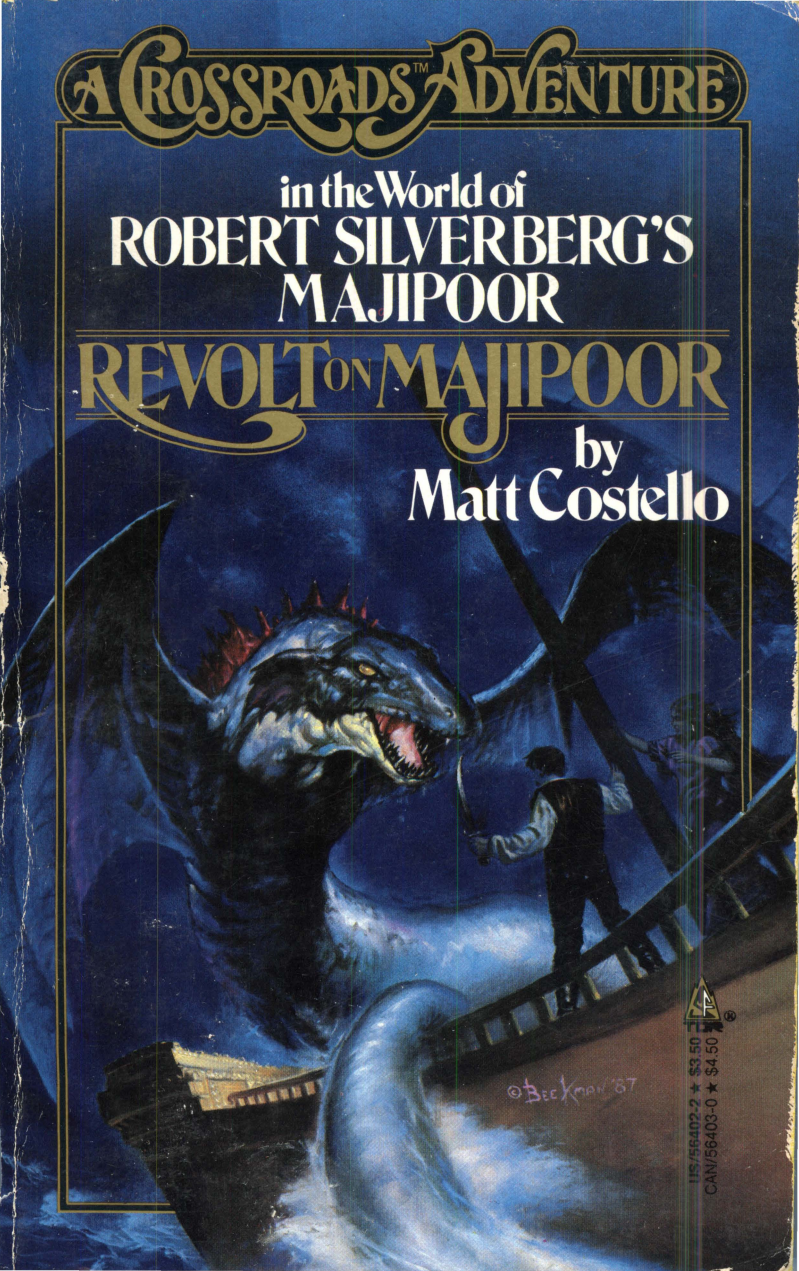
A CROSSROADS™ ADVENTURE

in the World of
ROBERT SILVERBERG'S
MAJIPOOR

REVOLT ON MAJIPOOR

by
Matt Costello



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MAJIPOOR—MENACED!

The vast planet Majipoor—its awesome vistas, miraculous cities, seven species, and billions of people—faces horror. Lord Valentine's young son Brynamir is kidnapped—and the price of his release will plunge the planet into genocidal war.

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And Lord Valentine's enemies are not who—or even *what*—they seem . . .

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A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

REVOLT ON MAJIPOOR

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Crossroads Game/novels are published by TOR Books by arrangement with Bill Fawcett and Associates.

First printing: August 1987

A TOR Book

Published by Tom Doherty Associates, Inc.
49 West 24 Street
New York, N.Y. 10010

Cover art by Doug Beekman
Illustrations by Todd Cameron Hamilton

ISBN: 0-812-56402-2
CAN. ED.: 0-812-56403-0

Printed in the United States of America

0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

DEDICATION

To Ann, who also admired Parras

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MAJIPOOR: AN INTRODUCTION by Robert Silverberg

IT WAS THREE or four years since I had last written anything and I felt quite comfortable about that. I was busy traveling and reading and constructing an elaborate exotic garden at my northern California home, and those activities seemed quite sufficient for me. But then one warm April afternoon in 1978 as I was wandering around alone near my swimming pool I heard the old familiar voice in my head whispering things to me, and suddenly a new book was there. I went into my office and scribbled this on the back of an envelope:

> The scene is a giant planet-sized city—an urban Big Planet, population of billions, a grand gaudy romantic canvas. The city is divided into vast subcities, each with its own characteristic tone. The novel is joyous and huge—no sense of dystopia. The form is that of a pilgrimage across the

entire sphere. (For what purpose?) A colossal odyssey through bizarre bazaars. Parks and wonders.

I looked at that for a long moment and wondered if I really wanted to get myself mixed up in writing another book. Then I took a deep breath and added:

The book must be fun. Picaresque characters. Strange places—but all light, delightful, raffish. Magical mystery tour.

And then finally I scrawled:

Young man journeying to claim an inheritance that has been usurped. His own identity has been stolen and he now wears another body.

That was all I needed. The story was clear in my mind, and I felt an impulse saying, "Go on. Go ahead. Do it, you dope. *Do* it!" At the top of the envelope I wrote a title: *Lord Valentine's Castle*. And the next day I set about the process of finding a publisher for it. Before long contracts were being signed, and I was back at the typewriter (in those far-off days before word processors!) again after my long layoff, and the world of Majipoor began to come into existence.

* * *

As Majipoor evolved in my mind, I realized that it couldn't all be covered by a single gigantic city, which had been my original conception. There had to be forests and valleys, mountains and deserts, agricultural zones, and such. Nevertheless I stuck to my basic notion of a gigantic planet that had a population of many billions, most of them living in enormous cities of great beauty and fascination. In order for human beings to live comfortably on so huge a planet, the gravitational pull has to be something reasonably similar to that of Earth—which meant a light core for Majipoor, very little in the way of metals. Metal-poor Majipoor therefore could not be a high-technology planet. Since it exists some fifteen or twenty thousand years in our future, it is able to take advantage of technological breakthroughs that are sheer magic to us, and so there is enough in the way of transportation, communications, and sanitation to provide a comfortable existence for its billions of inhabitants. Food is abundant, the air is fresh, the streams and oceans are clean. It is a cheerful and playful place in general, although highly urbanized. But in many respects it's an almost medieval place.

Majipoor was settled by colonists from Earth some fourteen thousand years ago, but also is occupied peacefully by representatives of a number of the galaxy's other intelligent species.

The chief alien life-forms that inhabit Majipoor are these:

—**Skandars.** Towering shaggy six-limbed beings of formidable strength and coordination, that look something like bears that walk upright and have four arms. They come from a chillier planet than Majipoor.

—**Ghayrogs.** Sleek reptilian-looking bipeds with scales and Medusa-like snaky hair.

—**Vroons.** Small many-tentacled creatures, a little like land-going octopuses in form, with telepathic powers.

—**Liimen.** Three-eyed humanoid creatures that live by farming or menial labor.

—**Hjorts.** Plump gray-skinned beings with frog-like eyes, frequently found in positions of minor authority (gatekeepers, customs officials, etc.).

Majipoor has, in addition, its own native intelligent race, the Piurivars, known to the settlers as shapeshifters or Metamorphs. These somewhat sinister humanoids, who are capable of physical changes of appearance, were rounded up long ago and forced to live in a reservation in an otherwise uninhabited part of the planet; they are regarded with some uneasiness by the

settlers, who fear them for good reason.

One entire hemisphere of Majipoor is occupied by ocean—the Great Sea, which is so vast that no explorers have ever crossed it in its entirety. (In general the people of Majipoor are not given to making difficult and risky expeditions without purpose, and few can see any purpose in sailing across the immensity of the Great Sea.) The most conspicuous inhabitants of the ocean are known as sea-dragons—gigantic creatures that move in immense migratory herds across the entire planet. The other hemisphere is occupied by three continents of huge size and a smaller, though not insignificant, island located at the center of the Inner Sea between the continents. These are:

—**Alhanroel.** The first of the continents to be settled, and the one with the largest population. The main governmental center is here, at Castle Mount, a gigantic mountain thirty miles high that has hundreds of cities located on its climate-controlled slopes. In the center of Alhanroel is a second governmental center, the Labyrinth, an underground city constructed in the form of a many-leveled maze.

—**Zimroel.** A rich and fertile continent bisected by the River Zimr, which runs from west to east through its upper third. Such major cities as the river port of Ni-Moya and the ocean ports of Pidruid (in the west) and Piliplok (in the

east) are found here. In the center of the continent is the Metamorph Reservation, closed to all outsiders.

—**Suvrael.** This southern continent is virtually all desert, though some areas are suitable for grazing animals. Its few cities are found along its northern coast.

The large island in the middle of the Inner Sea is known as the Isle of Dreams. It is the religious center of the planet.

The governmental system of Majipoor is a complex elective monarchy overseeing a hereditary aristocracy. Its chief figures are:

—**The Pontifex.** An imperial figure, aloof and virtually unknowable, who has no direct contact with those he rules. Surrounded by a great entourage, the Pontifex dwells in his palace in the depths of the Labyrinth on Alhanroel and rarely if ever emerges. No one speaks directly to him; he is addressed in the third person by a court official who relays the statements of others to him.

—**The Coronal.** He is the heir apparent to the Pontifex, and is generally a man of young or early middle years. The Coronal is the chief administrative officer of the realm, a combination of field marshal and prime minister, a person of vigor and decisiveness. He is consid-

ered to be the adoptive son of the reigning Pontifex and is chosen by him from a cadre of specially trained candidates who reside on Castle Mount. Upon the death of the Pontifex the Coronal succeeds him, entering the Labyrinth to stay and naming a new Coronal.

—**The Lady of the Isle of Sleep.** She is high priestess of the realm, virtually a mother-goddess figure as well. From her island sanctuary she presides over the spiritual life of the planet, appearing in dreams to citizens and guiding them toward higher aspirations—a process made possible through technological means. She is more often invoked as a symbol of virtue than actually involved in direct political activity. The Lady of the Isle is usually the mother of the reigning Coronal, and when he succeeds to the Pontificate she customarily retires in favor of the mother of the new Coronal, although she may retain her post if the new Coronal is motherless. Any vacancy in the Ladyship can also be filled from among her associated priestesses.

—**The King of Dreams.** This dark and powerful figure occupies an ambiguous role in the hierarchy, often opposing the decrees of the Pontifex and thwarting the actions of the Coronal. His power, which was established more recently than that of the other three high officials, derives from his control of thought-

amplifying apparatus more potent than that used by the Lady of the Isle of Sleep. While she can make suggestions that guide and direct, his machinery is capable of controlling. Customarily he serves as the executive arm of the Pontifex/Coronal administration, but when he chooses to defy them he can cause considerable trouble. The office of the King of Dreams is hereditary and has remained within the family of the Barjazids since its inception.

The enormous planet of Majipoor is a wonderful and beautiful place, filled with strange plants and animals, spectacular scenic areas, marvelous cities of a size almost beyond comprehension. In the fourteen thousand years of human settlement there, all manner of astonishing things have happened—and there is plenty to come.

INTRODUCTION AND RULES TO CROSSROADS™ ADVENTURES

Bill Fawcett

FOR THE MANY of us who have enjoyed the stories upon which this adventure is based, it may seem a bit strange to find an introduction this long at the start of a book. What you are holding is both a game and an adventure. Have you ever read a book and then told yourself you would have been able to think more clearly or seen a way out of the hero's dilemma? In a Crossroads™ adventure you have the opportunity to do just that. *You* make the key decisions. By means of a few easily followed steps you are able to see the results of your choices.

A Crossroads™ adventure is as much fun to read as it is to play. It is more than just a game or a book. It is a chance to enjoy once more a familiar and treasured story. The excitement of adventuring in a beloved universe is neatly

blended into a story which stands well on its own merit, a story in which you will encounter many familiar characters and places and discover more than a few new ones as well. Each adventure is a thrilling tale, with the extra suspense and satisfaction of knowing that you will succeed or fail by your own endeavors.

THE ADVENTURE

Throughout the story you will have the opportunity to make decisions. Each of these decisions will affect whether *the hero* succeeds in the quest, or even survive. In some cases you will actually be fighting battles; other times you will use your knowledge and instincts to choose the best path to follow. In many cases there will be clues in the story or illustrations.

A Crossroads™ adventure is divided into sections. The length of a section may be a few lines or many pages. The section numbers are shown at the top of a page to make it easier for you to follow. Each section ends when you must make a decision, or fight. The next section you turn to will show the results of your decision. At least one six-sided die and a pencil are needed to "play" this book.

The words "six-sided dice" are often abbreviated as "D6". If more than one is needed a number will precede the term. "Roll three six-

sided dice" will be written as roll "3 D6". Virtually all the die rolls in these rules do involve rolling three six-sided dice (or rolling one six-sided die three times) and totaling what is rolled.

If you are an experienced role play gamer, you may also wish to convert the values given in this novel to those you can use with TSR's Advanced Dungeons and Dragons™ or any other role playing game. All of the adventures have been constructed so that they also can be easily adapted in this manner. The values for the hero will transfer directly. While AD & D™ games are much more complicated, doing this will allow you to be the Game Master for other players. Important values for the hero's opponents will be given to aid you in this conversion and to give those playing by the Crossroads™ rules a better idea of what they are facing.

THE HERO

Seven values are used to describe the hero in gaming terms. These are strength, intelligence, wisdom/luck, constitution, dexterity, charisma, and hit points. These values measure all of a character's abilities. At the end of these rules is a record sheet. On it are given all of the values for the hero of this adventure and any equipment or supplies they begin the adventure with.

While you adventure, this record can be used to keep track of damage received and any new equipment or magical items acquired. You may find it advisable to make a photocopy of that page. Permission to do so, for your own use only, is given by the publisher of this game/novel. You may wish to consult this record sheet as we discuss what each of the values represents.

STRENGTH

This is the measure of how physically powerful your hero is. It compares the hero to others in how much the character can lift, how hard he can punch, and just how brawny he is. The strongest a normal human can be is to have a strength value of 18. The weakest a child would have is a 3. Here is a table giving comparable strengths:

Strength	**Example**
3	A five-year-old child
6	An elderly man
8	Out of shape and over 40
10	An average 20-year-old man
13	In good shape and works out
15	A top athlete or football running back
17	Changes auto tires without a jack
18	Arm wrestles Arnold Schwarzenegger and wins

A Tolkien-style troll, being magical, might have a strength of 19 or 20. A full-grown elephant has a strength of 23. A fifty-foot dragon would have a strength of 30.

INTELLIGENCE

Being intelligent is not just a measure of native brain power. It is also an indication of the ability to use that intelligence. The value for intelligence also measures how aware the character is, and so how likely they are to notice a subtle clue. Intelligence can be used to measure how resistant a mind is to hypnosis or mental attack. A really sharp baboon would have an intelligence of 3. Most humans (we all know exceptions) begin at about 5. The highest value possible is an 18. Here is a table of relative intelligence:

Intelligence	**Example**
3	My dog
5	Lassie
6	Curly (the third Stooge)
8	Somewhat slow
10	Average person
13	College professor/good quarterback
15	Indiana Jones/Carl Sagan
17	Doc Savage/Mr. Spock
18	Leonardo da Vinci (Isaac Asimov?)

Brainiac of comicbook fame would have a value of 21.

WISDOM/LUCK

Wisdom is the ability to make correct judgments, often with less than complete facts. Wisdom is knowing what to do and when to do it. Attacking, when running will earn you a spear in the back, is the best part of wisdom. Being in the right place at the right time can be called luck or wisdom. Not being discovered when hiding can be luck, if it is because you knew enough to not hide in the poison oak, wisdom is also a factor. Activities which are based more on instinct, the intuitive leap, than analysis are decided by wisdom.

In many ways both wisdom and luck are further connected, especially as wisdom also measures how friendly the ruling powers of the universe (not the author, the fates) are to the hero. A hero may be favored by fate or luck because he is reverent or for no discernible reason at all. This will give them a high wisdom value. Everyone knows those "lucky" individuals who can fall in the mud and find a gold coin. Here is a table measuring relative wisdom/luck:

Wisdom	**Example**
Under 3	Cursed or totally unthinking
5	Never plans, just reacts

7	Some cunning, "street smarts"
9	Average thinking person
11	Skillful planner, good gambler
13	Successful businessman/Lee Iacocca
15	Captain Kirk (wisdom)/Conan (luck)
17	Sherlock Holmes (wisdom)/Luke Skywalker (luck)
18	Lazarus Long

CONSTITUTION

The more you can endure, the higher your constitution. If you have a high constitution you are better able to survive physical damage, emotional stress, and poisons. The higher your value for constitution, the longer you are able to continue functioning in a difficult situation. A character with a high constitution can run farther (though not necessarily faster) or hang by one hand longer than the average person. A high constitution means you also have more stamina, and recover more quickly from injuries. A comparison of values for constitution:

Constitution	**Example**
3	A terminal invalid
6	A ten-year-old child
8	Your stereotyped "98 pound weakling"
10	Average person
14	Olympic Athlete/Sam Spade

16	Marathon runner/Rocky
18	Rasputin/Batman

A whale would have a constitution of 20. Superman's must be about 50.

DEXTERITY

The value for dexterity measures not only how fast a character can move, but how well-coordinated those movements are. A surgeon, a pianist, and a juggler all need a high value for dexterity. If you have a high value for dexterity you can react quickly (though not necessarily correctly), duck well, and perform sleight of hand magic (if you are bright enough to learn how). Conversely, a low dexterity means you react slowly and drop things frequently. All other things being equal, the character with the highest dexterity will have the advantage of the first attack in a combat. Here are some comparative examples of dexterity:

Dexterity	**Example**
3 or less	Complete klutz
5	Inspector Clousseau
6	Can walk and chew gum, most of the time
8	Barney Fife
10	Average person
13	Good fencer/Walter Payton
15	Brain surgeons/Houdini

16	Flying Karamazov Brothers
17	Movie ninja/Cyrano de Bergerac
18	Bruce Lee

Batman, Robin, Daredevil and The Shadow all have a dexterity of 19. At a dexterity of 20 you don't even see the man move before he has taken your wallet and underwear and has left the room (the Waco Kid).

CHARISMA

Charisma is more than just good looks, though they certainly don't hurt. It is a measure of how persuasive a hero is and how willing others are to do what he wants. You can have average looks yet be very persuasive, and have a high charisma. If your value for charisma is high, you are better able to talk yourself out of trouble or obtain information from a stranger. If your charisma is low, you may be ignored or even mocked, even when you are right. A high charisma value is vital to entertainers of any sort, and leaders. A different type of charisma is just as important to spies. In the final measure a high value for charisma means people will react to you in the way you desire. Here are some comparative values for charisma:

Charisma	**Example**
3	Hunchback of Notre Dame

5	An ugly used car salesman
7	Richard Nixon today
10	Average person
12	Team coach
14	Magnum, P.I.
16	Henry Kissinger/Jim DiGriz
18	Dr. Who/Prof. Harold Hill (Centauri)

HIT POINTS

Hit points represent the total amount of damage a hero can take before he is killed or knocked out. You can receive damage from being wounded in a battle, through starvation, or even through a mental attack. Hit points measure more than just how many times the hero can be battered over the head before he is knocked out. They also represent the ability to keep striving toward a goal. A poorly paid mercenary may have only a few hit points, even though he is a hulking brute of a man, because the first time he receives even a slight wound he will withdraw from the fight. A blacksmith's apprentice who won't accept defeat will have a higher number of hit points.

A character's hit points can be lost through a wound to a specific part of the body or through general damage to the body itself. This general damage can be caused by a poison, a bad fall, or even exhaustion and starvation. Pushing your

body too far beyond its limits may result in a successful action at the price of the loss of a few hit points. All these losses are treated in the same manner.

Hit points lost are subtracted from the total on the hero's record sheet. When a hero has lost all of his hit points, then that character has failed. When this happens you will be told to which section to turn. Here you will often find a description of the failure and its consequences for the hero.

The hit points for the opponents the hero meets in combat are given in the adventure. You should keep track of these hit points on a piece of scrap paper. When a monster or opponent has lost all of their hit points, they have lost the fight. If a character is fighting more than one opponent, then you should keep track of each of their hit points. Each will continue to fight until it has 0 hit points. When everyone on one side of the battle has no hit points left, the combat is over.

Even the best played character can lose all of his hit points when you roll too many bad dice during a combat. If the hero loses all of his hit points the adventure may have ended in failure. You will be told so in the next section you are instructed to turn to. In this case you can turn back to the first section and begin again. This time you will have the advantage of having learned some of the hazards the hero will face.

TAKING CHANCES

There will be occasions where you will have to decide whether the hero should attempt to perform some action which involves risk. This might be to climb a steep cliff, jump a pit, or juggle three daggers. There will be other cases where it might benefit the hero to notice something subtle or remember an ancient ballad perfectly. In all of these cases you will be asked to roll three six-sided dice (3 D6) and compare the total of all three dice to the hero's value for the appropriate ability.

For example, if the hero is attempting to juggle three balls, then for him to do so successfully you would have to roll a total equal to or less than the hero's value for dexterity. If your total was less than this dexterity value, then you would be directed to a section describing how the balls looked as they were skillfully juggled. If you rolled a higher value than that for dexterity, then you would be told to read a section which describes the embarrassment of dropping the balls, and being laughed at by the audience.

Where the decision is a judgment call, such as whether to take the left or right staircase, it is left entirely to you. It will be likely somewhere in the adventure or in the original novels there will be some piece of information which would indicate that the left staircase leads to a trap and

the right to your goal. No die roll will be needed for a judgment decision.

In all cases you will be guided at the end of each section as to exactly what you need do. If you have any questions you should refer back to these rules.

MAGICAL ITEMS AND SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

There are many unusual items which appear in the pages of this adventure. When it is possible for them to be taken by the hero, you will be given the option of doing so. One or more of these items may be necessary to the successful completion of the adventure. You will be given the option of taking these at the end of a section. If you choose to pick up an item and succeed in getting it, you should list that item on the hero's record sheet. There is no guarantee that deciding to take an item means you will actually obtain it. If someone owns it already they are quite likely to resent your efforts to take it. In some cases things may not even be all they appear to be or the item may be trapped or cursed. Having it may prove a detriment rather than a benefit.

All magical items give the hero a bonus (or penalty) on certain die rolls. You will be told when this applies, and often given the option of

whether or not to use the item. You will be instructed at the end of the section on how many points to add to or subtract from your die roll. If you choose to use an item which can function only once, such as a magic potion or hand grenade, then you will also be instructed to remove the item from your record sheet. Certain items, such as a magic sword, can be used many times. In this case you will be told when you obtain the item when you can apply the bonus. The bonus for a magic sword could be added every time a character is in hand-to-hand combat.

Other special items may allow a character to fly, walk through fire, summon magical warriors, or many other things. How and when they affect play will again be told to you in the paragraphs at the end of the sections where you have the choice of using them.

Those things which restore lost hit points are a special case. You may choose to use these at any time during the adventure. If you have a magical healing potion which returns 1 D6 of lost hit points, you may add these points when you think it is best to. This can even be during a combat in the place of a round of attack. No matter how many healing items you use, a character can never have more hit points than they begin the adventure with.

There is a limit to the number of special items any character may carry. In any Crossroads™ adventure the limit is four items. If you already

have four special items listed on your record sheet, then one of these must be discarded in order to take the new item. Any time you erase an item off the record sheet, whether because it was used or because you wish to add a new item, whatever is erased is permanently lost. It can never be "found" again, even if you return to the same location later in the adventure.

Except for items which restore hit points, the hero can only use an item in combat or when given the option to do so. The opportunity will be listed in the instructions.

In the case of an item which can be used in every combat, the bonus can be added or subtracted as the description of the item indicates. A +2 sword would add two points to any total rolled in combat. This bonus would be used each and every time the hero attacks. Only one attack bonus can be used at a time. Just because a hero has both a +1 and a +2 sword doesn't mean he knows how to fight with both at once. Only the better bonus would apply.

If a total of 12 is needed to hit an attacking monster and the hero has a +2 sword, then you will only need to roll a total of 10 on the three dice to successfully strike the creature.

You could also find an item, perhaps enchanted armor, which could be worn in all combat and would have the effect of subtracting its bonus from the total of any opponent's attack on its wearer. (Bad guys can wear magic armor, too.) If a monster normally would need a 13 to

hit a character who has obtained a set of +2 armor, then the monster would now need a total of 15 to score a hit. An enchanted shield would operate in the same way, but could never be used when the character was using a weapon which needed both hands, such as a pike, long-bow or two-handed sword.

COMBAT

There will be many situations where the hero will be forced, or you may choose, to meet an opponent in combat. The opponents can vary from a wild beast, to a human thief, or an unearthly monster. In all cases the same steps are followed.

The hero will attack first in most combats unless you are told otherwise. This may happen when there is an ambush, other special situations, or because the opponent simply has a much higher dexterity.

At the beginning of a combat section you will be given the name or type of opponent involved. For each combat five values are given. The first of these is the total on three six-sided dice needed for the attacker to hit the hero. Next to this value is the value the hero needs to hit these opponents. After these two values is listed the hit points of the opponent. If there is more than one opponent, each one will have the same number. (See the Hit Points section included earlier if you are unclear as to what these do.)

Under the value needed to hit by the opponent is the hit points of damage that it will do to the hero when it attacks successfully. Finally, under the total needed for the hero to successfully hit an opponent is the damage he will do with the different weapons he might have. Unlike a check for completing a daring action (where you wish to roll under a value), in a combat you have to roll the value given or higher on three six-sided dice to successfully hit an opponent.

For example:

Here is how a combat between the hero armed with a sword and three brigands armed only with daggers is written:

BRIGANDS

To hit the hero: 14	*To be hit: 12*	*Hit points: 4*
Damage with daggers: 1 D6 (used by the brigands)	*Damage with sword: 2 D6 (used by the hero)*	

There are three brigands. If two are killed (taken to 0 hit points) the third will flee in panic.

If the hero wins, turn to section 85.

If he is defeated, turn to section 67.

RUNNING AWAY

Running rather than fighting, while often

desirable, is not always possible. The option to run away is available only when listed in the choices. Even when this option is given, there is no guarantee the hero can get away safely.

THE COMBAT SEQUENCE

Any combat is divided into alternating rounds. In most cases the hero will attack first. Next, surviving opponents will have the chance to fight back. When both have attacked, one round will have been completed. A combat can have any number of rounds and continues until the hero or his opponents are defeated. Each round is the equivalent of six seconds. During this time all the parties in the combat may actually take more than one swing at each other.

The steps in resolving a combat in which the hero attacks first are as follows:

1. Roll three six-sided dice. Total the numbers showing on all three and add any bonuses from weapons or special circumstances. If this total is the same or greater than the second value given, "to hit the opponent," then the hero has successfully attacked.

2. If the hero attacks successfully, the next step is to determine how many hit points of

damage he did to the opponent. The die roll for this will be given below the "to hit opponent" information.

3. Subtract any hit points of damage done from the opponent's total.

4. If any of the enemy have one or more hit points left, then the remaining opponent or opponents now can attack. Roll three six-sided dice for each attacker. Add up each of these sets of three dice. If the total is the same or greater than the value listed after "to hit the hero" in the section describing the combat, the attack was successful.

5. For each hit roll the number of dice listed for damage. Subtract the total from the number of hit points the hero has at that time. Enter the new, lower total on the hero's record sheet.

If both the hero and one or more opponents have hit points left, the combat continues. Start again at step one. The battle ends only when the hero is killed, all the opponents are killed or all of one side has run away. A hero cannot, except through a healing potion or spells or when specifically told to during the adventure, regain lost hit points. A number of small wounds from several opponents will kill a character as thor-

oughly as one titanic, unsuccessful combat with a hill giant.

DAMAGE

The combat continues, following the sequence given below, until either the hero or his opponents have no hit points. In the case of multiple opponents, subtract hit points from one opponent until the total reaches 0 or less. Extra hit points of damage done on the round when each opponent is defeated are lost. They do not carry over to the next enemy in the group. To win the combat, you must eliminate all of an opponent's hit points.

The damage done by a weapon will vary depending on who is using it. A club in the hands of a child will do far less damage than the same club wielded by a hill giant. The maximum damage is given as a number of six-sided dice. In some cases the maximum will be less than a whole die. This is abbreviated by a minus sign followed by a number. For example, D6−2, meaning one roll of a six-sided dice, minus two. The total damage can never be less than zero, meaning no damage done. 2 D6−1 means that you should roll two six-sided dice and then subtract one from the total of them both.

A combat may, because of the opponent involved, have one or more special circumstances. It may be that the enemy will surrender

or flee when its hit point total falls below a certain level, or even that reinforcements will arrive to help the bad guys after so many rounds. You will be told of these special situations in the lines directly under the combat values.

Now you may turn to section one.

RECORD SHEET

PARRAS CORBALIN, lieutenant and personal aide to Lord Valentine of Majipoor.

Strength: 16
Intelligence: 14
Wisdom: 11
Constitution: 13
Dexterity: 14
Charisma: 12

Hit Points: 18

Equipment: A pack with 3 days' food, change of clothes, and 11 Crowns.

Weapon Carried: Vibration Sword (1 D6 Damage).

---

* 1 *

First it grows colder, the wind biting into Parras as he climbs on the ice-covered upper slope of Mt. Zygnor. He clings to the ropes pinned to the rock while standing on two pitons that somehow support his great weight. His back is to the Great Sea, only occasionally visible as the heavy clouds part to reveal it, dark and gray in the morning light.

Now the ice begins to build up, collecting first on Parras' well-insulated gloves and then on his goggles, rendering everything a crystalline blur.

He must keep climbing, he knows. To stop now, to wait until the clouds lift, is to wait for death.

He moves his hand, reaching into a sack lashed to his side. He flexes his fingers to clear the hand of ice, and then he digs out another piton. Letting the safety ropes hold him fast, he grabs the hammer and pounds the piton well above his head, hoping that hard grylite does not suddenly give way to a more porous rock.

He hits as hard as he can, aware of the growing chunks of ice building on his boots. One, then another, metal piton is pounded into the dense, bluish rock. Parras reaches up to

grab the pitons, and then he pushes gently upward with the toes of his boots, now not able to see anything, feeling only the icy intimacy of the cliff face.

But one piton comes flying out, and all of a sudden Parras is spinning around, facing out, now, away from the mountain, ready to slide down. He counts. If the other piton holds until the count of ten, he tells himself, it will give him a chance.

If not . . . if not—

"One," he says aloud. Then, trying not to hurry, "Two. Three. Four. Five." Was that some movement he felt? Perhaps the slightest tilting forward of the piton before it pops out, sending him tumbling down, easily pulling out the safety ropes attached to his belt?

"Six. Seven." It *is* holding, and if he was religious he would start muttering words to some deity who watches over fools who risk their lives. "Eight. Nine." He turns himself around, his cheek once again against the mountain, and then lowers himself back to his former handholds. His boots, too, find their resting place.

His heartbeat begins to slow and, forcing himself to concentrate, Parras tries to relax. And then he starts again. The pitons, the hammering, and again, until he is crawling up the cliff, blindly. He knows that to rush is foolish. And a mountain such as Zygnor does not suffer fools gladly.

He climbs up, until he feels the cliff yield, and

he knows it's over. A warm feeling of triumph fills him. He pulls himself up and, still unable to see, he crawls onto a ledge not more than three feet wide.

A place to rest, Parras thinks. Home, and he smiles, breaking the tiny icicles that dangle from his moustache.

He scrapes his goggles, clearing them, and then disconnects the safety lines attached to his belt, taking care to moor them to the ledge. After all, he does want to go down again. But for now there is only one thing. To stand here, at the top of Mt. Zygnor, the actual peak a mere twelve feet above, and below him all of Alhanroel. All, that is, except for Castle Mount, still many more miles higher, its hundreds of climate-controlled cities protected from these storms. Why, even now Parras knows that people on Castle Mount, at this very same height, are strolling through lush flower-filled gardens, listening to the hypnotic sound of the singing ferns in the warm morning air.

Which is why he is here in the first place. To taste something new, free from the perfect control of the Coronal's mountain.

Parras slides off his backpack and digs out the lightweight sleeping bag that will keep him warm during this tempest. He finds an opening in the rock and places a small quartz heater, still fully charged and ready to heat his tea. He unwraps some dried bilantoon meat and bites off a chunk. Salty and tangy to taste, Parras finds it oh-so-good to chew.

It was worth it, he reflects. Too many years on the Mount had dulled his senses. What was it Valentine had said to him? Peace can make a young man old before his time. And yet war can make that time all too short.

Parras takes another bite of the bilantoon, and lifts his metal cup from the heater. The different herbs from the tea fill his nostrils with familiar scents that remind him of his Lord Valentine and the Great Castle.

It was sheer luck that he became one of Valentine's personal lieutenants. Everyone fought fiercely the day Lord Valentine reclaimed his throne and threw down the Metamorph who ruled in his stead. It became a quest to save Majipoor, a quest that ended in a great celebration inside the Confalume throne room, the largest and grandest of the rooms in the castle. Its brightly gilded beams and colorful tapestries overwhelmed Parras, who had spent his days in the simple quarters of the Coronal's army.

But Valentine's hand singled him out, saying that his bravery, fighting beside Valentine and the incredible Skandar Zalzan Kavol, was something that must be rewarded. And so, Parras was appointed to stay beside Lord Valentine, the Coronal. As a lieutenant, an emissary, a confidant. It was a remarkable honor.

And also very boring.

The affairs of the kingdom, despite its sheer immensity, ran smoothly, requiring little direct-

ly of Lord Valentine and usually even less of his lieutenant, Parras Corbalin.

It took this, a risky, dangerous act such as climbing the great Zygnor alone, to sharpen his taste for a life sometimes lacking in flavor.

Suddenly, a high-pitched sound penetrates the thick layer of fur that surrounds Parras' ears. A message, he realizes, and one of the highest importance. Only one person knows where I am, thinks Parras. Only Valentine himself knows, and this message must be from him.

Parras quickly pulls a shiny black disk out of a side pocket of his pack, and then touches its edge in the proper sequence to receive the message. Though it comes from thousands of miles away, the voice is as clear as though Valentine himself stood on this ledge.

And the voice Parras hears is a grave one, lacking all traces of familiarity and lightness.

"Parras, you must return," Parras hears as the icy wind dances around him. "I would not trouble you if I was not in most urgent need."

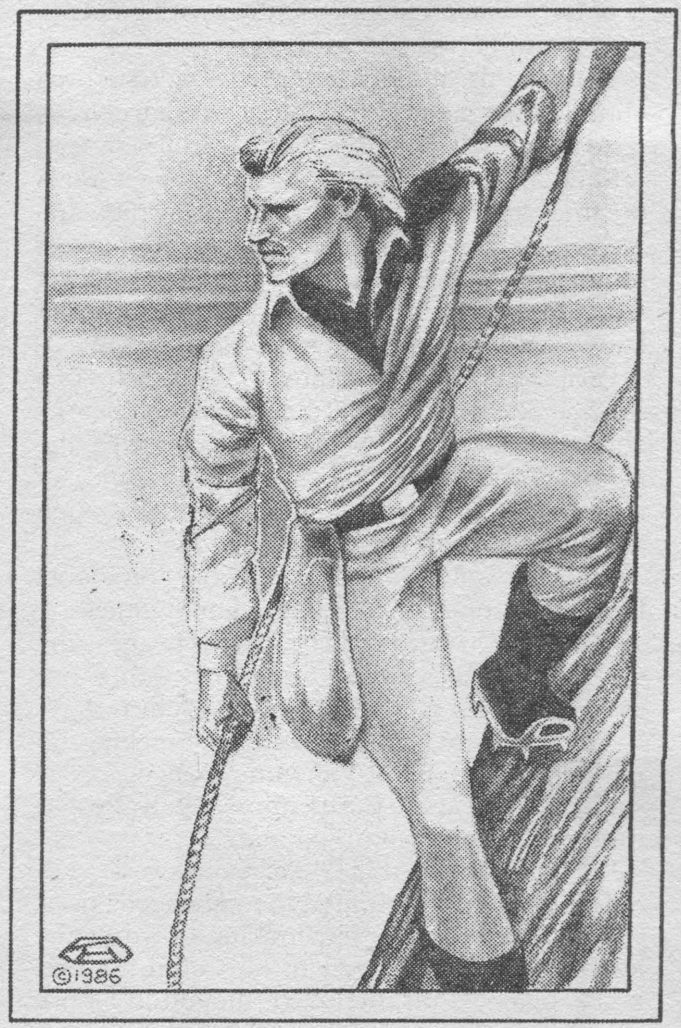
"Yes, my lord," Parras responds, picking up on the formal tone of Valentine's voice.

"I need you at the Castle immediately. Rest as little as possible, talk to no one."

"It is as good as done," Parras answers.

The disk becomes quiet; the message is over.

And Parras leans over, looking down at the ice-covered face he thought he would not embrace again until the next, hopefully more sunny, morning.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We must touch again much sooner, he thinks. He dumps out the rest of his tea, and rolls the unused sleeping bag back into his pack. The small heater is still warm as he shoves it in with the rest of his gear, readying himself to climb down.

It's always harder to go down, he thinks. I tend to rush, going down. The pitons sometimes grow loose. Memory can play tricks on you, making you think that there's a crack here to stick your boot into, or there's a small ledge that you can grab with your hand.

Oh, yes, going down is so easy.

If you don't care how fast you go.

Roll 3 D6.

If the roll is greater than Parras' Dexterity, turn to section 2.

If the roll is less than his Dexterity, turn to section 3.

If the roll is less than 6, turn to section 4.

* 2 *

Parras reaches out for a piton that's not there. He feels his body start to pull him down, while he wonders what happened. Was it someplace else, a little lower maybe, or a little more to the right? Or had it slipped out just after he got to the top, leaving nothing behind save a small hole?

All he knows is that he's holding on with one arm now.

Roll 3 D6.

If the roll is greater than his value for Strength, turn to section 5.

If it is less than his value for Strength, turn to section 3.

* 3 *

Parras gradually locates his misplaced trail of pitons leading down, and he struggles to go slowly, gently easing himself down even as great chunks of hail snap at his back.

Then he searches with his boot for the bottom pitons, swinging his legs like pendulums, but feeling nothing.

Roll 3 D6.

If it's greater than Parras' value for Strength, turn to section 5.

If it's less than Parras' value for Strength, turn to section 4.

* 4 *

Parras cautiously moves down the cliff face, thinking of only one thing, the next few inches. From one handhold to the next, re-attaching safety lines, checking the strength of each piton, and always straining every muscle to keep embracing the icy rock.

How long it takes him, he does not know. It is still light, though the exact location of Majipoor's sun is impossible to determine. He sees nothing, and the only sound is the wind slapping the rock, attempting to blow him off like some tenacious fly.

Parras reaches the bottom of the cliff, only a mere one hundred feet below the peak. Pausing to clean his goggles and gather up his ropes, he continues to climb downward, knowing that

there is little to challenge him ahead. He takes a moment to dig out another piece of chewy bilantoon, and then keeps moving, wondering what could be so important that Valentine would summon him.

Majipoor has been at peace ever since that fateful day that Valentine reclaimed his throne. Then Valentine married his Carabella in a tremendous celebration that lasted a full week. All of Majipoor joined them, with each city trying to outdo the other in the splendor of its parties, or the pageantry of its parades.

On the wedding night itself every major city of Majipoor staged a fireworks display that went on into the early morning hours. And, of course, dignitaries from other worlds, even those not especially friendly to Majipoor, sent gifts of varying degrees of usefulness. A three-headed Milop, a delicacy, so it is said; an air bed, crafted of fine wood yet designed to make a gentle, warm mattress of air to sleep on; and jewels and gems that glimmered with every color in the universe.

But as great as Valentine's joy was on that day, it was nine months later that his heart became truly full, when Lady Carabella presented him with a son. He was a sharp-eyed baby whose cries echoed down the halls, and they called him Brynamir. Zalzan Kavol picked the boy up on the day he was born and, holding him tightly to his furry cheek, announced to one and all that the boy had the hands of a juggler.

And that was a mere five years ago.

Now, Parras thinks, something is very wrong, some crisis that scares even Lord Valentine, who is surely the bravest man Parras ever met.

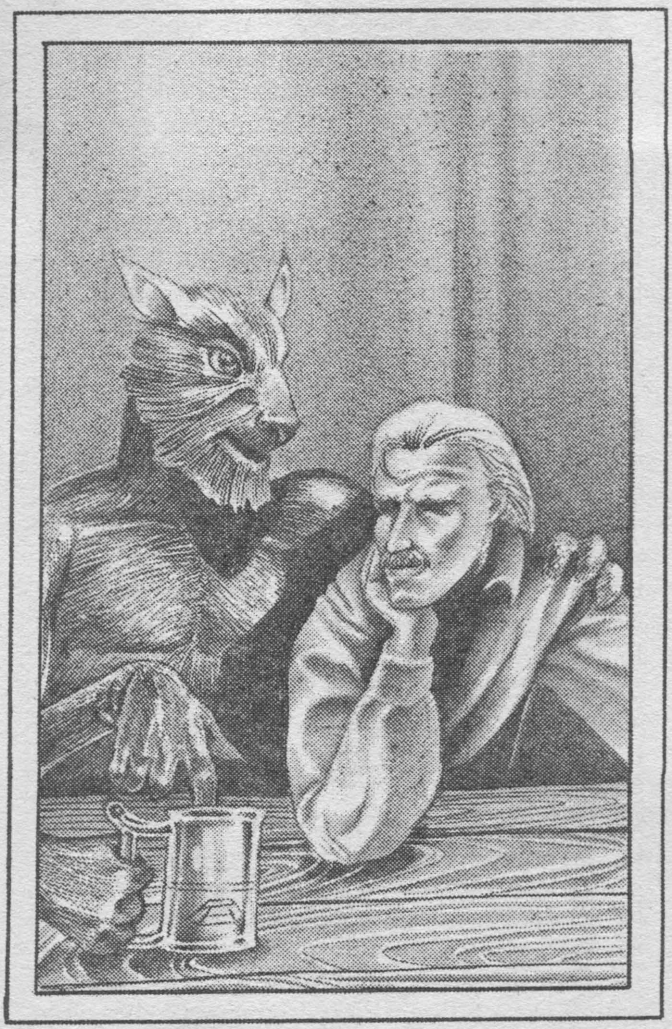
Mt. Zygnor ends suddenly, the rock leading to a thick forest of gawky androdragma trees laced with vibrant patches of flowering alabandina. Parras loosens his hood and jacket, feeling astonishingly warm. It is many miles yet to the village of Bylek, but Parras feels invigorated just once again standing on level ground.

The miles pass without incident and, just as it grows dark, the cloud cover lifts, revealing a beautiful shade of purple dotted with only the brightest stars.

Parras reaches Bylek just as many of the villagers are going to sleep. He passes a uniformed Hjort, apparently watching over the sleepy streets, and Parras realizes that he must look strange indeed.

Then he sees a brightly lit building ahead and a sign proclaiming it to be The Red Blave, an inn. He walks in, eager for a cup of thokka wine and, perhaps, some meat fresher than that in his backpack. A few minutes is all he will take. A bit of refreshment, and then he'll find Polol.

The room is crowded, a densely packed wonder of all Majipoor's creatures. A table of Ghayrogs sits almost sullenly in the corner, looking like conspirators, punctuating their remarks with licks of their forked tongues. The table nearest them, well away due to the strong acrid



odor often given off by Ghayrogs—especially when drinking—is filled with Hjorts whose somber expression is belied by their throaty laughs.

"Back so soon, young fellow? Old Zygnor prove too much for your out-of-shape carcass?" The Skandar standing at the bar laughs as he continues to talk to Parras. "There is a small hill nearby that the children play on, perhaps that—"

The crowd watches Parras, some eager to see some violence, others fearing that their quiet conversations over ale might be over. Parras takes off his jacket, his vibrating sword strapped tightly to his side, glistening in the smoky light.

Parras walks over to the steely-eyed Skandar. "I knew you'd be here, you fat old rug." The bartender stands nearby, frozen. "A glass of your best thokka wine," Parras says. "And if you have some cold, fresh meat, perhaps some blave, bring that too. And another ale for my friend Tylan Polol."

The bartender nods nervously and begins to pour.

The Skandar smiles, then opens his arms to hug Parras. "Good to see you so soon, my friend."

As usual, Parras is non-plussed by his friend's gigantic hug. "Tylan, I want you to rest assured that I've been to the top of Zygnor." The crowd, seeing the imagined confrontation melt away,

resumes their various conversations. The bartender puts down a tall glass of bluish wine and a plate of sliced meat. Parras takes a warming sip and speaks quietly to the Skandar.

"I've been summoned to the Mount. Immediately. As soon as I've finished this plate, you can take me to the floater and we'll return—"

The Skandar lets out a great sigh, his four arms waving in exasperation. "And my hunting? What of that? This was to be recreation for me too, Parras."

Parras looks at the Skandar, a look he used rarely, only when he needed to remind Tylan Polol of their special responsibilities. "If Lord Valentine needs our help, then we will do everything we possibly can. Everything." The thokka wine had disappeared, and the bartender poured another. "You've secured the floater, I assume?"

"Yes," Polol says. "It's locked in an old farmhouse just outside the village."

"And no one saw you?"

"No one."

Good, thinks Parras. Their floater carries the starburst seal of Majipoor, and it's bound to attract attention and unwanted interest. While the kingdom might be at peace, the throne was not without its enemies.

"Then, let's be off. We can be at Castle Mount by daybreak."

"This way, then, Parras. I'll tell the innkeeper to hold our rooms and watch our gear. With

luck, we'll be back before the end of the hunting season."

After some words, and a few passed crowns to the bartender, Polol leads Parras out of the inn and down the road, to the east. The village ends abruptly, and the valley opens up to expose the rich farmlands of the valley. They walk quickly, silently, until Polol says, "There! It's locked inside that old barn. The farmer asked me no questions."

"Then why is the door open?" Parras asks. Without a word, he and Polol quickly ready their weapons.

If Parras decides to hide and watch the old barn, turn to section 10.

If he decides to enter the barn, turn to section 7.

If he sends Polol ahead to look it over, turn to section 13.

* 5 *

Parras feels his hand begin to slip and, before he knows what's happening, he's twisting over and over, pulling one safety line out completely. He falls now, straight down, thinking only one thought—

That the other line holds.

Section 6

With a sudden jerk, it snaps taut, pulling on his side with an abrupt jolt that squeezes the wind out of him. He swings back and forth, parallel to the ground and unable to see if the bottom of the cliff is five or fifty feet away.

He waits until he comes to a stop, then he digs out a pin and hammers it in anywhere, just as long as he can grab it to spin himself around. Then he hammers another so that he can start again the arduous process of climbing down.

The awful moment comes when he has to detach his one safety line still affixed to the cliff. From now on, he's climbing free.

Not by choice, he thinks ruefully. The other safety rope dangles down from his belt, useless.

Parras has suffered 2 hit points of damage in the fall. Turn to section 4.

* **6** *

"Nice and safe," Parras says sarcastically. "Another few minutes and they may have damaged the floater permanently."

Polol pulls himself atop the gleaming vehicle. "Looks okay from here. Of course, we won't really know until we use it."

Parras throws his backpack into the rear of the floater. "For your sake, Tylan my friend, I

hope everything is fine. It's a long walk to Castle Mount."

"I know," the Skandar says. "And nary a decent inn between here and there."

Polol is already activating the floater by pressing the buttons that provide power. "Shall I navigate?" Polol asks.

"Wrong. I want to get back by dawn, and I'm not too sure how many ales you've had. *I'll* navigate and you can pilot."

"Good," Polol says with a relaxed smile. "That's mostly automatic anyhow."

Parras sits next to Polol, and straps himself into the seat, covered with a luminescent leather made out of the hide of a young sea-dragon. Polol guides the floater out of the barn, gently easing it up higher as he reaches the open air.

"Deftly done, Tylan," Parras laughs.

"No problem, Parras." He turns the floater sharply south. "Next stop, Castle Mount."

Turn to section 19.

* 7 *

Parras and the Skandar enter the barn quickly, their swords ready. A single torch inside the decaying barn illuminates a bizarre scene. Two men are clambering over the floater, giving it a

cautious, uncomprehending scrutiny. A fat Hjort stands beside the floater, apparently directing them. It takes only a moment for the trio to stop and see Parras.

The Hjort immediately raises a broad cutlass, while the two men go for knives strapped to their calves. And to Parras, it's quite clear that they're about to throw them.

Decide whether Parras will deal with the two men or the Hjort. Then turn to section 12.

* 8 *

"Your friend Polol can accompany you to Mayrtria. Seek out the small fishing vessel, the *Dark Sea*. Cylene will be there. By week's end you'll be at Zimroel. When you have rescued my son, or learned of his fate, signal me with your communication disk.

"And now, I must listen to my ministers scream for war. Good luck, Parras."

Parras bows to Valentine, and then turns and moves quickly ahead of Polol, leaving the great throne room.

Turn to section 30.

* 9 *

From what Parras knows of Metamorphs, the whole scenario seems wrong. Parras decides to press Valentine on his feelings about the situation.

Roll 3 D6.

If it's less than Parras' Intelligence, turn to section 15.

If it's more than Parras' Intelligence, turn to section 18.

* 10 *

They scurry beside an outcrop of bunch fungus, taking care not to step on any, which would send out a crunchy alarm.

"Ouch," Polol hisses, kneeling on a thorny vine.

"Quiet, Tylan," Parras whispers. "Look! There they are." Parras points to three figures

struggling with the floater, grunting as they try to pull it out of the barn.

"Good thing they can't get it to work," Polol says. "They'd be long gone."

"They'll wreck it at this rate. You head left, and I'll go right. We'll try to get closer to them. When you see me stand up, come out swinging."

"Oh good, a bit of confrontational diplomacy with the locals," Polol says as he scrambles away. Parras begins creeping in the other direction, watching the thieves pulling at the floater, still firmly planted in the barn.

He creeps closer, seeing now that two of them are scruffy-looking Humans, while a bloated Hjort seems to be directing them. One of the Humans is on top of the floater, poking around the controls.

Parras stands up, and he sees the Skandar rise quickly, his vibrating sword already slicing the air. They run toward the floater.

Parras has +1 advantage in all attacks in this confrontation. Decide whether he will go toward the Humans or the Hjort first. Then, turn to section 12.

* 11 *

Parras surprises the Humans, who nonetheless respond quickly, reaching for their slim stilettos, preparing to throw them.

Roll 3 D6.

If it's less than Parras' value for Dexterity, he gets two attacks on the first round. Otherwise he gets one attack while the two thieves prepare to throw their knives.

THIEVES *(each)*
To hit Parras: 14 To be hit: 12 Hit points: 28
Damage with thrown knife: 1 D6−1

After the first round they will flee the barn. The Skandar will have made short work of the Hjort, fighting with a ferocity that scares even Parras. The Hjort lumbers away as best it can, as Polol's laugh fills the barn. Turn to section 6.

* 12 *

If Parras attacks the Hjort, leaving the Humans for Polol, turn to section 21.

If Parras attacks the Humans, leaving the Hjort for Polol, turn to section 11.

* 13 *

Parras waits, crouching low while Polol scrambles forward, his four arms helping him crawl quickly through the tall grass.

Moments later, and Polol returns, a bit breathless as he talks.

"There's three of them, Parras. A Hjort and two Humans. As best as I can make out, they're trying to haul the floater out. They may have damaged it."

Parras nods. "Then we best move fast."

Parras has a +1 advantage in any attacks against the thieves. Turn to section 7.

* 14 *

If Parras decides to rely on his Intelligence, turn to section 9.

If Parras decides to rely on his Wisdom, turn to section 20.

* 15 *

"But surely," Parras says excitedly, "the Metamorphs realize that you can't remove your forces, no matter if your son is involved."

Valentine raises his eyebrows. "Precisely my thought. But then, they must actually hope that I will start a war."

"The Metamorphs want a war?"

"Perhaps," says Valentine. "Or, perhaps someone else does. Whatever the answer is, you and Cylene will have to find out."

Parras will have a +1 advantage for any Intelligence rolls for the rest of the adventure. Turn to section 8.

* 16 *

"My lord," Parras says quietly. "I'm sure that there is something that you're not telling me."

"Oh, you do." Valentine looks around the massive room, his voice echoing. "I make no secret of my sympathy for the shapeshifters. We occupy a planet that was once theirs. Still, that is the past and they could no more rule Majipoor than could a city full of Liimen. But this, this goes against everything I've ever learned about them. I feel," he says, his eye taking on a distant look, "there is something else going on here. I sense the hand of someone who is not a Metamorph. It's a feeling, but no more than that."

Parras has a +1 advantage in any rolls against his value for Wisdom for the rest of the adventure. Turn to section 8.

* 17 *

Valentine looks away, as if his eyes could stare right through the many layers of castle walls.

"Is there any other information you have . . . perhaps from your spies?" Parras asks quietly, feeling Valentine's pain fill the massive room with an almost unbearable presence.

"Information?" Valentine laughs, even as he dabs at a tear glistening on his cheek. "No, Parras. Even the King of Dreams appears to be sleeping through this nightmare."

Valentine turns and looks directly at Parras. "Come, my loyal lieutenant. You must begin."

Turn to section 8.

* 18 *

"If it comes to war," Parras says, "the Metamorphs will surely lose."

"Yes," Valentine says weakly. "And that is why you must do what you can. To save my son, and perhaps stop the annihilation of a race."

Turn to section 8.

* 19 *

"Wake up, Tylan," Parras says, leaning over to shake the Skandar's shoulder. "We're almost there."

Parras watches the Skandar grumble and growl in his half-sleep, his dangling arms stretching and coming to action in a way that always intrigues Parras. He could never imagine what it would be like to control four arms. How does one issue commands for four of them? he wonders. Which brushes the teeth, which one holds the fork? And, of course, there would be twice as much awkwardness in a situation

where you just didn't know what to do with your hands.

And none of these questions, Parras realizes with a small smile, ever seem to concern his burly friend.

"Just napping, Parras." Parras watches Polol blink to alertness, as together they watch the wonders of Castle Mount in the morning.

The light is behind them, bathing the many levels of the Mount in a warm, golden glow. There, just below them, they see Peritole Pass, and just ahead lies Bombifale Plain and the High Morpin Road.

And all around them they see a chain of smaller, dark-hued mountains all merging into this one massive mountain that juts nearly into space. And the Fifty Cities of Majipoor that dot the Mount are all stirring to life, as the unique buildings catch the yellow light and sharpen it into a crystalline sparkle.

The air is warm, soothing, as it always is on Castle Mount, and a hundred different fragrances fill the air, as one garden rivals the next.

They pass over a crew of Liimen working a small cliffside lusavender-seed plantation. One of them pauses to glance up at the floater, his three eyes blinking independently, in no apparent order.

And finally, the Castle itself is before them, spires upon spires, glimmering walls that reach straight up, even higher than the mountain, and then arch to the side, seemingly defying gravity

itself. A few sluggish Hjorts stand near the opulent Main Gate, victims of the graveyard shift, and they take little notice as the floater enters the main courtyard, an area larger than many of Majipoor's towns.

"It is a good feeling being back," Tylan Polol grunts, "no matter what the emergency. Why even now I'd be hunting—"

"If you were out of bed," Parras laughs.

Parras eases the floater down, noticing that a small contingent of the palace guard are standing around, obviously waiting for them. The floater comes to a stop.

"Lord Valentine is in the Confalume Throne Room," a chunky sergeant says, even as Parras and Tylan are stepping out of the floater. And then, in a lower voice, he adds, "He's been waiting all night."

They move briskly, making their way through the maze of corridors and rooms with an unerring sense of direction born of many years at the castle.

And, while walking, Parras wonders, Why the throne room? It's certainly not a place suited to a confidential matter of state.

Two Skandars, veterans of Lord Valentine's great march up the mountain, see them approach and open the two oaken doors to the throne room. Parras and Polol pick up their pace, sensing the urgency more intensely than before.

They enter, and there, standing under a tapestry detailing one of the final battles in the war with the Metamorphs, is Valentine. His eyes are dark, sunken, set in a face pulled tight with, what? Anger? Grief? Parras cannot tell.

"My Lord," Parras says, kneeling, and Polol joins him.

"Thank you for your speed, Parras. When I talk to you you'll know why every minute is important."

With a gesture, Valentine signals them to rise. Parras watches Valentine pour an amber liqueur from a clear flask. Powerful stuff for a breakfast drink, Parras thinks.

"In a few moments my advisors will enter, and the affairs of state will take . . . a more formal course. We have just this time now to see if something can be done, about this."

Valentine picks up a sheet of paper and hands it to Parras. He reads it:

Coronal!

Your son, Brynamir, has been taken by the nation of Piurivar. He is alive and well, and will remain so. You have one month to order the removal of all your forces from Zimroel. At that time, our representatives will assume control of the continent, as the separate nation of Piurivar.

Give the order, and your son will be returned. Failing that, your son will be put

to death. We will then select another target from the foul families of Majipoor.

Piurivar. The Metamorphs' name for Majipoor, Parras thinks. "But how?" he asks, handing the note back.

"How?" Valentine sneers. "Isn't everything possible for a shapeshifter? Why," he says with an almost hateful bark, "perhaps even you—"

"My lord!"

"No. I know you are Parras. And only you can do what must be done." Valentine takes another deep sip of the liqueur, and then faces Parras. "Save my son. Only a mad splinter group could think that some lunatic scheme like this might work. Of course I can't honor their request. All of Majipoor would curse me forever, and rightly so. But if they . . . If my son is not returned, I'll have no choice but to wage war on the entire Metamorph Reservation. That too would be ordained.

"In fact, I'm sure many of my advisors will suggest doing that immediately, sending armies to eliminate the shapeshifters once and for all."

And Parras is overwhelmed by Valentine's pain. He hangs by a narrow thread, Parras senses. So close to snapping. "But what can I do?" Parras asks.

And Valentine's answer is ready.

"There are Metamorphs who would help stop this," Valentine says quietly, and Parras nods, knowing Valentine's sympathy for the former

masters of the planet. "Find them, and get their help to recover my son before the month is out. After that time, it won't matter, for Majipoor's fate, and the fate of the Metamorphs, will be sealed."

"How can I get into the reservation?" Parras asks. "Won't I be stopped by—"

"You will travel by floater to Mayrtria, there to meet someone named Cylene. She is a scholar, very young, yet she knows more about the Metamorphs than anyone on the planet. You will leave your floater there, and your friend Polol—"

The Skandar looks up, a broad grimace of displeasure on his face.

Valentine continues. "You and Cylene will don the disguise of two researchers. You will travel by whatever means you can find, as fast as you can. Cylene should be able to gain entry into the reservation. Once there, you are to learn what you can. And, if it's nothing, in a little over thirty days, war will come to Majipoor."

Valentine pauses, walks over to Parras and puts a strong hand on his shoulder. "Not much time . . . an impossible task . . . a service to an old friend. Not an inconsiderable challenge, you'll agree. In fact, it may make the Zygnor seem like so much child's play."

Valentine holds Parras' gaze for a moment, his eyes lined with red streaks, as he fights for control.

Sections 20, 21

Decide whether Parras will leave now, or attempt to learn more from Valentine.

If Parras is ready to leave, turn to section 8.

If he continues to talk, turn to section 14.

* 20 *

Parras senses that there is more to be learned, and that there are other thoughts that Valentine might be able to share.

If Parras rolls less than his value for Wisdom, turn to section 16.

If the total is more than Parras' value for Wisdom, turn to section 17.

* 21 *

Parras decides to go for the Hjort, leaving his many-armed friend to deal with the scruffy-looking thieves.

The Hjort moves quickly, belying his bloated

body, and moves to the side even as Parras comes straight at him.

HJORT
To hit Parras: 13 To be hit: 11 Hit points: 8
Damage with cutlass: 1 D6

After one round of combat, turn to section 24.

* 22 *

Cylene certainly seems to know what she wants, Parras thinks. But he doesn't exactly share her feelings regarding the shapeshifters. Cold, depthless creatures. Who could know what they feel? Still, it might be best to let her run the show, at least until they're in the reservation.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is the same or less than Parras' value for Wisdom, turn to section 27.

If the total is greater, turn to section 23.

* 23 *

Cylene stands up and throws open a hidden compartment above her bunk.

"Put your sword in there," she orders.

Parras laughs. "What do you mean? I barely take the sword off to go to bed. And Zimroel is no place to be—"

"If you are seen wearing a sword," Cylene sighs, "it will let everyone know that you are no scholar. It must stay here. My father will see that it's kept safe until we return from the reservation. We are, after all, on a mission of peace."

She looks at Parras, as if it were impossible for him to say no.

If Parras decides to hand her his weapon, turn to section 41.

If he decides to keep it, turn to section 36.

* 24 *

The Hjort's bulbous eyes widen in appreciation of Parras' skill with his sword, and he glances at the exit.

Parras sees the Hjort charge wildly at him, his cutlass swooping down, but then the Hjort quickly darts to the right, running out of the barn. Parras looks over to see whether Polol needs any help. One of the humans lies still, a great bloody stain spreading out from his mid-section, and the Skandar appears to have a small wound on his chest.

The other human notices Parras and, seeing the Hjort gone, he scurries around to the back of the floater. By the time Parras reaches Polol the thief has already scrambled out a side window.

"That wasn't much of a workout," Polol laughs. Then, looking down at the corpse at his feet, "Except for this fellow."

Parras starts to examine the floater for damage.

Turn to section 6.

* 25 *

It could be risky trusting Cylene's feelings about Metamorphs, Parras realizes. Yet, he must depend on her, at least until they're inside the reservation. After that, whatever it takes to rescue Valentine's son, and Majipoor, is the only thing of importance.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is the same or less than Parras' value for Intelligence, turn to section 32.

If the total is greater, turn to section 23.

* 26 *

There's a strange quality to this young woman, some inner power that Parras senses. It's not, he reflects, just the way she orders her father around, or the way she helps run the ship.

It's something else.

She seemed to know who he was as soon as she saw him. It's unnerving, Parras thinks, but he feels almost exposed in front of her.

Perhaps, he wonders, there's another reason she was picked by Lord Valentine. For now, Parras would watch her carefully, to learn what he can.

Parras will have a +1 advantage when using his skill of Charisma with Cylene. This advantage only applies to her. Turn to section 31.

* 27 *

Yes, Parras tells himself, I must follow her. But I must keep my sword handy. She is a trusting soul, too trusting, and not experienced in the dangers of the world of politics.

And, Parras realizes, he now knows one reason for her self-assurance, her inner strength. Of course, he's suspected it all along.

She's a psychic.

And probably a pretty powerful one at that.

Something, to be sure, to keep in mind.

Turn to section 23.

* 28 *

Perhaps it's a good time to smooth things out with Cylene, Parras realizes. After all, they will be spending a lot of time together, much of it traveling through the rough terrain of Zimroel.

And besides, she's quite beautiful.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is the same or less than Parras' value for Charisma, turn to section 33.

If the total is greater, turn to section 23.

* 29 *

Is it a dream?

Yes, his mind screams, that's all it is. It's just some foulness dredged up by the old King of Dreams himself, some terrible pain from dream-wounds. Yes, it's just a nightmare.

But then it grows even darker, closing around him, engulfing him until he feels himself vanish, slowly becoming part of the emptiness that

surrounds him. And, in his last conscious moment, he's aware of a tiny, bright light, glimmering in some vast distance. And he races to it.

Parras is no more.

And what of Valentine, or his son, and the Metamorphs, and the fate of Majipoor?

No Coronal of Majipoor would let the entire hope of the planet rest on one person's shoulders, even one as loyal and strong as Parras.

There may yet be time . . .

Parras has failed in this difficult challenge. You may replay the adventure by raising Parras' skill level (and hit points) by 1 point. If you wish to begin the adventure at some point other than the beginning, see the list of locations in section 110.

* 30 *

It is still morning when they leave the endless corridors of the castle, but almost all traces of coolness are gone. They walk briskly toward their floater, but Parras senses that his friend's silence is merely the deceptive lull before the raging storm begins.

He decides to brave Polol's rage.

"It was not my idea, Tylan. I, of course, would want you to come."

The Skandar stops perfectly still, in the mid-

dle of the courtyard, his arms waving angrily. "But, begging his pardon, what is wrong with our good Lord Valentine?" Polol shouts. "Too much sipping on the thokka, perhaps? To think that he's sending you to a place where you could just vanish, disappear without a trace, thrown in some murky stream by shapeshifters. And *I* don't get to go. No, instead some woman will come along."

"He has reasons, Tylan, very—"

The Skandar brings an arm up to Parras' shoulder, and looks at his friend.

It's hard to read the message in such a shaggy face, Parras reflects. What is it saying now? Concern? Fear? Anger? Jealousy?

"If there's to be danger to you, I want to be there. Tell me, when have we ever faced enemies alone? Now, I'm to wait in Mayrtria while you adventure across the Inner Sea."

It's the fun, Parras thinks. That's it, most of it anyway. Polol just doesn't want to miss the excitement.

"It's Valentine's order, Tylan. And besides, do you think a Skandar could slip easily into the Metamorph Reservation? I have my doubts that I'll be able to, even posing as a scholar."

They were at the floater, watched now by only one guard. He backs away as Parras and Polol climb in. "Enough chatter, Parras. You have an appointment to keep. And I will get to do my hunting after all."

They take the floater up quickly, feeling al-

most as if they had never left it. Polol navigates now, plotting the most direct course and encoding the floater's memory, while Parras guides the copper-colored craft out of the courtyard, past the castle walls, and then down the tremendous mountain itself.

The journey to Mayrtria is uneventful, and Polol even begins to regain some of his composure. Halfway to Mayrtria he begins, once again, regaling Parras with his tales, most of them on the tall side, of female conquests in the bedrooms of Majipoor.

"Of course," he laughs, "I never have had a Ghayrog, though I've heard it's . . . possible." His whole furry belly shakes when he laughs. "A dozen teats may be an interesting experience. But to touch that leathery skin or smell those odors? Well, I'll pass on that, thank you. On the other hand, I knew this female Vroon once who worked, quite successfully, as a fortune-teller in Ni-Móya. With her six arms and my four, well, we made her small bed a mighty crowded place."

And on and on, Polol banters, drifting from conquest to conquest, misadventure to misadventure, and Parras knows that he will miss him greatly in the difficult quest ahead. And maybe, he wonders, he might not be the same person without Polol by his side. He's always been there, after all, to fight, to advise, or to just share his thoughts.

What now, Parras asks himself. What now?

Section 30

After a few hours, they leave the lower hills that gird the Mount and, skirting the cities of Normork and Minimool, they enter the fertile region that begins at Bimbak West. Here begins the food supply for most of the inhabitants of Alhanroel. Mile after mile of niyk fields alternate with equally large farms devoted to glein or staaja. Parras takes the floater as low as he can so the rich smell of the crops surrounds them.

"In another life," Parras says quietly, "I would be a farmer."

"And I would be a thief and a rake," Polol laughs.

Then, as morning yields to early afternoon, they see the sparkling turquoise waters of the Inner Sea, and, just barely visible, the first buildings of Mayrtria. The simple, squat structures seem to Parras to belong to some other, less lush part of Majipoor.

"Certainly not the most beautiful of cities," Parras says.

"True enough," Polol agrees. "But it does have one first-class inn, at the northern end. I once met—"

"We're to proceed directly to the harbor, and the *Dark Sea*."

The Skandar harrumphed. "I was talking of later, when you're gone."

The residents of Mayrtria all stopped to watch the Coronal's floater as it sails overhead, an uncommon sight, moving now at a more stately

pace. Devoted to the business of shipping crops, Parras knows, Mayrtria is not considered one of the jewels of Majipoor. A rather large proportion of its citizens are Ghayrogs who take a no-nonsense approach to their business.

The harbor appears suddenly, and Parras moves fast to slow the floater to avoid turning around in the rough sea wind. The hundreds of docks are largely empty. It's much too early in the season for the harvesting and shipping of crops to all the far-flung regions of Majipoor. A few docks show some sign of activity as machinery and raw materials are off-loaded.

"Pretty quiet, eh, Parras? Now, which of these bulky vessels do you suppose is the *Dark Sea*?"

Parras shakes his head. Short of examining each ship, he realizes he doesn't have a clue about how to find it.

Then Polol sees something, and signals Parras with a sharp tap on his arm. "Look there! Some Ghayrog is dressed in official clothes, there, standing beside that small hut. Perhaps he's an authority of some kind. Let's ask him."

Parras eases the floater down, right beside the Ghayrog, who seems to take no notice of the starburst seal. He merely flicks his tongue disinterestedly as Parras hops out.

"Good morning! We were wondering if you could give us some information."

The Ghayrog looks up slowly, the snake-like tendrils on his head slowly writhing as if in response to the question. "This is not," he says

quietly, "the bureau of tourism. I suggest that you—"

Polol thrusts himself forward, right up to the Ghayrog's damp snout, letting his own face react to the acrid odor of the creature. "Just tell us, my friend, where we might find the *Dark Sea.*"

The Ghayrog seems to smile and then, with some appetizing licks of its tongue, it answers.

"Oh, it's the *Dark Sea* you want. Why, then, you've come to the right place, oh yes. Merely follow the harbor north to almost the very end. You can't miss the vessel, oh no. It's about the last ship there."

Polol backs away as the aroma of the Ghayrog becomes almost overpowering. "Thank you," Parras says, and he and Polol pull themselves back into the floater and head north.

"Some of these cities are lacking in respect for the seal of the Coronal," Polol grunts as they move to the end of the harbor.

"Just as long as they pay their taxes, Tylan. What else matters?"

While most of the berths are empty, they pass over a handful of large cargo vessels, mammoth ships with dozens of levels, surmounted with enormous light sails, all now furled, and with the storage space equal to many large warehouses. Some of the ships are like small cities themselves, offering a full spectrum of recreational activities for the crew, including games, shops, entertainment cubes, and, it's rumored,

activities of a more basic sort.

The docks end abruptly.

"There's nothing here!" Polol yells. "There's no—"

But then he sees where Parras is looking, and, for a moment, they are both silent.

A small ship sits bobbing in the great swells of the Inner Sea. While outfitted with a light sail—a decidedly primitive one—the ship appears to be something out of a history book. Some small primitive fishing vessel, perhaps, or a patrol boat used to stop smugglers. A museum piece, Parras reflects. Entirely out of date.

"The *Dark Sea*," he says quietly.

He brings the floater down beside it. "Yes," Polol says broadly, "it really is best you go alone. I would, of course, only be in the way. And with such a sturdy vessel to get you across the sea, you'll have nothing to worry about." The Skandar laughs, as Parras shakes his head and gets out.

He walks over to the ship and looks around. No one is around, as far as he can see, though the ship appears ready to leave. It may be old, he reflects, but it appears well maintained.

"Hello?" he calls, but no one answers. "I'm going on," he announces to Polol. "You wait out there." Parras walks up the plank, its boards creaking loudly with each step. The ship bobs furiously, and Parras has trouble taking even a small step. "Hello? Is anybody—"

"You can stop right there."

Section 30

Parras turns to see a small, gray-bearded man standing behind him. He has a small energy thrower pointed right at him. "I'm looking for the captain of the vessel," Parras says quietly.

The small man glances over at Polol. "Tell your friend to keep his arms at his side or you'll spend the rest of your days without a head."

"Stop moving, Tylan," Parras barks. Then, "I was sent here by Lord Valentine. The documents are here, in my pocket. I'm supposed to meet someone named—"

Then she appears, from the same small door that the captain used. She is small, not much over five feet tall, with deep blue eyes and a half-smile that spoke of secrets and sadness. She looks at Parras, then to the floater, noticing the seal of the Coronal.

"It's okay, Father," she says quietly, with an authority that surprises Parras. "They're the ones. You are . . ."

"Parras. And you must be Cylene."

"Yes," she says. "And we must hurry. Your room is aft. Small, but serviceable."

The old man lowers his energy thrower.

"But I'll need your help on deck," he orders, "so no hiding in your room. This ship may be old, but it can move fast."

Already Cylene is undoing the ropes that hold the ship fast, pulling up the fenders that protect its sides.

"Well, Parras. Good luck then. It looks," Polol

says with a smile, "like you're in good hands." He throws Parras' backpack onto the deck of the ship.

"Enjoy your hunting," Parras shouts. "And try not to get into any trouble while I'm gone."

"That," the Skandar laughs, "I cannot do."

The captain goes to an ornate tiller and eases the *Dark Sea* out of its berth, making an unusual amount of engine noise as it slips into the choppy water of the Inner Sea. The captain shouts over to Parras, "Have you ever operated a light sail winch?" Parras shakes his head. "No matter. When I signal you, untie the light sail and turn both handles; you see them there. You must turn them together." He looks around, then calls out, "Cylene, have you checked down below?"

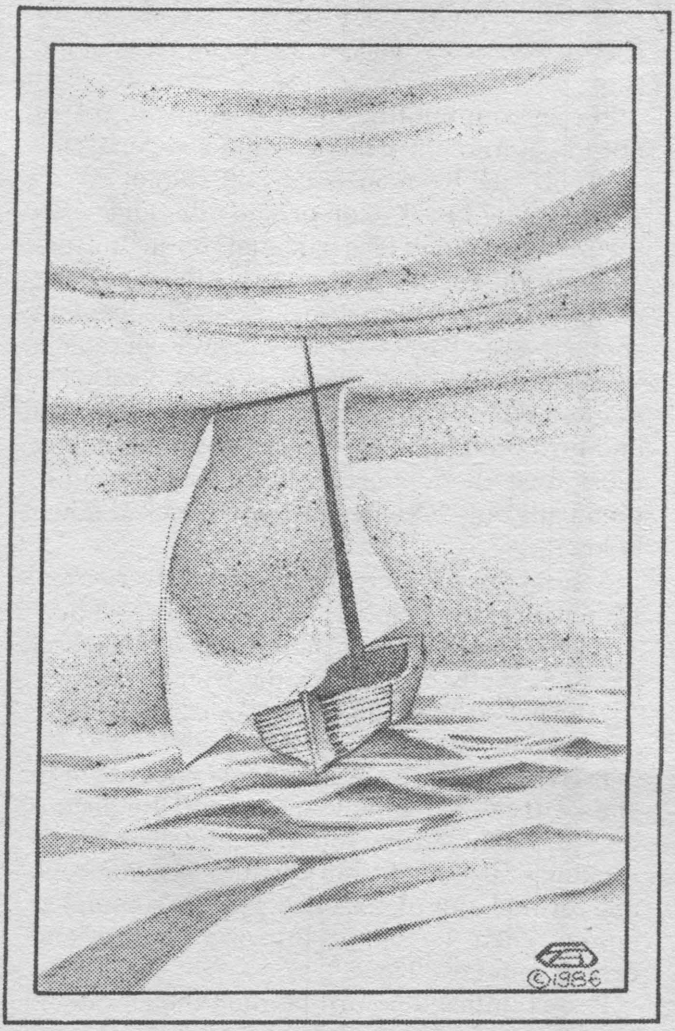
A scratchy speaker brings the answer. "Yes, Father. Everything looks," a slight pause, "fine."

It would appear, Parras thinks, that this vessel has not exactly been operating trouble free.

"I'm called Tolin," the man announces. "Now get to your post and wait my signal."

Parras, feeling like a young boy once again in class, runs to the winches. The sunlight glistens on the water, causing him to squint. The steady rocking of the small ship has him weaving back and forth, thankful, for once, that his stomach is empty. Then, he sees Tolin raise his arm and drop it quickly. "Now!"

Parras unties the cord holding the shimmering light sail, and then he turns the winches,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moving his arms in opposite directions to roll the sail up.

"Together!" Tolin's voice barks out. "You must keep them even or the sail will not fill properly. Watch what you are doing! Cylene, is everything still fine with the meters?"

Again the speaker crackles to life. "Yes, Father, everything looks very good here."

Parras raises his eyes to the sail, its silvery material almost blinding in the light. Only halfway up, and already his arms feel the strain. Big droplets of sweat pop out on his forehead.

"Faster! We need the sail up now!" Tolin yells. And Parras redoubles his efforts, thinking only of that glorious moment when the sails will be completely unfurled and the winch will lock into place.

"Almost there!" Tolin yells. "Just a bit more. A little bit more." Parras' arms move steadily, in big circles, as if stirring twin pots of some giant stew.

"There! Cylene, the sails are ready."

And Parras backs away as the sails fill with the breeze and capture the sun's rays. He hears a series of funny clicks and popping noises, and then the ship seems to handle more smoothly.

Tolin comes walking over to him. "Well done. It's not that easy to get the sails up. Normally, I'd have Cylene do it, but it's better she watches the meters. This is, after all, an old ship."

And while Parras contemplates the image of Cylene raising the sail, an image that makes him

wipe the sweat off his brow with embarrassment, she comes up from below.

"Sorry for the quick departure. We don't have much time, but now we can talk. My father can run the ship till we get to Piliplok. My room is this way."

She turns and leads Parras to the fore section of the ship.

Roll 3 D6.

If the total is the same or less than Parras' value for Wisdom, turn to section 26.

If the total is greater, turn to section 31.

* 31 *

Parras follows Cylene down to her room, a tiny cubby that Parras guesses is at the very bow of the ship. Cylene sits down on a small wooden bench and gestures to Parras to sit on her bunk.

Cylene shuts the door behind them.

"It's best my father not hear us. He thinks we are merely engaged in a research trip for Valentine."

She uses the Coronal's name with a familiarity that startles Parras, and he wonders how and where she met him.

"My father is a good man, but can be some-

what overprotective. I must ask that you use your discretion when around him. I don't want him worried needlessly."

Cylene pushes her auburn hair off her forehead, and then pulls down a map off the shelf over her bunk. She lays it down next to Parras.

"When we arrive in Piliplok, I've arranged to join a caravan that will cross the river Steiche, right here," she says, pointing. "We'll leave the caravan at the river, and then proceed on foot to the reservation, here, in the North. With luck, that will take two, maybe three weeks."

"Not much time left," Parras offers. "Wouldn't a floater—"

"No," Cylene says sharply. "That would attract attention. Our only hope is to enter the reservation and find the Beliathys."

"And who is he?" Parras asks, annoyed that the leadership of this adventure is decidedly not in his hands.

"A Metamorph and," she adds quietly, a wistful look in her eyes, "a friend. He was a council leader for one of the local ruling organizations. He may be able to help."

"If he hasn't kidnapped Valentine's son himself," Parras says bitterly.

"With that attitude, we're sure to fail. I know the shapeshifters," she says sharply, "and my judgment regarding them must be trusted completely."

Well, thinks Parras. We're not exactly off to a good start.

Section 32

If Parras decides to rely on his Wisdom, turn to section 22.

If he decides to rely on his Intelligence, turn to section 25.

If he decides to rely on his Charisma, turn to section 28.

* 32 *

Right, Parras thinks. Metamorphs are just great, no problem at all. Finest citizens of Majipoor. Except that maybe they want their planet back and some of them are willing to fight another war for it. And while Cylene is beautiful, stunning really, and obviously an authority on the shapeshifters, there are personal sympathies here that will bear watching.

Turn to section 23.

* 33 *

Parras smiles.

"Yes, Cylene, you are, after all, the expert. I'm really just along to help you in whatever way I can. My only interest is in finding Valentine's son, no matter what we have to do or who we have to befriend."

Or, he might add, who he would have to kill.

"Good. We'll get along much better that way." Cylene pauses a moment as she takes on a tentative look. "I was once involved with a shapeshifter. It was a professional relationship, until it changed, somehow. It left me very . . ." she searches for the word.

"Confused?" Parras guesses and she nods. "We've all felt that, Cylene, whether dealing with our race or another." She raises her eyes to him, and she lets a warm grin fill her face. "Yes, such is life in Majipoor with its many races. Now let me tell you what we must do."

Parras moves closer to her, smelling the tangy mixture of the wooden cabin and faint traces of her perfume.

Turn to section 23.

* 34 *

"Your bunk is aft, under the main light sail. My father usually prepares a simple dinner about an hour before the sun sets. Tonight, I will start preparing you to enter the Metamorph Reservation.

"For now," Cylene says with an angry glare, "I'd like to be alone."

Parras gets up and, ducking his head to get out of the cabin, leaves the suddenly chilly room for the relative warmth of the empty passageway.

It will, he smiles to himself, be a long couple of weeks.

Parras makes his way to his cabin and opens the door. He is greeted by the startled squeak of an oversized rat, gray and plump. The rat seems to hover in the corner, to see just how rude this intruder might be. When Parras throws his pack onto the bunk a cloud of dust rises into the air, and the rat, sensing his eviction, departs.

The *Dark Sea* moves smoothly now, and Parras can just barely sense the motion of the small vessel as it crosses from crest to crest, traveling over the foamy whitecaps, staying well above the churning troughs of water below the hull.

His arms ache and, surprised, he lies down in

the bunk to rest for a few minutes before going topside to see if Tolin needs help. He thinks of Cylene, of Tolin, of Polol and, lastly, of Valentine. In the background he hears the soft whir of the ship. Before long, he is snoring loudly.

A sharp rap on his cabin door awakens him.

"There is some dinner, Parras. In my father's cabin," Cylene's voice awakens him brusquely.

"Be right there," he answers, for a moment completely confused as to his whereabouts. Am I on Zygnor, he thinks? Or perhaps I'm back on the Mount, sleeping off a belly full of wine? But no, he remembers, and hastens to fill his growling stomach.

He finds Tolin's spacious cabin and enters to see the captain and his daughter well advanced into the meal.

"We didn't wait," Tolin says, his teeth displaying some crusty bread not yet completely chewed. "Have a seat and begin eating. We don't go in for any niceties here."

There was some fresh meat on a wooden platter, perhaps some roasted mintun, and some succulent sliced dwikka. A steamy dish of some cooked grain was almost half gone.

Parras, feeling very hungry, fills his plate.

"My daughter says that you, too, are a scholar."

His mouth full, Parras nods.

"You know," Tolin continues, a sidelong glance at his daughter, "I don't trust my girl with those shapeshifters. Killed a few, I have,

and they are the worst creatures you could ever fight. First they're one thing, then they're another. Drives you nearly batty when you are in a fight with them."

"Father," Cylene orders. "The Metamorph Wars are long over."

Tolin nods. "If you say so." Then, smiling wryly, he looks at Parras. "But I don't think they'll ever be over." He grabs the greasy, near empty platter of meat. "Some more?" he asks, and when Parras shakes his head, Tolin slides the scraps onto his own plate.

"Never like to waste food." he smiles.

Parras is scrubbing the rough ceramic plates, chipped and scratched from hundreds of simple meals, when Cylene comes up to him. "My father is on deck, smoking his pipe. I'd like to start your classes now."

"Classes?" Parras asks. "What do you mean, classes?"

"The history and biology of the Metamorphs." She leans forward to stare at the tub of sudsy plates. "After you're done here, of course."

Parras finishes the dishes and makes his way to Cylene's cabin. He knocks and she invites him in.

Her bunk is filled with books and maps, and she has arranged two chairs in front of it. "We'll do this a couple of times a day, Parras, until you can pass for an expert." She starts flipping

through the books. "And that won't be hard considering the amount of ignorance about Metamorphs in our fair land."

And she talks, interrupted only occasionally by a question from Parras. She told the terrible saga of the Metamorph Wars, about the final burning out of the renegade bands in Alhanroel. She described the great migration of the shape-shifters to the reservation, a mammoth piece of land occupying almost half of the great continent of Zimroel. And she talked of the lingering sorrow of the Metamorphs, how this was once the great world of Piurivar, but they became prisoners of their own land. And her eyes light up describing the wonders of the lost city of the Metamorphs, Velalisier.

Parras' questions are perceptive, probing the exact sequence that led to modern-day Majipoor. He asks about the ruling council that runs the reservation as a separate country, and he asks for the history of the splinter groups eager once again to wage war.

And for the next two days, they meet frequently. Cylene is like a frantic professor, information gushing from her even as she piles books onto Parras' arms, books that he takes to his bunk and reads.

Gradually he comes to understand something that had previously been a few lines in a history book, some ancient lesson learned when he was a boy.

Section 34

This, he thinks, was once their planet. We are no better than poachers, usurpers of what is not ours.

And with the realization comes the other, more sobering thought. It cannot be changed. What's been done has been done. The way of life on Majipoor is firmly set.

Cylene watches Parras' growing understanding with a sense of pride and wonder. She sees Parras not as merely another mindless soldier in service to the Coronal and Majipoor, but as someone capable of dealing with doubt and paradox. They were going over the map of the reservation when they felt the first bump.

"What's that?" Parras asks, a startled expression on his face.

"Come." Cylene smiles, taking his hand, warm now, Parras notices. "This you have to see."

She pulls Parras up the rough wooden plank steps. The sky is dotted with only a few clouds, but the brisk sea air is filled with the sounds of a most wondrous sort. Deep, gulping barks mix with high-pitched forlorn squeals. And everywhere they look, the sea is a foaming, churning, mass of sea-dragons.

"Aren't they wonderful?" Cylene asks.

Tolin is steering the ship through the herd, laughing and grinning. "There!" he shouts. "See that mother with her babies!"

Parras looks over and sees a big-bellied female, her long, trunk-like neck peering left and

right, as if counting her young. Her head is a fierce, triangular wedge, but her eyes only register her concern for her young.

Her glistening fins are flared, creating an enormous wake that pushes the young dragons ahead of her. And all around, dragons of every age are moving south, toward the Great Sea.

"I've never seen anything like it," Parras says over the din.

"Migration season," shouts Tolin, obviously enjoying the frenzy of it all. "But I've never seen—"

He stops in mid-sentence. Cylene is the first to notice. "Father," she says seeing him standing stock-still. "Is anything—"

"Cylene, my energy thrower! Quickly!"

Already she is moving to a sturdy box near the entrance to the lower decks. Parras looks to her, then to Tolin, confused about what might be going on.

Sea-dragons, he knew, were generally gentle, harmless creatures. And Tolin seemed to be steering clear of them. What could . . .

Then he sees it. Coming from the outer circle of the herd, fins flapping angrily at the water, its enormous head chewing at the air even as it made a direct line for the *Dark Sea*.

Cylene runs up to Tolin and hands the energy thrower to him. "Why is it coming at us?" Parras yells. "What's wrong?"

Cylene comes running back. "Look at her

belly when she comes up," Cylene says, pointing to the charging dragon.

As the dragon rides each crest, kicking through the water, Parras sees the many teats, full and engorged.

"Someone took her babies," Cylene shouts over the sound of the dragons.

And Parras recalls hearing about dragon hunters who violated the laws protecting young dragons to supply the very rich with the tender, tasty delicacy of newborn dragon. Somehow, one of the big ships must have distracted or anesthetized this massive sea-dragon, and scooped up her babies.

Now any ship that came near her would be doomed.

Parras looks at Tolin taking aim with his energy thrower, all the time wishing that he could be the one to shoot.

"I've got her now," Tolin shouts. "Just a bit closer. Just a bit—"

The dragon dives under the water, and Tolin lowers his weapon.

"Now where could she be?" Tolin asks. Then, smiling, "Maybe she's thought better of it."

Parras is already running to Tolin, fearing the worst, when the dragon surfaces, its broad back pushing the small ship up, almost skewing its aft end into the churning sea. But Parras, gripping the handrail, takes no notice of that. He sees the energy thrower come flying out of Tolin's hand,

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up into the sky. Too late, Parras thinks.

The ship slaps down in the water. Cylene looks to the light sails, flapping back and forth as they lose the wind.

The dragon rears up to bring its great body down upon the deck of the *Dark Sea*.

If Parras kept his sword with him, turn to section 40.

If he handed his sword to Cylene, turn to section 35.

* 35 *

Instinctively, Parras gropes for his sword, only to discover, with a sickening feeling, that it's gone.

"My sword!" he yells, and Cylene, her eyes bright with terror, looks at him.

"Hurry!" she shouts, and Parras is already flying past her, down to her cabin. He kicks the door open and opens up the compartment over Cylene's bed. Then he hears a terrible sound, the side of the ship being smashed by the tremendous weight of the dragon. He wastes no time as he holds his sword ready to push the enraged sea-dragon back.

He reaches the deck and sees that the dragon has already severely damaged one of the sections of the hull. He raises his sword, ready to battle.

The dragon has made its first attack. Turn to section 37.

* 36 *

Parras looks at Cylene's steely eyes, his hand unconsciously goes to the hilt of his sword.

"That, I am afraid, I cannot do. You might as well strip me naked. No, I'm afraid my sword must stay where I am."

Cylene shakes her head, her face flushed with anger. This, thinks Parras, is someone who is used to getting her own way.

"You don't understand, do you? *I* am the expert on the Metamorphs and, believe me, your carrying a sword endangers us both. They are highly suspicious creatures and, what's worse, they would waste no time in destroying an 'invader' of their reservation. You must leave your sword here."

Her hand, delicate but with finely etched veins that showed Cylene to be no stranger to hard work, reaches out to Parras.