out, and you have no choice but to run — [turn to 77](#) now. Otherwise, read on.

You slip off the path, skittering frantically over moisture-slick ground until you come to a shallow pit scooped out of the rock.

You drop flat into the old quarry, and press your face to the stone, praying that the creatures don't know it's there.

Skittering steps draw closer and closer, and you can't help but raise your head a little, terrified of being taken entirely unaware. There! Just a few yards away! You see pale feet and hands, gripping the bare rock like the pallid holdfasts of age-bleached kelp. They squirm, loose and disjointed like no human limbs should be. Unseeing heads cast this way and that, as if swaying in an unfelt tide, but whatever senses they possess don't seem to detect you, and they move gradually away.

You wait as long as you dare, and then [sprint for the shore \(turn to 17\)](#).

84.

You don't really know how to row, but you settle down with your back to the bow the way you saw Cato do it in Marinth harbour. It's slow progress, and you can't really see where you are going, but as you glance repeatedly over your shoulder you see the dark shape resolve into a tiny islet, little more than a rock in the uneasy sea.

When you draw closer, you realise that the tiny island is inhabited! A hooded figure sits cross-legged on the bare rock, head bowed, and hands resting on its knees. A wizard? A hermit? You can't imagine anyone living in such a tiny and desolate spot, but you call out for help anyway.

"Hello! Help! I don't know where I am!"

You clumsily drop the oars into the bottom of the boat and clamber to the front as the bow rebounds from the rocks, jarring you in your seat.

The figure does not move.

"Hello?"

Still no response.

- » [Gently shake the figure by the shoulder \(turn to 89\)](#).
- » [Row on \(turn to 18\)](#).

85.

Gain the keywords *Shore* and *Salinity*

You almost don't dare open your mouth, in case you drown, but you take the risk.

"An answer."

The merrow smiles, revealing needle-sharp teeth. "Ask, then."

Your mind whirls. Do you ask for a way to escape? For a way to the treasure? Greed overcomes fear, and before you can second-guess yourself you have asked the way to Keros.

The merrow tilts her head, little fins flickering pointlessly in the air. You fear that she isn't going to answer at all, but eventually she speaks.

"This is a groundling name, given to one of the islands beyond. I know not which one, but it lies beyond the reefs and you must find a way through them if you would reach it. Search the nearer islands, I do not know a route that would be of use to you."

She beats her tail, pulling back, and you think this is all you will get, but she pauses before the water's surface closes. "Beware the island of the pale men, they are deadly. The rocks of the shore are red as blood, and the waters cold."

"Thank you!"

The merrow inclines her head, but she is already retreating into the darkness of the ocean, her attendants vanishing into the depths with a lazy flick of their tails.

"Wait!" you cry out, "how will I get back to the surface!"

As if in answer, the bubble bursts, and you find yourself catapulted up into the shock of pressure and freezing water. *Test Swimming* (if you don't have *Swimming*, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you fail, *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you drown, spiralling down to the depths to join the scattered dead — [turn to 70](#) now.

Otherwise, you surge upwards before bursting into the air a few yards from your drifting boat. You clamber over the side, lying in the sloshing keel until you can regain your breath. When you are recovered, you clamber painfully to the oars and [move on \(turn to 18\)](#).

86.

You set out to scale the slick cliffs in the middle of the island. *Test Climbing* (if you don't have Climbing, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you fail, *Lose 1 Talent* or *Take 1 Wound* (your choice). If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you slip from the cliff, cracking your head fatally on the rocks below — [turn to 70](#) now.

The ground at the top of the cliffs is blanketed with shoulder-high ferns, and wiry snake-brush. It's a lush contrast to the bare shores of the other islands — enough of a contrast that you suspect some sort of magic is at work. Is this Keros? It would make sense.

Here and there, fallen branches tangle under your feet, although there are no trees.

A roaring sound leads you to the source of the water. A deep caldera is cut out of the centre of the island. Looking down, you see a deep and churning pool. At the pool's head, white water cascades from the mouth of an enormous serpent statue, its gaping maw level with the rustling ferns. A length of **rope** (+1 climbing, heavy) is lashed to the edge, but when you pull it up you see that it is broken (you can take it if you wish). There looks to be no way down other than to dive into the pool!

- » [Dive into the pool \(turn to 71\).](#)
- » [Return to the beach \(turn to 29\).](#)

87.

You blink slowly awake, confused. You should be dead.

You are lying in the bottom of your boat, just as you were after the storm. Except that this time, your outstretched hand is full of dust. Remove the **merrow's pearl** or **dead hermit's amulet** (whichever one you were carrying) from your inventory — it has saved your life, but its magic is now spent and gone.

When you haul yourself up, you see that you are drifting near to the shore of a steep sided island, crowned with a single tree.

Set your *Vitality* and *Talent* to their starting values. Do not change your *Fortune* score.

[Turn to 41.](#)

88.



If the box above is not checked, *Test your Talent*. If you pass, you manage to thread the needle and bring the Solstice safely into the inlet. If you fail, a wave drives the boat straight onto the rocks and the shock of the impact knocks you from your seat. *Take 1 Wound, ignoring armour*. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, [turn to 9](#) now.

Otherwise, check the box above and read on.

To your immense relief, the bow of the Solstice crunches into a fan of softly shelving gravel at the head of the inlet. You leap into the shallow water and haul it up, before the outrushing water drags it away, then clamber up to the clifftop.

A grassy plain covers most of the island, white with daisies and golden with buttercups. The lavender tufts of orchids bow in the constant breeze. It looks like a paradise, but when you sink your fingers into the turf you find that the soil is sand — as dry as bone.

The sun is bright, but half the island is in the shadow of the enormous tree, whose trunk is planted in the precise centre of the island. It can't be natural, you are sure, but is this Keros, and more importantly, can you find water, and a way home?

You are considering your next step, making your way cautiously along the shore, when you spy a low wall, tumbled and overgrown, and beside it the distinctive raised circle of a well!

Water!

- » If you wish to rush straight to the well [turn to 36](#).
- » If you wish to investigate the ruins first [turn to 75](#).
- » If, for whatever reason, you prefer to return to your boat and put off, [turn to 32](#).

89.

Gain the keyword *Shore*

You leap (or really, clamber) out of the boat, pretty much on top of the seated figure. Even then it does not react.

As soon as you lay a hand on it, you see why — the man is dead, little more than a husk within its ancient robes. The flesh, salt-dried and wind-withered, has gone hard as leather, clinging to the bones like the mummified ancients in the vaults of Heldad.

What was he doing here, alone on a rock no larger than a kitchen table? You cannot think of an answer. How long as he been here? You cannot answer that either. Cautiously examining the corpse you see that it has something lying in its lap — a fragile scroll of leather that you carefully extract.

When you unroll the leather, a metal locket drops into your hand. You recognise the lightning anchor symbol of Atros, the dead god of storms. Most gods, and their worship, perished in the wizard's war, but you loop the **hermit's locket** around your neck anyway — you need all the luck you can get out here.

You turn your attention to the scroll itself. Unrolled on the thwarts of Cato's ... no! of *your* boat, the leather proves to be some sort of map or diagram. A collection of circles and other rough shapes are marked in what you hope is charcoal and not blood. Perhaps structures on an island, or islands in an archipelago. Whichever way around, there are three main areas clearly marked. One is circular, with what looks like a flame pattern around the edge, perhaps it's meant to be the sun? Another shows what is surely a tree. The third a wavy line that might be a stream.

Two more shapes are marked out beyond the other three, though these have no details marked on them, possibly because the map has been damaged by water. You can make out writing down that edge of the leather, however, it says: *Under the Stone*

Not much the wiser, you take the **dead hermit's map**, and [move on \(turn to 18\)](#).

90.

You step over the altar stone, which is set about ten feet in front of the intact window.

It is a plain stone block, about five foot wide, two deep, and perhaps three high. You are not terribly familiar with altars — your village only had its little Godhouse, with carved roots and icons to the many small gods that survived the cataclysm — but you think it was probably once covered in cloth, or paint, or golden implements, or maybe all of the above.

You try to examine the sides, subtly, so as not to rouse the ghost's suspicions, in case it has compartments or openings that might hold the treasure of Keros, but it appears to be a solid block.

If you have the keyword *Swash* you saw an altar just like this in the ruined tower.

If you have the **dead hermit's map**, you can [check it now \(turn to 66\)](#).

- » If you are ready to guess the location, [turn to 13](#).
- » To examine the window instead, [turn to 74](#).
- » To examine the sarcophagi, [turn to 58](#).
- » To examine the hanging anchor, [turn to 95](#).

91.

Gain the keyword *Salt*

To your surprise, the interior of the building proves to be a single large chamber, high and arched, the bare copper of the corroded dome looming above a sunken floor in the centre. A dozen niches cut into the rough-built walls, each holding life-sized statues of mournful worshipers with clasped hands and eyes downcast towards the centre ... No! Not statues, but mummified corpses, their heads weighted down by metal anchors chained around their necks. You've stumbled into a grotesque mausoleum!

A whispering voice echoes around the chamber, a chorus of words that you cannot quite make out. At the same time, a column of mist coalesces in the central depression, tendrils of fog spreading from its base, *up* the steps towards your feet!

You turn to run, only to find that your feet are trying to take you the other way, towards the pit. The more you try to resist, the more the chorus of whispers draws you forward.

Test Occult (if you don't have Occult, *Test your Talent at -2*). If you succeed [turn to 67](#), if you fail [turn to 14](#) instead.

92.

The defile is narrow and as steep as a knife cut. You dearly wish that you could get a mouthful of the water rushing below your feet, but you dare not let go of the canyon wall.

Test Climbing at -1 (if you don't have Climbing, *Test your Talent at -3*). If you fail, *Take 1 Wound* as you lose your grip. If this reduces you to zero Vitality, you tumble from the cliff and dash yourself onto the rocks — [turn to 70](#) now — if you survive, you manage to regain your grip.

Eventually the canyon opens up into a steep-walled caldera. A deep pool fills most of the space, fed by a waterfall pouring from the mouth of the serpent statue that makes up most of the back wall.

You hurry to the side of the pool and drink your fill, then fill your water flask too (to 5 portions). If this is the first time you have drunk here, *Restore 2 Talent*. For the first time since the storm you feel refreshed and clean.

Looking around the caldera, you can't see anywhere else to go except [back to the boat \(turn to 20\)](#), unless you want to try [climbing all the way up the spray-slick statue and crawling into its flooded mouth \(turn to 43\)](#).

93.

You return to your boat, and turn the prow away from the dark island. Overhead three gulls soar and wheel, following your shadow on the water.

If you have a **stout stick** and some **rope**, and have not yet fixed the sail on your boat, you can do it now, lashing the stick and rope to the broken mast. If you do, gain the keyword *Sail* and remove the stick and rope from your inventory.

- » To head to the northern island, [turn to 49](#).
- » To head to the southern island, [turn to 62](#).
- » If you have the keyword *Shore* and feel you are ready to chart a different course [turn to 72](#).

Alternatively, if you have the keyword *Sail* and at least four portions of water in your flask, you could set sail for Marinth — if you think you have found what you came for — and [leave these cursed isles behind \(turn to 100\)](#).

94.

You retreat carefully from the edge and spread the dead hermit's map out on the rock, glancing up to check the alignment.

You are sure that the glitter of light came from the circular island marked with flames. That's the central island in the chain. The tree shape, if that's what it is, marks the island on the left, while the one on the right is no more than a blank shape on the map.

As for the other two islands, there's no sign of them when you stare out over the sea, but they must be somewhere beyond the central island, if they exist at all.

You decide it's time to set a course. Each of the islands looks like they are hours apart at a speed you think you can manage, so you should carefully choose which to head for.

- » [Set course for the north \(leftmost\) island \(turn to 50\)](#)
- » [Set course for the middle island \(turn to 47\)](#)
- » [Set course for the south \(rightmost\) island \(turn to 8\)](#)

95.

The suspended anchor is far too high to investigate from below, and you guess that the old chains are probably rusted solid now, but spiral stairs lead up the first storey of the broken tower to a balcony level with the hanging relic.

The steps are worn by long exposure to the rain falling through the broken tower, but are still intact enough to climb. They lead to a colonnaded walkway with low arches overlooking the body of the temple. From up here you can see the shape of an anchor engraved into the floor which was invisible from below.

You find a point where the balcony overlooks the anchor. Four massive chains are embedded in the tower walls, stringing the anchor between them. From here you can see that the anchor is sea-stained wood, surely taken from some actual ship, gilded, and strung up here as a votive offering to the god. The anchor itself could hardly hold a treasure, but some sort of small box seems to rest on top. Maybe that's where the treasure is ... or maybe it's just a normal part of an anchor, you are not a sailor.

- » If you are ready to guess the location, [turn to 13](#).
- » To examine the altar instead, [turn to 90](#).
- » To examine the sarcophagi, [turn to 58](#).
- » To examine the window, [turn to 74](#).

96.

You scabble desperately at the dry ground beneath the trees. The dry sawgrass cuts at your hands, and the sand lodges painfully under your fingernails. Surely there must be water here, surely you can find it!

You dig and dig, but there is nothing to find but sand and rocks and salt-dry soil.

Test your Talent at -1. If you fail, *Lose 1 Talent.*

Eventually you slump back against a tree, dispirited and sore. The madness is past.

If you have not already rested here, you can [do so now \(turn to 81\)](#). Otherwise the [top of the island \(turn to 4\)](#) is the only place to go.

97.

The passage emerges into a half-lit cavern, shaped a little like a pouring cup, with a scooped out centre and a channel leading from it to the opening where the sun shines through.

The channel is full of rushing water, as is the cupped out area. In the centre of the pool, a spike of crystal thrusts out of the ground, and in some way it appears to be the source of the water.

Wading into the pool, you see that the water appears to well from the base of the crystal. If you were to break it off, maybe the water would slow to a trickle and you could take it with you — or maybe it would simply flood you right out of the cave. Maybe this is the treasure of Keros, or maybe not.

Test Occult or Larceny, your choice. If you have neither, *Test your Talent at -2.* If you fail, you can't manage to safely recover the crystal, and have to [return to the Solstice instead \(turn to 20\)](#).

If you succeed, you conceive of a way to remove the crystal from its plinth without instantly drowning yourself. You may add the **water crystal** (heavy) to your inventory. The next two times you need to drink water, you can sup from the crystal instead of your flask.

You may *Rest. Gain 1 Experience* (because you have gained experience, you may also *Regain 1 Fortune*). If eat a **ration** you may also *Heal 1 Vitality*.

When you are done, you [return to your boat \(turn to 20\)](#).

98.

You have never eaten seal, but the thought of fresh meat and juicy blubber makes your dry mouth ache.

You grab your weapon and try to stab the closest seal — it's not as easy as you imagined! The spear head merely slashes the seal's side, and the maddened beast rolls in the water, slamming into your wallowing boat.

Fight one round with disadvantage If you are reduced to zero Vitality, [turn to 9](#) now. Otherwise you manage to fend off the initial attack, but now the other seals start to ram the boat.

You can abandon the hunt and get away or keep fighting. If you choose to escape [turn to 41](#) now, otherwise read on.

You won't give in so easily. You cast your spear again, and use it to drag the wounded seal closer. *Fight another round with disadvantage*. If you are reduced to zero Vitality, [turn to 9](#) now.

Otherwise, you drag the thrashing seal over the side of the boat, and deal it one final blow.

As fast as thought, the other seals are gone.

You set about butchering the seal and replenishing your rations.

You may *Rest*, *Heal 1 Vitality*, and *Restore 1 Talent*. If you *drink a portion of water* you may *Restore an additional Talent*. You may also take two more **rations**.

When you are done, you resume your journey.

- » To land on the northern island, [turn to 41](#).
- » To land on the central island, [turn to 76](#).

99.

You bring the Solstice as close to the wall of fire as you dare, stow the oars, and balance on the rocking thwarts, waiting for the moment when the gap appears.

When it does, you hurl yourself for the shore, no time for thought!

Test your Talent at -3. If you fail, [turn to 59](#). If you succeed, [turn to 37](#).

100.

You are not a sailor. Nevertheless you set your course for Marinth well enough. You've come to find some common ground with the Solstice since the storm, and you know which way is north. Luckily for you the circle sea is round, you have to hit the shore *somewhere*.

It takes you five days to make the crossing, one portion of water per day, and none for the last On the fifth evening you see the lights of Marinth flickering on the horizon, and the roaring column of the lighthouse at the harbour gates guides you in.

If you have the **greenstone tablet**, you take it to a sage for translation. The writing proves to be a prayer to Atros, the god of storms. Atros is long dead, another casualty of the cataclysm, so the holy inscription is little more than a curiosity these days, but as a work of art you can sell it for 200 gold, if you wish.

If you have the **fire boar's tusks**, they are clearly not the treasure of Keros you went to seek, but they are still of interest. You take them to an alchemist, who takes one as payment and turns the other into a **restoration potion** (one use, heal up to four points of Vitality or Talent, in any combination).

If you have the **water crystal**, it arouses great curiosity amongst the syndics who perpetually pick over the remains of the wizard's towers. They will offer you 300 gold. If you accept the offer, you may raise your **Marinth Status** (a title), by 1.

If you have the **teachings of atros**, you have truly found the treasure of Keros — no one in Marinth is particularly interested. Perhaps you will find a use for them elsewhere.

THE END

Use the following list to track keywords you have encountered.

- Sail
- Salinity
- Salt
- Sea
- Seasnake
- Shore
- Solar
- Somnolence
- Swash

Thanks

Thank you for playing, and thank you to Victoria Lawford, Paul Partington, Tristin Grizel Dean, and Sjoerd Hekking for playtesting and proofreading — any errors still in the game are entirely my own.

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

For more of games set in the world of Paldoria, see https://bit.ly/gnat_gamebooks.

David M. Donachie