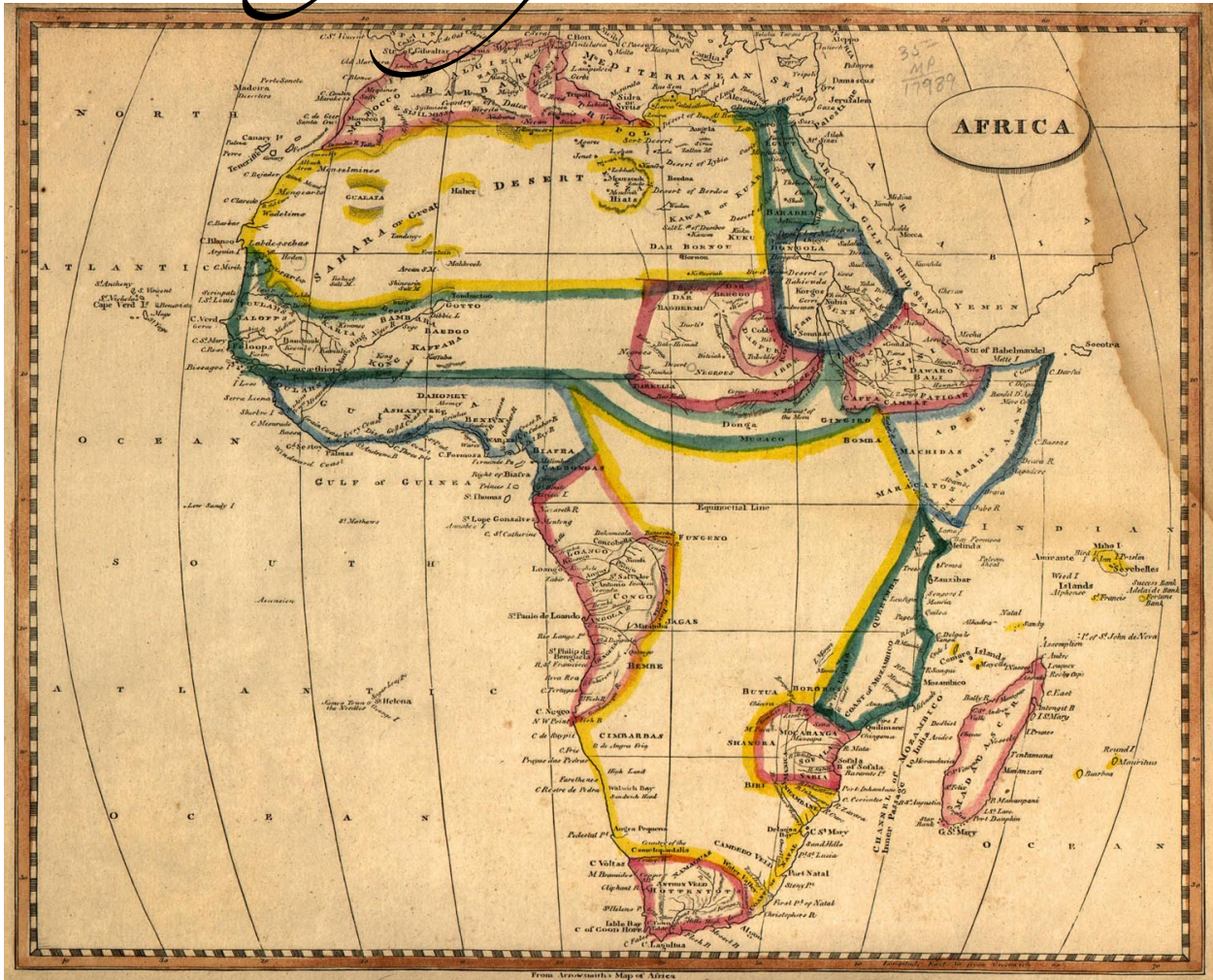


# City of Brass



a game of colonial expedition  
by Clinton R. Nixon

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*In a land that the sand overlays - the ways to her gates are untrod -  
A multitude ended their days whose fates were made splendid by God,  
Till they grew drunk and were smitten with madness and went to their fall,  
And of these is a story written: but Allah alone knoweth all!*

– Rudyard Kipling, “The City of Brass”

“Two pilgrims were quarrelling in hurried whispers as to which bank. ‘Left.’ ‘no, no; how can you? Right, right, of course.’ ‘It is very serious,’ said the manager’s voice behind me; ‘I would be desolated if anything should happen to Mr. Kurtz before we came up.’ I looked at him, and had not the slightest doubt he was sincere. He was just the kind of man who would wish to preserve appearances. That was his restraint. But when he muttered something about going on at once, I did not even take the trouble to answer him. I knew, and he knew, that it was impossible. Were we to let go our hold of the bottom, we would be absolutely in the air – in space. We wouldn’t be able to tell where we were going to – whether up or down stream, or across – till we fetched against one bank or the other -- and then we wouldn’t know at first which it was. Of course I made no move. I had no mind for a smash-up. You couldn’t imagine a more deadly place for a shipwreck. Whether we drowned at once or not, we were sure to perish speedily in one way or another. ‘I authorize you to take all the risks,’ he said, after a short silence. ‘I refuse to take any,’ I said shortly; which was just the answer he expected, though its tone might have surprised him. ‘Well, I must defer to your judgment. You are captain,’ he said with marked civility. I turned my shoulder to him in sign of my appreciation, and looked into the fog. How long would it last? It was the most hopeless lookout. The approach to this Kurtz grubbing for ivory in the wretched bush was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle.”

– Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Participate joyfully in the sorrows of life.

– Joseph Campbell

# The Expedition Afrique

In 1892, the French led a military campaign in Dahomey, the “Slave Coast” between Nigeria and Togo, against its kings so that they might have control of Porto Novo, a coastal city. They marched all the way to Abomey, the capital of the land, and found the rulers gone. They amused themselves by looting the city for souvenirs. The French press was most impressed by a white parasol decorated with human jawbones.

They never saw the inside of that parasol. Inside it was a map drawn in human blood, a map that pointed to a legendary city deep in Africa’s interior. This city was called the City of Brass, a bastion of ancient African civilization full of treasure, both gold and knowledge.

Sadi Carnot, the president of France, sent an expedition on that doomed journey. It only took three weeks for them to become hopelessly lost in an uncharted land. To this day, no one knows what happened to them.

In this game, you will play those lost souls. Trapped in Africa’s interior, with a map drawn on a parasol and not enough resources, you search.

## *A note about the content of this game*

This game was done in one week with minimal research. In addition, while there is no magic in this game, it is a fantasy. The nobility found among the people of Africa is not balanced against the savagery found here. Like all peoples, the historic Africans had both high nobility and awful destruction found in them. Even though this game depicts the negative side of culture disproportionately, the author is fully aware that is not the only side, or even the dominant side.

## *A note about this play of this game*

This game is about people who will cheat each other and maybe even kill each other. As players, you are bound to follow the rules of the game. Without adherence to them, and the honor not to cheat, the game will not work. So don’t be a bad player, only a bad character.

## Game setup

First, every player must choose a character to play. The characters are the Explorer, the Official, the Doctor, the Priest, the Naturalist, and the Native Guide. With only six characters, this means only six people can play this game. It is recommended that you play with at least four people, although three will do in a pinch. One player must choose the Explorer.

You must pick a name for your character and it should be appropriately French. You can feel free to flesh out the details of his or her existence if you wish. You must also answer this question: *what does your character seek in the City of Brass?* You don’t have to share the answer to this with anyone else, though, if you don’t want to.

One person must be chosen as the *Leader*. If a consensus cannot be made, the Explorer takes the vote. All other players close their eyes. As the Explorer reads the candidates aloud, each player makes a fist for no, or points two fingers down touching the table for yes. The Explorer tallies the votes, including his own, and announces the leader. *Whoever the Explorer announces is the Leader without question. The Explorer can lie.*

The Leader announces his *Companion*. This is his choice alone. The Companion is his second-in-command and confidante. The other characters are referred to as the *party members*.

The Leader shuffles the *resource deck*.

With this, the game begins and the party heads up river.

## The Five Acts

The game from here is split into five acts.

In The River, the expedition is led up the river and into the darkest jungles. They will encounter savage apes, rot, rough waters, the dark oppression of no sun, and maddening insects.

In The Mountains, the expedition leaves their boat to travel in the highest lofts of Africa. They will fight against tough climbs, rock slides, mountain elephants and cats, outclaves of natives, and finally, suffocation.

In The Savannas, the few that have survived will possibly enjoy a brief respite. That is, if they can avoid cobras and lions, tainted water, cannibals, and the inability to find a landmark in endless grasslands.

In The Deserts, the heroes are so close to the City of Brass. They must only navigate between roving fundamentalist slavers, scorpions, the pounding sun and endless hunger while searching for the few drops of water that might be found.

Outside the City, each character will go through their last test. Are they worthy to enter the City?

## Basics of play

While the setup for this game is very fixed, and dangers the adventurers will face are somewhat preset, this is a fairly standard role-playing game. One person narrates a danger, and some of the players say what they plan to do about it. They roll some dice and see how that works out for them.

But there's not a game master or referee, you say. Well, the buck has to stop somewhere. At the beginning and unless stated otherwise, the leader is responsible for narrating the obstacles that will befall the expedition.

When someone wants to meet an obstacle, they have to choose what ability to face it with: Strength, Endurance, Health, Reason, or Nobility. (Camaraderie cannot be used directly.) They roll a number of dice equal to their current ranking in that ability. Each one that is a five or higher is a success. Each one that is a six means you can roll another die and hope for more successes.

The ability scores on your character sheet are *maximum* scores. Every time you use an ability, lower the current score by 1.

When an obstacle is beaten, the party gains a certain number of resources and special cards. These go to the winner. If you are the winner and you like, you can give some of the resources to the companion to be part of the *party pool*.

### *Abilities and resources*

Each ability is matched with a resource that replenishes it. The correlations are:

<i>Ability</i>	<i>Resource</i>
Strength	Food
Endurance	Water
Health	Hygiene
Reason	Safety
Nobility	Honor
Camaraderie	Wine

### *The Leader's role*

Like it was stated above, there are five acts in this game. For the first four, there are five obstacles keeping you from the next act. You must have a certain number of *quest points* (QP) accumulated against each obstacle to defeat it.

At the beginning of the act, you assign how many QPs it takes to beat each obstacle. In the act write-ups below, it will tell you how many you have to assign. If you become the Leader in the middle of an act, you can shuffle these around. However, nothing undefeated can become defeated: even if the number of accumulated QPs is higher than what you assign to it, it'll still take another QP to beat it. Things defeated can become undefeated, though.

You *will not* decide what obstacle the party decides to take on at a time. The companion decides that. You will, however, decide how many QPs to make a challenge. Let's say an obstacle takes five QPs to defeat. You can beat that by challenging it for 1 QP five times, or for 2 QP once and 3 QP another time, or in any other combination. Higher QP challenges get more resources for the party, but they're harder to win. You can choose between 1 and 4 QP to challenge for.

You're also going to flesh out each obstacle: this game just names each with a phrase. Besides giving the obstacle a face, you give it ratings that determine what it's good at. We'll cover that below.

You will narrate for all obstacles unless this text says otherwise, which it will below. If a player says he's going to wrestle the Reptile Queen, you'll say what the Reptile Queen does.

You will also pass out all cards. When the resource deck is empty, take the discards and shuffle them.

You will also take votes, unless this text says otherwise. You can take a vote for anything, and it's binding for all party members unless they decide to fight among themselves. All votes are taken by asking everyone to close their eyes. You call for a yes or no vote on an issue. If a player clenches his or her fist, that means no. If he or she points two fingers down toward the table, that means yes. You announce which side wins. *This is important: you can lie.* You do not vote yourself except to break ties.

You cannot take on obstacles you would narrate for. This is prohibited. You are the Leader! Your followers take on challenges. You are, until one of them dies, invincible.

After each act, you must call for a vote of confidence. If you are voted out of the Leader's position, you become a party member and the Companion becomes the new Leader.

## *The Companion's role*

First and foremost, you are the interface between the Leader and the party. While the Leader is responsible for moving forward and onward, you are responsible for deciding what the party does *right now*. It is up to you to tell the Leader what challenge the party is going to take on, and how they want to take it on. You cannot tell the Leader how many QPs to challenge for, but you can say things like "we'd like to proceed cautiously" or "we want to leap into the mouth of hell."

You also decide who is taking on a challenge, unless stated otherwise. You can ask for volunteers if you like.

You manage the party pool. If anyone asks for a resource from the pool, and you have it, you have to give it to them. You do not have to give more than they need to have their maximum ability score, but you can.

You can overthrow the Leader. If you think he is lying about a vote, you can exclaim "J'accuse!" Everyone opens their eyes and the votes are re-tallied. If the Leader was telling the truth, all of your resources are stripped and put in the party pool. You are demoted and the leader chooses a new Companion. If the Leader was lying, you become the new Leader and the old Leader is demoted to a party member. Choose a new Companion.

You can do everything a party member can do.

## *The party members' role*

Your primary role is to keep your character alive. It's not as easy as it sounds. "City of Brass" is designed to kill your character. As the designer, I'll be honest with you. *I hope you die painfully and alone in darkest Africa.*

Now that that's over, your goal is to take on challenges and beat them. This is the only way you'll get the resources to live.

Not every challenge will be defeatable by one of you. You'll need to help each other out.

## *Helping the others*

You've got two options. You can fight alongside someone else. They roll and you roll, and if any of you beat the challenge, you are all winners. Figure out a way to split the resources gained among you. (Wait until you're all hungry and thirsty and scared. This'll be fun.) You all have to use the same ability.

Fighting alongside each other is better than fighting alone, but it isn't that much better. And, in case you were wondering, all of you lose an ability point, just like if each of you challenged separately.

You can assist someone else in their fight by spending a point from Camaraderie. You still spend a point from the ability you use, as well. In this case, if you can narrate a good reason, you can use a different ability from the person you're assisting. You roll your dice and they roll theirs, and you add the dice together. Now that's much better, but wine is hard to come by, so it's risky to do often. Again, you are all winners.

The initial person to take on the challenge determines who loses resources if you all lose.

Lastly, can you refuse help? Hell, yes.

## *Your resources and abilities*

You have six abilities, five of which are directly usable in a situation. Camaraderie, as stated before, is used only to assist others.

When you use an ability, you lose a point from it *after you roll*. When you lose a conflict, you will lose points in one or more resources. You can directly lose those resources if you have them. If you don't, you lose points from their associated ability.

If you reach zero in an ability, you cannot use it again until you have restored it to its full strength.

You can spend resources to regain ability points any time you're not actively engaged in a conflict. You gain a number of points equal to the number on the card. You cannot split up a card into smaller amounts.

Here's another fun bit about resources. After losing a conflict, each person involved can ask someone else for one type of resource they just lost. If you get asked, you either have to give them all of your resources of that type, or some of your resources of that type, or you can say that you can't give them any. If they think you have more than you're giving, or you said you couldn't give them any and they think you have some, they can, if they like, exclaim "J'accuse!" Hand them your cards. If you have any of that resource left, they can take all of them. If they were wrong, they hand you their cards. Take whatever you want and hand the rest back.

When you use resources or specials, place them in the discard pile.

## *How to die*

It's easy. Go to zero in three abilities and you're dead.



### *What happens after I die?*

The most fun part of the game happens after you die. You then get to play a *tormentor*. Choose any ability besides Camaraderie. All challenges against the obstacle in an act that is associated with that ability are yours to control. You narrate for them and decide how many QPs the challenge is. The Companion still gets to decide when to challenge you, and the Companion still gets to decide who takes you on. You can, however, choose to attack the Leader instead. He is not immune to you.

### *Eating the dead*

Of course you can eat the dead. You can convert their Strength to food and their Endurance to water. (This is their maximum Strength and Endurance.) Everyone participating must drop one Nobility permanently. (Your maximum is lowered by one.) Take these resources and put them in a separate pile than your normal one. If anyone ever takes them from you, they count as participating.

If you have an argument over the distribution of the resources, you'll have to figure out a solution. Maybe you'll fight over eating the flesh of a dead comrade. If so, see the rules below.

### *Inter-party strife*

Party members can fight amongst themselves. That's all fine and well. You're not getting any QPs for it, but you probably have your own reasons.

One person has to start the fight, and they should what they're fighting for: that is, something that will definitely occur if they win the fight. The person they want to fight against can refuse to fight, but they have to give on the conditions. (Let's say someone wants to fight you to take all your food. You don't have to fight, but if you don't, they get your food.) If you do fight, the attacker chooses the first ability to fight with. You both roll and the loser loses resources or ability points in that ability equal to the *margin of victory*. (You know what this means: if I have 5 successes and you have 3, I have a margin of 2.) You can choose to continue the fight as long as you like.

## *Obstacles*

The first four acts of the game are filled with five obstacles each. See their obstacle sheets to find their names and the QPs the Leader needs to set to defeat them. Remember, the Leader gets to set their difficulty from the act's options.

The obstacles only have a name. It is up to the Leader to make them real, and they may take different faces each time you play the game.

Beside each obstacle are the abilities they threaten. After that are the resources they give when you defeat them.

### *Fighting an obstacle*

Mechanically, it works this way. The amount of QPs you're challenging for is the number of successes you need when using an ability the obstacle threatens. *If and only if* you can find an interesting way to use another ability, you need a number of successes equal to the QPs minus one.

In game, the fight and outcome must be narrated. If you win, you narrate how you overcame the obstacle. If the obstacle wins, the Leader narrates.

### *The outcome*

If you win, you get resources for that. The Leader draws a number of cards from the resource deck equal to the QPs challenged. This is increased by the margin of victory. However, the total number of cards drawn can never be more than the QPs challenged times two. Any card that is a resource the obstacle gives or a special is given to the winner.

If you lose, you lose ability points or resources. The Leader draws a number of cards from the resource deck equal to the QPs challenged, also increased by the margin of victory. Any card that is associated with an ability the obstacle threatens, you lose ability points or resources for. Notice some cards have a number on them: a “Food 3” card gives three food, right? Yes, you lose three Strength for it. But, here’s a small bonus: any special cards drawn are given to the loser.

## *The City of Brass*

If you live through the four acts, you reach the City of Brass. The current Leader describes it bright shining in the sun. He or she must also narrate the party members being split up by forces from the City. (Maybe the interior is a maze. Or maybe armed soldiers separate you. It’s up to the Leader.)

All players with living characters draw one card from the *city cards*. These cards contain questions. Hand the card to another player, who will ask you these questions. You must answer out loud.

The last question is always “Are you worthy to enter the City of Brass?” Everyone votes on this question and you tally the votes. As per normal, everyone except you closes their eyes and you tally. You can lie. Answer the question. If anyone thinks you’re lying, they can exclaim “J’accuse!” Everyone opens their eyes and tallies the votes. If you lied, your character is slain. If they were wrong, they cannot vote anymore.

## *Conclusion*

I could tell you this game has a point, like:

*Everyone is essential. We all have special and unique talents, and if one of us falls, we all stumble. It’s a harsh, cruel world out there, and you’ve got to band together with whoever you can to survive. Don’t be a jerk and love your neighbor and care for the downtrodden.*

But I won’t.

# *The Explorer*

*What is your name?*

*Why do you seek the City of Brass?*

## *Strength 6*

Years of exploration have left the Explorer ready to take on any danger.

## *Endurance 5*

No matter what the heart of the wilderness throws at the Explorer, he can endure it.

## *Health 4*

Disease? The Explorer's had 'em all and lived. This gives him the ability to shake off most of them, but has also eaten his insides.

## *Nobility 3*

Too little time living among civilization has left this once-noble man less than he once was.

## *Reason 2*

The Explorer travels the footpaths of madness.

## *Camaraderie 1*

In the end, the Explorer lives for himself.

## *Special Abilities*

*Law of the Fist:* The Explorer can sacrifice one Nobility instead of one Strength when meeting any Strength challenge.

# *The Official*

*What is your name?*

*Why do you seek the City of Brass?*

## *Strength 1*

The Official has lived his life behind a desk and under a mound of paper.

## *Endurance 2*

The only running the Official has done has been for office.

## *Health 3*

The hearty French diet has left the Official well-fed, if not in excellent shape.

## *Nobility 6*

Being the paragon of French society is the foremost job requirement for the Official.

## *Reason 4*

Fortunately, the rust of government has not dulled the Official's knife too badly.

## *Camaraderie 5*

The Official knows *he* can't make it through Africa on his own: he needs friends.

## *Special Abilities*

*Supply Drops:* Once per Act, the Official can roll Nobility. (Lose one Nobility, per normal.) The number of successes he gets are the number of cards from the resource deck he can draw. Keep Food, Water, Wine, and Hygiene cards.

# *The Doctor*

*What is your name?*

*Why do you seek the City of Brass?*

## *Strength 3*

The Doctor has lifted his share of bodies onto the heap.

## *Endurance 1*

The Doctor keeps his body like a groundskeeper keeps his own yard.

## *Health 6*

In his medicine bag lies a cure for every ill.

## *Nobility 2*

It takes a certain personality to slice open a man's chest and see the pus inside.

## *Reason 5*

The Doctor's had years of schooling and more years of nights reading alone.

## *Camaraderie 4*

When you're ill, everyone loves a doctor.

## *Special Abilities*

*Medicine Bag:* The Doctor can challenge (using his Reason) to help others' Health. The challenge is against the number of points from Health that person is missing. This challenge threatens *the recipient's Health* and gains *Hygiene for the recipient*.

# *The Priest*

*What is your name?*

*Why do you seek the City of Brass?*

## *Strength 5*

The Priest is a massive bulk of a man.

## *Endurance 3*

The bull-like body of the Priest can keep him going or weigh him down.

## *Health 2*

Who needs medicine when one has faith?

## *Nobility 4*

Even the nobles confess their secrets to the Priest.

## *Reason 1*

The Priest does not need to *know*: he believes.

## *Camaraderie 6*

There is a word to soothe every troubled soul.

## *Special Abilities*

*Alcoholism*: The Priest can use wine to recover any ability except Reason.

# *The Naturalist*

*What is your name?*

*Why do you seek the City of Brass?*

## *Strength 2*

The Naturalist's strength is not found in his arms or legs.

## *Endurance 4*

Weeks onboard boats sailing to remote islands will do wonders for your stamina.

## *Health 1*

The Naturalist sacrifices his body for science.

## *Nobility 5*

Born to the upper-crust, the Naturalist uses his connections to fund his expeditions.

## *Reason 6*

To the Naturalist, the world is an ordered and logical place.

## *Camaraderie 3*

It is a necessity to bring others on your quests for knowledge.

## *Special Abilities*

*Belief System:* The Naturalist believes in the order of the world. He can never go below 1 Reason. He can challenge with 1 Reason and not lose a point.

# *The Native Guide*

*What is your name?*

*Why do you seek the City of Brass?*

## *Strength 4*

A once-proud warrior of his people, the Native Guide is well-skilled in combat.

## *Endurance 6*

The Native Guide has run from his ghosts across all of Africa.

## *Health 5*

The Native was born in Africa, and its diseases and dangers are natural to him.

## *Nobility 1*

The Native Guide was cast from his people and now leads white men.

## *Reason 3*

The wild has made the Native Guide wise.

## *Camaraderie 2*

The Native Guide has no respect among his own people, and no trust among the palefaces.

## *Special Abilities*

*Earning Redemption:* The Native Guide can use Honor to restore Camaraderie.



## *Act One: The River*

*Quest Points: 5, 4, 4, 3, 3*

*The Reptile Queen (Strength, Reason / Food, Safety)*

*The Devil's Teeth (Endurance, Strength / Water, Safety)*

*The Endless Night (Reason, Nobility / Safety, Water)*

*The Jungle Rot (Health, Endurance / Hygiene, Food)*

*The German Outpost (Nobility, Health / Honor, Hygiene, Wine)*

## *Act Two: The Mountains*

*Quest Points: 5, 5, 4, 4, 3*

*The Gorilla King (Strength, Nobility / Safety, Food)*

*The Trek Upwards (Endurance, Health / Honor, Hygiene)*

*Natives and Missionaries (Nobility, Reason / Food, Honor, Wine)*

*The Flesh-Eater (Health, Strength / Hygiene, Food)*

*The Mountain Storm (Reason, Endurance / Water, Safety)*

## *Act Three: The Savannas*

*Quest Points: 6, 5, 4, 4, 3*

*Hyenas and Lions (Strength, Health / Food, Safety)*

*Lost! (Endurance, Reason / Safety, Water)*

*Black Waters (Health, Nobility / Water, Hygiene)*

*Ravenous Cannibals (Reason, Strength / Food, Honor)*

*The Hunting Lodge (Nobility, Endurance / Honor, Wine)*

## *Act Four: The Deserts*

*Quest Points: 7, 6, 5, 4, 3*

*The Blazing Sun (Endurance, Reason / Hygiene, Safety)*

*The Fanatic Slavers (Nobility, Strength / Honor, Food)*

*Cobras! (Strength, Health / Safety, Food)*

*The Mirages (Health, Endurance / Water, Wine)*

*A Gnawing Hunger (Reason, Nobility / Food, Honor)*