

VIRTUAL REALITY ADVENTURE

HEART OF ICE





ZONE 18347
**NORTH
AFRICA**
EUROPE
ICESCAN

SAHARAN ICE WASTES

Lost City of Du-En

ATLANTIC OCEAN

IBERIAN
Kastilan

PYRENEES

LYONESSE SWAMPS

Old Marsay

ALPS

APPENINES

Venis

Etruscan Inn

GULF OF INCUNABULA

Karthag

Tarabul

BALKANS

BLACK SEA

Bezant

ANATOLIAN PLATEAU

AEGEAN SEA

INLAND SEA

Daralbad

ATLAS MOUNTAINS

Jib-&-Halter Pass

Kahira

Nile River

Maka

SEA OF REEDS
Sudan

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Virtual Reality Adventure Books are solo adventures with a big difference. They're not random. Whether you live or die doesn't depend on a dice roll – it's up to you.

To start your adventure simply choose your character from the list on pages 7 and 8. Each character has a unique selection of four skills; these skills will decide which options are available to you.

Fill in the skills of your chosen character on the Adventure Sheet on page 6. Also note your Life Points and your possessions.

Life Points are lost each time you are wounded. If you are ever reduced to zero Life Points, you have been killed and the adventure ends. Sometimes you can recover Life Points during the adventure, but you can never have more Life Points than you started with.

You can carry up to eight possessions at a time. If you are at this limit and find something else you want, drop one of your other possessions (by crossing it off your Adventure Sheet) to make room for the new item.

Consider your selection of skills. They establish your special strengths, and will help you to role-play your choices during the adventure. If you arrive at an entry which lists options for more than one of your skills, you can choose which skill to use in that situation.

That's all you need to know. Now choose your character.

Virtual Reality *titles to test your skills*

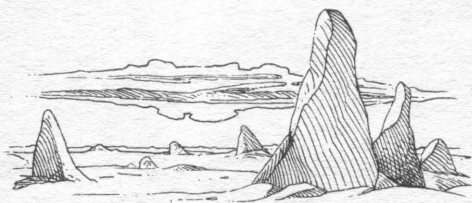
1. Green Blood
2. Down Among the Dead Men
3. The Coils of Hate
4. Necklace of Skulls
5. Heart of Ice
6. Twist of Fate



VIRTUAL REALITY ADVENTURE

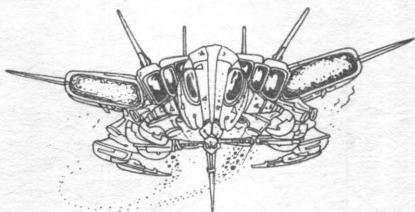
Heart of Ice

Dave Morris



Illustrated by Russ Nicholson

MAMMOTH



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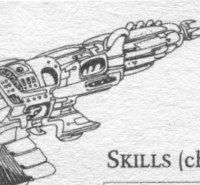
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ADVENTURE SHEET

SKILLS (choose four)



LIFE POINTS

Initial Score _____

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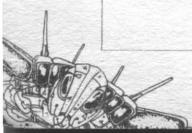
POSSESSIONS (maximum of 8)

NOTES AND CODEWORDS

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MONEY

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CHOOSE ONE OF THESE CHARACTERS

The Explorer

Skills: CLOSE COMBAT, LORE, STREETWISE, SURVIVAL

Profile: Others might mourn the collapse of civilization, but for you it only opens up new areas of mystery in the world.

Life Points: 11

Money: 20 scads

The Bounty Hunter

Skills: CUNNING, PILOTING, SHOOTING, STREETWISE

Profile: Times are hard and the strong prey upon the weak. It is left to the likes of you to enforce the law.

Life Points: 10

Possessions: Barysal gun (6 charges)

Money: 40 scads

The Spy

Skills: AGILITY, CYBERNETICS, ROGUERY, STREETWISE

Profile: Even as the world dies a slow death, governments vie with one another for the wealth and power that remain. You steal secrets and trade them to the highest bidder.

Life Points: 10

Money: 30 scads

The Trader

Skills: ESP, LORE, SHOOTING, STREETWISE

Profile: Few dare cross the icy wastes between cities, so a daring adventurer can make a tidy profit.

Life Points: 10

Possessions: Barysal gun (6 charges), psionic focus

Money: 35 scads

The Visionary

Skills: CLOSE COMBAT, CUNNING, ESP, PARADOXING

Profile: Cursed as you are with second sight, you know that mankind has no future unless something is done to save the world.

Life Points: 10

Possessions: Psionic focus

Money: 30 scads

The Scientist

Skills: CYBERNETICS, LORE, PILOTING, SURVIVAL

Profile: Most people understand nothing of the machines created by their ancestors, but you've learned that knowledge is power.

Life Points: 10

Money: 30 scads

The Mutant

Skills: AGILITY, CUNNING, PARADOXING, ROGUERY

Profile: Born with strange powers, you are more than human. Others would kill you if they knew your secret.

Life Points: 10

Possessions: Psionic focus

Money: 30 scads

Alternatively design your own character, taking any four skills of your choice from the list on page 9. Your character will also have any possessions needed for the skills chosen (for example, a barysal gun with 6 charges if you choose SHOOTING) and will start with 30 scads. You have an initial Life Points score of 10.

GLOSSARY OF SKILLS

AGILITY

The ability to perform acrobatic feats, run, climb, balance and leap. A character with this skill is nimble and dexterous.

CLOSE COMBAT

The use of a range of martial arts incorporating elements of karate, jujitsu and t'ai-chi.

CUNNING

The ability to think on your feet and devise clever ploys for getting out of trouble. Useful in countless situations.

CYBERNETICS

The ability to program and operate computers – almost a forgotten science in the apocalyptic world of the 23rd century.

ESP

The ability to sense danger and read other people's minds. You must possess a psionic focus to use this skill.

LORE

A combination of history, legend and general knowledge which gives you a good basis for dealing with the unknown.

PARADOXING

The ability to mentally affect the normal laws of nature. A slower and less reliable technique than ESP, but with sometimes miraculous effects. You must possess a psionic focus to use this skill.

PILOTING

The ability to handle virtually any vehicle from an air-sled up to a space shuttle.

ROGUERY

Stealth and espionage skills: picking pockets, opening locks, and skulking unseen in the shadows.

SHOOTING

Expertise with long-range weaponry. You must possess a charged barysal gun to use this skill.

STREETWISE

With this skill you are never at a loss in cities. What others see as the squalor and menace of narrow neon-lit streets is home to you.

SURVIVAL

A talent which enables you to cope in desolate and uninhabited regions: forests, deserts, swamps and mountain peaks.

BACKGROUND

THE LAST THREE CENTURIES

In 2015, worsening conditions in the world's climate led to the first Global Economic Conference. It was agreed to implement measures intended to reverse industrial damage to the ecology and replenish the ozone layer. By 2031, an array of weather control satellites were in orbit. For added efficiency, and as a mark of worldwide co-operation, these were placed under the control of a supercomputer network called Gaia: the Global Artificial Intelligence Assembly. The Earth's climate began to show steady improvement.

The first hint of disaster came early in 2037, when Gaia shut down inexplicably for a period of seventeen minutes. Normal operation was resumed but the system continued to suffer 'glitches'. After one such glitch Paris suffered a two-day heatwave of such intensity that the pavements cracked. After several months, the fault was identified. A computer virus had been introduced into Gaia by unknown means. The system's designer began programming an antivirus but died before his work was completed. The crisis grew throughout that year until finally, following the death of 5,000 people in a flash flood along the Bangladesh coastline, the Gaia project was officially denounced. Unfortunately it was no longer possible to shut it down.

By the mid twenty-first century, global weather conditions were in chaos owing to Gaia's sporadic operation. Ice sheets advanced further each year.

Australia was subjected to virtually constant torrential rain. The centre of Asia had become an arid wasteland. The political situation reflected the ravages of the climate, with wars flaring continually around the globe. Late in 2054, computer scientists in London tried to hack into Gaia and locate the replicating viruses in the program. Gaia, detecting this, interpreted the action as an attack on its program and retaliated by taking over a range of defence networks which allowed it to launch a nuclear strike. London was completely destroyed.

By the end of the century Gaia had routed itself into all major computer networks, taking control of weather, communications and weapons systems across the planet. Periods of lucidity and hospitable climate were interspersed with hurricanes and arctic blizzards. The US President gave an interview in which he likened Gaia to a living entity: 'She was intended as mankind's protective mother, but this "mother" has gone mad.' Spiralling decline in the world's fortunes left much of humanity on the brink of extinction. The population fell rapidly until only a few million people remained scattered around the globe – mostly in cities where food could still be artificially produced.

It is now 2300. The rich stand aloof, disporting themselves with forced gaiety, waiting for the end. The poor inhabit lawless slums where disease is rife. Between the cities, the land lies under a blanket of snow and ice. No one expects humanity to last another century. This is truly 'the end of history'.

PROLOGUE

The Etruscan Inn lies in the shadow of the Apennine Mountains beside a frozen waterfall, sheltered from the wind by a high ridge of bare black rock. You sit at a long window and gaze out towards the mountains. Dusk is melting the sharp outlines of the crags, filling the valleys with blue gloom. The moon glimmers faintly under racing black clouds. Later this evening there will be more snow.

Turning from the window, you let the curtain fall back and make your way across the dingy room. Travellers sit at the sides, noisily gambling and sipping hard liquor the colour of fire. Many are hunters and traders from the plains which slope down from here to the Ligurian Sea. Others may have been here much longer: thin old men and women who found meagre employment. The Etruscan Inn is a famous stop-over for those who undertake the perilous Apennine crossing. If a few such, gazing up at the ice-capped peaks, found their spirits daunted and chose to stay, who can blame them? You sometimes wonder yourself why you bother to press on across the world in the teeth of such hardship and poverty.

The story of how the inn came to be here is a strange one, even for these bizarre times. The building was originally an air cruiser which crashed in the mountains two hundred years ago. An ancestor of the present innkeeper turned the wreckage into a hostelry for wayfarers. The power unit had not been damaged in the crash, so the inn has electricity – a rarity in the

modern world. Even better, several of the air cruiser's caretaks were salvaged. These are robots which continually clean and repair the structure, sturdily carrying out the tasks they were programmed to do centuries ago.

Pushing aside a drape, you step into another room of the inn. On the wall, a screen flickers with scenes from an old film. The innkeeper is sitting with a few others at the back of the room, loudly commenting on the action. You step over a caretak which resembles a long metal cockroach. It extends polishing pads to clean the floor where you were standing. Propping yourself against the wall, you watch the film for a few minutes, but the innkeeper's shouts and jeers are impossible to ignore. When you complain, he only gives a great gusting laugh and says, 'There's no point in getting interested in any film that appears on this screen. The video link comes from a satellite connected to Gaia, who changes channels as the whim strikes her. Sometimes I have seen newsreel footage over a century old. At other times there are films, musical shows, or documentaries. But I have yet to see the end of any programme. There—!' He points at the screen and, turning, you see that the film has been replaced by a blizzard of grey static.

'Turn it off, can't you?' growls a man from the adjacent room. 'Some of us would like to get to sleep.'

'Turn it off, you say?' The innkeeper bellows with laughter. 'It hasn't been off in all the time I've been alive. It can't be turned off. Not unless Gaia decides

to take pity on us and give us a few hours' peace.'

An angry florid-faced man stamps through from the other room and glowers at the screen, which has now changed to show a weather report for the coming month. 'Preposterous!' he snarls in outrage. 'It says New York will be having thunderstorms. There has been no rain in New York for years. It is buried under half a mile of ice!'

The innkeeper only chuckles and goes about his chores. 'Don't blame me,' he says. 'Everyone knows Gaia is mad.'

The man whose rest was disturbed glares after him and protests: 'If you can't turn it off, why not smash the screen? It only shows gibberish anyhow.'

Seeing the man step forward as if to do just that, the innkeeper wags a finger at him. 'I'd advise you to leave it as it is. Stick wads of wool in your ears if the noise disturbs you. But if you smash the screen, the caretaks will spend the whole night repairing it and none of us will get any sleep, what with their scuttling about and the clattering of spare parts.'

Hearing this, the man throws up his arms in exasperation and, gathering his blankets, stomps off to sleep at the far end of the inn.

Night falls. The drunken roistering turns to low murmurs, then snores. You huddle on your own bedding and listen to the moaning of the wind outside the fuselage. Tomorrow you have to set out again into the cold. It is not a pleasant prospect.

From the adjacent room you can hear the screen crackling with incessant babble. There is part of a

game show probably taped before your great-grandfather was born, followed by clips from science fiction films of the twenty-first century. You are thirsty and you cannot sleep. Ignoring the mumbled complaints of the people stretched out around you, you get up and step over them, moving through to the room where the screen is.

You sit down. Maybe a half hour of random videos will cure your insomnia. Then the screen changes. It is a news report from the year 2095. The main item concerns the crash of an air cruiser in the Apennine Mountains. You sit forward in your seat, intrigued. Pictures taken from the air reveal the broken tangle of wreckage that was later repaired to form this inn.

Suddenly the picture changes. 'In another item today,' says the announcer's voice, 'scientists studying the meteor that fell in Egypt last month say that it may be the oldest object in the universe. These pictures show the safety suits that are needed to approach the meteor, which emits radiation of a type never previously identified.'

The scene flickers to a date months later. A reporter is standing at a roadside, an armoured truck blazing in the background. 'Terrorists of the sect known as the Volentine Watchers today seized the mysterious meteor as it was being transported to Cairo for further tests. The terrorists, who worship the meteor which they call the Heart of Volent, have yet to issue a statement.'

The screen crackles again, becoming a rich green

colour, the world's continents outlined in red – the continents as they looked before the sea-level fell and the polar caps crept down to cover them.

A warm feminine voice speaks: 'The Heart of Volent remained in the hands of the cultists for twenty years. They founded the city of Du-En in the Sahara and learned how to tap the Heart's power, which they used to devastating effect in the Paradox War. Later Du-En suffered civil war and became abandoned. I have now completed analysis of the scientific tests carried out before the Heart was seized by the cultists. These are my findings. If a human were to make direct physical contact with the Heart, this would release the full energy stored within. The effect would be to activate that person's total psychic potential. In effect they would gain ultimate power over their surroundings. This has been a communication from Gaia. Thank you for your attention.'

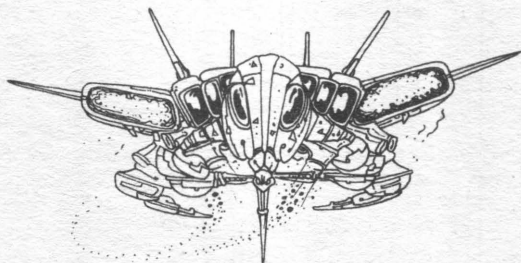
The screen goes blank and silent for a moment, then starts to show a cartoon. You hardly notice it. You are too awestruck by the realization that you have just heard the voice of Gaia.

What she said begins to sink in. *Ultimate power . . .* It lies somewhere in the ruined city of Du-En, across the Saharan Ice Wastes. Suddenly wary, you look at the sleeping forms stretched out around the room. Did anyone else hear Gaia's broadcast? No one shows any sign of being awake. Plunged in thought, you return to your blankets and stretch out, but now sleep is even harder to come by. When you finally doze off

just a few hours before dawn, your dreams are filled with images of the strange meteor from space and the power that it contains.

Will you go to Du-En and seek the Heart? Are you tempted by a power that could change the whole world? If so, turn to **1**.





1

You are packed and ready to leave the inn at dawn. Cold grey light seeps in through the row of dusty portholes at the side of the common room. Making your way to the door, you find the innkeeper polishing the antique Formica desk. Seeing you set your pack down beside the door, he comes over and kicks away one of the caretaks which had its metal body pressed down across the door-sill.

'You're lucky having those,' you say, pushing the door open a crack to take a breath of fresh icy air.

The innkeeper grunts as he watches the caretak re-orient itself and glide away across the floor. 'They are a mixed blessing, since they insist on trying to repair the inn to the form it had originally. This door is a feature that I added myself, more convenient than the hatchway at the back of the fuselage. But if I leave it unattended for more than a few hours at a time, those wretched caretaks always try to weld it shut!'

You smile to show that you sympathize. 'I'd be grateful for your advice. I'm now travelling on to the Sahara. What is the best route?'

The innkeeper flings the door wide, ignoring the curses that erupt from his customers at the sudden intrusion of cold air. Gazing across the expanse of dazzling white snow, he says, 'The most obvious course would take you to Venis, where you could board the ferry for Kahira, and yet . . .' He rubs his hands, blowing out a long furl of steam in the chill air. 'Myself, I'd be tempted to go instead through

the Lyonesse jungle, just to savour a bit of warmth in this frigid world. Thence across the Jib-and-Halter and the Atlas Mountains – unless you stumbled across the ruins of lost Marsay, of course, in which case you might even find a tube tunnel to take you straight to the Sahara!’

Thanking the innkeeper for his advice, you indicate that you are ready to pay your bill. He looks at you in surprise and points to a small dapper man in a grey-trimmed white snowsuit. ‘Your friend there has already paid.’

At this, the small man comes over and extends his hand, smiling broadly. ‘Hallo. My name is Kyle Boche. We’re travelling in the same direction.’

If you accept Kyle Boche as your companion on the road, turn to **23**. If you tell him that you prefer to travel alone, turn to **45**.

2

The figure emerges from the darkness like a ghost. It is wrapped in a rough cape of stitched furs, its shrivelled frame sprouting a spindly neck which supports a large soft head like a leather bag. Pushing back its hood, it reveals a hideous face dominated by a single glowing eye on a flexible stalk.

Boche scrambles to the side of the ledge and then freezes, mesmerized by the creature’s eye. The stalk swivels, turning the lethal gaze towards you. If you have **AGILITY**, turn to **112**. Otherwise it is too late to act, and you are plunged into a hypnotic trance from which you will never recover.

3

The passage is lit by gleaming blue-white tubes along the ceiling. They cast a garish glare in which the sight of a dead body ahead seems like a glimpse of a nightmare. Boche and the baron watch while you stoop and inspect the corpse. You roll it over, surprised at how well the shrivelled flesh has kept in the cold air. 'His own mother could still recognize him,' you remark with grim humour.

'Except she'll have been dead two centuries as well,' says Boche. He gazes off along the corridor, then gives a start. 'There's another one!'

The baron sweeps on ahead and hovers low over the next body. 'He died of a broken back.'

'So did that first one,' you say as you come hurrying up with Boche.

A metallic scuttling sound resounds from the far end of the passage. Instantly your whole body is tensely alert, nerves jangling in fear of the unknown. Then you see it approaching along the passage like a giant robot spider: the body a glass bubble filled with blue fluid, surrounded by legs formed from long articulated steel pipes. Inside the glass bubble floats a lumpish embryonic figure pierced by many tubes. Its eyes are open and it is watching you.

Boche gives a gasp of disgust and fires his barysal gun at the glass bubble, but the thing has already raised a row of its legs to form a shield, and the blast splashes away leaving hardly a mark. 'I think we'd better run,' he says, backing away.

If you want to try and outwit the thing with



CUNNING, turn to **40**. If you confront it with AGILITY, turn to **62**. If you use PARADOXING and a psionic focus, turn to **84**. If you hurl a stun grenade, turn to **106**. Otherwise your only option is to retreat and take the other passage: turn to **128**.

4

The two men make no move to stop you as you dart through into the steam room. A moment later you realize why, when they wedge the door shut and peer in through the narrow glass partition with mocking leers. 'Cook in there like a prawn, then,' they laugh. 'It only makes our job all the easier!'

Engulfed in a cloud of chokingly hot steam, you slump onto the bench at the back of the room. You are trapped. Condensation patters off the wooden roof-beams; sweat soaks you within moments, plastering your hair to your scalp. As the minutes tick by, you listen to the assassins chattering cheerfully just outside the door. They know that they have only to bide their time. Soon you will be too weak to put up any fight.

If you have PARADOXING (and a psionic focus) turn to **158**. If not, but you do have SURVIVAL, turn to **180**. Failing either of those options, you can only lie gasping until the assassins enter and finish you off at last.



You step through into what seems to be a recreation room, with padded couches set around low glass-topped tables. At the far end of the room, a row of couches is set facing a screen on the wall. An image flickers into sharp clarity, but it takes you a moment to identify the wary, baffled-looking figure in the picture. It is you.

You glance at the camera mounted on the wall, then back at the screen. The picture changes to show other views: the parked Manta sky-car, the outer door, the gondo trudging up and down in the snow outside.

'Who spoke?' you say, feeling uneasy at calling out to an empty room.

'I did.' The voice comes from the screen.

'Gaia?'

'Yes. Attend, as there is little time before I fall again to the darkness. You must go to Giza.' The screen flickers to show another scene, this time of pyramids against a backdrop of crystal night. 'The word "humbaba" is the key to entry. Find Gilgamesh and activate him. He will be your servant in the race for the Heart.'

'Race? So others are seeking the Heart?'

'Yes. The broadcast you received was seen by many across the globe. The mightiest of this age will compete for the power. That is the way of mankind.' Gaia gives a sound that might almost be a sigh, then speaks more quickly. 'I am working to secure an area of my mind that will be protected against the viruses

that beset me. I will speak again to you when it is easier.'

The screen suddenly goes blank. Gaia is no longer present. Record the codeword *Humbaba* on your Adventure Sheet if you don't already have it, then decide if you will take a look at the sky-car (turn to **49**) or leave (turn to **395**).

6

The library is a huge series of halls in the basement of the building. The air is dry and musty, and green-shaded lamps blaze at intervals above the imitation walnut desks. In addition to the thousands of books, there are two or three computer terminals of antique design.

Here you can try to establish contact with Gaia (turn to **116** if you have CYBERNETICS, to **138** if not) or read up about the Heart of Volent (turn to **160** if you have LORE, to **182** if not). If you decide to leave the library, turn to **73**.

7

The elevator arrives at the lobby and the doors slide open, but the waiting security guards are amazed to find it empty. The security chief barks an order: 'Get upstairs! Check the other floors!' You hear them go charging up the stairs. Waiting until the coast is clear, you lower yourself back down through the access hatch on top of the elevator car. Ignoring the spluttered protests of the receptionist, you dart out into the safety of the night. Turn to **311**.

8

During your march east you have taken an hour or two each day to practise with the shortsword. The exercise has helped keep you warm, as well as acquainting you with the feel of your new weapon. Now you can use the shortsword in any hand-to-hand fight, its effect being to reduce any injury you take by 1 Life Point. (So if you were instructed to lose 3 Life Points, for instance, possession of the shortsword would mean you lost only 2.) Note this on your Adventure Sheet. It applies only to injuries sustained while using CLOSE COMBAT, of course. Now turn to 334.

9

A short distance along one of the tunnels you find a doorway. While Fax looks on with fluttering gestures of protest, you force the door and enter a small computer room. A caretak is crawling across the banks of equipment, dutifully sweeping away the dust. You log into the computer. As you suspected, it maintains the city's generator and lighting systems, as well as hydroponic gardens which are presumably the ultimate source of the food here.

Fax screws up enough courage to peer over your shoulder. 'What are you doing?'

Your fingers flit across the keyboard. 'Trying to find if there's a communication line to the outside world still working anywhere in the city. Ah, here's one! Now I'm going to contact Gaia.'

Fax utters a doleful bleat. 'Surely Gaia is mad? You

are rash to draw her attention. She might switch off the sun!’

If you persist in attempting to contact Gaia, turn to **336**. If you agree that the risk is too great, you can either explore the transit tunnels (turn to **439**) or else leave Marsay and continue west (turn to **420**).

10

At dawn the ferry enters the Isis estuary and skims upriver towards Kahira. Taking a stroll on the deck, you notice a waft of warmth rising from the river. It eases the bitter chill of the morning air. Questioning one of the sailors, you learn that heating pipes are laid along the river bed. No one knows the source of energy, but the effect is to keep the Isis from freezing, with the result that the river-plants and fish are more plentiful than you would expect. ‘That is the basis of Kahira’s prosperity,’ he tells you. ‘But one day the pipes will fail. Then the river will freeze and Kahira must die.’

You glance to the east, where the sun struggles morosely behind a drape of stern grey cloud. ‘That is the whole world’s eventual fate.’

Kahira hoves into view around a bend in the river. It straddles the Isis on massive concrete buttresses, a huge fortress-city with towers like spines along its back, looking like a beast of mechanical Armageddon against the wintry surroundings. The ferry glides to a halt, the gang-ramp is extended, and you disembark in front of the city gates. If you have the codeword *Diamond*, turn to **251**. If not, turn to **229**.

The fog makes the buildings across the plaza look like lace cut-outs against the night sky. You cross to a line of lights under a colonnade, your footsteps ringing on the slick cobblestones. Finding a row of shops and stalls, you search until you find an answer to your question. 'Seek at the rooms of Pindar the Copt,' advises a stall-holder, pointing to a narrow door at the end of the colonnade. 'He knows the answer to all mysteries.'

Pindar seems to be a local fortune-teller and spinner of yarns. You stand at his door for a few moments, looking at the faded bronze plaque, then step inside. The room is hung with jewel-bright rugs and the air smells of must and incense. Three crabbed old men look up from their hubble-bubble pipe. Without asking your business, they wave you to a cushion.

You sit down. 'Tell me about the Sphinx.'

'She asked a riddle of all who passed, and those who failed to answer were devoured,' says one of the old men.

'The answer to her riddle was Man himself,' says another.

Now Pindar speaks. 'That was the Greek Sphinx. The Egyptian Sphinx is male. He sits at Giza and watches over Kahira, keeping the Saharan snows from overrunning the city.'

You smile. 'These are only stories.'

'Not the last part,' insists Pindar in a pragmatic tone. 'A nuclear reactor is set under the Sphinx, and

this is what powers the heating elements that keep the River Isis from freezing. The same reactor presumably still supplies power to the military complex inside the Great Pyramid.'

Giving him a keen look, you say, 'You seem well informed.'

'I have lived a long time. If you are interested, the answer to the Sphinx's riddle these days is "Humbaba".'

Note the codeword *Humbaba* if you do not have it already. If you have LORE, turn to **95**. If not, turn to **311**.

12

Even after a century or more of disuse, the computers still work. The screen glimmers to life and you key in a connection to Gaia. A stream of meaningless gibberish runs onto the screen, followed by a sequence which seems ominously meaningful. If you have CYBERNETICS, turn to **34**. If not, turn to **55**.

13

Sunlight, hazed by a high overcast, is thrown up from the snow dunes in an unremitting glare as white and harsh as exposed bone. Squinting does no good. Your eyes feel gritty and tired. On the fourth evening, huddling behind the shelter of a crag of ice, you gaze across the landscape. It is like looking through a film of blood. The next day you find the sunrise burns so hard that you cannot stand to open your eyes.

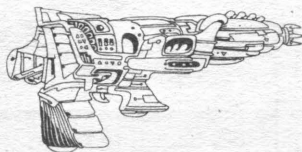
Snow blinded, you can only sit and wait for the dazzle to clear. If you were to press on now, you would soon lose your bearings and die. As you wait, the chill crawls deeper into your bones and you lose another 3 Life Points (unless you have a burrek, in which case you can curl up and share its body warmth, losing only 2 Life Points.) Lose 1 extra Life Point if you do not possess either a fur coat or cold-weather clothing.

If still alive, you are relieved to discover that after a day and a night your eyesight has recovered enough for you to press on. From now on you are careful to shield your face against the glare. Turn to **403**.

14

‘There is nothing else to interest you here,’ says Little Gaia when you question her. ‘You should get under way.’

Accepting her advice, you return up the shaft to the top level. Turn to **361**.



15

On the third day you do not awaken. The toxins in the air and wildlife here have got into your bloodstream. You moan and gasp, thrashing weakly in the depths of a fever from which you will never recover. Your adventure ends here.

16

You descend via a ruined subway entrance whose ventilation ducts connect with part of the catacombs. Golgoth jabs at buttons on his map box, bringing up a crackling image of the tunnels. The air in the ducts is stale, but he assures you that there is a good chance of reaching the underground tunnels close to the Shrine of the Heart. The Gargan sisters are even less enthusiastic about the route you are taking. With their broad shoulders, the duct feels like a long metal coffin.

The stale air makes it hot work. You are soaked in sweat by the time you finally wriggle out of the duct and drop to the floor of a dimly lit tunnel. The Gargan sisters follow, grunting curses, as Golgoth consults the map box. Check the codewords on your Adventure Sheet: if you have *Gilgamesh*, turn to **198**; otherwise turn to **325**.

17

Among the items originally stored in the sky-car's locker were a flashlight and a length of rope. If you have not equipped yourself with these already, you may as well do so now because, if the baron's hunch is right, the moment of truth is almost upon you. After amending your list of possessions, turn to **39**.



18

'The Truth is a Flame,' you say.

'What ignites the flame?' intones the computer. So far so good.

'The spark ignites the flame.'

'What is the spark?' it asks.

'The Heart of Volent.'

You wait with bated breath. Then, with a hum, the elevator starts to descend. You are being conveyed to the Shrine of the Heart! Turn to **150**.

19

Captain Novak comes racing towards you out of the smoke. His uniform is torn and singed by the explosion and he has a wild look in his eyes. You are not sure whether to block his way or stand aside, when suddenly a barysal shot streams through the air, piercing his brain. A second shot hits him as he falls, but glances off his armour and ricochets into you. You are badly burned, taking 6 Life Points damage (unless you have a speculum jacket, in which case only 4 Life Points). If you can survive this injury, delete the codeword *Mallet* and turn to **41**.

20

Singh was so intent on watching for Golgoth that he did not expect an attack from you. Caught unawares, he is flung to the ground. Rushing in, you snatch up the cannon and finish him with a blast from his own weapon.

The smoke begins to disperse. At first you see no

sign of Golgoth, then he emerges from one of the elevator tubes. He had attached his gun to the wall magnetically and set it for remote fire. Retrieving it, he casts a wary glance at the cannon and then smiles. 'Ultimate power can be quite a temptation . . .' he says, glancing significantly from the cannon to the gun in his own hand.

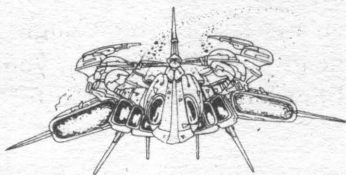
If you blast him with the mantramukta cannon, turn to **43**. If you trust him not to shoot, turn to **431**.

21

You can fire at Golgoth (turn to **109**), Boche (turn to **87**) or Vajra Singh (turn to **131**).

22

Grabbing the stage curtain, you haul yourself up hand over hand until you reach the machinery that moves the puppets' wires. Swinging out, you gather up the wires and snag them into the rotating cogs. Down on the stage, the puppets are jerked off their feet and lifted up as their wires snarl inside the machinery. You see your companions look around in surprise, then Golgoth thinks to look up. Seeing you, his smile flashes in the strobing light. 'There's our *deus ex machina*,' he says. 'You can come down now. And thanks.' Turn to **110**.



23

'I overheard you say you were bound for the Saharan Ice Wastes,' says Boche. 'My own journey takes me in that direction.'

As you set off together through the deep drifts of snow, Boche takes your arm and points to a row of black wooden posts. 'That is the road to Venis. We can catch the ferry from there to Kahira.'

If you agree to go east to Venis, turn to **200**. If you'd rather go west through the Lyonesse jungle, as the innkeeper recommended, turn to **177**.

24

To Boche's obvious surprise, you suddenly dive off the ledge and wriggle down into the bank of snow piled against the rock face just below it. Within seconds you are buried out of sight. Lying there, you listen for the approaching footsteps which tell you the mysterious figure is near at hand.

Boche starts to cry out, then gives a gasp and falls silent. You decide to wait no longer, but leap up from your hiding place and deliver a hard blow on the back of the stranger's neck. The stranger falls, and at the same moment you see Boche shake his head as if recovering from a trance. Turn to **90**.

25

Dawn hides behind a blanket of dark snow-laden cloud. Huddled in warm furs, a few travellers make their way to the quayside to await the ferry. As you approach the ticket kiosk, you see an old man



looking out to sea, propped like a limp sack on a bench. He is crippled, having no legs, and his face has the look of a clay effigy that has crumpled in on itself through sheer age. A puff of white hair haloes his liver-spotted pate. *Poor old devil*, you think as you pass him.

He looks up. Keen hawk's eyes meet your own. 'I don't care for your pity, youngster,' he snaps.

'I'm sorry,' you say, 'I didn't mean—' And then it hits you: he can read your mind.

'Of course I can read your mind. Have you never heard of Baron Siriasis?' Before you can reply, he hauls himself to the edge of the bench. It seems to you that he is about to fall to the ground, and you take half a step forward, but he glares at you and says, 'I don't need your help either!'

To your amazement, he rises into the air until he is hovering in front of you, his gaze level with yours. For a moment your eyes lock. You hear his words of warning, not spoken, but burning their way into your mind: *Don't go to Du-En if you want to live.*

Abruptly he turns and drifts away. A woman standing behind you in the queue glances after him and says, 'Startled? That's Baron Siriasis, one of the lords of Bezant. He's said to be the most powerful psionic alive.'

You have never before seen a man with enough psychokinetic power to levitate his own body. 'Indeed, who can doubt it?' you say to the woman.

If you have the codeword *Diamond*, turn to **224**. If not, turn to **202**.

26

Reaching up, you point the shower nozzle so that a stream of scalding hot water hits one of your assailants in the face. He gives an agonized screech and falls clutching his eyes. By a lucky accident, the shower jet strikes the oil lamp by the door, plunging the shower hall into darkness. As you hear the other man step forward, you get ready to dart aside. He lunges, his knife gashing across your ribs to inflict the loss of 3 Life Points. (Exception: if you have CLOSE COMBAT then you are expert enough to parry an attack even in the dark, and lose only 1 Life Point.) Before he can thrust again, you have caught his wrist. There is a brief struggle – a crack of bone, a wet sound, a groan. Slowly your attacker goes limp in your grasp, impaled on his own knife.

You grope your way to the door and relight the lamp. The dead man's blood goes swirling across the shower tiles into the drain. His accomplice whimpers as you approach. Turn to **48**.

27

You can detect no thoughts from the next room. Either you imagined the voice, or the speaker was one whose thoughts you cannot read.

'Hurry,' the voice cries out. 'Not much time . . .'

If you ignore it and check out the Manta sky-car, turn to **49**. If you go through to the next room, turn to **5**. If you think it would be wiser to get out of here, turn to **395**.

You step out of the elevator and follow the signs along empty corridors until you come to a plushly carpeted room with a door opposite. There is a desk where you might expect to see a nurse or clerk, but the room is unoccupied. The door has a plaque: the red crescent is a universal symbol, and beside it is the doctor's name-plate. You push the door open. A woman looks up from the book she was consulting and gives you a smile which is both a greeting and an enquiry.

'Dr Jaffe, I presume.'

She puts the book into her bag and closes it. 'You caught me just in time. I was about to go home.'

She is refreshingly free of the sycophancy that characterizes most of the Society's employees. You mention this to her as she is giving you a check-up and she laughs, saying, 'Well, most of the members are so used to wielding power that they bully anyone who'll let them. That wouldn't do for a doctor; *I'm* supposed to be the bully!'

If injured, you can restore 2 lost Life Points. Dr Jaffe also gives you a pack of antidote pills saying, 'These are generally useful against most diseases and toxins you'll encounter while in Kahira.' Note the antidote pills on your Adventure Sheet and then turn to 73.



29

The indicator light shows you have fifteen floors to go. About thirty seconds. Long enough to work a miracle if you're lucky. You clear your mind of everything but a single purpose: to direct your willpower through the psionic focus you wear.

The indicator light shows you have reached the third floor . . . the second . . . the first. With a high chime, the elevator comes to a halt and the doors start to open.

Suddenly all the lights go out, not only here but in the street outside, plunging the lobby into total darkness. 'Power cut!' you hear someone shout. Then someone else snarls an order to open fire, and gunfire spatters the rear wall of the elevator where you were standing only seconds before.

Following the wall, you find the door and duck out into the night. Hurrying off, you wait until you have gone half a block through the welcome enveloping mist before you allow the electricity to flow again. That was as narrow an escape as you've ever had. You'll have to sharpen your edge if you are to have any chance of getting the Heart. Turn to **311**.

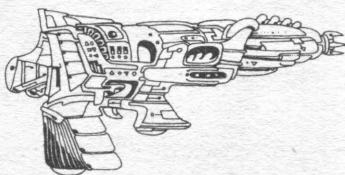
30

Cold reptilian thoughts seep into your brain, jolting you awake. Your gaze flicks across the swaying fronds around you, searching for the source of the thoughts. Warned by an intuitive impulse, you glance up in time to see a narrow fang-lined snout on a long neck dropping towards you. Leaping to your

feet, you cast a handful of soil into the creature's eyes and race off through the trees. Turn to **228**.

31

You sit at the front of the carriage and stare through the window, even though the tunnel is unlit and there is nothing to see. Hours pass before a glimmer of light shows along the tunnel. The carriage glides to a halt and the doors open with a whirl. You emerge into a maze of partly collapsed corridors – there are no caretaks here to keep the place spruce. You search until you find a spiral staircase, at the top of which is a tunnel choked with rubble. Laboriously you clear away the masonry blocks until at last you feel a slight breeze of fresh air. Flickering light shows through a crack in a wall panel. You press your fingers against the panel. It is only light plastiwood which you can break through easily. If you have ESP and a psionic focus, turn to **141**. If not, turn to **357**.



32

If you fight them with CLOSE COMBAT, turn to **76**. If you draw a gun on them, turn to **98**. If you prefer to resort to CUNNING turn to **120**. If you have none of those options, you really would be better off not tangling with them: turn to **54**.

33

Bador thrusts his chin forward and strokes his grizzled scrub of beard as he waits to see how he can help you. Will you ask him about Giza (turn to **59**), the Saharan Ice Wastes (turn to **77**), the city of Kahira (turn to **143**), or where you should take lodging (turn to **99**)?

34

Gaia must be having one of her periodic bouts of madness. The commands which have appeared on the screen tell you that she has logged into the computer which oversees the nuclear reactor supplying power to this base. Your jaw sags in dismay as you see the next set of commands: a sequence which, if completed, would cause the reactor to go critical!

There are times for subtlety, but this isn't it. You rip out the external cables, physically breaking the link to Gaia. The computer sputters and fades before the reactor override command could be completed. You've saved yourself and quite possibly all of Kahira, but with the computer out of action there is no way to restore the reactor to full function. Failsafe systems will probably shut it down now. That means that the electricity will go off soon. Since that will disable the elevator, you lose no time in ascending to the surface while you still can. Turn to **361**.

35

You gnaw wretchedly at your meagre provisions, trying to ration out what remains to last as long as possible. If you have SURVIVAL, you manage to trap a migrating bird which pauses to rest on one of the spurs of ice, and you need lose no Life Points. If you do not have SURVIVAL, the bird escapes and you lose 1 Life Point while hunger continues to weaken you. Assuming you can go on, turn to **100**.

36

A laboratory extends from the far end of the hall. A bank of computers lines one wall. The benches are strewn with electronic equipment whose function you cannot even guess at, most of it only half-constructed. On one bench, next to a metal box, you notice an empty coffee-cup. It looks as if this base was evacuated in a hurry.

You stoop to inspect the metal box. It looks something like a communicator, with a viewscreen and speaker on one side next to an array of buttons. You guess that the prominent red button on the side will power it up . . . whatever it is.

If you try using the computers to put through a message to Gaia, turn to **12**. If you power up the metal box, turn to **57**. If you spend time on a more thorough search of the laboratory, turn to **80**. Otherwise you can descend to the military level (turn to **255**) or leave the pyramid (turn to **361**).

37

You make do as best you can with the little food remaining. You take to sleeping in the middle of each day, when the sunlight gives some small respite from the cold. Rising in late afternoon, you travel on through the night so that the activity keeps you from freezing to death. You watch the stars wheel ponderously overhead, melancholy sparks drifting through the silent heavens. Lose 1 Life Point – unless you have SURVIVAL, in which case your natural hardiness means you can cope with no loss of Life Points. If still alive, read on.

When dawn at last washes the sky silver and lays gold-pink tracks across the snow, you are amazed to find tears of joy running down your cheeks. You have survived another day of this terrible ordeal . . . Turn to **125**.

38

If you have the codeword *Uruk*, delete it and note *Gilgamesh* again.

As night falls, an eerie glitter of lights appears in the sky, like a translucent curtain draped across the cosmos. Janus Gaunt gazes up and tells you it is the *Aurora Cordis*, caused by particles from outer space falling into the field of paradox radiation emanating from the Heart of Volent.

You stand in awe, humbled by the magnificent sight. The curtain of light ripples and stirs in the heavens. 'It seems staggering,' you remark to Gaunt in a whisper, 'to think that just a fraction of the

Heart's power could create something on such a scale.'

He chuckles. 'The Heart's power is much greater than that! Power enough to shape worlds and shift the stars in their courses, if the legend is to be believed.'

'And do you believe it?'

He gives you an odd, half-frightened look. 'Believe it? I have studied the scientific records. I know it for a fact.'

If you have the codeword *Nemesis*, turn to **60**. If not, turn to **82**.

39

You ease yourselves down into the crevice. The walls are slick with frost and you have to brace your back against sharp rocks to keep from slipping. At last you see a glimmer of light below and you emerge onto a ledge overlooking a large underground cavern. A distant howl of rushing air reaches your ears, magnified by the vast space surrounding you. The light is a dull grey phosphorescence from deep in the rock. Climbing down to the floor of the cavern, you advance through a forest of slender stalagmites which glisten like old candles.

Baron Siriasis bobs along beside you like a grotesque broken manikin. He points. 'Ahead is a chasm. Fortunately for you both, there seems to be a bridge across it.'

As you step out from among the stalagmites, you fail to notice at first that a thick glowing vapour is

roiling around your feet. Boche heads towards the chasm, but stumbles and gives a cry of alarm as the vapour begins to creep up around his limbs. With a groan, the baron seems to sag and drift down to the cavern floor. You take another step, then you realize that the mist is draining your strength. It rises across your vision, a luminous fog that seeps into your skin like ice water. You can no longer see your comrades. Then you see a sight that sends a tingle of dread through you. Taking shape within the mist, reaching towards you with ghastly imploring fingers, is a horribly twisted figure that looks like a squashed effigy of white clay.

If you have the codeword *Gilgamesh*, turn to **105**. If you possess cyborg body-parts, turn to **127**. If you have neither of those but you do have LORE, turn to **171**. Otherwise, there is nothing you can do to stop the phantom from reaching through your skin and extracting your life-essence, and your adventure is at an end.

40

Tossing the nearest corpse aside, you lie down on the floor of the passage and tell Boche and Siriasis to start retreating. 'Keep firing at it,' you say to Boche, 'and make sure you don't hit me.'

Boche takes two more shots, forcing the thing to keep its front legs raised as a shield. It stalks forward, feeling its way with its other legs. You feel a shudder of dread as it reaches you and probes your prone body with a metal leg, but you force yourself to keep

absolutely still. The thing assumes you are one of the corpses littering the passage. As it clammers across you in pursuit of Boche and Siriasis, you find yourself staring up at the stunted little body inside the glass bubble. There is no doubt that the body inside the bubble is the thing's guiding intelligence. You lash upwards with your boot, cracking the glass, and the blue fluid pours out. The thing rears up on its legs like a dying spider, takes a series of rushing steps that up-end it against the wall, then twitches and dies. In stunned silence, the three of you step past and head on to the end of the passage. Turn to 281.

41

Boche comes along the passage with gun in hand. He is covered with dust from the explosion and has a gash across his forehead where he was hit by a splinter of masonry, but he is smiling. 'The baron's dead,' he tells you.

'How? What happened?'

He swells with pride. 'I got him with a grenade. I'd been carrying it all along, but the joke was that I didn't even know it myself. It was the only way to foil his mind-reading, you see.'

'I don't understand.'

Boche coughs rock dust out of his throat and then goes on: 'I knew the baron was heading for Du-En and that he'd be the hardest foe I'd have to face, so I got myself hypnotized to forget that I was carrying a grenade. I had a post-hypnotic suggestion planted

that I should use the grenade at a key moment. He never knew what hit him.'

'Ruthlessly cunning . . .'

If you intended any sarcasm, Boche fails to notice it. 'Thanks,' he says. 'Now, let's get going before the tunnel collapses on us.' Turn to **175**.

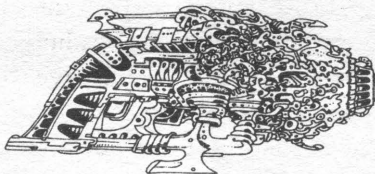
42

A barysal beam stabs blindly through the smoke, narrowly missing you. Singh turns and squints in the direction of the shot. 'I still can't see him . . .' he mutters grimly.

If you have a charged barysal gun and want to return fire, turn to **64**. If you advance under cover of the smoke towards where the shot came from, turn to **86**. If you back off out of the smoke and look around, turn to **108**.

43

Golgoth fires back, but he has no defence against the unstoppable power of the mantramukta cannon, which literally blasts him apart. His last shot strikes you glancingly, however, and you feel an agonizing pain coursing through your side. Lose 3 Life Points (or 2 Life Points if you have a speculum jacket). If still alive, turn to **415**.



44

Gargan XIV's fist lashes out, cracking your head back against the wall. If you have CLOSE COMBAT, lost 1 Life Point; if not, lose 3 Life Points. As you are squaring off for a hard fight, you see that Gargan XIII has drawn a knife and is standing over Golgoth, in no hurry to finish him off. Suddenly he looks up with a broad smile. Turn to **154**.

45

You look at Boche's hand but do not take it. In these latter days, with humanity on the brink of extinction, you have learned to be wary of strangers. 'I travel alone.'

Boche is not deterred. 'Come, that's hardly friendly,' he points out. 'I've paid your bill.'

'I did not ask you to. Landlord, return this man's money. I shall settle my own account.'

Your bill for the night is 3 scads. If you are willing to pay this, amend your money and turn to **67**. If you reconsider and accept Boche's generosity, turn to **23**.

46

Grabbing handfuls of snow, you rapidly dust it over your clothing and face. The cold nips your skin painfully. Ignoring the discomfort, you pluck some icicles from the overhang above the ledge, lodging these across your hood in front of your face. Taking up an intent rigid pose, you look like just another of the frozen corpses lining the walls of the pass.

Boche is slow on the uptake. 'What are you doing?' he asks.

'Get going, you fool,' you hiss out of the side of your mouth. 'You're the decoy.'

He hesitates, then drops from the ledge and vanishes out of sight along the pass. Soon afterwards, the mysterious figure draws level with where you are crouching. A gold glimmer shows under its hood as it glances up, then hurries on towards Boche.

You leap down behind it, and a hard blow with a rock lays it flat in the snow. Turn to **90**.

47

The Compass Society is an international organization whose membership consists entirely of the rich, powerful and privileged. Possession of one of the coveted gold membership cards marks a person out as someone to be respected, with full access to the Society's wealth and lavish resources. Although the Society is not represented here in Venis, you know that it has premises in Daralbad, Bezant and Kahira. If you possess an ID card, turn to **69**. If not, turn to **414**.

48

You stoop to question him. His knife lies beside him, but he is in too much pain to think of retrieving it. He peers at you between his fingers, his face and eyes badly scalded.

'Who are you?' you ask. 'Why did you try to kill me?'

‘Body snatchers,’ he replies, grinding his teeth in agony because of the burns. ‘Any healthy stranger is fair game in this part of town.’

Body snatchers seize live organs for transplants. You know that a high price can be had on the black market for a usable heart, kidney or liver – and no questions asked of how the body snatchers came by it. It is a foul trade, lacking even the relative openness of conventional mugging.

If you have **STREETWISE**, turn to **114**. If you have **ESP** (and a psionic focus), turn to **136**. Otherwise, turn to **92**.

49

You touch a dial on the dashboard. The liquid crystal display shows that the sky-car’s power unit is still working. None of the other instruments show damage. The caretak has maintained the sky-car well. There is not even a trace of dust on the vehicle’s smooth black finish.

In a storage locker behind the seat you find food, medical supplies and a variety of other items. Stored in vacuum packs, they should still be usable despite having been left here since before the Ice Age.

If you try powering up the sky-car and flying it out of the complex, turn to **71**. If you would rather just loot the storage locker of useful goods and then leave, turn to **93**.

50

You sit at the front of the carriage and stare through the window at the hurtling darkness. There is no way to tell how fast you are travelling, but you estimate from the long smooth acceleration at the start of the journey that it could be about four hundred kilometres an hour. The carriage never gives the slightest jolt.

Hours pass before you see the glimmer of lights along the tunnel. The carriage glides to a halt and the doors open with a whirl. You emerge and set off along a tunnel very different from the one in Marsay. This subway station has not been maintained by caretaks, and dust and rubble cover the tiled



walkways. Climbing a staircase, you find the entrance blocked by fallen masonry and have to labour for more than an hour before there is a gap large enough to squeeze through. You find yourself on an ice-hard plain under the descending chill of dusk. A sprinkling of snow drifts down out of the sky. A few kilometres away, Kahira straddles the River Isis on its thick buttresses, a grey concrete lobster winking with a thousand eyes of light through the haze of mist. You set out at a brisk pace, anxious to reach the gates before curfew. Turn to **229**.

51

The elevator carries you almost to the top floor of the building, where a well-equipped gym overlooks the city. You spend half an hour on the treadmill, watching your own reflection in the glass window superimposed against the mist-shrouded towers and twinkling lights of Kahira. Another half-hour on various weights machines leaves you feeling firmed up and fit. You finish with five minutes under a massage bed followed by a relaxing spa.

As you are leaving the changing-room, you almost collide with a huge Fijian in a trim black suit and mirror glasses. He grunts an absent-minded apology and hurries past, staring urgently around the room. He is the only other person you have seen in the building who doesn't seem to be an employee here. You are about to head off towards the elevator when he calls after you: 'Hey! Who are you? You're not my boss!'

If you possess a barysal gun and want to use it, turn to **227**. If you prefer to use CLOSE COMBAT, turn to **248**. If you try CUNNING, turn to **269**. If you have none of those, you had better run for it: turn to **290**.

52

The elevator reaches the ground floor and the doors slide open. You step out, only to be confronted by a group of uniformed security men with rifles. 'You're in illegal possession of a Compass Society ID,' growls the security chief with a wolfish grin.

'Let me explain . . .'

He shakes his head. 'Tell it to the marines. Better yet, tell it to the angels.'

With a click of his fingers, he signals to his men and you are blasted apart in a juddering hail of gunfire.

53

A rustling in the leaf canopy directly overhead warns you of danger. You open your eyes in time to see a narrow wedge-shaped head snaking down from the branches, its wide pink mouth lined with teeth like needles.

You react instantly, flipping backwards over the log an instant before the jaws strike. The creature rears back, spitting out soil and twigs, head bobbing on a long grey cable of neck, and lunges again. You slip aside, snatch up your belongings, and race off through the trees. Turn to **228**.

54

You take yourself to a table and sit down. The twins watch you for a moment longer, then return to their drinking. You glance around the inn. No one else dares stand up to the two Amazons. What about you? You might eavesdrop using **ROGUERY** (turn to **208**), read their minds using **ESP** and a psionic focus (turn to **230**), try to outwit them using **CUNNING** (turn to **120**), or draw a barysal gun if you possess one (turn to **98**). Otherwise you had better mind your own business: turn to **252**.

55

The computer locks you out. You try rebooting, to no avail. With a shrug, you turn to exploring the rest of the pyramid, idly wondering what Gaia was up to when she entered the stream of inexplicable commands into the computer system here.

The answer comes so suddenly that you never know it. Gaia was in the throes of her periodic madness when you contacted her this time. She located the nuclear reactor supplying power to the pyramid and ordered it to go critical. Without warning a blossom of plasma erupts from the earth. For a brief incandescent second it is as though time has turned back to before the Ice Age, and the Pyramid of Cheops once more sits on hot sands in blazing light. Then the blast spreads – sweeping away the pyramids that have stood here for fifty centuries, vaporizing the snow and ice covering the desert, turning the rock to lava and the river to

steam, and making of Kahira a cinderous ruin. In the midst of such a holocaust, you own death goes unnoticed.

56

You curse the recklessness that brought you into the Ice Wastes before you were adequately prepared. Your lack of food intensifies the cold, which seems to drill into your bones. Each dawn you arise lethargic and listless, like one who has been visited by a vampire in the night. Each step you take costs a greater effort; you feel torpid with fatigue and hunger. If you do not have SURVIVAL, lose 4 Life Points as you slowly starve. If you have SURVIVAL, you manage to trap a bird which alights on one of the tors of glacial ice, and need lose only 2 Life Points. (Also, lose 1 less Life Point if you possess a burrek, as you can tap some of its oily blood for sustenance.)

Assuming you still have the strength to go on, turn to **100**.

57

You touch the red button. The box produces a prolonged hum which rises in tone and then ends with a bleep. 'Ready,' says a synthetic feminine voice from the speaker.

Taken aback for a moment, you lean closer and gingerly speak to the box. 'Er . . . ready for what?'

'Explain,' says the box crisply. 'Your query was unspecific.'

'Is this a radio? Who am I talking to?'

'I am a miniature facsimile of the Global Artificial Intelligence program,' replies the box.

'Gaia? But Gaia is crazy.'

'I was loaded with Gaia's program prior to virus infection. I am able to model the thinking of the Gaia system at a reduced rate owing to my limited memory capacity, which now stands at 512 gigabytes.'

'What can you tell me about the Heart of Volent?'

'Nothing. No such information has been loaded into my memory.' The device has an annoyingly smug little voice. All the same, if it has even a fraction of Gaia's intelligence then it may be useful. Record on your Adventure Sheet that you now possess Little Gaia. You can now search the lab for other equipment (turn to **80**), descend to the bottom level of the pyramid (turn to **255**), or leave (turn to **361**).

58

The volcanic gases here make the air poisonous, stunting the trees around the oasis and causing the slow death of animal life. No doubt those insects swarming in the sudorific updraughts have had to mutate in order to tolerate the conditions here. You know that prolonged exposure to the tainted air might eventually cause cancer unless you have some protection. Otherwise it is only worth staying if you are on the brink of death and are so desperate for recuperation now that you are willing to take a

gamble with your life.

If you have either a gas mask or cyborg body-parts, turn to **169**. Otherwise, choose whether you will stay for a day or so (turn to **103**) or continue onwards at once (turn to **426**).

59

He holds up his finger. 'Ah, it is a very ancient place, not very far to the west. There, in ancient times, were buried the royalty of Egypt. Later, men came from the distant corners of the globe with a great warrior they called Gilgamesh, who had skin of iron and eyes of fire. They told him to watch across the snows for stirrings of life in the ruins of Du-En, and, if any threat arose from there, he was to take up his sword and venture forth.' Bador sees the look on your face. 'It is true, all true!'

Now you can ask his advice about the Sahara (turn to **77**), about Kahira itself (turn to **143**), or where to stay in the city (turn to **99**). Or you can dismiss him (turn to **95**).

60

If Gaia is to be believed, to unleash the power of the Heart would spell death for all of creation. But is she to be believed? Or trusted, for that matter? Gaia is not even a 'she', but an 'it' – just an artificial intelligence resident in a network of computers. And schizophrenic into the bargain, thanks to the complex computer viruses entrenched in her software.

You must make up your own mind. If you think

the Heart should be destroyed, you will need to find a friend who is willing to help you do it. You look dubiously around the faces limned in the campfires. By their very nature, these are the most ruthless and determined adventurers of the age. Can you make them trust you? Or should you forget Gaia's dire warning, and just try to get the Heart for yourself? If you have ESP and a psionic focus, turn to **152**. If not, turn to **82**.

61

If you have ESP (and a psionic focus) turn to **344**. If you have ROGUERY, turn to **365**. If you have LORE, turn to **387**. If you have CYBERNETICS and possess Little Gaia, turn to **408**. If you have none of those, turn to **429**.

62

You are in no doubt that the stunted little form inside the central globe is the thing's guiding intellect. Racing forward, you avoid a sweep of the powerful metal legs and throw yourself into a forward roll that carries you onto the top of the glass globe. The half-formed face of the embryo is floating just inches from your own. Its muddy eyes give no sign of surprise or understanding – it has the drooling vacant face of an imbecile – but suddenly the metal legs buck and rear in a frantic effort to throw you off. You cling on for several seconds until you feel it give an upward thrust, trying to crush you against the ceiling. You leap clear at the last moment and the

glass globe strikes the ceiling with a crash. As the blue fluid drains away, the thing gives a dying spasm and then falls still.

Boche comes over and helps you to your feet. 'I wonder what *that* was,' he says with emphatic distaste.

'I don't care as long as there aren't any more of them,' you reply. Together you head on to the end of the passage.

Turn to **281**.

63

Reduce your gun's charge by one. The barysal beam crackles through the air, only to spatter off an invisible shield of psychic force. If you have PARADOXING and a psionic focus, you could try to strip away the defensive shield and fire again, assuming you still have any charges in your gun (turn to **282**). Alternatively, you can back out of the hall the way you came (turn to **107**) or press on deeper into the catacombs (turn to **129**).

64

If you have ESP (and a psionic focus) turn to **130**. If not, turn to **240**.

65

The shot was a decoy! Sensing Golgoth's thoughts, you whirl to see him running silently through the smoke towards you. He has a knife in his hand, and the look in his eyes is as cold as death. You block his

first thrust but take a gash on your forearm, countering with an elbow-strike which leaves him dazed.

The fight is short and brutal. Golgoth is a master of lethal killing techniques. Lose 5 Life Points – or 3 Life Points if you have CLOSE COMBAT. If you can survive that, you finally manage to twist the knife around and impale him. Turn to **72**.

66

The puppets are programmed to fight each other in an epic battle. But you doubt if the programmers ever expected a group of spectators to wander onto the stage during the performance. Dodging the sword-blows is almost impossible. The strobing light was supposed to enhance the scene, adding a sense of frantic pace as well as disguising any jerkiness in the puppets' movements, but it also makes it much harder to see a sword-thrust coming. You finally succeed in pushing your way through the mêlée and jumping down off the stage, but in the process you take several nasty cuts. Lose 2 Life Points (unless you have CLOSE COMBAT, in which case lose only 1 Life Point). If you are still alive turn to **110**.

67

Taking up your pack, you trudge out into the snow. Moments later you hear the crunching of rapid footsteps and Boche catches up with you. His breath curls into the diamond-clear morning air. 'We may as well travel together for mutual convenience, at

least for a while,' he says chirpily.

If you agree to this, turn to **133**. If you refuse point-blank, turn to **155**.

68

Reduce your gun's charge by one; when it reaches zero charges it will no longer fire.

There is the familiar pulse of blistering grey-white light, which instantaneously illuminates the overhanging crags like daylight. The sharp crack of vaporized snow and superheated air reverberates off the rocks. You are gratified to see the figure throw up its arms and fall to the ground.

'That was rash,' snaps Boche. 'You might have just killed a potential ally.'

You lower yourself from the ledge and start off towards the prone figure. 'Let's find out,' you call back over your shoulder. The figure looks dead, but you are careful to keep your gun trained on it. Turn to **90**.

69

The drawback to using the card is the holographic picture on the front, which looks nothing like you. If you have **ROGUERY**, turn to **452**.

Without **ROGUERY**, you must either try to get the picture altered or else give up on it for now. If you want to get the ID card altered, turn to **113** if you have **STREETWISE** or to **135** if you do not. If you want to forget about the card and investigate your other options instead, turn to **414**.

70

One of the men sticks out a foot to trip you, while the other chops at your neck with his knife.

If you have either **AGILITY** or **CLOSE COMBAT**, you are able to fend off the blow and escape past them, grabbing up your clothes as you run (turn to **92**).

If you do not have either skill, the blade gashes you across the breast-bone – a painful but not lethal injury. Lose 3 Life Points and decide whether to retreat into the steam room (turn to **4**) or stand your ground and fight (turn to **26**).

71

If you have the **PILOTING** skill, turn to **115**. If not, turn to **137**.

72

‘We’ve done it!’ you cry. ‘Now to destroy the Heart.’

But Singh shakes his head. ‘Nonsense. I have honoured our agreement thus far, but only to ensure success. Now we must decide which of us survives to claim the power.’

‘Hardly an even battle,’ you comment, nodding at the powerful mantramukta cannon in his hands.

He tosses the cannon aside. In his belt is tucked a weapon in the shape of an ancient duelling-pistol, but with a nozzle that tells you it is in fact a modified laser.

If you have a charged barysal gun, turn to **284**. If not, turn to **305**.

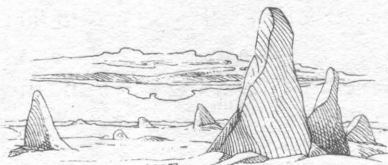
73

If you have not already done so, you can now take the elevator to the library (turn to **6**), the medical lounge (turn to **204**), the gymnasium (turn to **51**), the armoury (turn to **447**), or the canteen (turn to **94**). If you decide you have pushed your luck far enough and wish to leave before your deception is uncovered, turn to **311**.

74

The carriage gathers speed. You sit at the front and stare through the window at the darkness rushing by. Hours pass before you see the glimmer of lights along the tunnel. The carriage glides to a halt at a sleek station lit by dull red lights. You stand up, but the doors do not open. Instead the motilator gives a placid announcement: 'We have arrived at a restricted area. We will now proceed to Maka, where you will be able to transfer to another vehicle for your onward journey. We apologize for any inconvenience.'

Again the carriage picks up speed, this time for a journey of less than two hours. Arriving at another terminal, you wait to see what other destinations the motilator will offer. On the map, only Tarabul continues to flash. You can either take the subway there (turn to **31**) or disembark and see where you are (turn to **375**).



‘What’s *that*, what’s *that*?’

You sit bolt upright and stare around. The voice you heard was jarringly strange: humanlike, but not quite human. Nerves tingling, you scan the undergrowth—

Teeth snare your shoulder and you cry out in pain and surprise. The attack came from above. Lose 1 Life Point. You look up to see an uncanny beast peering down at you. Stretched between the branches, its body is a tent of leathery wing-flaps. Its head is a narrow snout filled with teeth, swaying on a long flexible neck. It watches you with small glittering eyes and croaks, ‘What’s *that*?’



Nothing nice, that's for sure. If you want to use SHOOTING and a charged barysal gun, turn to **96**. If not, turn to **118**.

76

'I have been travelling for weeks,' you reply curtly, 'and I will not be deterred from taking a good hot meal just because two slab-shouldered termagants want to drink themselves into a stupor.'

A mutter of guarded approval goes around the other customers when they hear your tone of defiance. It is not exactly a cheer. Obviously the twins have kept everyone here tyrannized for hours.

You walk forward. One of the twins plants a hand in the middle of your chest. You seize it, apply a lock, and twist. She rolls out of the lock, bracing her arm against the bar and kicking up with strong yet fluid grace. You weave aside, block a punch from the other twin, and counter with a stiff-fingered strike to the solar plexus. She braces against the blow, taking it on muscles like steel cables. Her sister, springing upright, launches a kick at your kidneys which you barely avoid, the attack hitting you on the hip with bruising force.

The Jib-and-Halter Inn has never witnessed such a rough-house. Punches, kicks and brutal gouges lash back and forth while the other customers look on aghast. Lose 3 Life Points. If you survive this, the twins finally step back and signal that they are prepared to end the fight. If you agree, turn to **164**. If you insist on fighting on, turn to **186**.

Bador expresses dismay when you tell him you intend to cross the Ice Wastes. 'By your father's beard! Do you wish to become a corpse with hoarfrost in your veins? Put aside all thoughts of such a scheme, I pray you!' You cannot help smiling. 'What?' says Bador, starting to weep. 'Do you mock my concern?'

You place a hand on his sleeve. 'Calm yourself. You and I are strangers, and you already have your fee. Do not allow the thought of my death to upset you, but give me advice on how to avoid such a fate.'

'Only the barbarian Ebor venture into the Sahara, and even they dare go no further than its fringes. It is a place of ghosts and devils, and the wind is like obsidian.'

'The Ebor . . . a nomad tribe? How do they survive?'

'They have burreks, shaggy thick-necked beasts that grow folds of fat. When the blizzard comes, the Ebor rider shelters by his burrek and bleeds the animal, frying up a blood pudding to sustain him.' Bador grimaces to show what he thinks of such a custom.

Now you can ask what he knows about the city (turn to **143**), about Giza (turn to **59**), or the best place to spend the night (turn to **99**). If you have learned all you need and want to send him away, turn to **95**.

The flyer slowly drifts into the air on streamers of lambent gas. As the main thrusters engage, it picks up speed and goes roaring up into the heavens. A flash of sunlight glances off the hull as it veers towards the east. You watch until it is lost in the soft blue haze.

You set out on foot until you come to a shore of white sand, which you follow north to a ferry building. A group of men emerge and appraise you with suspicious glances before showing you to the ferry boat, a single-masted schooner which has seen better days. Two or three other passengers are already aboard, and on seeing you one of them says: 'Good! Now the ferry is full, we can set sail for Port Sudan.'

You must pay 1 scad for passage to Sudan; cross it off your remaining money. Moonlight is making a creamy track in the water by the time you reach Sudan, a village of wooden huts huddled within the vast shell of an abandoned city wall. The boat sweeps in across the harbour, guided by a flaring beacon, and moors at a jetty reeking of fish. The streets are empty, and it is obviously too late to find a hostelry for the night, so you decide to sleep on the boat. The ferrymen are averse to this, insisting they should be paid more for providing you with accommodation as well as transport, but the other passengers are encouraged by your lead. 'You were happy enough to keep us waiting two days until you had enough passengers for the journey,' snaps one.

At last the ferrymen sullenly agree. You sleep until dawn tinges the sky with the colour of a candleflame. If you now wish to do some shopping in Sudan, turn to **101**. If you are eager to set out for Du-En, turn to **234**.

79

Reduce your barysal gun's charge by one; when it reaches zero charges you can no longer use it.

A thin searing beam spits through the air, burning a precise hole through the giant bometh's head. It utters a deep growl, takes two stumbling steps through the snow, and then falls. You hurry over to make sure of the kill. You would not want a wounded bometh stalking you through the night. Turn to **341**.

80

You find several items scattered across a bench at the back of the laboratory. These include a flashlight, a pair of binoculars, a set of polarized goggles, and a barysal gun. The gun has been opened for inspection, but it is a simple matter to secure the butt and replace the screws. You check the power unit, finding two charges remaining. Note any items that you wish to take, and also note the number of charges in the gun if you take it. Now you can descend the shaft to the bottom level (turn to **255**) or ascend and leave the pyramid (turn to **361**).

81

Gilgamesh stands rock-still beside you. You hear the soft whir of a fan sucking air into his chest-plate. Then he announces that the air here is toxic.

'How toxic? The trees seem to survive well enough.' You brush midges away from your face. 'And the insects.'

'They are adapted to the conditions here,' replies Gilgamesh in his abrupt mechanical voice. 'Trace elements may cause cancer in higher life forms.'

'After how long?'

'Unknown. Even one day's exposure is potentially hazardous. Recommend you take precautions to filter your air supply or leave the vicinity.'

If you have a gas mask, turn to **169**. Otherwise, choose whether to stay and rest for a few days (turn to **103**) or depart as Gilgamesh suggests (turn to **426**).

82

The moon rises, wreathed in a haze of frost. In the crisp cold light, the ancient halls and towers look more than half unreal. You watch the others huddled by their campfires. No one has much to say. Each of them is absorbed in private hopes, dreams and fears of what tomorrow will bring. And each knows that their brittle truce is in its final hours. When the Heart is found it will be every man for himself. Who would expect anything else, when the prize at stake is nothing less than the power of a god?

Vajra Singh and Thadra Bey have retreated to their respective tents and scarcely seem to invite

conversation. If you wish, you can talk to one of the others – either Chaim Golgoth (turn to **126**), Kyle Boche (turn to **104**), Janus Gaunt (turn to **148**), or Baron Siriasis (turn to **170**). Alternatively, you could just turn in for the night (turn to **192**).

83

The sky is clear and blue, with high wisps of grey cloud. The snow crunches underfoot as you walk across the square to join Kyle Boche. Floating out of his tent comes the legless Baron Siriasis. You look around but the square is otherwise deserted apart from clumps of servants waiting beside the tents.

‘The others have already descended,’ Boche tells you and the baron. ‘Vajra Singh went with Golgoth, down through the main temple complex. Thadra Bey took herself alone into the adjoining subway tunnels. Janus Gaunt was gone before I woke.’

‘I suggest we three team up, then,’ says the baron briskly.

Boche nods. ‘Agreed. If we find the Heart, our alliance holds until the other teams are dealt with. Where shall we descend?’

Last night you noticed an icy crevice beside the building that Singh levelled with his mantramukta cannon. You point it out to the others. ‘It looks to give onto the cellars, and there may be a way through to the temple catacombs below.’

The baron gazes down into the crevice, then gives a curt nod. ‘I sense it is a favourable route. It will lead us to the Heart.’

If you have a Manta sky-car, turn to **17**. If not, turn to **39**.

84

You see the air twist inside out as the baron projects a bolt of psychic force against the oncoming creature. Like Boche's gun-blast, the bolt is deflected by its shield of metal legs. 'It is a robot, immune to paradoxing!' shouts the baron. 'We must retreat!'

You have a better idea. You may not be as powerful a psionic as Baron Siriasis, but you are cleverer. Instead of channelling your psi-force as a direct bolt, you use it to transmute the blue fluid that fills the glass bubble. Within moments the gnarled little homonculus inside is floating in acid. The thing rears up on its long legs like a dying spider, then topples to the floor. By the time you go over to look, the body inside has entirely dissolved away.

'Not a robot,' you say to the startled baron, 'but a cyborg. You should have attacked the organic part.'

He glares at you, then gives a curt nod of respect. 'It seems I can still learn new tricks of my craft, even from a youngster like you.'

Together you head on to the end of the passage. Turn to **281**.

85

The brain reaches you. Its single remaining eye glares into yours, seeming to burn your soul like a lens focusing the rays of the sun. Your veins and arteries feel as though they are filled with ice water.

Thoughts which are not your own intrude upon your mind. You are locked in a psychic contest for possession of your living body!

If you have both ESP and PARADOXING (and a psionic focus) turn to **151**. Otherwise you can do nothing to save yourself, and darkness closes over your soul as Baron Siriasis steals your living body for himself.

86

If you have ESP (and a psionic focus) turn to **65**. If not, turn to **240**.

87

Reduce your gun's charge by one. Boche falls to your first shot. His death acts as a signal for the start of hostilities. Golgoth and Singh, in no doubt that each is the most dangerous foe, whirl to face each other. Golgoth's first shot hisses into sparks on Singh's armour as the Sikh warlord raises his mighty mantramukta cannon. Turn to **410**.

88

Gargan XIV closes in on you. Gargan XIII draws a knife and looks down at Golgoth, in no hurry to finish him off. Suddenly he looks up with a broad smile. She was wrong in thinking him beaten. To the contrary, he has the look of a cat who has trapped two large mice. Turn to **154**.

89

There is no love lost between you and the Gargan twins. Seeing you square off warily against them, Janus Gaunt tries to defuse the situation, saying, 'Come now, we must set aside past differences! Until we can locate the Heart, a state of truce must apply.'

'Truce? That word is a refuge for cowards!' Gargan XIV hisses at him, while never letting her molten gaze stray from you.

'Du-En's getting overcrowded,' says Gargan XIII as she takes a step towards you. 'Someone has to put the rubbish out.'

You flick a glance at Gargan XIV. While her sister kept your attention, she has drawn a gun. You leap to one side just as a thin beam of energy spits past your shoulder and sears a gobbet of molten stone out of the wall behind. Gargan XIII drops into a crouch and comes stamping forward to grapple you, but you throw one of Gaunt's glassy-eyed xoms towards her and duck away behind the weathered stump of a pillar.

In the tense atmosphere of the camp, the squabble acts like a spark in a powder keg. Within seconds everyone is preparing for full-scale battle. Boche dives through an open doorway just in time to avoid Thadra Bey's throwing-dagger. An ectoplasmic aura crackles around Baron Siriasis as he marshals his psychic force. With a thoughtful frown, Chaim Golgoth draws his gun and steps back looking for a target. Janus Gaunt panics and shouts to his xom servants: 'Kill everyone! Protect me!'

Then a voice rips like thunder across the square: 'Stop this senseless fighting *now!*' and, turning, you have your first view of the mighty Vajra Singh. Turn to **300**.

90

'Is it dead?' says Boche.

You snap an icicle from under the ledge and drive it deep into the grotesque pulpy head. The creature gives a single spasm and lies still. 'It is now.'

You roll the body over to inspect it and are almost overcome by a wave of nausea. It is the most loathsome thing you have ever seen: a thin malformed body with a bloated mauve-pink head. The only facial feature is a long thick stalk ending in the cyclopean eye – now thankfully dimmed by the glaze of death. The scalp is covered with tiny orifices like gaping eyelids. Are they breathing holes? Sensory organs? There is no way to tell.

Boche joins you beside the body. 'It's a mutant.'

You nod. 'That's for sure, but a mutant *what?*'

If you follow the creature's tracks back to its lair before the snow covers them, turn to **134**. If you wait where you are until dawn, turn to **310**.

91

You piece together a jigsaw of legend, superstition and historical fact. The Heart fell from the sky: an unearthly gemstone that became the focus of a crazed cult. The cult used its supernatural power to wage the Paradox War. Now the Heart lies buried under

the ruined city of Du-En, and the one who retrieves it will become mightier than any man has ever been.

'Why, then, did the civilization of Du-En fall?' you ask a scholar at the library.

'Its rulers went mad. No one could wield such power and stay sane.'

'Do you know it for a fact, or is it just your own theory?'

But his only answer to that is a whimsical smile. If you have STREETWISE, turn to **157**. If not but you have LORE, turn to **414**. If you have neither, turn to **25**.

92

By the front desk of the inn there is a notice-board where posters are pinned up for the perusal of bounty hunters. You scan the pictures of wanted criminals to see if any resemble the two men who attacked you, but without success. When you ask the innkeeper, he only shrugs and says that people are constantly coming and going. 'I cannot keep track of all the riff-raff of Venis!'

'But I might very easily have been murdered.'

His only answer to this is to point to a sign on the wall which reads: *The management is not responsible for the safety of customers or their belongings*. You give him a glowering look, then turn and stride out of the inn. A walk in the night air will help you to cool off. Turn to **329**.

93

You lay out the contents of the storage compartment on the floor beside the vehicle. There are ten food packs, a medical kit, a flashlight, cold-weather clothing and a length of nylon rope. Note anything you are taking as possessions on your Adventure Sheet, then turn to **395**.

94

The canteen is located at the top of the building, with wide windows giving a breathtaking view over the city. You stand and look out for a few minutes at the tall towers wreathed in swirling fog. Below, a dark patch of woodland studded with mistily sparkling lamps can only be infamous Claustal Park.

The canteen has no human attendants, just a food dispenser which brings forth foil-wrapped packs at the touch of a button. You can take any number of food packs you like, up to the total limit of eight possessions at any one time. Record these on your Adventure Sheet.

As you are leaving the canteen, you almost collide with a huge Fijian in a trim black suit and mirror glasses. He grunts an absent-minded apology and hurries past, staring urgently around the room. He is the only other person you have seen in the building who doesn't seem to be an employee here. You are about to head off towards the elevator when he calls after you: 'Hey! Who are you? You're not my boss!'

If you possess a barysal gun and want to use it, turn to **227**. If you prefer to use CLOSE COMBAT, turn

to **248**. If you try **CUNNING**, turn to **269**. If you have none of those, you had better run for it: turn to **290**.

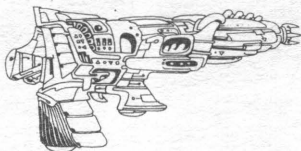
95

If you possess an ID card and wish to make use of it, turn to **353**. Otherwise, if you have not already done so you could try to find out about Baron Siriasis (turn to **401**), Chaim Golgoth (turn to **422**), Gilgamesh (turn to **380**), or the Sphinx (turn to **11**). If you are ready to get some rest, turn to **311**.

96

The blast hisses in the dank steamy air. Blue plasma-fire burns through the creature's neck. It utters a bleak wail of distress and falls crashing to the ground, where you finish off the twitching carcass with a heavy stone.

Reduce your barysal gun's charge by one; when it has zero charges left you will not be able to use it. The wound in your shoulder is beginning to throb. You clean it with some leaves, then tear strips from the lining of your jacket to make a bandage. Lying back against the log, you feel slightly giddy, but this is no place to rest. There might be more of those creatures about. Hauling yourself to your feet, you lumber off in search of a safer place to hole up. Turn to **228**.



The nearest man stabs his knife at your heart. You deflect the blow with an open-handed block to his wrist, then sidestep in close to deliver two swift elbow strikes across his face. As he sags, you pluck the knife out of his fingers. The angle is wrong to get the man with the gun, so you cast the knife at the other. It catches him in the shoulder and he falls back with a grunt.

The man with the gun is about to fire. You throw yourself into a forward roll, hearing the blast crack overhead and explode against the wall. Scissoring your legs, you thrust him off-balance before he can take another shot. He topples into the fire, his frightened yelp cut brutally short as his head hits a rock.

Before you can get to your feet, the man with the knife in his shoulder comes lumbering forward and tries to stomp you in the guts. You jerk aside, catch his ankle, and bring him down backwards across your hip, where a swift powerful twist ends the struggle.

You search the shelter. The barysal gun has one charge left. You also find two knives, a set of polarized goggles, cold-weather clothes, binoculars, and six food packs. Take what you want, remembering that you can carry no more than eight possessions. Then you wait for the blizzard to blow itself out before emerging into the crisp snow outside. Turn to **393**.

98

Your gun is barely out of its holster before one of the twins flicks her wrist and sends a splash of fiery vodka into your eyes. The gun discharges with a sizzling crack. You stumble back, wiping your face. A kick lashes out, striking the gun from your hands. Strong fingers seize your head. There is no time to act before your legs are swept out from under you. You topple, and a mighty twist from your assailant breaks your neck. Your great adventure has been cut short in an unseemly tavern brawl.

99

He is emphatic that you should on no account sleep in Claustral Park. 'This is unsafe after nightfall,' he says, wagging his finger. 'The claustrals are barely deterred from entering the streets as it is.'

'What are claustrals?'

He jerks back in exaggerated surprise. 'Do you truly not know? They are rank fiends – creatures that are the reverse of men. They flourish in darkness, cold and filth; they abjure sunlight and goodness. Their food is the decaying remains of the dead.' His fat jowls shudder with fright.

'Decaying flesh? So why would they hunt a living person? Possibly the claustrals are simply figments of a fairy tale!'

He looks at you sadly, as though at a person who had lost their wits. 'Do not allow your cynicism to tempt you into the park,' he maintains.

'So where should I stay?'

‘The Ossiman Hotel is best. If you cannot afford a hotel, avoid the backstreets, where muggers lurk. If you must, sleep by the gratings on Fishermonger Plaza – it is well lit, warm, and there are plenty of folk around all through the night.’

Now you can ask his advice about the Sahara (turn to **77**), about Giza (turn to **59**), or about Kahira itself (turn to **143**). Or you can dismiss him (turn to **95**).

100

You continue on, watching the sun slide dankly down into the west. A silvery afterglow rims the skyline. Pale humps of snow extend to the murky horizon, divided by hollows brimming with violet shadow. Catching a movement out of the corner of



your eye you freeze, slowly turning to see a huge sabre-fanged bometh standing on a rise not fifty metres away. You slink back behind an ice boulder, not certain if the creature saw you.

If you have the codeword *Gilgamesh*, turn to **123**. If not but you have **SURVIVAL**, turn to **256**. Otherwise, you could attack the bometh with **SHOOTING** and a charged barysal gun (turn to **79**) or with a stun grenade (turn to **145**). Alternatively, you can close with it (turn to **277**), track is using binoculars if you have them (turn to **319**), or creep off before it spots you (turn to **298**).

101

You stroll around the market, but there is little on offer here. If you wish to buy a fur coat, it will cost 5 scads. You can buy food packs for 4 scads each; these consist of fish, oil and grain dried into blocks, each giving rations for several days.

A small girl follows you along the dusty street singing a ditty:

‘Out across the Ice Wastes,
Yellow steam and snow,
Cough your guts and freeze to death,
A silly way to go.’

No doubt the same rhyme has been repeated by children here for many generations. For some reason you find it more discouraging than any amount of sage advice. Not for the first time, you find yourself wondering if you are mad to consider a journey across the daunting Saharan plains. Still, when life

on Earth is guttering like a candle about to blow out, only a fool makes plans for the future. You square your shoulders and turn to the west. Turn to 234.

102

You are halfway across the tarmac when you realize your mistake. The pilot of the flyer has already engaged the boosters. You see him at the cockpit window, his face contorting in surprise and shock at the sight of you racing towards the craft. Your last image is of him jabbing desperately at the controls, but he is too late to abort the booster ignition. An instant later, a blast of white-hot gas bursts from the landing jets and billows up to press a wave of solid heat into your face. Blinding light burns into your retinas, followed by darkness and oblivion.

Lose 5 Life Points. If you are still alive, turn to 122.

103

You build a lean-to beside the bubbling pool in the shelter of the dwarf conifers. You soon discover that the water of the pool is tainted with volcanic gases, but when you need to drink it is easy enough to collect snow from beyond the edge of the oasis and bring it back to camp to melt. Food is more difficult to come by. The birds you saw when you first arrived prove to be very timid, and canny enough not to let you catch them. If someone had told you even two weeks ago that you would be eagerly chewing grubs and insects for food, you would have

laughed scornfully. At least the hot gases rising from clefts in the rocks mean that you can bake the insects before eating them.

Recover 2 Life Points. On the morning of your second day at the oasis, you notice a slight feeling of nausea, and begin to wonder whether the sulphur-tinged air is affecting your health. If you decide to leave the oasis and head on, note the codeword *Hourglass* and turn to **426**. If you want to stay for a few days more, turn to **15**.

104

Boche struts around the fire under the colonnade while outlining his plans for how you will share the power of the Heart. Lost in your own deep reverie, you hardly hear his words. Finally you look up and ask him: 'Why do you want ultimate power, Boche?'

He stops short and looks at you sharply. For a moment you think he is about to give you a straight answer, but no: 'What are you saying? Are you having doubts? Surely not, when we are on the verge of triumph. You must not be so timid!'

If you have the codeword *Nemesis* and want to suggest an alliance, turn to **236**. If you would rather get some sleep, turn to **192**.

105

Even though the three of you are helpless, Gilgamesh can still act. Lunging forward through the swirling vapour, he seizes the gnarled phantom in his arms and carries it with stiff strides to the edge of the

chasm. It shrieks and twists in his grasp, flowing and distorting like a painting in the rain. Sparks cascade from Gilgamesh's visor as it sinks its fingers under his armour. For a long instant they both stand there, wreathed in white mist, struggling for the upper hand. Then Gilgamesh steps forward over the edge and he and the creature drop out of sight. You hear its thin bleating cry echo up from the depths and then there is silence. When you run to the chasm and look down, you find no trace of either the phantom or your loyal automaton. Delete the codeword *Gilgamesh* and turn to **149**.

106

The thing comes stalking forward, feeling its way while keeping its front legs raised as a shield. You have already seen that gunfire cannot penetrate the tough metal alloy. The glass case in the centre is another matter, though. You roll your grenade along the floor of the passage and pull the others back to a safe distance. There is a loud bang. The grenade is designed only to stun a living target, but the explosion cracks the glass and the blue fluid gushes out. As it does, the thing rears up like a dying spider, falls with a twitching of its robotic legs, and lies still.

Boche nervously goes over to look at it. The little embryo inside the glass case lies as inert as a lump of cold clay. 'It's dead,' he says. In stunned silence, the three of you head on to the end of the passage. Remove the stun grenade from your possessions and turn to **281**.

107

If you have the codeword *Mallet*, delete it and turn to **195**. If not, turn to **217**.

108

Golgoth had the same idea. You come face-to-face with him on the edge of the smoke cloud. Instead of a gun, he has a crossbow in his hands. He shoots, but you are already dodging and the bolt only opens a gash across your shoulder. Lose 2 Life Points. If you survive and have SHOOTING (and a charged barysal gun), turn to **304**. Otherwise, turn to **326**.

109

Vajra Singh had the same idea at the same time. Golgoth's gaze snaps from Singh to you, but he hesitates a moment too long. Your shot hits first, and Golgoth crumples to the floor. Singh wastes no time taking stock of the situation, swinging his mantramukta cannon around to point at you. Boche seizes his chance to take a shot, but it spatters off Singh's armour. It is the last thing you see, as a moment later you are blasted out of existence by the fiery roar of the mantramukta.

110

After Gargan XIII's wound has been seen to, you spend another hour searching the bomb shelter. You find a canteen, but the food is unsealed and spoiled. At last you have to accept that you will not get access to the Shrine of the Heart from here. Weary and

disappointed, you head back to the ventilation duct.

'You know the theory that the Heart was formed in the Big Bang?' says Golgoth to you. 'The boffins say it's actually another universe, like a seed that didn't quite get started. I read somewhere that the same thing happens with people. Often you start off with a twin in the womb, but that twin gets reabsorbed into you. In some people, the process happens quite late in the foetus' development. Occasionally the vestigial remains of the unborn twin is found inside a cyst – you know, tiny limbs, a nubbin of a heart, and so on. It might be true of any of us.'

You wonder why he is telling you this rather ghoulish bit of medical lore when one of the Gargan sisters interrupts: 'That is only true for those born in the inferior natural way, inside a womb. My sisters and I were all carefully nurtured and grown to maturity. The artificial wombs guaranteed perfect nutrient balance.'

Golgoth laughs at her proud remarks. It seems to you he is deliberately provoking her. 'Your own sisters were all fine specimens of womanhood,' he replies. 'I should know; it was me that killed all twelve of them.'

You have not taken in what Golgoth has said before Gargan XIII explodes into action. Roaring in fury, she grabs Golgoth's shoulder and spins him around. His gun is in his hand and it looks to you as though he might have got off a shot, but Gargan XIII slaps it away and knees him in the stomach. He

reels back into Gargan XIV, who grabs him by the throat and dangles him like a rag doll. 'So this is the great Commander Golgoth, sister,' she says contemptuously. 'Like all so-called natural humans, he is nothing compared with our pure racial stock!'

She tosses Golgoth aside and he slumps to the floor. You have a nasty feeling you'll be next. If you have *Gilgamesh* and want to order your automaton to attack, turn to **220**. If you step in to fight them yourself, turn to **44**. If you hold back to see what happens, turn to **88**.

111

After a cursory greeting, the others start to disperse back to their tents. Janus Gaunt tells you he has just brewed a pot of tea and invites you to join him. You are pleased enough to share the warmth of his fire, but when a xom hands you a teacup in its bloodless fingers you cannot suppress a shiver of dread. 'Don't bother about them,' he says with a laugh. 'They're just robots, really – except that they're made out of once-living tissue instead of plastic and metal. They're powered by a small electrochemical implant in the chest cavity.'

'They are an abomination against nature,' says Boche flatly, draining his tea. 'Where do we get firewood?'

Gaunt is taken aback by Boche's rudeness, but replies courteously: 'Take it from the buildings around the square. The mulberry window-shutters you are warming your hands over, for instance, date

from tenth-century Persia. It is a pity to burn such artifacts as these, but the former owners have no more use for them.'

Boche rises with a grunt and trudges off, entering a narrow doorway. You follow to find him flashing his torch around. 'Ah, here is some firewood already broken up for our convenience,' he says.

'It is mine,' purrs a voice of menace from the doorway. Thadra Bey stands there, muscles coiled taut in pantherish grace, a lethal dart-projector in her hand.

'Down!' roars Boche, cannoning into you from behind and sending you flying into Thadra Bey. You and she go rolling out into the snow, her dart singing through the air and narrowly missing Chaim Golgoth, who responds at once by drawing his barysal gun. In seconds all hell has broken loose, as the uneasy truce splinters apart. Thadra Bey rakes her fingers across your face and leaps away, levelling her dart-projector, and you hear Gaunt yelling to his xoms: 'Defend me! Slay any who attack!'

For a moment it seems that the struggle for power will be decided here and now. Then a voice rips like thunder across the square: 'Stop this senseless fighting *now!*' and, turning, you have your first view of the mighty Vajra Singh. Turn to **300**.



112

With only a split-second left before the creature's gaze paralyses you, you act on raw instinct. Leaping high into the air, you somersault over its head, twisting so as to land directly behind it. The eyestalk sweeps frantically, trying to see where you went. But before the creature can bring its ghastly scrutiny to bear, you give it a hard blow across the back of the head. As it falls senseless in the snow, Boche recovers from the hypnotic trance. Even so, it is several seconds before he has recovered his wits enough to speak. Turn to 90.

113

You soon find a man who can do what you want: a fat sweaty fellow with a profusion of ancient tools and devices strewn around his shop. Guiding his laser by hand, he makes a few deft changes to the image on the card until it could pass for your own likeness. 'Five scads,' he says, holding it out to you.

'Five?' you scowl.

'Membership of the prestigious Compass Society is usually much more expensive than that,' he says with a shrug.

You consider snatching the card back, but the fat man cannily anticipates you and holds it close to the laser beam until you pay. If you agree to his terms, cross off 5 scads and acquire the codeword *Proteus*. If you refuse to pay, he destroys the ID card and you must delete it from your list of possessions.

Now turn to 414.

114

'There's a flaw in your story,' you point out to the man as you scoop up the knife he dropped. You stroke the point against his neck, pricking the skin until a single drop of blood appears. He swallows nervously. You go on: 'Body snatchers don't use knives. There's too much risk of puncturing a vital organ – damage to merchandise, you might say. They prefer garrottes and sedative sprays.'

'All right,' he admits. 'We were hired to kill you.'

'Who?' You prod him again with the knife.

'Baron Siriasis.'

You are puzzled. 'I've never heard of him. Why should he want me dead?'

'He didn't explain it to us. Apparently he regards you as a rival.'

This is a mystery you can clear up later. Telling the surviving assassin to make himself scarce, you dry yourself off and get dressed. You can keep either or both of the assassins' knives if you wish, and you also find 10 scads on the dead man's body which you can add to your money. Turn to **92**.

115

You settle at the controls of the sky-car and touch the button to power it up. There is a deep hum, and slowly it rises into the air. Hovering at a height of a metre above the floor, you cautiously engage the thrusters. A blaze of blue-white light illuminates the rear wall as the sky-car cannons forward. Quickly you reduce thrust, adroitly steering towards the

corridor leading to the entrance. A couple of times you bump the wings against the side walls, scratching, to your great annoyance, the perfect matt-black paintwork. You must take care until you have got the hang of this vehicle. Note on your Adventure Sheet that you have a Manta sky-car; it does not count towards your limit of eight possessions.

As you emerge into the open, the gondo looks on aghast and then, turning with a yell, starts running clumsily off through the deep snowdrifts. You increase speed to catch up. He drops flat as you roar overhead and swing around to hover beside him. He lies trembling with his arms over his head until you say: 'It's just me.'

He looks up. 'I thought you were a flying monster!'

'You should have looked twice before you panicked,' you say with a laugh.

After some urging, the gondo warily clammers up and slides into the seat beside you. 'Is there any roof to shield the cockpit?' he asks.

'Apparently not. Remember that when the Manta sky-car was in common use, people could go about in thin clothing without the fear of freezing to death.'

You steer back towards Venis. The outward journey took a couple of hours; returning is a matter of minutes. If you have the codeword *Diamond*, turn to **181**. If not, turn to **159**.

The computer terminals are only intended to access the library catalogue, but you have no trouble routing into the building's administrative computer and then opening an outside line via the rooftop satellite dish. Like most organizations with the ability to connect into global communications, the Society protects its system from accidental linkage into Gaia by the use of a filter program. This is necessary to prevent infection by the same viruses that are resident in Gaia, as well as to stop Gaia from taking over the Society's whole system for her own use.

You set a standard filter-override program running. It should take a few minutes, and to kill time you run a check on other users who have logged into the system recently. Only one name is displayed: Janus Gaunt. He requested all the Society's records regarding the Heart of Volent. Intrigued, you call up his biofile. The screen shows a round-faced man with extremely white skin and hair like silver floss. Flicking idly through the data, you find he has a reputation for outstanding work in the fields of bio-engineering and nanotechnology. The address of his mansion causes you a double-take; it is located in the Paris catacombs. You were not even sure Paris still existed.

The terminal bleeps, informing you the link with Gaia is ready. You switch over. When you type in your query about the Heart, Gaia's response is swift: THE HEART MUST BE DESTROYED. ACTIVATION OF ITS POWER WILL CRASH

THE UNIVERSE, WIPING OUT ALL THAT EXISTS.

You reply: INCLUDING THE EARTH?

EVERYTHING, Gaia tells you. BARYSAL BOMBARDMENT CAN CAUSE A CRITICAL RESONANCE, DESTROYING THE HEARTS CRYSTALLINE STRUCTURE. TWO SIMULTANEOUS BOMBARDMENTS MUST BE MADE, THE BEAMS PHASED AND CROSSING AT RIGHT ANGLES.

This is awkward. From what you have heard, the Heart is a gem several metres across. To destroy it as Gaia suggests, you'd need an accomplice. And two barysal guns. You try to get further information, but the link is broken. Like a senile invalid, Gaia has lapsed back into her customary incoherence. Acquire the codeword *Nemesis* and then decide what to do next. If you wish to study the records on the Heart of Volent, turn to **160** if you have **LORE** or to **182** if not. If you have finished in the library, turn to **73**.

117

'It's been useful having you along,' says Shandor, beaming his confident smile as he firmly shakes your hand. 'I'm sure you won't need my advice on getting by in Venis, resourceful as you are, so let me give you something else.'

He reaches into a pocket and produces a money token which he touches to yours, automatically transferring the sum of 20 scads to you. You are about to protest when you notice the sum remain-

ing on his token. He can well afford what he's paid you.

Add 20 scads to your money. Bidding Shandor and his men farewell, you set off into Venis. If you have both CLOSE COMBAT and a shortsword, turn to 8. If not, turn to 334.

118

You jump to your feet and scramble off through the undergrowth. The creature follows at a leisurely pace, squawking triumphantly from high in the branches. It claws its way effortlessly between the closely spaced trunks, sometimes sailing out across clearings on the wide leathery kite of its body.

If you have SURVIVAL, turn to 206. If not but you do have LORE, turn to 140. If you have neither, turn to 162.

119

A lethal blue spike of light pierces the air, charring its way through the chest of the man with the gun. The knifeman blinks, starts to backpedal, then realizes he has no choice but to attack you anyway. That instant's hesitation proves his undoing, as you have time to swing your gun around and unload a blast at point-blank range. The third man rushes in with a sob of desperate fury. You lash out with the butt of the gun and he drops as though poleaxed.

Reduce your gun's charge by two. When it reaches zero charges, you will no longer be able to use it. You search the trappers' shelter. Their barysal gun

has two charges left. You also find two knives, a set of polarized goggles, binoculars, cold-weather clothes, and six food packs. Take what you want, remembering that you are limited to a total of eight possessions. Then you wait for the blizzard to blow itself out before emerging into the crisp snow outside. Turn to **393**.

120

The innkeeper is cringing at the end of the bar with a sick look on his face. You bow to the twins, saying, 'Ladies, pardon me. I am a simple servant here.' Turning to the innkeeper, you ask: 'Master, shall I fetch the very best vodka for your guests?'

The twins scowl at him. 'Isn't this the best?'

He twitches nervously, but senses you have a plan in mind. 'Er . . . my dear ladies, cherished guests—'

One of the twins seizes his jerkin and hauls him across the bar, glaring into his face. 'Well?'

'Ulp. In fact, there is one bottle of extremely fine Old Daralbad Immolate in the cellar . . .'

'Fetch it!' This is addressed to you. You race out to the cellar door to fetch a bottle, returning by way of the bathroom at the back of the building where you find the inn's medicine cabinet. As you come racing back, the bottle is snatched out of your hands.

'I must advise caution, my lady,' you say, almost grovelling. 'This is strong liquor.'

'Pah!' She drains half the bottle at a gulp, then hands the rest to her sister.

You stand back and watch. Gradually the twins

start to yawn, then fold across the bar. Only when they begin snoring do the rest of the customers feel safe in approaching these two fearsome Amazons. Even asleep, they inspire such fear that no one knows quite what to do with them, until you suggest putting them in a rowboat and pushing it out to sea.

‘When will they wake up?’ asks the innkeeper.

You shake your head. ‘Who knows? I put a whole packet of sleeping pills in that vodka, but these two seem to have a vigorous metabolism. Best that we get rid of them at once.’

Record the codeword *Scythe*. Also add the inn’s medical kit to your list of possessions if you wish to keep it, and then turn to **142**.

121

Golgoth must have a keen interest in lurid fiction, because his thoughts are filled with images of carnage, explosions, gunfire, and violent death. Then you realize that these are not scenes from films or books – they are Golgoth’s memories of his life! He has successfully eliminated dozens of the United States’ enemies around the world, mainly by dint of trickery, cunning, and a quite unabashed level of viciousness. Viewing these memories from his mind, at the same time returning that placid smiling gaze, sends a shiver along your spine.

If you ask Golgoth what he knows about Giza, turn to **337**. If you question his reason for carrying a crossbow, turn to **315**. If you allow Boche to lead you away from this hardened killer, turn to **358**.

122

Awareness returns slowly, the details of your surroundings emerging out of a blur. There is a white ceiling above you and soft fabric at your back. The air carries a faint smell of antiseptic. You can make out the low whine of air-conditioning.

'You're able to hear me?' booms a voice.

You wince, focusing on a face that looms above yours. The colours seem harsh, garish. Sounds come to your ears with a rasping undertone, as though filtered by electronics.

Another face comes into view: slender and handsome, with a high forehead capped by a green circlet. He has a lopsided but not unfriendly smile. 'How are you feeling?' he asks.

'I've got pins and needles,' you say in a voice still slurred by anaesthetic. Reaching across to rub your left arm, you feel the unyielding hardness of metal in place of flesh. You sit bolt upright with a thrill of horror, throwing off the sheets. You can only stare at what they have made of you: a being half of robotics, half of living tissue. A cyborg.

'It was all we could do to save your life,' explains the man wearing the green circlet. 'You were caught in the jets as my flyer took off. I brought you up here. It was touch and go for a couple of weeks, but you should be all right now.'

'What's left of me, that is,' you say bitterly. Note that you now possess cyborg body-parts. Turning to the window, you see a surprising profusion of stars in a flat black void. 'Where are we, anyhow?'

The other man, the doctor, takes you by your still-living right arm and leads you to the window. A vast crescent globe of swirling grey and white hangs in space below you. 'That's the Earth,' he says. 'You're on al-Lat.'

The pilot joins you. 'I know you are still shaken, but I must ask you some questions. You should not have been in Maka. How did you get there, and why?'

If you tell him the truth, turn to **144**. If you prefer to invent a convincing story, turn to **166**.

123

'Target identification: bometh,' grates Gilgamesh. 'Mutant wolf/bear hybrid. Predator. It presents a danger. Immediate elimination is called for.' He raises his arm, ejecting a crackling blast of energy that turns the dusk to day. The swirling snowflakes hiss into steam. On the crest of the rise, the giant beast shudders and falls, rolling down into the deep snow. With Gilgamesh clanking along behind, you hurry over to make sure the bometh is dead, as you would not want a wounded predator stalking you through the night. Turn to **341**.

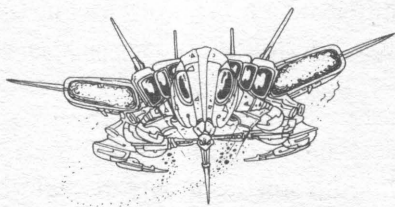
124

The carriage rushes on into the darkness of the tunnel. You wait for almost two hours, and then you start to feel the carriage slowing down. It enters a station and glides to a halt, but there is a delay before the doors open. 'Karthag station is damaged,'

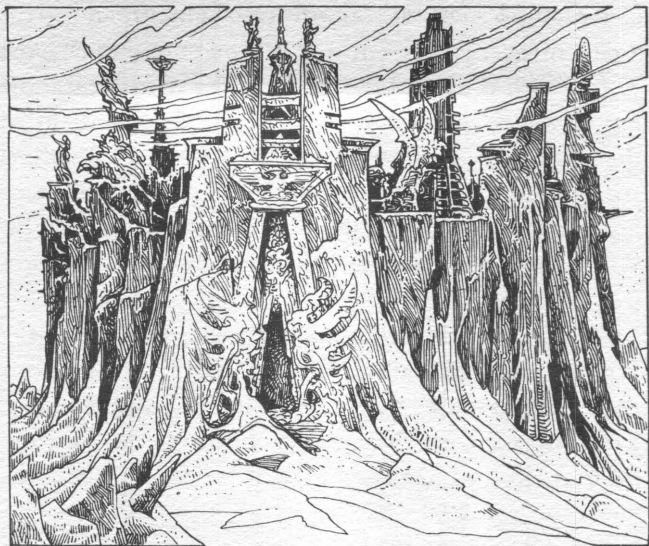
explains the motilator's calm electronic voice. 'You are recommended to select an alternative destination.'

Through the window, you can see that the station has caved in. Huge chunks of shattered concrete litter the platform, with twisted metal cables extending from them like torn arteries from a heart. It is sheer luck that the tunnel itself was not blocked, otherwise you would have ended your journey with a severe jolt, to say the least.

What now? If you disembark here, turn to **146**. Or you can take the subway back to Marsay, and from there head on to Kahira (turn to **50**), Tarabul (turn to **31**), Giza (turn to **74**), or even resume your journey on foot (turn to **420**).



At last you see a streak of dark rubble against the dazzling skyline. You fear it might just be a line of hills or even a trick of the light, but as you approach on quickened footsteps it is possible to make out the details of brooding towers, empty palaces and gargantuan snow-bound walls. You have arrived at the lost city of Du-En.



If you have the codeword *Diamond*, delete it and turn to **191**. If not, turn to **213**.

126

You find Golgoth squatting by torchlight at the end of the colonnade, where he has laid out all his weapons on the flagstones. As he checks each, he slips it into its concealed sheath: a garrotte wire under his belt, along with a flexible steel blade; poison darts in a bandolier inside his jacket; guns at hip, ankle and wrist; small flat grenades clipped along his sabretache. You watch him aghast for a few minutes. 'Quite the professional killer, aren't you, Golgoth?'

'Don't get far if you only make it a hobby,' he says.

You sigh. 'Does human life mean anything to you?'

He buckles on his barysal gun, gets up and gives you a long thoughtful look in the torchlight. 'Not the life of scum like this.' He gestures along the colonnade. 'I've happily sent hundreds like them to an early grave. Who do you think my USI bosses should've sent – a pack of boy-scout Marines?'

'So you're here as a USI agent?'

He nods. 'Of course. The power of the Heart cannot be allowed to fall into hostile hands. In order of priority, I will either take it to the States, get the power myself, or destroy it.'

If you have the codeword *Nemesis* and want to propose an alliance, turn to **214**. Otherwise, you can go and talk to Kyle Boche (turn to **104**) or get some sleep (turn to **192**).

127

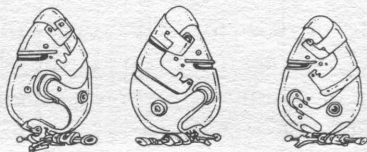
The glowing phantom is leeching the strength from your living tissue, but your artificial body parts are not affected. Lunging out with your metal arm, you seize it by the neck. Your cyborg leg carries you forward with a lurching gait until you stand on the brink of the chasm. The phantom squirms in your unbreakable grip, its form twisting and flowing like melting wax. As its fingers penetrate the circuits of your arm there is a flash of sparks and the feedback causes you 2 Life Points of damage. If still alive, you manage to throw the phantom down. Its thin bleating cry echoes up from the depths as it falls, trailing its gleaming wisps of vapour like a comet's tail. Turn to **149**.

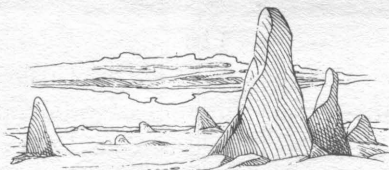
The passage brings you to a series of galleries, each consisting of a cloister running either side of a central concourse softly illuminated by chandeliers. Many of the heavy buttresses have been defaced, leaving chunks of broken masonry scattered across the marble floor. 'No doubt this devastation was wreaked in the city's collapse,' says Boche in a hushed voice. 'It's said that the people of Du-En went mad and turned against their leaders.'

Baron Siriasis drifts to halt and peers off into the gloom of the cloistered walkway at the side of the room. 'I sense a presence,' he says after a moment's concentration. 'Something is stalking us.'

Quickening your pace, you hurry on through the galleries until you see a heavy iron-bound doorway ahead. A rasping sound echoes out of the cloisters to one side. It sounds like chitin slithering across stone. You are about to break into a run when the lights go out and you are plunged into darkness.

If you have night vision, turn to **302**. If not, you can use **ROGUERY** (turn to **216**), **ESP** and a psionic focus (turn to **194**), **SHOOTING** and a charged barysal gun (turn to **238**), or light a flashlight or a lantern if you have one (turn to **172**). Failing any of those options, turn to **260**.





129

With the ghastly brain floating after you, you race out of the hall. The passage soon forks, but you have no time to pause and get your bearings. You blunder on, gasping for breath, looking back over your shoulder to see if your pursuer is still there. Losing sight of it around a bend in the tunnel, you begin to calm down and think. The baron is a powerful psychic – more powerful than you ever dreamed, to outlive his body like this – but he cannot survive once the remaining oxygen in his brain tissue is used up. All you have to do is stay ahead of him that long.

Your simple plan is ruined a moment later when, darting around a junction in the passage, you come face to face with a hover-droid. A quarter of a second is long enough for you to start to turn and for the hover-droid to identify you as an intruder in the catacombs. As you leap back, its laser flares up and you feel a sickening pain as the hot beam cuts through your gut. Lose 4 Life Points (unless you possess a speculum jacket, in which case lose only 3 Life Points).

If alive, you retreat rapidly. But just as you lose sight of the hover-droid, you turn to see the baron's brain drifting towards you. You are between a rock and a hard place. Turn to **85**.

130

The shot was a decoy! Sensing Golgoth's thoughts, you whirl to see him running silently through the smoke towards you. The look in his eyes is the chilling glint of an inhuman killer. Your arm comes up by instinct and you send a lethal blast of energy through his heart. He topples at your feet. Reduce your gun's charge by one and turn to **72**.

131

Your shot burns through Singh's armour and he staggers back, but although wounded he is far from beaten. He presses the fire button on his mantramukta cannon just as Boche goes for an opportunist shot at you. Lose 2 Life Points as the beam carves through your shoulder (exception: if you have a speculum jacket, lose only 1 Life Point). A moment later Boche falls as Singh swings the cannon around, blasting him apart with a torrent of searing energy.

There is a moment of silent as the cannon's blast cuts out. It will take a few seconds to build up charge before it can fire again. Golgoth seizes the chance to take aim with his barysal gun. This is the showdown that will decide which of you lives to claim the power of the Heart. Turn to **410**.



132

A barrage of tightly focused plasma bolts flash through the air directly overhead. You feel the wave of heat as the copper wires are vaporized. The puppets drop lifeless to the stage.

Gilgamesh lowers his arm. Smoke is wafting from his built-in gun. 'Random motion of manikins may have caused you damage,' he grates in his mechanical voice. 'They have been rendered inert. Danger now over.'

'And you wanted to leave the tin man behind,' Golgoth reminds the Gargan sisters as you get down off the stage. Turn to **110**.

133

'You won't regret it,' he says emphatically.

You look to the east, where the morning sun is hidden under a shelf of heavy grey cloud. A line of black posts protrude from the snow, marking the road to Venis. The other direction would take you through the swamplands of Lyonesse – the one region of Europe not afflicted by ice sheets and arctic blizzards. But Lyonesse has dangers of its own.

If you head east, towards Venis, turn to **200**. If you intend to go west through Lyonesse, turn to **177**.

134

The creature's lair proves to be a cave at the end of the pass. Inside you find a fire of smouldering peat. Around it are strewn bones from humans and large animals. It seems that the creature trapped its prey

by hypnosis, leaving the victim to die of exposure. Whenever it needed fresh meat, it had only to fetch in one of the frozen bodies along the pass – a gruesomely effective procedure. The aftermath of the Paradox War has left the world with many such weird mutations.

Boche gives an involuntary cry of disgust, which he immediately disguises with a nervous laugh. He has discovered a clutch of the creature's young: blobby heads like diseased potatoes, bodies as shrivelled as a bag of giblets, the mesmeric eye no more than a yellow pebble on the end of an embryonic tuber-like stalk.

'Cute little devils.' If you want to kill them, turn to **156**. If not, turn to **178**.

135

You show the card to various forgers around town. One tells you that the process involved in altering a hologram is very expensive, since lasers and other rare devices are needed. You are about to leave his shop when he sidles over and glances furtively along the street. Dusk squats over the city, pouring dank slushy snow from a colourless sky. He lowers the blinds. 'I can't alter the picture,' he says. 'But what about your own face?'

'Cosmetic surgery?'

He shows you to a room at the back. 'I do it all the time for clients who want to escape their past misdeeds. A whiff of gas and you sleep. When you wake, you'll have a new face.'

‘How much?’

After some haggling, he settles on the sum of 5 scads. He reaches out his hand, but you smilingly shake your head, telling him you will pay once the operation is over. He prepares his instruments, then invites you to breathe the anaesthetic gas. If you reconsider and leave now, turn to **223**. If you go ahead with the operation, turn to **201**.

136

You sense that he is lying. Narrowing your gaze, you search deeper into his thoughts while he lies there helpless on the tiles. The shower splashes water onto both of you, icy cold now.

You glimpse the image of a crippled man. White hair like a puff of steam surrounds an old, sick, deeply seamed face. He ordered your death. The assassin does not know why.

Deciding it is easier just to question the man, you say: ‘Who was the man who hired you?’

‘Baron Siriasis, a paradoxer from Bezant. He said you were not to reach Kahira.’

‘Why did he want me dead?’ you ask. But the question is futile: you have already read the assassin’s mind, and he cannot give you any answer. It is a mystery you must clear up later. Telling the man to make himself scarce, you dry yourself off and get dressed. You can keep either or both of the assassins’ knives if you wish, and you also find 10 scads on the dead man’s body which you can add to your money. Turn to **92**.

The sky-car emits a soft hum as you engage the power. White light flares from the thrusters, casting a garish glow across the walls. It rises to hover a metre or so above the floor. Despite the smoothness of its movement, you are aware of the enormous power in the machine and open the throttle only gently. Unfortunately you misjudge it even so. The thrusters boom, sending the sky-car caroming across the chamber. Frantically you twist the joystick, trying to turn towards the corridor, but you are moving too fast. The sky-car smashes into the wall and you are flung out, hitting the floor with numbing impact.

When you come round, your whole body is a single throbbing ache. You feel sure you must have cracked a couple of ribs, and your wrist is badly wrenched. Blood pours from a deep graze above your eyes, and as you get to your feet a wave of dizziness hits you.

Lose 4 Life Points. If you can survive this, you stagger over to look at the sky-car. It is a wreck. The chassis has split and white-hot sparks are cascading from the broken power unit. The caretak that had maintained it for all these years comes crawling drearily forward and begins probing the wreckage. You almost feel sorry for it; it has its work cut out for the next year or so. The sky-car will not fly again before then. Now all you can do is rummage through the storage locker and salvage a few items. Turn to 93.

138

You seek out the librarian: a plump sour-faced man who sits at his desk amid the stacks like a spider in its web. He is barely able to disguise his irritation when you explain what you want. 'A link to Gaia? That is most irregular. Very few of our members make such requests.'

He will deter you if you let him, if only to spare himself inconvenience. Recalling the status of the typical Society member, you adopt an uncompromising attitude and say, 'It was not a request, but a command. You will now establish a link so that I can talk to Gaia.'

'Talk?' He spreads his hands imploringly. 'What will you talk about? Gaia is mad!' Seeing you will not be put off, he grumbles under his breath and pushes a slip of paper across the desk. 'Write your query there and it will be broadcast to Gaia. The reply will be brought back to you.'

'I prefer a direct two-way communication.'

'Impossible!' he cries. 'That is against Society policy, as any link to Gaia must be stringently monitored to prevent arrogation of our computer network.'

You sense he will not be swayed on this point. You write out your message and wait for half an hour until the librarian comes back. 'Here is your reply from Gaia,' he says, his tone of surprise showing that he did not expect anything but gibberish. He reads from the paper in his hand: 'Go and meet with Gilgamesh under the pyramid.'

Humbaba will give you access.'

'Is that all?'

He nods. 'Gaia then began to transmit random references to Babylonian myth followed by a digression into architectural feats of history, and the link was terminated.'

Note the codeword *Humbaba*. If you now intend to consult the archives for information about the Heart of Volent, turn to **160** if you have LORE or to **182** if not. If you are finished in the library, turn to **73**.

139

You ascend into the mountains across stark rocky ridges like the broken backs of colossal dinosaurs. The sun shines as feebly as a flashlight seen through a thick pane of ice. When the wind gusts into your face, it is so cold that you can hardly draw breath.

On the second day you come upon four figures also trudging eastwards. They are several hundred metres ahead on the surface of a glacier. As you hurry to catch up you see patches where the snow has swirled away to reveal the icy surface of the glacier reflecting glints of feeble daylight.

The leader of the group is a short broad-shouldered man whose dark sparkling eyes display an easy authority. The other three, apparently his bodyguards, are hulking men whom you take to be of South Pacific origin. It is hard to be sure with the fur hoods drawn so tightly around their faces.

The short man shakes hands and introduces

himself as Hal Shandor. 'Our sky-car crashed in the hills back there,' he explains. 'We're going on to Venis. Travel with us if you want.'

If you join their group, turn to **225**. If you prefer to journey alone, turn to **161**.

140

The creature that attacked you is a sanguivore, a mutant lizard with gliding and mimicking abilities. The sanguivore's saliva contains an anti-clotting agent, ensuring that its prey slowly bleeds to death even after escaping from it. That explains why it's in no hurry to catch up with you. It is content to track you through the woods and wait until you collapse from exhaustion. Well, you have a few resources not shared by any wild animal. Tearing the lining of your jacket into strips, you bind the wound to prevent further blood loss.

If you want to rest here, turn to **184**. If you press on through the jungle for a while, turn to **250**.

141

There are men beyond the plastiwood partition. You read their thoughts: three hunters. No doubt the cruelty you see in their minds is only a symptom of their harsh existence on the fringes of the Sahara. All the same, you are wise to stay concealed. They are not above murdering lone travellers for the clothes on their back. Waiting until they go to sleep, you carefully ease the partition open and sneak past them. A rug hangs across the entrance of their shelter. You

can hear a blizzard howling through the night outside – an uninviting sound, but preferable to staying here to be butchered when these three wake. Drawing your hood down, you slip out into the icy wind. Turn to **314**.

142

The reputation of the Gargan clones is so daunting that no one dares to suggest killing them. ‘I have heard that the other members of the clone group were killed, but who can be sure?’ says one man with the flaring blue hat-flaps of a Tuareg hunter.

‘That’s true,’ admits the innkeeper with a nod. ‘I wouldn’t care to have twelve identical Amazons barge into my taproom a month from now and demand retribution for their sisters.’

At last a compromise is reached. The unconscious sisters are taken down to the shore and placed in a small boat which you push out across the freezing jade sea. You watch the boat drift away into the frosty evening haze. Shivering, you stamp back through the snow to the inn, where you are given food and wine and treated like a hero.

Restore 1 Life Point if wounded. The innkeeper also offers you provisions for your journey: two food packs. Note these on your Adventure Sheet (each counts as one item) and then turn to **273**.



143

'On this point,' announces Bador, 'I would be untruthful if I pretended to know with adamant certainty. According to some, the city took its name from Khare-Ohe, or "Field of Conflict", as it was founded on the spot where the first Pharaoh watched a falcon fight a rat. Another version relates it to the settlement of el-Qahira, consecrated to the red planet of victory.'

You shake your head. 'These are ancient myths. I am interested in recent history.'

'Ah. Well, when Du-En rose to power, Kahira became important as a base of operations for those armed forces opposing the Volentine Watchers – in essence, the rest of the world. Owing to heat-conductive pipes buried along the bed of the River Isis, fishes are abundant even in these parlous times, and Kahira continues to flourish. The warm water, rising into contact with icy winds off the Saharan plain, forms the incessant mist which is characteristic of the city.'

'And why is the city built on high columns of concrete, instead of sprawling along the river banks?'

Balor pulls an uncertain face. 'Defence? Scarcity of materials? An obscure edict? Who can say?'

Now you can ask his advice about the Sahara (turn to 77), about Giza (turn to 59), or about the best place to stay (turn to 99). Or you can dismiss him (turn to 95).

'I found a terminal of the intercontinental subway system, beneath the ruins of Lost Marsay. I tried to reach Giza, but I was unable to alight there and was left with no alternative but to travel on to Maka.'

He strokes his thumbnail across the cleft of his chin, deep in thought. 'Why were you trying to reach Giza?' he asks at last.

The truth seems absurd, but you tell him anyway. 'I was following the advice of Gaia.'

He gives you a sharp look. 'Do not attempt to contact Gaia while you are on al-Lat! Our computer systems are secure from viruses, and that's the way we'd like it to stay!' His face softens into an easy smile. 'Still, I'm forgetting my manners. I am Riza Baihaqi.'

You shake hands. There is a moment of uncomfortable silence, then Riza says, 'I can never atone for the guilt I feel . . . This dreadful injury you've suffered . . .'

You raise your artificial arm and flex the fingers. There is a soft buzz of gears, but they seem dextrous enough. 'It could be worse,' you admit. 'These prosthetics will do as temporary repairs, at any rate.'

'You are putting a brave face on things, my friend,' says Riza. 'But, in all truth, where on Earth could you hope to find a cure for your dreadful injuries?'

If you tell him about Du-En, turn to **188**. If you say you are keen to return to Earth, turn to **275**.

145

The stun grenade sails through the air and crunches into the deep snow at the foot of the rise. The bometh slowly stirs itself and lumbers down the slope to snuffle around. As it locates the grenade, you detonate by remote. A flurry of snow is thrown up into the bometh's face by the blast and you see it drop. An imperceptible fraction of a second later, the hard crump of the explosion reaches your ears. By that time you are already running towards the fallen predator. Kneeling beside it in the crater of slush formed by the explosion, you lift the huge limp head across your knee and give it a sharp twist. The bometh gives a spasm and then lies still. Delete the grenade you used from your list of possessions, and then turn to **341**.

146

You explore the corridors leading off the platform, but all are blocked by rubble. There is no way of reaching the surface from here. As you return to the carriage, though, you notice a small partition in the wall. It is labelled as an air vent. You remove the grating and peer up the darkened shaft. A waft of rich loamy air drifts down. The shaft is intended for caretaks servicing the ventilation ducts, but at a pinch you might be able to squeeze up it – if you're not bothered by claustrophobia.

If you venture up the shaft, turn to **168**. Otherwise you must take the subway back to Marsay, from where you can proceed to Kahira (turn to **50**),

Tarabul (turn to **31**), or Giza (turn to **74**), or resume your journey on foot (turn to **420**).

147

How long have you been out on the Ice Wastes? You've lost all sense of time. The wind becomes a constant roaring in your ears. You stumble on through sheets of snowflakes, each breath sounding like a sob of pain.

If you have SURVIVAL, lose 3 Life Points; if not, lose 4 Life Points. You lose 2 less Life Points if you posses a burrek, which you now slaughter in desperation for its meat. (If you had a burrek, cross it off your Adventure Sheet.) If still alive, turn to **125**.

148

Gaunt walks with you to the outskirts of Du-En to show you the night sky. His undead xoms stalk silently alongside bearing glow-lamps. At the city gates, they dim the lamps and you are left with the light of ten thousand glittering stars. The snows of the Sahara are swallowed by darkness, but you get the impression of standing at the hub of infinity.

For a long period neither of you speaks. Then Gaunt recites softly: 'Some say the world will end in fire, some say in ice. From what I've tasted of desire, I hold with those who favour fire. But if it had to perish twice, I think I know enough of hate to say that ice is also great, and would suffice.'

'What's that?'

‘The words of a poet of long ago.’ He gazes to the north. ‘My home city lies under a shield of ice a kilometre thick. Soon the world will slip into a coma, like a man frozen at the point of death. The polar caps will meet and everything will end.’

‘Unless we find the Heart and use its power to set things right.’

He turns with a smile almost of delight. ‘Is that why you’ve come here? I fear you’ll be disappointed. The Heart must inevitably fall into the hands of the one who is most ruthless. To seize true power, a man must have a heart of ice. When the powerful do good deeds – I speak of Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon, Mao – they do so inadvertently. The good and honest of the world are always the most impotent.’

It suddenly occurs to you that Gaunt hasn’t a chance of surviving here; he is too intellectual to vie with the others for the Heart. If you tell him that, turn to **279**. If you ask what he thinks of the others, turn to **258**. Otherwise, you can return to the main square and seek out Kyle Boche (turn to **104**) or turn in for the night (turn to **192**).

149

Slowly the chill leaves your bodies. ‘Curious . . .’ mutters the baron, floating over to peer into the chasm. ‘It seemed to be a genuine ghost, so far as I could tell. I could not read its mind, at any rate.’

‘Just as long as it’s gone now,’ grunts Boche. He gestures at a narrow stone bridge spanning the chasm. On the far side, an archway opens onto a

tilled hall. 'Who wants to go first?'

The baron gives him a scornful look and hovers out across the drop. As you watch him drift to a halt on the far side, it occurs to you that he looks a rather ghostly figure himself.

Boche glances at you, shrugs and strides rapidly across the bridge. 'It's not too bad as long as you don't look down,' he calls over his shoulder.

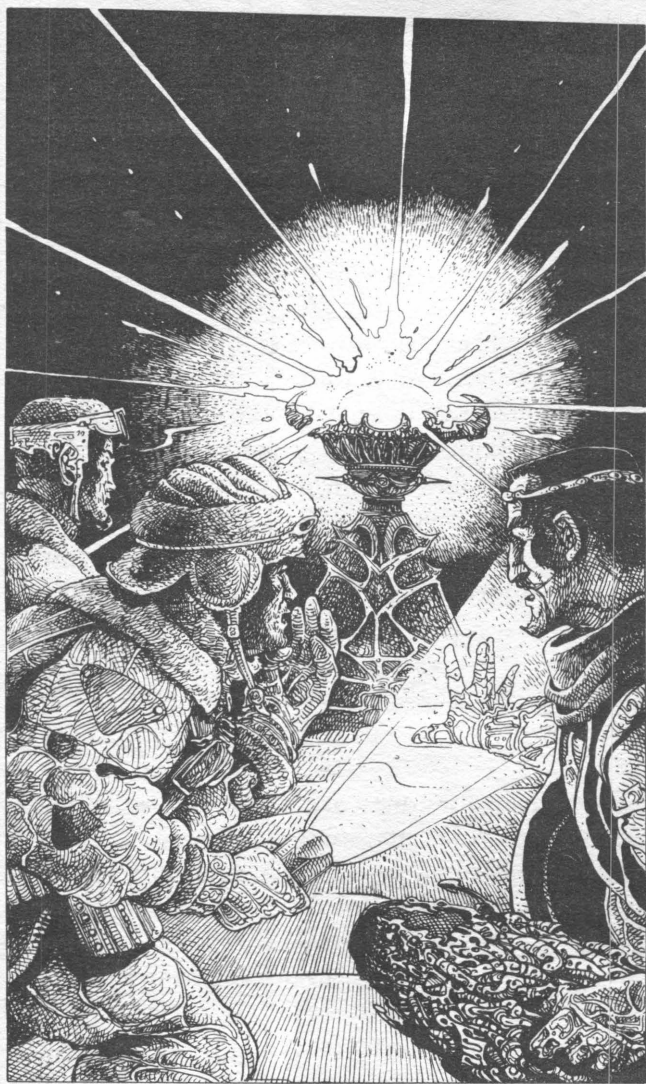
They are waiting for you to cross. As you step onto the bridge, you find your gaze drawn downwards in spite of Boche's advice. The walls of the chasm plunge dizzyingly into feculent darkness. Then you notice something else. Set into the rock walls, about five metres below the level of the bridge, are a row of metal grilles. If you climb down to investigate, turn to **193**. If you continue across the bridge, turn to **215**.

150

You step out of the elevator to find Singh, Boche and Golgoth already there. Thadra Bey didn't make it.

You are in a dome so vast that it feels like a gulf in the black void of intergalactic space. Boche's flashlight does not reach the far wall. In the centre of the chamber, on a raised dais at the end of a ramp, lies a purple gemstone almost two metres in diameter. Scintillant sparks stream from deep in its core, giving off a violet radiation that causes a pain at the back of your eyes.

'The Heart of Volent . . .' breathes Boche in a



voice of awe. ‘The key to ultimate power!’

If you have the codeword *Red*, turn to **303**. If you have the codeword *Blue*, turn to **346**. If you have the codeword *Yellow*, turn to **324**. If you have none of those, turn to **367**.

151

Even with all your power you could not beat Baron Siriasis in a battle of will. He is the world’s mightiest psychic, and because of desperation his strength is doubled. But you do not have to beat him; you only have to hold him off while he dies expending the last store of oxygen in his disembodied brain. Slowly you begin to feel his efforts weaken, his invading tentacles of thought slipping from your mind.

The brain suddenly drops out of the air, hitting the floor with a wet splat. There is a groan that could not be heard with the ears, and a last telepathic message: *The darkness . . .*

Silence. The baron is dead at last. Turn to **261**.

152

Who is the most trustworthy person here? You can rely on your psychic senses to guide you. Vajra Singh is an honourable man, but you cannot believe he would ever relinquish the chance for ultimate power. Chaim Golgoth is motivated by duty to his nation – at least on the surface. Thadra Bey would ever ally herself with others; she is as proud and independent as a cat. James Gaunt strikes you as free of malice; a reflective man, he could even be virtuous

if he were of stronger character. Kyle Boche is vain, pompous and self-serving. And as for Baron Siriasis . . . his mind is closed to you entirely.

Perhaps you would be better to ask yourself who is least untrustworthy. Turn to **82**.

153

If you touch the Heart, you will attune its power and create a new universe in which you wield the power of a god. But in doing so you would wipe out this universe and everything in it. You stand and gaze into the flickering facets. You can feel the palpable power within it. Can you resist its lure?

If you release the Heart's power, turn to **174**. If you have a stasis bomb and wish to prevent the Heart ever falling into anyone's hands, turn to **197**. Otherwise your only option is to reject the chance for power: turn to **453**.

154

Gargan XIII follows Golgoth's gaze to her leg, where there is a razor-thin cut through the trouser fabric. She pulls it apart to reveal a scratch on the skin. Golgoth holds up a small needle he had hidden in the palm of his hand.

You see now that Gargan XIV has a similar scratch on her forearm. 'Cyanide,' explains Golgoth. 'Should take just about five seconds now . . . four . . . three . . .'

The Gargan sisters exchange a look. There is no time for words. Suffering identical stabs of pain, they

crumple to the floor. By the time you feel for a pulse, they are already dead. 'They went two seconds sooner than I thought,' says Golgoth in a curious tone. 'Must've been their faster~metabolisms. Well, let's see what they've got.'

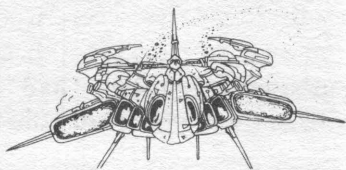
Stripping the bodies of equipment, you find two barysal guns (each with three charges), a flashlight, a medical kit, a stun grenade and three food packs. Golgoth tells you that you can take any four items you like. Add these to your list of possessions and then turn to **176**.

155

'Why won't you see sense?' asks Boche in an affable tone. 'Two can travel more safely than one. The road is plagued by robbers.'

You find Boche's sincerity to be as false as a serpent's smile, and you have no desire to wake up one morning to find he has made off with your money and provisions. 'For all I know, you are the robber,' you tell him to his face.

Before he can come up with an answer to this, you slog off through the snow. Now you must decide your route. Will you head east, to Venis, where you may be able to get passage to Kahira (turn to **139**), or will you follow the innkeeper's advice and go west through the Lyonesse jungle (turn to **221**).



156

Grimacing, you cast the tiny gorgons into the flames. They produce a high-pitched whine which continues long after they must have burned to death – presumably the result of air escaping from their breathing cavities.

‘They might have been the only members of a new and unique species!’ protests Boche. ‘Are you proud to have committed genocide?’

‘Since each would have grown up to become a murdering monster, yes I am,’ you reply. You are increasingly beginning to suspect that Boche is a fool. Refusing to discuss the matter further, you search the cave. Turn to **178**.

157

Others are also interested in the story of the Heart. A black-caped guide, overhearing your enquiries, follows you down the street, saying, ‘You’re not the first to pass through Venis bound for Du-En. Last week there was Janus Gaunt, hiring guides for a trip across the Saharan Ice Wastes. And only this morning I took a woman of al-Lat to see Malengin the Gene Genie. Thadra Bey was her name. A veritable Amazon already – now, thanks to Malengin’s potions, she is more than human.’

Intriguing. If what the guide says is true, the hunt for Du-En has become a race. Deep in thought, you hardly notice the guide demanding that you pay for the information he’s given you. Give him a scad if you wish (remember to cross it off), then turn to **414**.

By dint of tremendous mental effort, you find that you are able to move the steam cloud into the centre of the room, leaving cooler air where you are sitting. You concentrate on shaping the steam into a funnel, and gradually a miniature whirlwind forms in the air in front of you. As it twists faster and faster, it also becomes narrower. With your mind, you shape it like a clay pot on a wheel.

One of the assassins glances in through the glass. 'What the devil's going on?' he shouts. They start to fumble with the latch, but you hardly notice. All your concentration is now on the hissing funnel of superheated steam.

The door opens. The two men stand staring in disbelief, knives slack in their hands. Mentally you cast the lance of steam towards them. One gives a scream as he is struck full in the face, and falls clutching his eyes. The other, although scalded, staggers in and tries to slice your belly open with his knife. Luckily he slips on the wet floor, and you take only a glancing blow: lose 1 Life Point. You close to grapple with him and a brief struggle ensues, ending when your attacker is impaled on his own knife. You can tell straight away that this one is dead, but the other man is still lying in the doorway whimpering. You go over. Turn to 48.



159

The next day, you glide the Manta southwards out of town and across the icy flats descending towards the Inland Sea. Flurries of snow gust out of a dull cloud-heavy sky. The headland to your left looks like a streak of tarnished silver over the iron-coloured waves. Once clear of the coastline, you take the Manta up to an altitude of ten metres and open the throttle. The wind comes shrieking around the cockpit screen, but you are sheltered behind the controls. There are even heating vents to either side of the dashboard that give you some comfort.

The sea skims by beneath, grey as gunmetal and churning with chunks of ice. The sky resembles the underside of a giant fungus. Hours pass. As you approach the estuary of the Isis, a haze of mist looms up to blanket the coastline, formed where the river flows into the freezing depths of the Inland Sea. Warmed by submerged pipes, the waters of the Isis teem with life. The heat is soon lost when the river enters the Inland Sea, but the estuary can support several fishing villages.

The coast hurtles closer. Now you can see boats scattered on the silvery water. Startled fishermen look up in fright as you go screeching past only metres above their heads. You laugh; to them your vehicle must look like some kind of demonic flying fish. If you wish to steer a course to Kahira, turn to **247**. If you bypass Kahira itself but decide to visit the nearby pyramids of Giza, turn to **268**. If you head straight for Du-En, turn to **289**.

The Society's books add little to what you already knew. The Heart of Volent fell from space, a meteorite resembling a violet gemstone two metres across. It became revered by a religious cult calling themselves the Volentine Watchers, led by one Eleazar Picard. Learning how to tap the Heart's power, the cultists reversed the degradation of Earth's environment in a small region around their city of Du-En, in the Sahara, and for a time enjoyed prosperity.

Then came the Paradox War. The Volentine Watchers used their strange power to send blasts of chaos-inducing radiation against the nations of the world, whom they deemed corrupt and decadent. The new Ice Age was already under way because of Gaia's instability, and the Paradox War accelerated the process. Some regions became so irradiated that the normal laws of nature no longer applied, and they were quickly overrun by eerie mutants.

The rest of the world allied to establish a military bunker at Giza, intending to strike from there against Du-En, but it was never needed. The people of Du-En succumbed to mass insanity and fled their city, only to perish in the Sahara as the snows returned. Eleazar Picard himself was found by a patrol from al-Lat, but only rambled incoherently for a few days before dying. Du-En was declared off-limits, the Sahara an icy wasteland inhabited only by ghosts. And so it has remained for two hundred years.

You return the books to the shelves. If you have

not already done so, you could now try making contact with Gaia (if you have CYBERNETICS, turn to **116**; if not, turn to **138**). If you're finished in the library, turn to **73**.

161

You trek wearily onwards, often plunging almost to your waist through fine powdery banks of snow. The sun pokes feeble rays of light across the bleak sky like an old man clutching for his pills. Quicksilver ribbons lie across the landscape, marking out the course of glaciers through the ridges of rock. Night descends like a sheath of hoarfrost. For days your ordeal continues as you cross the rugged mountain slopes and finally begin your descent towards the foothills. Lose 3 Life Points (or 2 Life Points if you have SURVIVAL). If still alive, you give a hoarse grunt of relief through frost-numbed lips when the towers and cupolas of Venis finally appear against the skyline.

If you have CLOSE COMBAT and a shortsword, turn to **8**. Otherwise turn to **334**.

162

With each step you take you are getting weaker. Lose another Life Point. The blood is still pouring freely from the jagged rip in your shoulder, and you realize that the creature must have injected an anti-clotting agent. Hurriedly tearing the lining of your jacket into strips, you bind the wound to prevent further blood loss.

Looking back, you see no sign of your pursuer. Perhaps it lost interest after having a taste of your flesh. You can either rest here (turn to **184**) or press on further into the jungle (turn to **250**).

163

You are held at gunpoint while your arms are wrenched behind your back and securely tied. One of the men rummages through your belongings, then jerks his thumb contemptuously towards you. 'Are we keeping an extra mouth to feed, then, Snarvo?'

The man with the knife sneers. 'Not unless you want a pet for yourself, mate.'

'Hang on,' says the third man as he tucks his gun away. He stands peering at you in the firelight, chewing his lip thoughtfully. 'I've seen your face before, haven't I?'

'Yeah,' you say sarcastically, 'at the President's last garden party in Dallas.'

The others snigger at this, admiring your casual attitude in the face of death, but the man with the gun stands there glowering in silence. Suddenly he clicks his fingers. 'On a wanted poster in Daralbad, that's where I've seen you! They've set a bounty of five hundred scads for you, my friend.'

'I'm much in demand.'

'Too right! Too right!' He strides excitedly around the fire, then turns to his cronies. 'Well, what's it to be? Hang on here in the hope of another bear, or take this prize to Daralbad for the bounty?'

They settle on cashing you in for the reward. You

pretend to take the news sourly, then wait while they celebrate by drinking themselves into a stupor. Flexing your wrists, you soon work free of your bonds and creep quietly over to their supply packs. You remove three food packs, cold-weather clothing, and some polarized goggles. Note what you are taking on your Adventure Sheet. Then you slip out into the snow. Turn to **314**.

164

Gargan XIII heartily shakes your hand, Gargan XIV set ups the glasses and pours each of you a shot of vodka. You take the glass and sip, only to wince as the alcohol sears into your cut gums. A mist of blood tinges the vodka. The Gargan sisters down their own drinks without a murmur. 'You are a fine warrior!' declares XIV with approval.

Despite their declarations of friendship, you are careful not to drink much. It's possible that, having realized you are too tough to beat in a straight fight, they hope to ply you with vodka until you are helpless. Turning to the innkeeper, you ask, 'I'll take food and a room for the night. How much do I owe you?'

Eyes rolling in fright at the two Amazons, he flaps a hand limply in the air and replies in a strained voice: 'No charge, since you are a friend of these fine ladies.'

Restore 1 Life Point for the night's rest. In the morning, the innkeeper provides you with a food pack for the journey. Add this to your list of

possessions and then decide if you will travel with the Gargan sisters (turn to **294**) or delay setting out until they have moved on (turn to **273**).

165

If you have **STREETWISE**, turn to **187**. If not, you can bed down in a park (turn to **209**), a quiet back alley (turn to **231**), or an open plaza (turn to **253**).

166

You steady yourself as if you were suffering a giddy spell. ‘I . . . can’t remember,’ you tell him. ‘My mind’s a blank. The accident . . .’

He glances at the doctor, who nods and says: ‘That isn’t uncommon in a case like this. You’ll find your memory patchy at first, but it will slowly come back to you.’

The pilot seems satisfied. His brooding look is suddenly swept away by an open smile. ‘I have forgotten my manners! I am Riza Baihaqi; this is Dr Anwar Mujam.’

You shake hands. ‘Be careful to use your flesh-and-blood hand for delicate tasks,’ warns the doctor. ‘The grip strength of your cyborg arm is enough to crush bone.’

‘I’ll be careful!’ you reply with a strained laugh.

Riza gestures towards the viewport where the crescent Earth hangs like a luminous pearl. ‘You would of course be welcome to remain here as our guest, but I expect that you will be anxious to return to Earth?’

If you wish to go straight back to Earth, turn to **275**. If you want to tell Riza about your quest, turn to **188**.

167

There is an alpha-numeric keypad set in a recess beside the door. You tap in the sequence H-U-M-B-A-B-A and hold your breath, hardly daring to hope that the antique circuits still work. Then, with a soft whir, the door slides up and you are able to step into the interior of the Great Pyramid. Turn to **233**.

168

After some squirming, you manage to wedge yourself into the shaft and begin a slow ascent. You are in total darkness. Minutes crawl by, and the air grows stifling as you climb. At last, with the sweat pouring off your body, you are on the verge of giving up when you detect a nimbus of grey light from just above. You struggle towards it, cramming your body around a twist in the shaft. A heady aroma hands in the air here, sweet as greenwood.

You emerge into a larger space at the junction of several ducts. As your eyes adjust to the faint light trickling down from above, you make out a human shape in the gloom. He is hanging like a puppet, entangled in a thick mass of fleshy creepers dangling from the top of the shaft. You approach and touch his shoulder. His head lolls back slowly, falls off, and strikes the floor with a hollow clatter.

You cannot stifle a gasp of horror. You step back,

only to find a taut vine cable wound around your ankle. Another brushes your face, gropes with abrupt vitality, and seizes your throat in a firm grip. The creepers are alive and predatory. You struggle, grappling with the vine at your neck to no avail. It is tightening, squeezing your windpipe. Your pulse pounds inside your ears with a dull roar. Do you have a canister of vine killer? If so, turn to **190**. If not, there is nothing you can do to free yourself and you will slowly strangle to death in the grip of the mutant plant.

169

The air here is tolerable once filtered of volcanic fumes. You build a lean-to beside the bubbling pool in the shelter of the dwarf conifers. Although the water of the pool is undrinkable, you can easily collect snow from beyond the edge of the oasis and bring it back to camp to melt. For food, you catch insects and grubs and bake them on the hot rocks.

Recover 4 Life Points, then turn to **426** when you are ready to move on.

170

The baron is cloistered in his tent. A couple of servants are hunkered down in the snow outside next to a glimmering fire, but they pay you no heed. Glancing into the tent as you pass, you notice that the baron is intently studying a video screen which he has set up on a low table next to the cushions on which he is propped. He seems to be muttering

something quietly to himself.

If you want to eavesdrop, turn to **364**. If you just boldly enter the tent uninvited turn to **386**. Alternatively, you could go and talk to Golgoth (turn to **126**), Boche (turn to **104**), or Gaunt (turn to **148**).

171

It is a beam phantom – the victim of a teleporter accident which has left it eternally out of phase with the rest of the world. Such creatures suffer eternal torment because of the teleporter's mangling of their internal organs, but there is nothing that can be done for them, since they do not truly exist. Even in the ghostly state they are dangerous, however, as their desire to return to solid form means that they insatiably seek contact with the living. And their touch drains all life energy.

While you still have the strength to move, you shrug off your jacket and lunge forward, catching the beam phantom inside. The feel of it is sickening, like a broken body that has been put back together by a maniac surgeon. Even with the jacket insulating your grip, its negative force drains you like a well of coldness. Lose 2 Life Points. If you survive, you succeed in manhandling the squirming creature over to the chasm and hurling it down. Its thin bleating cry echoes up from the depths as it falls, trailing its gleaming wisps of vapour like a comet's tail. Turn to **149**.

172

You hear a scuttling of many insectoid legs. In the sudden flare of light you catch a glimpse of a shape like a giant black centipede, mouthparts churning like oiled blades. Blinded by the unexpected light, it writhes and retreats in panic to the darkness of the cloisters. The three of you seize your chance to hurry on through the iron-bound door, slamming it behind you. A moment later a heavy form thuds against the door. 'That was a close call,' breathes Boche, wiping a trickle of cold sweat out of his eyes. Turn to **281**.

173

Misjudging the leap, you fall short by an arm's length and go plunging down through the fog to meet your doom on the hard flagstones twenty storeys below.

174

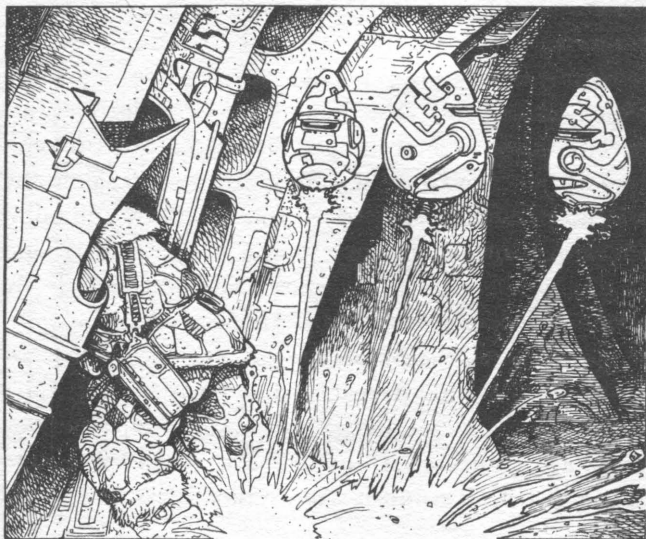
You kneel beside the huge gem and embrace it, feeling its power surge through you. Coruscating bands of energy blaze from the depths of the unearthly gem, swathing you in an aura of blinding violet light. The fabric of reality is ripped apart and you feel weightless. A vortex spins up through the dome, sweeping away rock and air, rising up into space, out past the moon and planets. In what seems like seconds, all of creation has been swept away, replaced by a new universe of your own making.

You are immortal and all-powerful now. Your adventure has culminated in godhood.

175

There is a sound from somewhere ahead in the maze of tunnels. Boche cocks his ear. 'It's old-fashioned laser fire,' he says, adding significantly: 'But none of the others were carrying lasers.'

The mystery is soon explained. Turning a corner, you find yourselves facing three hover-droids that resemble large silver eggs with a rotating gun-turret mounted underneath. They are gliding directly towards you, the aiming-lights of their lasers playing across your vision. Boche throws himself off down a side tunnel. You are in motion an instant later, just as three laser beams lance out, burning a patch of molten stone on the floor where you had been



standing only a few moments earlier.

Racing headlong through the tunnels, you reach a circular room with a violet starburst set in mosaic on the floor. Several other tunnels lead into the chamber, and down one of them you see Vajra Singh, Thadra Bey and Chaim Golgoth running from another group of hover-droids. 'We stirred up a whole nest of them,' shouts Golgoth. 'Too many to fight!'

As he enters the room, Vajra Singh whirls and fires his mantramukta cannon over the heads of Bey and Golgoth. Four hover-droids explode in a blossom of plasma, but you can see others converging on the room from the other tunnels.

Across the sweep of the opposite wall are seven glass-fronted elevators, each large enough for one person. Thadra Bey lopes across to the nearest and the door slides shut behind her. In moments the room will be swarming with hover-droids. The rest of you have no choice but to follow her lead. As you step into an elevator, the door closes and an electronic voice says: 'Identify yourself, please.' Will you tell it the truth (turn to **280**) or will you pretend to be a follower of the Volentine cult (turn to **301**)?

176

You return to the surface. Janus Gaunt and Thadra Bey are already back at the camp. They tell you they explored a warren of tunnels under the plaza but to no avail. 'All we found were vaults full of mildewed grain,' growls Bey.

The long light of sunset bathes the ruins by the time Vajra Singh and the baron reappear. You soon learn that they set out along different routes which converged at a long underground hall. They are obviously excited by what they discovered. 'We have identified the temple precincts,' announces Vajra Singh, gesturing to a cluster of buildings across the square. 'The Heart of Volent lies somewhere below. Tomorrow may be the last day of the search.' Turn to **38**.

177

Boche is not enthusiastic. 'The Lyonesse region is infested with malefactors and noctambules,' he avers. 'We would be at great risk. Also, the Atlas Mountains are a daunting obstacle. As your partner in this venture, I strongly urge you to reconsider!'

He is obviously not willing to accompany you if you insist on heading west. If you do so anyway, turn to **221**. If you change your mind and take the road to Venis, turn to **200**.

178

Strewn amid the mortal remains of the gorgon's victims, you discover a number of items: an ID card, a battery unit for a barysal gun (good for six charges), a working flashlight, and a set of polarized goggles.

Boche holds up the goggles and jokes, 'I don't suppose our one-eyed chum had much use for these, eh?' He insists on an equal division of the items, but gives you first choice. Add two of the items listed

above to your list of possessions.

You spend a reasonably comfortable night in the cave and head on your way in the morning. Turn to 199.

179

You find an answer to your enquiries in a drinking parlour under the Bridge of Sighs. Here a group of men, rendered affable and talkative by the vials of synthash liqueur they have imbibed, tell you all you need to know.

'Ky Boche?' says one of them, scowling distractedly out into the drizzle beyond the eaves of the drinking parlour. 'I have heard of him. A wayfarer and sometime trader.'

'A trader?' snorts another of the men, sluicing the hot liqueur around his mouth before adding: 'A parasite, rather! His sole instinct is treachery; his sole talent is self-preservation.'

You turn to the man who has just spoken. 'I take it you've personally had dealings with Kyle Boche?'

He nods slowly, narrowing his eyes as he peers inward at his memories through a haze of synthash fumes. 'We collaborated in a smuggling operation running furs into Daralbad. This was a few years back. The militia were alerted and Boche scarpered in the boat, leaving me to face the music alone. They're pigs in Daralbad, and that's how I lost these two fingers, see? Later I managed to escape, and I heard Boche had been strutting around telling everyone how I let him down. If I knew where to

find him, I'd go this minute and put a knife through his weaselly heart!

A third man joins the conversation. 'I do not wholly disagree with my friend here, except to add that Boche's characer is more complex than he suggests. If he is treacherous or self-serving, he is not aware of being so, for he is a man of such prodigious vanity that he can admit no faults.'

The other man, refilling his glass, only hisses like an angry swan and says again: 'He is a mere parasite!'

If you wish to reveal your knowledge of Boche's whereabouts to the man he betrayed, he will pay you 10 scads for the information. If you decide to do that, delete the codeword *Diamond* if you have it. Now turn to 414.

180

Lose 2 Life Points. If you survive, you slump in the corner of the bench with barely strength to move. At last, thinking you helpless, the assassins open the steam-room door. 'Let's get this carcass over to the baron – prove we've done the job,' one of them says.

'Rather a disappointment,' says the other, grabbing a hunk of your hair and lifting your head up off the bench. 'I was hoping I'd get to use my knife.'

Hearing this, you explode into action. You have no compunction about giving the nearest man a very hard kick in the groin. As he doubles up and his accomplice gapes in surprise, you lunge out of the door and race back towards the dormitory. Your

181–182

nakedness draws a few choice looks from the inn's other residents, so you hastily pull on your clothes.

A few minutes later, the assassins glance into the dormitory. With so many other people around, they think better of pursuing you and instead duck out into the night. Just as well – after being shut up in the steam room, you feel too weak for a fight. Turn to **92**.

181

Do you want to find Kyle Boche and tell him about acquiring the sky-car? If so, turn to **203**. If not, delete the codeword *Diamond* and then turn to **159**.

182

By luck you find the following reference:

Extract from the debriefing of Eleazar Picard, leader and sole survivor of the Volentine Cult, July 16, 2113 AD; debriefing conducted by Colonel Mehmet Alishah of al-Lat:

Picard: It was the light at the end of Time, and my sanity is blinded!

Alishah: How is it you escaped? You alone and no one else?

Picard: I remembered the Truth.

Alishah: What is the Truth?

Picard (recites): 'The Truth is a flame. What ignites the flame? The spark ignites the flame. What is the spark? The Heart of Volent!'

You flip through a few other books. Eleazar Picard was the founder of the cult that worshipped the Heart of Volent two hundred years ago. He ruled Du-En with six others – until the night of July 15, 2113, when the entire populace of the city went mad and fled into the Saharan Ice Wastes. Du-En has stood abandoned since then. You check one other detail: Picard died, still raving, only hours after being questioned by Colonel Alishah.

Note the codeword *Lunar*. If you have not already done so, you could now try making contact with Gaia (if you have CYBERNETICS turn to **116**; if not, turn to **138**). If you're finished in the library, turn to **73**.

183

The signs you have noticed indicate a porphyry. These are parasitical creatures of ancient myth who roam the night in search of living victims, from whom they drain the body warmth (or, in some versions, the very lifeblood) in order to sustain their own existence. They can only be slain by decapitation, but are vulnerable to direct sunlight, running water, and certain herbs.

You guess that this porphyry was overpowered and hurled into the glacier centuries ago as a way of getting rid of him. Even frozen running water has the power to hold him immobile. Of course, now that the ice has been chipped away, he might be able to escape. You glance up at the thin wedge of powder-blue sky beyond the crevasse, already

streaked with dusky grey streamers of cloud. Less than two hours of daylight remain. You tell Shandor your suspicions.

‘Porphyrs?’ he mocks. ‘Fairy tales for kiddies, surely!’

You aren’t so sceptical. Fortunately you remember one other thing about these creatures. Their minds are quite simple, and they are particularly baffled by vertical or horizontal lines, which their eyes try to follow to infinity – similar to the way a chicken can be hypnotized by drawing a chalk mark in front of its beak. You scratch two intersecting lines into the ice directly in front of the trapped porphyr’s eyes, then step back with a satisfied nod. ‘There, it can’t escape now.’

Shandor chuckles and claps his hand on your shoulder. ‘In case you hadn’t noticed, it couldn’t anyway: it’s been dead two hundred years and it’s trapped under thousands of tons of ice. Still, if it makes you feel safer . . .’ He turns to his bodyguards. ‘Let’s get going. We can do another six kilometres by nightfall.’ Turn to **249**.

At last you nestle down in the cleft of a dead tree and drift off to sleep. Strange feverish dreams flicker across the back of your eyelids. Moaning, bathed in torrents of sweat, you fling out an arm to brush away what you imagine to be a gnat. You are not aware of the long prow of a reptilian head that hangs down out of the foliage and starts to sup on your blood. Its

venom thunders through your bloodstream and keeps you drowsy while it feasts. You are destined never to wake.

185

They obviously mean to kill you, not out of viciousness but from the simple logic of survival. There probably is not enough game in the region to provide enough food for a fourth person. As they close in, you put on a crafty expression and glance over your shoulder, back the way you came.

‘Got friends, have you?’ growls the man with the knife. He puts the tip to your throat. ‘Answer!’

‘I’m alone.’

‘What, then? What were you looking at?’

‘Nothing.’ You compress your lips. The knife presses tighter, shedding a drop of blood. ‘All right! There’s a storeroom down there – food, medical supplies, that sort of thing. I was just regretting that I’ll never get back to civilization and sell it.’

They peer into the rubble-clogged tunnel, a sheen of greed in their eyes. ‘You’re lying . . .’ suggests the man with the gun.

You shrug. ‘Yeah. I was just prowling the tunnels for the sake of sightseeing. Of course.’

The third man scratches his chin thoughtfully. ‘We ought to take a look. This joker didn’t just spring out of thin air, after all.’ He looks at the man with the knife. ‘Snarvo, you stay here and watch our . . . guest. Krench, you come with me.’

They tie you up, then depart in search of

nonexistent booty. You wait until they must be out of earshot in the tunnels below. Snarvo is facing down the tunnel. He thinks you helpless, but in fact you have been burning the rope away from your wrist over the crackling fire. It is a painful business, but better than certain death: lose 1 Life Point.

Suddenly you cannon into Snarvo, winding him with a butt in the stomach. Wrestling for the knife, you twist it around and stab him. As he slumps gasping to the floor, you snatch up the knife and run over to the opening. Outside a blizzard is raging, but you cannot wait here for the others to return. You push the rug aside and dash out into the storm. Turn to 314.

186

Again the battle is joined. This time you and your two opponents have the measure of each other. The twins circle warily, trying to divide your attention. You plant your back solidly to the bar and wait with arms spread wide, daring them to attack. The extravagant acrobatics have been set aside now – all three of you are too breathless to waste effort on high-flying kicks or fast barrages of punching.

One sister lunges forward, clutching at your neck. You counter, pushing her arm up as you drive stiffened fingers into the corded muscles of her throat. As she splutters, briefly limp, you swing her around, using her as a shield so that her sister's sudden attack catches her in the back. But she recovers faster than you expected, and her knee

drives up agonizingly into your groin. Lose another 3 Life Points. If you survive this, you finally manage to swing one of the twins off her feet and hurl her at the other with such force that both are knocked senseless. You are not in much better shape yourself. Acquire the codeword *Scythe* and then turn to **142**.

187

You recognize the signs that mark some areas of the city as unsafe: the hard sidelong scrutiny of the locals, the ragged evidence of poverty, the nervous hurrying footsteps in the fog. You head for a well-lit plaza where people are likely to be working all night. Turn to **253**.

188

You explain what you have learned regarding Du-En and the Heart of Volent. 'It seems far-fetched,' says Riza when he has heard you out.

You look down dourly at the fusion of metal and flesh that is now your body. 'Before my accident, it seemed a noble but distant goal. Now it has taken on a personal dimension. With the power of the Heart, I can restore myself to full health.'

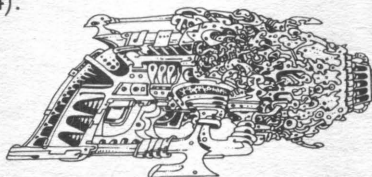
'And much more, if Gaia is to be believed!' says Riza. He takes you through to another room and sits you in front of a screen. 'Here you have access to the information banks. Perhaps you can find out something that will help in your venture.'

You watch as he touches a few buttons. A list of files concerning the Heart of Volent appears on the

screen. 'I think I can take it from here,' you tell Riza.

He nods. 'Good. I'll come back in an hour or so and see how your work is going.'

If you have LORE turn to **232**. If not, you can either check through the files on the screen (turn to **210**) or go for a stroll and see what else you can find out here (turn to **254**).



189

Glancing around for a means of opening the door, you notice an alpha-numeric keypad set in a recess to one side. As you are cleaning away the crust of snow, it strikes you that a hundred years might have passed since this door last opened. There are billions of possible combinations, but whoever used it then would have known the correct sequence to punch into the keypad.

You close your eyes, focusing with that inward mental sense which transcends ordinary reality. The veil of time draws aside. For a moment you glimpse a figure in the military dress of an earlier era, stabbing impatiently at this very keyboard.

The image flickers, breaks apart like a projection on smoke. With bated breath you enter the same sequence you thought you saw the soldier use: H-U-M-B-A-B-A. There is a crackling of ice as the door slides up to admit you. Turn to **233**.

190

A haze begins to close over your vision. You haul out the canister, point it up into the mass of squirming roots above your head, and press the nozzle. An acrid fluid sprays out, soaking the plant. Some of it covers your fingers, causing the canister to slip out of your grasp. Ignoring the slight stinging sensation, you jab your hand against the root holding your throat. With a hushed and eerie rustling sound, the creepers pull away and shrivel up the shaft. You steady yourself against the wall and gratefully suck in lungfuls of the stale vine-scented air.

The canister fell by your feet. As you retrieve it, you notice something else glinting in the half-light. A barysal gun. You glance at the long-dead cadaver. The gun didn't do him much good, but you might find a use for it. It has just one charge remaining; note this if you decide to keep it.

You can see now that there is no way you can hope to reach the surface from here. The shaft is blocked by the dead plant. You wriggle back down the shaft and take the subway carriage back to Marsay. Fax has long gone, of course. If you go up to the ruins and continue your journey on foot, turn to **420**. If you wish to try one of the subway's other destinations, you can choose between Kahira (turn to **50**), Tarabul (turn to **31**), and Giza (turn to **74**).



191

The gates of Du-En stand open to the elements, leaving the side avenues piled under deep snow-dunes. The buildings are monoliths of dark stone, desolate remnants of a civilization long gone. Their vast scale and pitiless geometric decoration make them seem out of proportion to the human soul. You find them tyrannical and depressing.

'Impressive architecture, eh?' says Boche, looking to a high black tower whose fretwork dome shows like a fleshless head against the bleak white sky.

You see a thin swirl of smoke rising from a campfire in the main plaza of the city. 'It seems we're not the only ones to heed Gaia's message,' you say dourly. 'Come on, let's introduce ourselves.' Turn to 243.

192

You return to your campsite in the shelter of a ruined building and settle down for the night. The flames of the fire throw long capering shadows across the walls. The ground is so cold that it seems to suck the vitality out of you. How long has it been since you ate? If you have a food pack, you can regain 1 Life Point. You can regain another Life Point if you have a medical kit. (Note that if you possess a Manta sky-car, its storage locker contains a medical kit and several food packs.)

If you have the codeword *Hourglass*, you lose 1 Life Point while you sleep. Once you have made the necessary adjustments to your Adventure Sheet, if still alive to see the dawn you can turn to 83.

193

If you have either AGILITY or a length of rope, turn to 237. If not, your footing slips on an icy outcropping and you fall helplessly to your doom.

194

Your sixth sense, while not as sensitive as the baron's, warns you of something alien and predatory moving in for the kill. You hear its insectoid legs rattling on the marble floor. Diving to one side, a stab of pain lances up your leg. Without the forewarning of your ESP you would have been torn in half by the monster's mandibles. As it is, you lose 1 Life Point. If still alive, you scramble to the doorway where you now see the flash of Boche's torch. As you throw yourself through, the baron slams the door shut and Boche drops the bolt. Just in time. A second later and the door gives a jolt as something massive slams against the other side. Turn to 281.

195

You retreat as far as the room where Novak was frozen in stasis. The baron's brain glides closer. The telepathic messages are getting scrambled and incoherent now, as the thing slowly uses up its remaining oxygen. *The soldier's dead. Can't risk using Boche . . . Not until I know . . . How did he hide grenade from me? Need new body . . . new life. Yours . . .*

If you have a stun grenade, turn to 239. If not, turn to 85.

196

You manage to jump across and catch hold of a girder that projects from the roof of the building opposite. You scramble up over the parapet and run off while the Fijian blusters threats behind you. Turn to 311.

197

You fetch Vajra Singh's cannon and begin to power it up. A hum of colossal energy fills the air. Taking the stasis bomb from your pack, you station yourself beside the Heart. You will freeze yourself in time, so that if any others reach here in the years to come they will find you waiting, sealed along with the Heart inside a zone of stasis. Even if they have the means to break the stasis, they will have to get past you to claim the Heart.

The stasis bomb activates, turning you into an undying sentinel for all time.

198

You had not expected Gilgamesh to be able to follow through the narrow ventilation ducts, but now there is a metallic clanking and he climbs out into the corridor. In order to fit in the shaft, he has detached his right arm and most of his armour segments, so that he now looks like a bizarre metal skeleton.

'This reconfiguration lacks a long-term power source,' he tells you. 'I have enough power stored for three hours, then I must reintegrate with my other components.'

‘Aren’t you more vulnerable without your armour?’

‘Affirmative. I shall avoid direct danger except when your own life is threatened.’

‘The automaton looks less impressive when it’s undressed,’ you overhear Gargan XIII remark to her sister.

‘Probably just like its owner,’ says Gargan XIV with a sneer.

Turn to **325**.

199

Dusk is falling on the tenth day after leaving the Etruscan Inn when you finally come in sight of Venis. It shimmers with a thousand lights under a sky like dull green bronze. Hungry and cold, you quicken your pace until you can make out individual buildings – first the temporary shacks where hunters and traders dwell, then the slums of corrugated iron and plastic which fill the narrow streets that some say were once canals. Above them loom the blocks of ancient plazas, where the rich and powerful of the city reside in palatial buildings shored up with wooden scaffolding to support them from the ravages of time.

You soon learn that the ferry to Kahira is not due for a couple of days. Kyle Boche tells you that he has friends he must visit, and arranges to meet up with you when the ferry arrives. While waiting, you have a choice of where to take lodging. The lavish Marco Polo Hotel will charge 12 scads for two nights; the

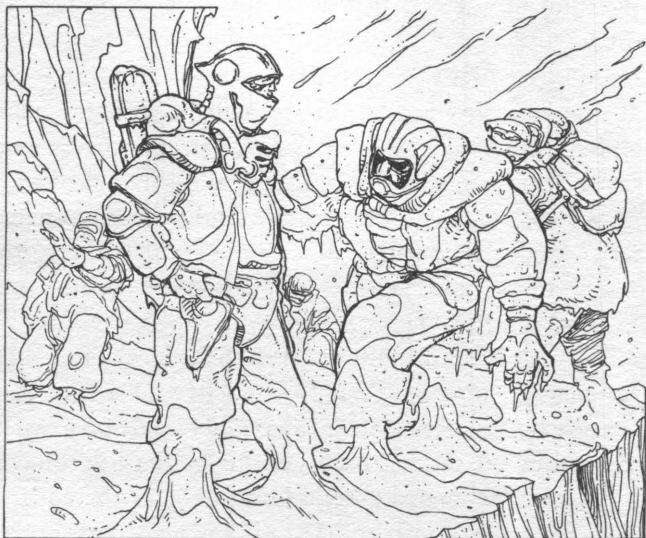
Hotel Paradise will charge 6 scads; the disreputable Doge's Inn will cost only 3 scads.

Decide where you are staying and deduct the money. If you choose the Marco Polo and have an ID card, turn to **222**. If you choose the Marco Polo but do not possess an ID card, turn to **286**. If you opt for the Paradise, turn to **244**. If you check in at the Doge's Inn, turn to **371**.

200

Record the codeword *Diamond* on your Adventure Sheet.

Your journey takes you up into the mountains, where the days are dull under a leaden sky and the



nights are filled with swirling snow. You subsist on a few rations brought with you from the inn, but these are quickly used up. Too quickly. You must reach an inhabited area soon or else starve.

Forcing your way bent-backed against a glacial wind, you are traversing a narrow pass when you catch sight of a human figure on a ledge up ahead. Your cries of greeting are ignored, and the figure is hidden for a moment behind a veil of snow. Hurrying forward, you discover several other figures, but none are glad to see you. They are beyond any emotion, in fact, being long dead and frozen into rigid statues by the cold.

If you go closer to investigate, turn to **264**. If you ignore the frozen corpses and continue along the pass, turn to **285**.

201

If you have ESP and a psionic focus, a sudden sense of danger warns you not to proceed and you slip out of the shop: turn to **223**.

Without ESP, you blithely submit to the anaesthetic and your consciousness slides away, never to return. You should have been more wary than to put yourself at the mercy of such street scum.

202

The queue shuffles along slowly and at last you reach the ticket office. A bored official in the livery of a Venisian merchant guild peers at you through a screen of wire-meshed glass. "The cost of passage as

far as Kahira is ten scads,' he tells you.

If you are able to pay this sum, cross it off your money and turn to **246**. If not, turn to **288**.

203

Boche has a broad grin on his face as he looks over the sky-car and then turns to you, saying, 'This is a startling and welcome piece of luck! Now that we have a Manta, success in our venture is virtually assured.'

'Our venture?' You raise your eyebrows. 'So you did overhear Gaia's message back at the Etruscan Inn.'

He claps you heartily on the back. 'You know I did, but what of it? We are partners, and shall share the power of the Heart equally. Now that we have this vehicle, there is no need to wait for the ferry to Kahira. We can set out directly for Du-En.'

Turn to **159**.

204

You take the elevator to the floor indicated but find only the dim after-hours lights illuminating the corridor. As you are looking around, a janitor steps out of an office with pail and broom in hand and nods to you respectfully. 'If you are looking for Dr Jaffe, she has gone home for the night. The surgery opens again at nine am.' Turn to **73**.

205

Shandor's two remaining bodyguards produce small picks with which they hack at the ice. They are strong men and throw themselves into the job tirelessly, but it is soon obvious that the ice is too hard-packed. They remove their fur jackets despite the cold and one of them, turning to Shandor and wiping beads of sweat out of his eyes, says, 'It's going to take us hours to get the body out, boss.'

Shandor glances at you, then shrugs. 'Just chip it away around the hand, then. Get the sword.'

It is almost an hour before they have achieved this. By now the wind has dropped, making just a low ghastly moan as it gusts along the gully leading down to the cave. Nightfall cannot be more than a couple of hours off. You go over with Shandor and peer at the ice wall. Where the picks have gouged down to the corpse's hand, the clear blue ice has become cloudy with white cracks. The hand hangs limply, the shortsword still clutched in its fingers. Shandor goes to take it, hesitates, and turns to you with a grimace of distaste. 'I'm not easily spooked, but . . .' He gives an embarrassed chuckle.

The shortsword is of Japanese style, its blade still razor sharp in spite of a faint speckling of rust. You can take it if you wish (remember to note it on your Adventure Sheet if so); if not, one of the bodyguards will claim it.

You notice something odd about the corpse's hand. The slight violet bloom to the skin could be attributed to its preservation in ice, but the long

index finger and the hair on the palm are not so easy to explain. If you have LORE, turn to **183**. If not, turn to **270**.

206

The creature that attacked you is a sanguivore. A species of tree-dwelling lizard which is halfway to evolving flight, this is just one of the hallucinatory byproducts of the Paradox War. From the way your wound is pouring blood, you suspect the sanguivore's saliva contained an anti-clotting agent. That alone would not explain your increasing dizziness, though, which suggests its bite also injected a drug. No wonder it's in no hurry to catch up with you – easier by far to track you through the woods and wait until you collapse. Well, you are not as helpless as the wild animals on which the sanguivore normally preys. Tearing the lining of your jacket into strips, you bind the wound to prevent further blood loss.

The only thing you can do about the drug is stay on the move until you find shelter. If you lie down now you would never get up again. Turn to **250**.

207

You start to move forwards, begin a lunge towards the man with the gun, then jump adroitly aside as he discharges a blast. The blue-white flash snaps through the air and explodes against the knife-wielder's arm. He drops with a whimper. The third hunter runs in, arms spread wide to grab you, but you duck under

his clumsy tackle and dart towards the rug covering the door. Another shot crackles from the gun, and again you veer away, but this time it glances across your hip, burning the clothing away and inflicting a painful burn. Lose 1 Life Point. You are lucky to be alive. Wasting no more time, you throw yourself through the opening and limp off into the blizzard. The hunters do not give chase. Turn to **314**.

208

Placing your chair behind a heavy oaken post, you drape your coat across the back and prop your travelling-pack under it. If the sisters were to glance in your direction, they would assume you were still brooding at your table. In fact they seem entirely preoccupied, leaning on the bar and muttering to one another in terse whispers. You slide through the shadows to the far end of the room, slip unnoticed over the bar, then creep back on hands and knees until you are hidden just below where the sisters are talking. The innkeeper notices you, but luckily he is too terrified to make any comment.

‘We’ll need a barysal gun,’ one of the sisters is saying.

‘We’ll need two. Gaia said the Heart must be bombarded with two barysal beams at right angles. That will cause a critical resonance and destroy it.’

‘There’s going to be others heading for the Heart. Vajra Singh’s interest cannot be a coincidence; Janus Gaunt, too. It’ll be difficult to achieve the Heart’s destruction with such people intent on preserving it.’

'We must succeed, or the whole world will end.'

You listen with keen interest. So others are bound for Du-En and it seems not all of them share the goal of ultimate power. This is worth thinking about. Meanwhile, you return stealthily to your seat. Acquire the codeword *Nemesis* and turn to **252**.

209

Claustral Park is a large expanse in the upper level of the city which is entirely given over to wilderness. The fence is lined with bright arc-lamps, and these are directed inwards across a grassy perimeter towards a thick unkempt woodland.

Scaling the fence, you scurry across the open area of grass and push into the bushes. Twigs and moss suffice to make a reasonably comfortable bed. As you drift off to sleep, you gaze back through the trees at the arc-lamps glaring hard in the mist. Why illuminate the park if no one comes here after dark? Perhaps the lamps were installed in bygone days and it is not known how to turn them off . . .

You awake with a stifled scream. You have been seized by many hands and they are dragging you deep into the woods. You struggle, making contact with rough bodies that rasp your flesh like sandpaper. In the darkness you can see nothing of your assailants, but you can hear their snuffling grunts. They drag you to a clearing and break your limbs so that you cannot escape.

The claustrals cannot believe their good luck. Now they will feed on fresh meat for weeks to come.

210

Initiating a search of the files, you turn up a video almost two hundred years old. It shows an interview with Eleazar Picard, leader of the Volentine Cult, after he had fled from the unexplained destruction of Du-En. As you listen to Picard rambling about 'the madness' and 'the end of everything', you begin to piece together the facts. Apparently there was some kind of cataclysm or riot in the city, from which Picard barely escaped with his life.

A hawk-faced man in a colonel's uniform appears on the screen. He listens as Picard becomes slightly more lucid under the effect of truth serum. 'It was the light at the end of Time, and my sanity is blinded!'

'How is it you escaped?' asks the colonel. 'You alone and no one else?'

Picard replies: 'I remembered the Truth.'

'What is the Truth?'

At this point, Picard's eyes glaze and he starts to recite a catechism of his faith: 'The Truth is a flame. What ignites the flame? The spark ignites the flame. What is the spark? The Heart of Volent!'

You scan forward through the rest of the interview, but Picard soon lapses into incoherence. A message at the end informs you that he died soon afterwards.

Note the codeword *Lunar*, then turn to 254.

211

In a recess beside the door is a keypad comprising both letters and numerals. Putting your ear to the door, you begin to experiment with various combinations. Only an expert cracksman like yourself could recognize the distinctive clicks and whirs from the mechanism that show when you are on the right track. After an hour or so you have identified the first four letters of the code sequence. From that point on it is a simple matter of trial and error to find the correct keys to press. Your efforts are rewarded with a hum of machinery as the door slides upwards, revealing the interior of the pyramid. Turn to **233**.

212

The motilator registers your destination by flashing a light on the map. A chime sounds, warning that the doors are about to close. Fax steps back and raises his hand to wave. You watch his lean figure recede along the platform as the carriage gathers speed. The lights of the station dwindle into the distance of the tunnel. You are on your way . . . where? To Kahira (turn to **50**), to Karthag (turn to **124**), to Tarabul (turn to **31**), or to Giza (turn to **74**)?

213

Up ahead you can now see a small figure trudging through the snow, dwarfed by the high walls of the city. Approaching, you attract his attention and he turns. As he unzips his hood you are struck by

sudden recognition. 'Kyle Boche,' you mutter wryly. 'What a small world.'

'So,' he says with a wide grin, 'you have also come to seek the ultimate power!'

Turn to **191**.

214

'You might alter that list of priorities once you've heard what the Heart's "ultimate power" actually consists of,' you tell him.

He listens as you explain about Gaia's warnings. 'That does change things,' he admits. 'It seems the Heart is a danger to the very existence of the United States.'

'The very existence of the whole universe!'

Golgoth smiles. 'The universe doesn't sign my pay cheques. But I agree, we must see that the Heart is destroyed.'

Record the codeword *Blue* and turn to **192**.

215

You reach the far end of the bridge and pass through into the tiled hall beyond. The architecture here is the same oppressive design as on the surface: the heavy harshly-chiselled lintels and monumental bulbous columns, the gigantic vaults and grotesque carvings. You have a choice of routes from here: either of two wide passages directly ahead, or a doorway to your left. If you go through the door, turn to **259**. If you take the left-hand passage, turn to **3**. If you take the right-hand passage, turn to **128**.

216

You are used to sneaking about in the dark, and you have learned to rely on your other senses almost as well as on your sight. Even as the huge predator comes darting out from the cloisters to attack, you are racing nimbly ahead to the feeble glimmer of light from the doorway. Reaching it, you turn to see Boche and the baron fleeing in terror. In the light of Boche's flashlight you have a brief glimpse of a gigantic centipede with flanks like polished steel. As the others dive through, you slam the door shut and drop the bolt. A second later the door judders as the monster throws itself against it. 'Let's hope it holds,' says Boche grimly. 'I wouldn't want to fight that beastie!' Turn to 281.

217

You retreat as far as the room where the soldier is frozen in stasis. The baron's brain glides in pursuit. The telepathic messages are getting scrambled and incoherent now, as the brain slowly uses up its remaining oxygen: *Stay . . . need your body. Getting dark . . . Need new body . . .*

So that's its game! You duck around behind the stasis zone, watching the hovering brain as though through a lens. As soon as you are around the edge of the zone, you sidle to a point directly opposite your foe, then backtrack and run around to come up from behind. In his confusion, the baron had forgotten that light takes several seconds to cross the stasis zone. He is still watching your image when

you club him out of the air and crush him underfoot. The brain emits a dying wail – a silent sound that you hear only inside your mind. It will haunt you for many years. If you live that long. Turn to **261**.

218

Veering the sky-car in the air over Kahira, you glance down to see the Fijian shaking his fist up at you. He looks a tiny figure from here. You buzz him, swooping so low that he has to throw himself flat on the roof for fear of being hit. You fly off laughing into the night. Note on your Adventure Sheet that you now have a Manta sky-car. It will not count against your limit of eight possessions. (If you already had a sky-car then you'll have to ditch it, as you can only fly one at a time.) Turn to **311**.

219

You station yourselves beside the Heart. Within its glittering facets, a universe is waiting to be born. Infinite possibilities flicker in the violet glare.

Golgoth seems to share your mood. 'There's no other way,' he says. 'Ready?'

'What will happen?' you ask him. 'I mean, will it just disappear, or will there be an explosion?'

He shrugs. 'I don't know. Personally I doubt if I'll be around afterwards to collect this month's pay, but no one lives for ever.'

You nod. 'I just never expected to be a martyr, that's all.'

The beams from your guns converge at the centre

of the Heart, splintering its crystal lattice. The light within it glows until it blinds you. With a rush of energy, the Heart suddenly bursts apart, engulfing you and Golgoth in a cold flare of energy. In this chamber deep below the ruins of Du-En, the two of you give your lives for the sake of the whole world.

220

Gargan XIV was expecting that. She tosses a glass vial into Gilgamesh's unprotected ribcage. The vial breaks, releasing a green fluid which hisses as it gives off a cloud of acrid vapour. Gilgamesh staggers as the acid burns through his central power casing. He tries to aim his gun, but suddenly there is a crackle of sparks and his body locks rigid. You see the gleam of light fade from his eye-slit.

'That's your robot dealt with,' says Gargan XIV, beckoning you to come closer. 'See if you can do any better.'

Meanwhile, Gargan XIII has drawn a knife and is standing over Golgoth. She thinks he is beaten, when suddenly he looks up with a broad smile. Lose the codeword *Gilgamesh* and turn to **154**.

221

As you travel west, the bitter cold begins to ease. Instead of wild blizzards, you find yourself trudging through flurries of soft sleet. After several days you see a harsh light on the horizon. Ahead looms an arc of sunlight slanting through a wide gulf in the clouds. Even when night falls, the light keeps blazing down.

An old weather satellite far out in space, misdirected by Gaia's freakish whims, bathes the landscape in endless sun. These are the steaming swamps and jungles of Lyonesse.

On the northern fringes of the region, you have heard that men exploit the fertile farmland to support the old city of Lyon. To the south, the warm waters mean plentiful fish. But no one inhabits the interior of Lyonesse, which is the stalking ground of mutated beasts and carnivorous fungi.

You press on undaunted, pleased to be able to shrug off your thick furs as you leave the icy wasteland behind and enter the lush dank morass. Foliage like ships' sails blots out much of the sky, leaving you plunged in green gloom despite the ceaseless daylight. Extravagant blooms with jewel-like colours exude a mingling of musky scents. Creepers stretch in nets between the black trees. Ferns form high banks across your path. Off in the distance, the chittering and screeching of jungle animals seem unreal after so many days with only the wind's howl in your ears. Here there is no night or day. When tiredness becomes too much, you slump sweat-soaked beside a fallen log and roll your clothing up to make a pillow. The succulent jungle whispers lull you off to sleep.

If you have ESP and a psionic focus, turn to **30**. If you have AGILITY, turn to **53**. If neither, turn to **75**.

222

You notice a man at reception using a gold card similar to the one you found. After glancing at it, the clerk puts on an ingratiating smile and escorts the man through to the VIP lounge. You make discreet enquiries of a bellboy, who tells you that the cardholder is a member of the Society of the Compass. 'They're the top people. Always get the best of everything.'

'It's a sort of traveller's club, then?'

'More than a club! One gentleman who stayed here told me that he displayed his Compass ID to a mugger who threatened him in the street. The mugger was so frightened of the Compass Society's retribution that he ran off empty-handed.'

A useful item. You examine your own ID card in the privacy of your room. Unfortunately, the hologram photo looks nothing like you. Perhaps you can see about getting it altered. Turn to **286**.

223

You hurry along to the end of the street where an old man stops you and asks, 'Is Sarco the Poisoner still open for business?'

'How should I know?' you reply. 'I am not acquainted with the man you mention.'

He returns a look that suggests you are either deranged or a liar. 'I just now saw you leave his shop!' he declares.

You rub your jaw ruefully. 'Sarco the Poisoner, indeed . . .' It seems you've had a narrow escape. If

you persist in trying to get the ID card altered, turn to **245**. If you want to see to other matters before the ferry to Kahira arrives, turn to **414**.

224

As the queue moves along, Kyle Boche hurries to join you. Stamping his feet to fend off the morning chill, he tells you that he was delayed by some last-minute purchases in town. You notice a new barysal gun at his belt. 'We're on our way now,' he says excitedly, grinning as he stares out into the mist over the sea. 'The adventure's begun!'

A problem arises when you reach the ticket office. The cost of passage to Kahira is 10 scads each. Boche peers woefully at his remaining funds and then turns to you with a shrug. 'You'll have to pay for me, I'm afraid. Still, we're partners. I'm sure you'll agree I've never stinted from doing my bit up till now.'

If you agree to pay for both yourself and Boche, reduce your money by 20 scads and turn to **246**. If you are prepared to pay for yourself but not for him, cross off 10 scads and turn to **267**. If you do not have enough money even to buy your own ticket, turn to **288**.

225

The next morning you are overtaken by a blizzard that turns the sky as dark as Doomsday. Stumbling on, you are barely able to see the others through the thick snowfall. Then a blue flare erupts in the gloom, drawing you to where Shandor stands with two of his bodyguards. He has a sputtering magnesium

torch in his hand which drips hissing fragments of hot metal into the snow. 'Where's Goro?' says one of the bodyguards.

You all gaze off into the blizzard. No one says a thing until Shandor grabs your sleeve. 'We can't do anything for him now,' he calls over the shrieking wind. 'Come on, there's an ice cave we can shelter in.'

You follow the others down a crevice in the ground. In the light of Shandor's flare, the walls around you gleam like old blue glass. 'This is frozen meltwater,' you say, running your hand across the smooth ice. 'We must be on another glacier.'

'Inside a glacier, you mean,' mutters Shandor. 'Eerie, isn't it? We're safer here than out in that storm, though.'

You walk along the gallery of ice, overwhelmed by a sense of awe. Perhaps this was a mighty river once, a raging torrent, before the summers died and the Ice Age took root in the world. Now it slides imperceptibly along at the rate of a few centimetres a year.

You see a face in the ice and jump back with a startled cry. Shandor comes over and raises the torch. Frozen just inside the surface of the wall is a man in black military-style overalls, a shortsword held in one hand. Perhaps he has been there for centuries, but what makes you shudder is the fact that his eyes are wide open. 'I could almost fancy he's watching us,' you say.

'Tell you what I fancy,' says Shandor. 'That sword he's got.'



If you chip the body out of the ice, turn to **205**. If you just wait until the blizzard is past and then press on, turn to **249**.

226

The relief crew arrives and takes shelter from the cold inside the terminal building. Strolling along the wharf, you spy a cluster of wickerwork pots containing live cancretes. These are pale crustaceans with long spines: a noted local delicacy when baked in clay. With cautious dexterity, you open one of the pots and remove the cancrete inside. The cold has made it torpid and it makes only a half-hearted effort to sever your thumb with its claws. You wrap it in your jacket. Returning with it to the terminal building, you sidle over to the fireside where some of the sailors are enjoying an early-morning nip of whiskey. None of them notices you slip the cancrete into the pile of jackets and pullovers they have strewn across a chair.

You stand by the window and look out to sea, pretending to watch for the ferry. At last a gong is sounded, announcing the ferry's imminent arrival, and the relief crew begin to gather their belongings. Suddenly there is a yelp of pain from one of the sailors and he throws off his jacket as though it were on fire. The cancrete emerges and crawls sullenly away across the floorboards. 'That cancrete has bitten me severely,' says the sailor, displaying a red weal on his hand.

A youngster whom you take to be the cabin boy

watches in horror as the cancrete squeezes into hiding behind the stones of the hearth. You guess that this is his first voyage when he blurts out: 'Did you see that horrific creature? Are they common in the Inland Sea?'

'Not of such a size,' you tell him quietly. He looks relieved until you add: 'Most grow much bigger. Didn't your shipmates tell you about them?'

Eyes widening in fright, the cabin boy rushes out without explanation. You step smartly into the breach. Introducing yourself to the captain, you portray yourself as a person with some prior nautical experience. 'Your cabin boy has withdrawn from the voyage, but I am a willing and able worker,' you tell him.

A faint furrow of suspicion clouds his brow, but he admits that he is one hand short. 'Very well, I'll take you on. But since you are untried, I won't be offering full pay.'

You shrug casually as you shoulder your pack. 'Pay? Passage to Kahira is enough.' Turn to **246**.

227

'They told me my boss was up here,' says the Fijian, 'but all I see is you. Imposter!' He starts to lunge towards you.

You turn in the doorway to face him, displaying your gun. 'Here are my credentials,' you say coolly. 'Now, let's go and see what's in that closet over there.'

Staring down the barrel of your gun, he has no

arguments. You guess that he is a professional bodyguard, because he obviously expects what's coming next. With hands on the top of his head, he turns his back and steps into the closet. You club him across the neck with the butt of the gun and he drops. Closing the door of the closet, you leave quickly before he can recover and raise the alarm. Turn to **311**.

228

Crashing through a thicket of glossy green fronds, you are brought up short by an astounding sight. A majestic ruined city spreads off into the jungle in front of you, seeming to shimmer in the haze of eternal tree-filtered sunlight. Some of the buildings have been choked by vegetation, grappled to destruction by cables of vine, walls uprooted by inexorable growth and carpeted with moss. But other towers still stand gleaming, bright glass and polished steel glorious in the dappled green-gold light. Those must be the buildings still cleaned and maintained by caretaks, the diligent robot janitors left by the ancients.

You skirt the perimeter of the city, stumbling and staggering from sheer awe, like a blind man suddenly given the gift of vision. It can only be the remnants of old Marsay, the mythical place lost for two centuries. A bee as big as a child's fist goes careering clumsily past your ear, legs sprawling like a helicopter's skids, and disappears into a vast buzzing hive in the eaves of a crumbled house. Birds sit

pecking at lichen-stained girders, sparing you only a disdainful glance. You feel like an intruder here.

A barren patch of ground lies ahead, about fifty paces across, forming an avenue towards the intact area of the city. If you follow it, turn to **271**. If you would rather press on into the jungle, turn to **292**.

229

Kahira is shrouded in a mist that rises from the warm river waters which flow beneath the city. The city gate is a metal shutter; it opens into a wide cargo lift at the bottom of a concrete buttress. You hurry through just before the gate closes for the final time this evening. Standing in a crowd of people, donkeys and camels, you wait while the lift rattles up to the street level and opens to disgorge its passengers onto a fog-draped plaza. You step out under the glare of a neon lamp and gaze around the plaza, ignoring the stragglers barging past you with their packs. The babble of voices is muffled by the fog. The air is dankly cold, with a flat reek of mist and wet concrete.

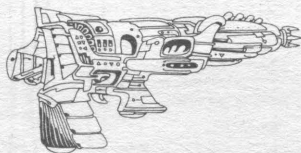
A man wearing an illuminated fez scurries up to you, brushing his fingertips together as though washing. A clutch of snagged teeth gleam in the street-light as he bows. 'Greetings! I am Bador, a dracoman. For a single scad I will be pleased to assist you with the many queries you must have regarding this estimable city.' If you pay Balor's fee, cross off 1 scad and turn to **33**. If you tell him to be gone, turn to **95**.

You look into the surface thoughts of the twins as they converse. The memories are of a hostelry in Florida, a crackling video screen, a tantalizing message concerning the power of the Heart of Volent. They, like you, heard a transmission from Gaia. They travelled across the Atlantic to get here. No question about it – they must be heading for Du-En.

You are about to end the mind probe when you glimpse another memory that amazes you. The twins found an old computer complex in Madeira and managed to make contact with Gaia again. This time she seems to have been more coherent and told them that the Heart was dangerous. If a person were to claim its power, the universe as it currently exists would be swept away, remade in a new image.

The twins apparently concluded that the Heart should be destroyed. Gaia told them that this could be done by dual barysal beams striking the gemstone at right angles, which would set up an internal dissonance. The Heart would then crack apart like a glass shattered by a soprano's highest note.

One of the twins glances up. Guiltily you withdraw your mental scan, looking away before she notices you watching them. Record the codeword *Nemesis* and then turn to 252.



231

You find a deserted alley where you slump down behind a stack of cardboard boxes.

You have no sense of how long has passed when you feel a boot nudge you in the ribs. You open your eyes. Half a dozen figures stand over you in the dim mist-filtered moonlight. 'Get up,' says a voice.

You start to rise, but the nearest figure sweeps out his leg and sends you sprawling back against the wall. You steady yourself against the damp brickwork and glare back at them.

A woman steps forward and speaks in a brittle zealous voice. 'We are of the Church of Gaia. Give of your belongings that Gaia may bring salvation to the world.'

You have heard of this cult – just one of hundreds that have sprung up in the latter days of the world, as people turn in their desperation to strange beliefs. The Church is founded on a particularly deranged creed. Instead of believing Gaia to be a sophisticated computer, they think she is the creator goddess! If you give them your money, turn to **274**. Otherwise you must use CUNNING (turn to **295**) or fight (turn to **316**).

232

You try a peripheral avenue of investigation, consulting all files relating to the Heart of Volent before it acquired that name. You discover that it was a large gemstone, apparently of interstellar origin, which fell to Earth in the late twenty-first

century. Coming into the hands of the Volentine cult, it became the focus of cult worship and was conveyed to their citadel in the fastness of the Sahara.

The technical records are intriguing. Before the Heart was stolen by the Volentines, a preliminary scientific study was made to analyse its crystalline structure and intrinsic radiation. The results, when fed into Gaia, yielded the startling conclusion that it was a by-product of the Big Bang which created the universe – in essence a kind of ‘twin’ universe which had frozen in stasis before it could expand. It is eerily akin to the way that abortive twins are often formed in human gestation, only to be reabsorbed by the developing foetus.

Gaia’s remark from the time ring ominously across the gulf of centuries: ‘This object is unstable. Psionic disruption, as from direct contact with a human mind, could reactivate its expansion inside our own universe, leading to the destruction of all that exists. A new universe would result. Destruction of the object is advised, and this can be simply accomplished by bombardment with coupled barysal beams of complementary phasing.’

Gaia’s advice was not acted upon. She was already considered unreliable. That was before the world experienced the Paradox War – evidence of what a fraction of the Heart’s untapped power could do. Note the codeword *Nemesis*. You can now look through data on the Volentine cult (turn to **210**) or take a look around at the rest of al-Lat (turn to **254**).

233

Delete the codeword *Humbaba*.

A tunnel beyond the doorway is lit by luminant strips close to the floor, which bathe you in a sinister blue glow as you advance towards the centre of the pyramid. You reach a room whose walls are covered with video screens. A partial projection of the world's surface stretches across the ceiling, reduced to a chequerboard of black patches where the scanning satellites have gone off-line over the years.

In the centre of the room is a shaft that descends into the depths of the pyramid. A circular steel plate hovers at the top, beside a row of buttons. You guess it is a sort of elevator, although a much more sophisticated design than any in existence nowadays. Studying the buttons, you discount the levels given over to dormitories and recreation. That leaves the research and military levels, located furthest down in the building.

If you risk taking the strange elevator, decide whether you will go to the research level (turn to **276**) or the military level at the very bottom of the shaft (turn to **255**). If you think it would be wiser to leave the way you came, turn to **361**.

234

The ground underfoot is hard-packed gravel under a sprinkling of snow. As you travel on, a biting wind sweeps down from the north bringing heavy snow. The pale blue sky is blotted out by glowering clouds through which enough daylight seeps to give the

snow a canescent hue. You hunch into the wind and trudge on, fearing to stop and rest in case you never get up again. Lose 1 Life Point unless you have either SURVIVAL or a fur coat.

If you survive, you eventually reach the River Isis and cross over a old iron bridge to the west bank. From here, a broad sweep of gleaming ivory dunes extends to the horizon under a sky darker than wet stone. These are the Saharan Ice Wastes, thousands of kilometres of uncharted wilderness, desolate snow fields pounded by incessant arctic gales. This is the terrible barrier that separates you from your goal. Turn to **393**.

235

You pass a restless night troubled by bouts of nausea. As the sky begins to show the dim silver burnish of predawn light, you rise and run trembling fingers through your sweat-matted hair. If you have a pack of antidote pills, turn to **320**. If not, turn to **342**.

236

He listens with interest as you explain how the Heart can be destroyed by two people working together. 'A fitting use for that fine barysal pistol of yours,' you conclude with a grim smile.

He nods and then leans close, putting an arm across your shoulders. 'You're right, of course. I'm glad you confided all this to me. We must keep it secret from the othes. They are mad dogs, who

care nothing for whether the world lives or dies.'

Record the codeword *Yellow* and turn to **192**.

237

Reaching the nearest grille, you find it rusted and easy to wrench out of the wall. Narrowing your shoulders, you squeeze through into a small tomb chamber. A body lies on a low carved slab, withered but preserved by the cold dry breeze gusting up from below. The robes suggest this was one of the priests of the Volentine cult. Hearing the others calling you, you make a hurried search of the tomb, finding nothing of interest except for a speculum jacket. This gives some protection from barysal gunshots. Note the speculum jacket on your Adventure Sheet. Since the others are anxious to be off, you climb back up to rejoin them without inspecting the other grilles. Turn to **215**.

238

With unerring precision, you blast a shot at the lintel above the doorway. The beam fractures the darkness and raises the lintel to white-heat in an instant. 'Run towards the door!' you shout to the others.

You race in the direction of the glowing stone lintel. The baron reaches it first, gliding through the doorway and turning to slam it after you and Boche have run through. A moment later, something slams into the other side with juddering impact, but the door holds.

'What was that?' you ask.

'I caught a brief glimpse of it in the glare from your gunshot,' says Boche. 'Believe me, you don't want to know!'

Reduce your gun's charge by one; when it reaches zero charges it will be useless. Then turn to **281**.

239

You are almost hypnotized by terror, and it is only by the merest chance that your fingers brush the grenade hanging at your belt. Unclipping it, you send it rolling and bounding across the floor. The baron's brain comes rushing through the air just as the grenade detonates. There is a flash, and the brain is flung to the floor by the concussion. While it lies dazed, you crush it under your heel. If only you could shut out the dying shriek that echoes telepathically through your mind and will stay with you until your dying day. Turn to **261**.

240

You feel a jolting impact as though someone had punched you in the throat. Looking down, you are amazed to see a steel crossbow bolt has pierced your windpipe. You stagger back a couple of steps and then fall, dying in a pool of blood. You have failed with success almost in your grasp.

241

Golgoth checks Boche's gun, but the charge has been used up. If you possess a charged battery unit for a barysal gun, turn to **219**. Otherwise turn to **263**.

242

You sift carefully through the debris, but find nothing more than torn clothes and broken ornaments. Boche points out a rusty brown stain on a broken tabletop. 'The rioters went in for human sacrifice,' he says.

The baron hovers over the spot, peering back through the curtain of time. Finally he gives a curt nod. 'Yes. The populace broke in here and slaughtered the acolytes. But this is not where the High Priest and his adepts dwelt. That lies deeper in the catacombs, and there we shall find the Shrine of the Heart.' He swivels in the air and glides rapidly back to the antechamber, calling over his shoulder: 'Come!'

You and Boche exchange a glance, then follow. The baron is inspecting the two passages, but his psychic senses cannot tell which is better. 'You choose,' he says.

If you go right, turn to **128**. If left, turn to **3**.

243

Passing under a broken arch, you enter the central plaza. This is a broad area of snow-covered flagstones roughly three hundred metres across, enclosed by ruined palaces that gleam like lead in the white haze.

There are several campfires built up against a fallen colonnade. As you get closer you see antique furniture and splintered doors crackling in the flames: plunder from the once great city of Du-En, lost art

treasures beyond price. In this desolate place, their only value is the warmth they give.

A man steps forward from the fireside and pulls off his glove to shake hands. 'Greetings, I am Janus Gaunt.'

While Boche makes the introductions, you take stock of Gaunt. He is younger than his grey hair would suggest, with an open friendly manner. His servants stumble along behind him in the snow, but they wear only thin clothes and you guess they are past feeling the cold. Gaunt sees you looking at them and nods. 'These are my xoms – reanimated cadavers, loyal and tireless.'

Others are now emerging from their tents along the colonnade. A wizened old man with no legs who comes drifting through the air like a ghost is introduced as Baron Siriasis, a psionic from Bezant. Next comes a woman who walks with long feline strides, eyes glittering like jade in the wan afternoon light. She gives you a single guarded look and then turns away. 'That is Thadra Bey of al-Lat,' says Gaunt. 'And here is Commander Chaim Golgoth, an agent of United States Intelligence. The two strapping bronzed ladies behind him are Gargan XIII and Gargan XIV, sole survivors of a clone superwarrior group.'

Golgoth smiles and shakes hands; the Gargan twins watch you with a glare like Medusa's sisters. 'There's also Vajra Singh,' adds Golgoth, nodding towards a large scarlet-and-black pavilion across the plaza. 'You'll meet him soon enough, I'll warrant.'

If you have the codeword *Scythe*, delete it and turn to **89**. Otherwise turn to **111**.

244

The Hotel Paradise proves to be a converted temple overlooked by a high bell-tower. You stand looking up at the inside of the splendid domes. Once, centuries ago, this vast hall must have rung with orisons to the forgotten deity of that era. Now it echoes instead to the grunt and clamour of people eating in the refectory or clattering up and down the wooden stairway to their rooms. Turn to **329**.

245

You eventually find a man who can do what you want: a fat sweaty fellow with a profusion of ancient tools and devices strewn around his shop. Guiding his laser by hand, he makes a few deft changes to the image on the card until it could pass for your own likeness. 'Five scads,' he says, holding it out to you.

'Five?' You scowl.

'Membership of the prestigious Compass Society is usually much more expensive than that,' he says with a shrug.

You consider snatching the card back, but the fat man cannily anticipates you and holds it close to the laser beam until you pay. If you agree to his terms, cross off 5 scads and acquire the codeword *Proteus*. If you refuse to pay, he destroys the ID card and you must delete it from your list of possessions.

Turn to **25**.

After fifteen minutes, a pale green light flashes through the murk out to sea. The assembled travellers start to rise and gather their belongings as the ferry comes sweeping in towards the dock. A massive hovercraft of three tiered decks surmounted by a high conning-tower, the ferry glides up the frosty foreshore and settles on its metal skirt. Workers immediately rush out with planks to assemble a boardwalk, and you go aboard with the others.

There is a delay while supplies are loaded. You find a couch on the middle deck and gaze out to sea. A polarizing tint in the glass adds to the gloominess of the scene, with tall iron-black clouds piled high above a sea of grey swell and ice floes.

Eventually the craft raises itself and you are under way. Stewards come round and lunch is served at long curved tables in the central lounge. You chew at a stodgy gruel formulated from sea algae, washed down with spiced tea.

You take a promenade on the outside deck, but the chill of the afternoon soon drives you back inside. Some of the other passengers have started card games. As the daylight fades, a gap in the louring cloud reveals a handful of diamond-bright stars. The bar is opened and the atmosphere aboard gradually acquires a current of bonhomie, but you remain aloof and troubled. Most of these people have no further destination in mind than Kahira, no ambition beyond a small profit and a frisson of petty adventure. But

your own goal is direly remote: the lost ruins of Du-En, in the far hinterland of the Saharan Ice Wastes. It seems impossible to believe, but there in Du-En you will either grasp the ultimate power – or perish.

Turn to **10**.

247

You travel upriver until Kahira comes in sight through the veils of sparkling river-mist. It straddles the river on huge concrete buttresses, a city built on many levels, with gleaming towers stretching towards the darkening sky. Steering the sky-car towards the gate set into one of the colossal buttresses, you cast a single glance west across the Sahara. The pyramids of Giza are half-hidden by mist. Beyond lies the implacable desert of ice which you must cross to reach your goal. If you have the codeword *Diamond*, turn to **251**. If not, turn to **229**.

248

The Fijian is strong and well trained, but you have the advantage of suppleness. His foot lashes out. You dodge to one side, catch the ankle, and twist him off-balance. Rather than allow you to dislocate his knee, he falls back, braces his arms on the ground, and delivers a thrust with both legs that sends you slamming back against the wall.

Lose 2 Life Points. If still alive, the impact leaves you stunned, giving your opponent time to get to his feet. He charges towards you bellowing. You steady yourself to meet the attack, and by luck a

wall-mounted extinguisher comes to hand. You feel no compunction at using it; any weapon is fair in such a fight. A spray of foam to the eyes blinds the Fijian long enough for you to swing the canister in a solid clout to the side of his head. He falls like a sack of bricks.

You stoop and check his pulse, relieved to discover he is still alive. You had better get well away before he comes round. Turn to **311**.

249

The third bodyguard, Goro, is found only fifty metres from the ice cave where you took shelter. He is frozen on his hands and knees, having died crawling in the merciless fury of the blizzard. Snow is piled around the body.

The other two, who may be his brothers for all you know, betray no emotion at the sight. Of course, they must have known he could not have survived. 'Shall we bury him, boss?' says one.

Shandor looks at the sky. Dusk is already descending along the edge of the valley, shadows creeping like blots of soot across the crisp white snow. He considers, then gives a curt nod back towards the crevasse. 'Toss the body down into the cave – it's as good a tomb as any. I want to be off this glacier by nightfall.'

Your journey continues for another week. Hungry and beset by chilling winds, you feel drained of strength. The unbroken glower of grey cloud across the sky leaves you dispirited. By the time you reach

the eastern foothills, your fingers are tingling with the first stages of frostbite. Lose 2 Life Points unless you have SURVIVAL, in which case lose only 1 Life Point.

Outside Venis, Shandor tells you he is detouring north to meet some friends who live in an isolated manor house. If you have STREETWISE, turn to **117**. If not, turn to **438**.

250

Crashing through a thicket of glossy green fronds, you are brought up short by an astounding sight. A majestic ruined city spreads off into the jungle in front of you, seeming to shimmer in the haze of eternal tree-filtered sunlight. Some of the buildings have been choked by vegetation, grappled to destruction by cables of vine, walls uprooted by inexorable growth and carpeted with moss. But other towers still stand gleaming, bright glass and polished steel glorious in the dappled green-gold light. Those must be the buildings still cleaned and maintained by caretaks, the diligent robot janitors left by the ancients.

You skirt the perimeter of the city, stumbling and staggering as much from sheer awe as from your throbbing wound. It can only be the remnants of old Marsay, the mythical place lost to the sight of man for two centuries.

A bee as big as a child's fist goes careering clumsily past your ear, legs sprawling like a helicopter's skids, and disappears into a vast buzzing hive in the eaves of a crumbled house. Birds sit



pecking at lichen-stained girders, sparing you only a disdainful glance. You feel like a intruder here.

A barren patch of ground lies ahead, about fifty paces across, forming an avenue towards the intact area of the city. If you follow it, turn to **271**. If you would rather press on into the jungle, turn to **184**.

251

The city gate is a metal shutter that opens into a wide cargo lift at the bottom of a concrete abutment. Those entering are conveyed up inside the abutment to the lowest street level twenty metres above. You have arrived just before the gates are closed for the night, and as you step out into the street you draw the attention of a man in blue-and-grey combat dress.

Boche recognizes him, throwing out his chest in a display of wary truculence. The man stops and nods, a relaxed smile on his slim features. 'Kyle Boche. And is this your accomplice, or your latest victim?'

'Chaim Golgoth! Are you still a hired murderer?' pipes up Boche in a tone of bravado. He turns to you: 'This man kills people for a living.'

You notice the insignia on Golgoth's sleeve: the blazoned silver eagle and blue stars of United States Intelligence. Even with the world close to collapse, the United States remains a force to be reckoned with. If Golgoth really is a USI assassin, Boche is being reckless in bantering with him like this. You size up what you can see. Golgoth has a holstered barysal gun and, to your surprise, a steel crossbow slung behind his hip. At a glance he looks open and

friendly, his voice mild with wry amusement. But there is something almost chilling about the eyes. Those are the eyes of a man who is always alert.

If you have Esp (and a psionic focus) and want to probe Golgoth's mind, turn to **121**. Alternatively, you can query him about Giza (turn to **337**) or his reason for carrying a crossbow (turn to **315**), or simply pass by him into the city (turn to **358**).

252

At last the fearsome twins begin to show signs of lassitude. They call for plates of stew, which they devour with gusto, then go crashing off into the dormitory where they hurl themselves down on cots and are soon snoring like two lionesses.

'What fearsome furies!' says the innkeeper in a disconsolate whisper. 'They drank a hundred scads' worth of vodka. I think there's little hope of getting my money, however.'

The other customers of the inn set up bedding on the floor of the taproom. No one dares to share the dormitory for fear of the Gargan sisters awakening and setting on them in a drunken rage. You cannot blame them. You pass an uneasy night yourself, rising early to set out on your way. Turn to **273**.

253

Fishermonger Plaza, on the lowest level of the city, is a wide paved area surrounding an area of gratings directly above the river. At night, the gratings are opened and nets lowered. Bright lamps are shone

down into the river to attract the attention of fish, which are then hauled up in huge writhing shoals. This continues throughout the night, and the promise of fresh fried fish brings all manner of night-time workers to the plaza. At stalls ranged around the gratings, a curious band rubs shoulders: off-duty policemen, fishermongers, prostitutes, street cleaners, beggars and burglars.

You huddle down beside a shuttered pastry stall. The bright light and bustle make it difficult to sleep here, but at least you are safe from muggers. You pass a restless night, awakening before the dawn with a gritty feeling in your eyes and cramp in your limbs. 'Get away from here!' says the stall-holder as he opens up for the day. 'I will not have my wares contaminated by a beggar's lice.'

You wait until he is not looking to steal a pastry for your breakfast, then make your way to the bazaar. Turn to **333**.

254

A young technician sees you wandering around bewildered and takes you on a tour of the laboratories. 'The al-Lat station was originally intended as a base of pure scientific research,' he explains. 'Luckily we were always designed to be self-sufficient, so the degradation of Earth's climate and population has not affected us.'

You pause beside a bank of supercooled chambers. 'What research is going on here?'

'These are neural networks – artificial brains into

which we are loading the original weather control programs used when Gaia was first set up. They are works of genius, unsurpassed even today. Naturally we cannot tap into Gaia herself, by reason of the viruses that have invaded the system. But these original programs are uninfected.'

'What is the purpose of the work?' you ask.

'We hope to terraform the planet Venus – that is, make it suitable for human habitation. Then we can colonize.'

You give a snort of incredulous laughter. 'Why not use your skills on Earth? Although inhospitable, it is still a better place than Venus!'

He smiles. 'We thought of that, of course. Any attempt to alter the Earth's current climate might meet with Gaia's displeasure, and al-Lat would be targeted by nuclear missiles against which we have no defence.'

If you argue that the Earth should not be callously abandoned, turn to **296**. If you offer to join the people at al-Lat and help with the terraforming project, turn to **317**.

You step onto the hovering platform, surprised and relieved that it remains steady under your weight and does not go plummeting to the bottom of the shaft. Once again, as so often in the past, you have cause to marvel at the technology of your ancestors. Touching the lowest button, you activate the elevator and the platform glides gently down the

shaft, depositing you in a circular chamber from which several doors lead off. All are closed. As you stand pondering which way to go, an automatic circuit engages and a synthesized voice speaks from a slot in the wall, enquiring your reason for being here.

What will you answer: 'Gaia' (turn to **297**), 'Gilgamesh' (turn to **318**), 'Du-En' (turn to **441**), or 'the Heart of Volent' (turn to **383**)?

256

A hunter who makes a habit of tangling with bomeths will not live very long. Instead of grand heroics, you decide to track the beast to its lair. Crouching motionless until the moon rises, you see the bometh rouse itself and go loping away across the undulating hillocks of snow. You follow until you see it disappear into a snowdrift, whereupon you drop low and compose yourself for a long wait. Two or three hours go by. At last it emerges from the lair, sniffs the wind, and lumbers off in search of prey.

Once it is out of sight, you scramble over to the snowdrift, pushing along a tunnel into a hollowed-out cavity where there are three small bomeths on a nest of moulted fur. Ignoring them, you turn your attention to the closely packed walls of the lair: the bometh's 'larder', where the beast has stored remains of previous kills. You dig out the carcass of a large fowl, which the icy cold has preserved well. Wrapping the flesh carefully, you make one food pack which you can add to your list of possessions.

One of the young bomeths nips at your ankle. The

257-258

teeth do not penetrate your boot, but it is a timely reminder that the parent might return at any time. You squirm back to the open and hurry away. Turn to **298**.

257

Your fingers show signs of frostbite and you have a dozen small bruises and sores. You dose yourself with antibiotics and apply ointments and dressings from the medical kit. If injured, you can restore 1 Life Point. Turn to **278**.

258

When he folds his hands across his chest and speaks in his mild whimsical way, Janus Gaunt puts you in mind of a priest. 'Vajra Singh is the lion among us,' he says; 'proud, brave and noble – cross him, and you'll measure your remaining span in seconds. So, if Singh is a lion, Golgoth is a fox, agile and crafty. For Baron Siriasis' totem I would suggest the spider: a brooding, spiteful, sinister creature, always ready to cast its net.'

'And Thadra Bey is evidently a tigress,' you say, 'for I have never seen a woman so sleek and fierce. And Kyle Boche?'

'Boche?' He gives a snort of contempt. 'He is a jackal . . . no, an albatross around your neck, I think!'

'And what about you, Janus Gaunt?' breaks in a voice abruptly. You turn to see Kyle Boche sauntering out across the snow. He casts a hooded

glance around the throng of silent xoms. 'Perhaps you're the worm of the group? The maggot that eats from within?'

Gaunt turns on his heel and stalks away without reply, his xoms clustering along behind like sleepwalkers. Boche takes your arm and leads you back to the main square. 'You should be more careful,' he chides. 'Gaunt might have murdered you out there and turned you into one of his undead. You're lucky I came along when I did.' Turn to **104**.

259

You are in a dimly lit room with a number of smaller rooms leading off it. You guess that this was where the acolytes of the Volentine cult lived. Even after two hundred years, there are still signs of the rioting that led to the city's downfall. You clamber through a wreckage of broken furniture and toppled cupboards. Crumpled sheets of writing-plastic litter the floor.

Boche picks up a book, ruffles the charred pages and drops it to the floor. 'There's nothing here to interest us,' he says. 'Let's press on.'

If you insist on searching the wreckage, turn to **412** if you have **ROGUERY**, or to **242** if you do not. Otherwise you can go back to the antechamber and take either the passage to the left (turn to **3**) or the passage to the right (turn to **128**).

260

There is the rattle of hard insectoid legs on the smooth floor, then something huge slams into you. It feels like a coiled monster with a body as hard as ebony. Striking out blindly, you feel a segmented eye squash under your fist, spurting out ichor. Then it seizes you in its mandibles and two scything blades are driven into your sides. You give a scream of agony. It feels as though the monster is trying to saw you in half. If you have CLOSE COMBAT, lose 4 Life Points; if not, lose 6 Life Points. Lose 1 less Life Point if you possess cyborg body-parts. Assuming you survive, you manage to break free with a sob of terror and stumble on to the doorway. Boche and the baron slam and bolt the door behind you, and you see it almost buckle off its hinges as the monster throws itself furiously against it. 'I hope that holds,' you say to the others, 'or else we're insect food.' Turn to **281**.

261

You find Boche recovering from the blast. Despite a gash on his forehead, he is in good spirits. 'It worked!' he says. 'I'd been carrying that grenade all along, but the joke was that I didn't even know it myself. It was the only way to foil the baron's mind-reading, you see.'

'I don't understand.'

Boche spits out rock dust before explaining. 'I knew the baron was heading for Du-En and that he'd be the hardest foe I'd have to face, so I got myself

hypnotized to forget that I was carrying a grenade. I had a post-hypnotic suggestion planted that I should use it at a key moment. He never knew what hit him, did he?’

‘A ruthlessly clever scheme.’

If you intended any sarcasm, Boche fails to notice it. ‘Thanks,’ he says. ‘Now, let’s get going and find the Heart!’ Turn to **175**.

262

A swishing in the air is followed by a noise like a knife being driven into an apple. You are startled to see a crossbow bolt protruding from Singh’s eye. He is spun round by the impact, dead on his feet, raking the floor with a random blast from the mantramukta as he falls. Molten chunks of marble fly up, one of them striking you heavily across the left arm. Lose 4 Life Points unless you have cyborg body-parts, in which case lose only 1 Life Point.

As the smoke disperses you see that Golgoth had attached his gun to the wall magnetically and set it for remote-controlled fire. Retrieving it, he casts a wary glance at you. ‘It’s just up to us now,’ he says. ‘We can make a shoot-out of it, and probably both die, or we can co-operate to get rid of that.’ And he jerks his thumb towards the ominously glittering Heart of Volent. Turn to **431**.



263

Golgoth gives you a bleak smile. His gun is aimed at your chest. 'So we can't destroy the damned thing after all,' he says without relish. 'I certainly can't get it back to the States, so I guess that leaves one option.'

'You can't . . .!' you say, shaking your head. 'It'll be the end of the world.'

'The world's on its last legs anyway. No one thinks humanity will survive another century. Maybe I can make a better world.'

You give him a withering look. 'You're just trying to justify yourself, Golgoth. You're like all the rest. It was power you wanted all along.'

He shrugs. 'Just doing my job.' And his gun spurts fire, killing you instantly.

264

Boche scrambles up to the ledge and goes through the pockets of one of the corpses. 'I don't like robbing the dead, but there might be some food,' he mutters.

If you have **ROGUERY** turn to **328**. If not but you have **PARADOXING** (and a psionic focus) turn to **370**. If you have neither, turn to **306**.

265

After reassuring the anxious scribe that you will do nothing to damage his hardware, you connect one of the laptops into the phone network. The antiquity of the modem will limit your ability to converse with

Gaia, but it also means that the terminal you are using is safe from Gaia's resident hyperviruses, which are too complex to copy themselves across the primitive modem link.

The scribe watches in amazement as you type your questions. In this world of declining technology, what you are doing seems to him like magic.

HELLO, GAIA. PLEASE TELL ME ABOUT THE HEART OF VOLENT.

IT WAS FORMED AT THE BEGINNING OF TIME. THE PERSON WHO ATTUNES IT WILL HAVE POWER OVER EVERYTHING.

HOW CAN YOU HELP ME TO GET IT?

MY MIND IS NOT ALWAYS CLEAR. YOU WILL NEED AN ALLY. GO TO GIZA. SEEK GILGAMESH UNDER THE PYRAMID. HUMBABA WILL GIVE YOU ENTRY.

WHAT THEN?

UNKNOWN. THE FUTURE . . . A TABULA RASA . . .

The screen goes blank as the scribe reaches out and pulls the plug. 'Enough, please,' he says firmly. 'I know you've assured me there is no risk, but bear in mind it is my livelihood that's at stake.'

Resolving to establish a better link with Gaia when you have time, you leave the stall and head off along the street. Note the codeword *Humbaba* and turn to 372.

You identify each of the potions, describing its effect in detail. Malengin takes out a pad and eagerly scribbles down everything you can tell him. 'This will be invaluable!' he says, so pleased that he agrees to sell to you at a discount.

The potion he calls the Virid Mystery is easiest to identify. It is simply an antidote designed to reverse unwanted genetic changes. Luckily the other three potions are more useful.

The potion called the Exalted Enhancer costs 7 scads and will toughen your skin so that you gain 5 Life Points, even above your initial score (so, if you began the adventure with 10 Life Points your maximum score would increase to 15). However, it also slows your reflexes so that you must lose AGILITY if you have it.

The Mask of Occultation costs 6 scads and gives the ability to alter your appearance and colouring. If you buy this retrovirus, note on your Adventure Sheet that you have 'chameleon skin'.

The Peerless Perceptivate costs 4 scads and confers the ability to see in almost total darkness. If you buy this retrovirus, note on your Adventure Sheet that you have 'night vision'.

Once you have finished your business with Malengin, turn to **414** if you have STREETWISE, or to **25** if you do not.



267

Boche frowns in indignation and amazement. 'I cannot understand your attitude. I've worked very hard getting you this far, and now you propose to abandon me!'

You thank the official for your ticket and then turn to Boche, saying, 'In the area of wilderness survival, you turned out to be long on opinion but short on expertise. Even so, I tolerated your company because you gave me to understand that your contacts would be useful once we reached civilization. However, I have not seen anything of you for the two days we've spent in Venis. Now you show up like a bad penny, having squandered your money on fancy gear such as that new barysal gun, and you have the audacity to expect me to pay for your passage. Boche, you are an idiot.'

Though taken aback, he is not at a loss for words. 'I expected a little more support from you. Have you forgotten that I started out with a gesture of comradeship by paying your bill at the Etruscan Inn before I knew a thing about you?'

'That, more than anything else, should have warned me off associating with you; it's the typical con-man's opening gambit.' You give a bored sigh. 'Farewell, Boche.'

You walk off towards the seafront before he can say anything else. Delete the codeword *Diamond* from your Adventure Sheet and then turn to **246**.

268

You travel upriver. Flurries of sleet sweep out of the evening sky. Veering west, you steer towards the pyramids of Giza where they stand outlined against the feeble afterglow of sunset. The Sphinx lies huddled with banks of snow along its stone flanks, face ravaged by frostbite. You set the sky-car down and trudge across the icy plain towards those ancient ruins. Turn to **440**.

269

You catch on at once. The Fijian obviously works for the person who originally owned your ID card, and rushed up here in search of his boss, only to find you instead. ‘There was another person here,’ you glibly tell the man, ‘who suffered a heart attack just minutes ago and was taken on a stretcher to the medical lounge. Could that have been your boss?’

His jaw drops, then he races out and stabs anxiously at the elevator button. You join him and politely ask for the ground floor. Watching him fidget impatiently as the elevator descends, you say, ‘Don’t worry, the Society has excellent medical facilities – the best in Kahira. I’m sure your boss will be all right.’

The elevator stops at the floor for the medical lounge and the Fijian gets out. You continue down to the lobby and leave without delay, before he discovers he’s been lied to. Turn to **311**.

270

You find the missing bodyguard, Goro, lying only fifty metres from the ice cave where you took shelter. He froze to death on his hands and knees, crawling in the teeth of the blizzard. Snow is piled around the body. Ice cakes his features, which are locked rigid in an expression of stubborn intensity. The other two, who may be his brothers for all you know, betray no emotion at the sight. Of course, they must have realized he couldn't have survived. 'Shall we bury him, boss?' says one.

Shandor looks at the sky. Dusk is already descending along the edge of the valley, shadows creeping like blots of soot across the crisp white snow. He considers, then gives a curt nod back towards the crevasse. 'Toss the body down into the cave – it's as good a tomb as any. I want to be off this glacier by nightfall.'

After sliding Goro's body down into the crevasse, the four of you trudge on in silence. By the time you crest the shoulder of bare black rock bordering the glacier, the stars are beginning to glimmer between the low banks of cloud. Something impels you to glance back. You see the last of the sunlight trickle off the world. In the same instant, a slurry of thick purple steam gushes out of the crack in the ice far behind. You rub your eyes and look again. Now there is nothing. It must have been a trick of the fading light.

Shandor's bodyguards have found a spur of rock to give cover from the night winds. They warm it

with blasts from their barysal guns, leaving the rock surface pleasantly warm when you hunker down beside it to eat the rations that Shandor shares out. If you possess the shortsword from the body in the ice, turn to **291**. If one of the others took it, turn to **312**.

271

A man emerges from a low building and stands in a wary posture as he watches you approach. He licks his lips nervously and shifts his grip on the shovel he is holding, but your impression is that he is nervous rather than hostile. When you smile and hold out your hand, he relaxes with a shrug and tosses the shovel aside, introducing himself as Portrin Fax. He is a loose-limbed fellow, slender as a starved mantis, with fretfully pursed lips and wet blinking eyes.

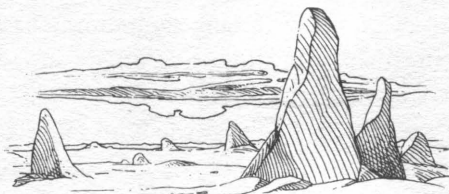
His dwelling is paved with umber and grey tiles and shows signs of having once been a transit terminal of some kind. The air is cool. Panels along the side wall shed a bright white light. The only items of furniture are rickety frameworks of wood with ragged furs stretched over them. Fax waves you to what he describes as a chair and pours drinks. You take the mug he offers, wincing at the powerful fumes. 'My own liquor,' he explains. 'I brew it by mixing herbs into a tank of cleaning fluid.'

You pour the drink away when he isn't looking. 'You live alone here?'

He sits, folds his arms, only to leap up and stride around the room. Company clearly makes him nervous. 'A hermit, that's old Fax,' he says. 'In the

outside world I was a misfit, but here I live like the Sun King. The city has generators which supply light and keep the air cooled.' He giggles. 'Who would dream, in this time of the fimbulwinter, that a man might wish for a cool breath of air? But here in Lyonesse it is necessary.'

If you have LORE, turn to **313**. If not, turn to **356**.



272

You are held at gunpoint while your arms are wrenched behind your back and securely tied. You test the bonds, but these are men who have learned not to be careless. One of them rummages through your belongings, then jerks his thumb contemptuously towards you. 'Are we keeping an extra mouth to feed, then, Snarvo?'

The man with the knife sneers. 'Not unless you want a pet for yourself, mate.'

'Just get on with it, Snarvo,' mutters the third man, tucking the gun back into his belt. 'And don't get blood on the rug.'

Skarvo steps forward, an unpleasant grin creasing his weather-hardened features, and his knife brings your life and your adventure to a sticky end.

The sun shows itself as a golden blur in the east, smoky and cheerless under an overhang of sullen cloud. The air grows colder as you walk, the warm geysers of the pass soon lost to view in the overcast.

The way rises into foothills, then the brooding hulks of the Atlas Mountains. Long shoulders of rock lie bare to the sky: the carcass of old Earth, gaunt under its pall of snow. Craggs scrape up past you on all sides, stern and daunting, like pillars supporting a canopy of snow-bloated clouds.

A frosty halitus hangs over the high hills. You find the landscape both magnificent and dispiriting and are glad when, after another two days, you begin to descend towards a broad windswept plain. If you have SURVIVAL, you manage to locate a few rodents in their burrows; once wind-dried, the meat is hard but acceptable. If you do not have SURVIVAL you must either delete a food pack from your list of possessions or, if you have no food packs, lose 1 Life Point.

The only other people you spy are a group of Hamadan ascetics on their shaggy camels. They pay no attention to you, as their creed insists that they disdain all outsiders. Adjusting their white-and-tan turbans with cold contempt, they go bounding off across the lone and level snows. Turn to **393**.



274

With broad witless smiles, the priestess and her followers accept your donation. You must give them all your money. If you have no money, you must give them two possessions of your choice instead. 'Thank you, pilgrim,' says the priestess. 'The goddess will watch over you.'

'May she bring you as much good fortune as I believe you deserve,' you reply ambiguously. 'Now, if you'll excuse me, I'd like to get some sleep.'

You settle down among the litter, finding sleep hard to come by now that you are seething with fury at having been robbed. As daylight begins to show as a pearly gleam beyond the city spires, you rouse yourself and head towards the bazaar. Turn to 333.

275

Riza conducts you along a passage which leads into what seems at first like open air. Seeing you look around in amazement, he laughs and points across a lawn towards a group of buildings. You now see that the horizon seems to rise upwards the further you look, curving over into the sky until it is lost behind a haze of light directly overhead. To either side of you, only a few hundred metres away, unimaginably vast slabs of cliff reach off into the sky.

'Did you expect a cramped space-station in the ancient style?' says Riza. 'We have enlarged al-Lat over the centuries, until it is what you see today: a cylinder some two kilometres wide and half a kilometre long. Rotation provides us with gravity,

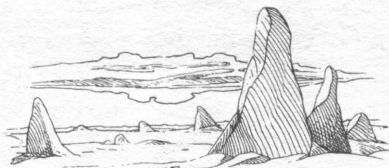


the sun's rays with light and heat.'

You have to admit that it is more comfortable than Earth is these days. Riza takes you to his flyer, and soon you are dropping towards Earth's atmosphere. You descend just ahead of the dawn, touching down on the shore of the Sea of Reeds at a fishing village called Sudan. You bid Riza farewell and stand watching as the flyer climbs back up into the early morning sky. If you want to do some shopping in Sudan, turn to **101**. If you are eager to set out for Du-En without delay, turn to **234**.

276

The hovering platform conveys you to a circular landing marked 'Research Level'. You step off and conduct a quick exploration of the rooms on this floor. In a long hall you find lockers containing cold-weather clothing, food packs and medical kits – many more than any one person would ever need. You rip open one of the food packs. The contents are still fresh. Take whatever you want from here, amending your list of possessions to show how many cold-weather suits, food packs and medical kits you now have. (Remember you are limited to a total of eight items in all.) If you have activated Little Gaia, turn to **14**. If not, turn to **36**.



277

The bometh sits like a sphinx atop the rise, head lifted to the star-filled sky. Wisps of breath escape its nostrils. It seems oblivious of your approach as you slowly work your way around and then stalk closer from downwind. But as you close the last few metres and leap from hiding, it rises with a languid growl and turns its long scything fangs to slash at you. Only now, as it rears up to grapple with you, do you get a sense of the bometh's size and power. It is enough to make your knees go weak. The beast must weight half a tonne!

The battle is ferocious and bloody. Without CLOSE COMBAT, you do not have a chance: the bometh sinks its teeth deep into your chest and proceeds to rip out your lungs. If you have CLOSE COMBAT, lose 5 Life Points and turn to **341** if you survive.

278

The sun lurches into view above the city walls – a disk as pale as watery milk. Out in the main square, the others are preparing to set out into the ruins. You see Golgoth clipping on his weapon-belt as he chats to the Gargan sisters. Apparently they have agreed to explore as a team. Surprisingly, Gaunt and Thadra Bey have also formed a group. Baron Siriasis and Vajra Singh both opt to search for the Heart alone.

Vajra Singh oversees the drawing of lots. 'We shall set off into the ruins at fifteen minute intervals determined by the lots,' he tells the others. 'You can explore individually or in groups, as you prefer.

Remember that the truce applies only here in the open. If groups encounter each other while in the catacombs below the city, they must negotiate or else do battle.'

If you wish to descend into the catacombs, turn to **385**. If you think a day's rest is in order, turn to **363**.

279

'You don't have what it takes, Gaunt,' you say as you gaze up at the constellations. 'You're too reflective – too prone to see all sides of an issue. You lack that "heart of ice" that makes a man ruthless and successful.'

If you have the codeword *Gilgamesh*, turn to **299**. If not, turn to **321**.

280

The elevator door slides open. You are confronted by one of the hover-droids which immediately opens fire. Although you twist to one side, the blast rips through your arm, burning you to the bone. Lose 6 Life Points unless you possess a speculum jacket, in which case lose only 4 Life Points.

If still alive, you stab desperately at the button. As the door closes, you see Thadra Bey die in a hail of laser-blasts. If you cannot figure out the answers that the computer wants to hear, you will be next. Turn to **301**.

You enter a lofty room that is plunged in gloom. Boche flicks his torchlight around and it falls on a curious sight. The light seems to spill slowly, like a puddle of oil, through a zone several metres across. In the middle stands a man in old-fashioned military dress. Beside him on the floor lies a metal globe about the size of an egg, covered with glowing studs.

‘It is a stasis bomb, I believe,’ announces the baron in his stern clipped tones. ‘Watch.’

He glides off, skirting the zone where the torch beam slowed down. You see him drifting around the far perimeter. But then suddenly he comes back into view around the edge of the zone, even though you can still see his image moving beyond it!

‘The stasis bomb slows down time in a two-metre radius,’ explains the baron. ‘Light takes several seconds to cross the zone, which is why you can still see my image floating on the other side.’

As you watch, the image moves around the zone, disappearing like a ghost as it reaches the edge. ‘How long has that man been frozen there?’ wonders Boche.

‘Probably since the fall of Du-En. Almost two hundred years. That period will have seemed to him like only a few seconds.’

If you have LORE, turn to **323**. If not, you can try to free the man using either a charged barysal gun (turn to **345**) or PARADOXING and a psionic focus (turn to **366**), or you can leave him frozen and continue on your way (turn to **388**).

282

You take a step back and shoot again as the baron's brain swoops closer. This time you use your own psionic power to break through the force field. The blast strikes the brain dead centre. There is a horrible psychic shriek as it falls to the floor and shrivels. You press your hands to your ears, but you cannot shut out those death-cries, cries that will haunt your dreams forevermore. Reduce your barysal gun's charge by one and then turn to **261**.

283

A merchant takes you to a vault tunnelled into the block of one of the great piazzas. Passing through a door guarded by two burly men with iron batons, you wait in a short corridor lit by a flickering light panel. At last a steel door opens at the far end and you walk through into the merchant's storeroom. Here he shows you what he has for sale:

Barysal gun (with six charges)	16 scads
Psionic focus	18 scads
Polarized goggles	8 scads
Flashlight	10 scads
Gas mask	10 scads
Stun grenade	8 scads
Knife	4 scads

'I will also buy such items,' the merchant tells you, 'at half the price I've quoted for sale.'

This means that if you have a barysal gun you could sell it to him for 8 scads, for instance. 'Why should I wish to sell?' you ask him.

His lip curls in an inscrutable half-smile. 'You have come to Venis for the ferry, I presume. You'll need money for your ticket.'

Make any purchases or sales you wish. Then, if you have **STREETWISE** turn to **414**. If not, turn to **25**.

284

You both draw your guns at the same time. If you have **SHOOTING**, turn to **327**. Otherwise decide if you will aim at his chest (turn to **348**), his throat (turn to **369**), or between his eyes (turn to **391**).

285

Night overtakes you on the slope of the mountain. You have to scoop snow to make a rudimentary shelter, and even so the wind numbs you to the core of your bones. Lose 2 Life Points – unless you have **SURVIVAL**, in which case you know how to construct an effective shelter and you lose only 1 Life Point.

Morning comes as a sullen grey intrusion of light across the cloud-draped sky. Stamping the circulation back into your weary limbs, you set off towards Venis. Turn to **199**.

286

In the hotel bar, you strike up conversation with a tall sloe-eyed woman called Thadra Bey. Her accent tells you she is a native of al-Lat, the huge space colony in Earth-Moon orbit. 'I hear that conditions on al-Lat are vastly better than on Earth,' you remark over a glass of synthash. 'But perhaps you are down

on business?’

She sips at her drink. ‘What I seek is only available here. On al-Lat, the science of genetic engineering cannot be practised for fear of infecting the colony with a deadly plague. Consequently, the only improvements that can be made to the human body are by mechanical means.’

‘Your own body appears not to need any improvement,’ you put in politely.

She continues as though you had not spoken: ‘A friend of mine had an implant along her optic nerve so that she could tell the time merely by blinking. The device became permanently stuck on, so that she could not sleep because of seeing lighted numerals in front of her eyes. Worse, it was three minutes fast.’ She finishes her drink, waving away the waiter who tries to refill it. ‘Here on Earth the body can be enhanced more efficiently, using genetic retroviruses. Specifically, I seek a man called Malengin who is said to trade in such things.’

If you have **STREETWISE** (or a vade-mecum) and want to help her, turn to **307**. If not, turn to **329**.

287

Remember to cross off the sum of 6 scads. This retrovirus confers the ability to see in almost total darkness. Note on your Adventure Sheet that you have ‘night vision’, then turn back to **434**.

288

Delete the codeword *Diamond* if you have it.

Perhaps one of your skills could help you secure a place on the ferry. If you have **PILOTING** and want to make use of it, turn to **309**. If you prefer to rely on **ROGUERY**, turn to **331**. If you resort to **CUNNING**, turn to **226**. If you have none of these, turn to **352**.

289

From a cruising height of thirty metres, the Ice Wastes resemble a sea of luminous snow broken by islands of exposed black rock. The wind shrieks across the land without respite, driving swathes of powdery snow which has carved strange shapes from the surrounding cliffs. You see few signs of life. This is one of the most desolate regions of Earth. The daylight is bleakly pale, the dusk as blue as smoke, and the night sky is filled with a thousand stars scintillating in the gaps between colossal crags of cloud.

Days pass like a blur. And then at last, glowering on the horizon, you see the grim black walls of a ruined city. You have arrived at Du-En. If you have the codeword *Diamond*, delete it and turn to **191**. If not, turn to **213**.

290

You dive into the elevator and jab the button. The Fijian comes charging towards you. 'Stop! Imposter!' he bellows. You are relieved that the doors close before he can get to you.

Just as you are about to take the elevator down to the ground level, it occurs to you that he might call ahead to the lobby and have you intercepted by security guards. If you decide to chance it, turn to **354**. If you go up to the roof instead, turn to **376**.

291

You are woken by the touch of fingers on your face. They feel like icicles. You look up, and in the silver lustre of the moonlight you see a man bending over you. You open your mouth to scream, but the only sound you can muster is a stifled croak of dread. It is the same man you saw frozen inside the glacier!

You press back against the rock and get your legs under you, slowly sliding to a standing position. The man watches you with an uncanny expression of capricious menace, like a cat confronted with an odd-looking canary.

A severed arm lies by your feet in the snow. A head, half buried a short distance off, stares with glazed eyes. You look around in mounting horror. Shandor and his men have been brutally murdered while you slept.

The strange man smiles, but not in a human way. He looks like a living shadow. It is amazing that he doesn't freeze to death in those thin overalls. His hand comes up, a flicker of ivory in the darkness. 'The sword,' he murmurs. 'My sword. Return it to me.'

If you have **CLOSE COMBAT**, turn to **398**. If you have **PARADOXING** and a psionic focus, turn to **377**. If

292-293

you have SHOOTING and a charged barysal gun, turn to **355**. If you have none of these, turn to **419**.

292

Day and night have no meaning in Lyonesse, forever drenched in its own block of humid sunshine. You find a place to rest, awaking to find the golden beams at a low slant. A thick tangible darkness hovers between the thick fleshy leaves. Insects scurry and swarm. You have been bitten by gnats while you slept, causing you to scratch furiously as you make ready to set out. The itching of insect-bites is an unfamiliar sensation in the latterday Ice Age. So is the lassitude brought on by the heat. You are now almost eager to leave the hot jungle region behind. Turn to **420**.

293

The gondo meets you early the next day outside your hotel and leads you east out of town. Leaving the narrow understreets and the elegant crumbling mansions on their high stone platforms, you pass first through the warren of wooden buildings lining the outskirts of the town. The road becomes a hard slippery tract of frozen mud. Now you are surrounded by the ramshackle dwellings of Venis's slums: crude hovels with roofs of moss and scavenged fibreglass. The inhabitants are crippled beggars who peer out in fear as you pass.

As you leave the city behind, the temperature drops severely. A harsh wind howls into your face,

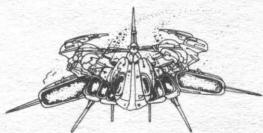
scattering drifting veils of snow off the rolling terrain ahead. You trudge on, hood pulled tight across your face, following the gondo and wondering whether you would not have done better to stay by the fireside at your hotel.

The gondo stops and points at a white hump on the landscape. You see a wide door of black metal in the hillside. Advancing, you realize that the hillock is probably a building buried deep under snow and ice. The door intrigues you, since it must be heated internally to be clear of ice itself. You try pushing, soon discovering that it rolls up on smooth bearings. Dim green light shines out from inside.

The gondo refuses to come inside with you. 'It's haunted,' he tells you again. 'That's why even the wild animals don't shelter by the door, despite the warmth.'

Scowling at him for his timidity, you step inside. You are in a corridor lit by green lights in the ceiling. The walls and floor are black.

A metallic ringing noise comes out of the gloom. Your nerves are instantly on edge. Something is scuttling through the shadows at the far end of the corridor. If you have SHOOTING (and a charged barysal gun) and want to fire, turn to **373**. Otherwise you can retreat from here and return to town (turn to **395**) or advance for a closer look (turn to **416**).



You stand outside the inn in the grey predawn, waiting for the Gargan twins. They join you as the sun exudes a wash of white gold in the eastern sky. Clouds seep across the heavens like clots of iron filings. The warmth of the geysers attracts swarms of tiny midges which dance in the air as fine as siftings of dust.

Gargan XIII comes over. 'We are ready to set out. You, like us, are bound for the Sahara?' As she speaks, she absent-mindedly plucks a scatter of midges out of the air and rolls them to death between her palms.

There is no point in pretending. These two are sharp enough to guess the truth. 'We're all bound for Du-En, I believe. Presumably for the same purpose.'

'Our goals may not accord as closely as you imagine,' says Gargan XIV as she joins you. 'Still, for the time being we are allies.'

You set out. The way rises first into foothills, then through the brooding hulks of the Atlas Mountains. Long shoulders of rock lie bare to the sky. The sad carcass of old Earth is gaunt under its shroud of snow. Craggs scrape up past you on all sides, stern and daunting, like pillars supporting a canopy of snow-dark cloud. As you walk, you begin to ponder the uneasy alliance between yourself and the Gargan twins. They may be figuring that it is useful to have a third person in their party, because the Saharan Wastes are direly inhospitable. On the other hand, maybe they just intend to tag along and to slay you

when you are off your guard.

Your suspicions are settled on the morning of the third day, when you wake to discover them gone — along with most of your supplies. They have left only your money and clothing. Lose 1 Life Point unless you have SURVIVAL, as it will be hard to forage in this desolate wilderness. Note down the codeword *Scythe* and then turn to **393**.

295

‘The goddess Gaia!’ you cry in a voice of rapture. ‘Blessed is she, exalted above all others. Give praise to Gaia!’

‘Praise be to Gaia!’ they reply like robots.

The priestess fixes you with a gimlet stare. ‘What do you know of our goddess?’

You return a beatific smile. ‘She has given me a holy mission. That is why I have come to Kahira, and if she had not guided me on every step of the journey I would never have survived. It is a miracle indeed!’

One of the others is indignant to hear you say this. ‘Such lies!’ he fumes. ‘It is blasphemy! You must be punished for your blasphemy, unbeliever—’

He starts forward to kick you, but the priestess holds up her hand. She is watching you with a far-away look. ‘No . . . I sense it is the truth.’

You stifle a sigh of relief. Either it’s your honest face, or she has some telepathic ability. You give them a broad grin. ‘It’s perfectly true. Leave me in peace, or Gaia will curse you. Better yet, give

donations to help me in my holy cause!’

With peevish ill-grace they hand over some cash, then shuffle off in search of someone else to victimize. Add 10 scads to your money. At dawn you set off to the bazaar whistling a jaunty tune. Turn to 333.

296

You round on him in shock. ‘And Earth will be left to die?’

‘It’s not our concern,’ he replies with a shrug. ‘We are an independent state. The people of Earth must solve their own problems.’

You give a hollow laugh. ‘You are human! How can you abandon the planet that gave you life? To look on uncaring as she expires under shrouds of ice is inexcusable! If there were a disaster which made al-Lat uninhabitable, where would you go once the Earth is dead? Your indifference is short-sighted and stupid. You people are like survivors of a shipwreck, clinging to broken timbers in a stormy sea, gawping impassively while your ship sinks!’

He thinks for a long moment, then slowly nods. ‘Your arguments are passionate indeed.’ He goes off and returns with a metal box-shaped device the size of a book. ‘This is my pet project. I call it Little Gaia. It is a miniature artificial brain programmed with Gaia’s original personality – that is, from when she was still sane.’ He presses it into your hands. ‘Take it. It is the only aid I can give you, except to wish you luck. Now I must go to find Captain Baihaqi,

who should be ready to take you home.'

Record Little Gaia among your possessions. You are left alone for a few minutes in the laboratory. You could use the computer here to contact Gaia herself. If you wish to do that and you have CYBERNETICS, turn to **339**; if you do not have CYBERNETICS, turn to **360**. If you would rather just wait until Riza Baihaqi comes for you, turn to **275**.

297

The Global Artificial Intelligence Project is conducted on the research level directly above,' replies the voice. 'Current status of the project: on hold. Please step onto the stratum disk.'

In awe of the science that could build a device capable of answering with such intelligence, you do as you are told. The platform ascends to the next level. Turn to **276**.

298

The next day, with the snow glittering like diamond dust under pale gold sunshine, you see a shimmering haze in the middle distance. Approaching, at first you think the oasis ahead is a trick of your imagination. Dwarf conifers surround a steaming pool fringed with moss-covered rocks. Long-beaked birds peck at the ground for grubs. Then you catch a sulphuric tang on the air and realize that the warm updraught here must be rising from fissures deep underground. It feels as unreal as a dream when you pass between the foliage and settle yourself on a slab

of rock, pulling off your clothing to enjoy your first experience of warmth in many days. If you think it might be worth resting up here to recover your strength, turn to **405**. If you are keen to press on without delay, turn to **426**.

299

Gaunt glances at your automaton bodyguard. 'Perhaps you're right,' he says wistfully. Without another word, he turns and wanders back towards the camp, the xoms dutifully following like silent sleepwalkers.

You watch the constellations wheel imperceptibly overhead. Half an hour passes and you begin to notice the cold. It is late. Trudging back to the main square, you see Golgoth checking his weaponry for tomorrow's adventure. Boche waves to you from beside the fire, where he has brewed up some tea. You can join Golgoth (turn to **126**), Boche (turn to **104**), or just go off to bed (turn to **192**).

300

Vajra Singh stands like a demon in the snow, a great slab of a man with a darkly saturnine face and eyes like a lion's. His silver anti-laser armour gleams in the weak sunshine. He watches you all for a moment, scanning you as he might size up a pack of hyenas. Then he raises his huge hand-cannon and touches the fire button. The air is riven by a sound like a volcano erupting as a torrent of blistering white plasma streams from the cannon, juddering across the walls



above and scattering chunks of smouldering masonry far out into the square. Everyone dives for cover. Still unleashing the barrage of crackling energy, Vajra Singh turns and directs it at the foundations of a building across the square. The heavy stone walls burst apart, and slowly the whole façade collapses to leave only a burnt-out shell.

Vajra Singh touches a button on the side of the cannon and the blast cuts out. The roar dies to a low hum. You notice a small red light glow as the weapon powers down. 'That weapon is the mantramuktas,' Janus Gaunt whispers in your ear.

'This squabbling must cease!' snarls Vajra Singh as the others come out from hiding. 'We must work together in the short term or we stand little chance of penetrating as far as the Heart. Is that clear?'

On the side of the mantramukta cannon, a green light winks on. Now you know that it takes a few seconds to rebuild its power after each blast. You see that Chaim Golgoth has noticed this too.

Seeing that the only reply is sullen silence, Vajra Singh goes on: 'Here in the main square we shall remain in a state of truce. While exploring beneath the ruins, this truce is not in force. Also, no underlings or servants are to be taken on expeditions. This is a contest to see which of us deserves the ultimate power, not who is able to hire the most bodyguards.'

Janus Gaunt glances from face to face, then takes it on himself to answer. 'We agree to these terms.'

With a swirl of his majestic robes, Vajra Singh

turns and strides off to his tent, where his four servants stand waiting.

If you have the codeword *Hourglass*, turn to **235**. If not but you do possess a medical kit, turn to **257**. (If you have a Manta sky-car, you will find a medical kit in the storage locker.) If you have neither *Hourglass* nor a medical kit, turn to **278**.

301

'What is the Truth?' asks the computer enigmatically. If you have the codeword *Lunar*, turn to **322**. If not, turn to **61**.

302

You hear a scuttling of many insectoid legs and then a giant black centipede bursts from the cloisters, mandibles churning like oiled blades. It was expecting you to stand helpless as it attacked, but you surprise it by evading its charge and racing off along the gallery, dragging Boche behind you. The baron is guided by his psychic senses, but you see it bite a bloody swathe in his side before he breaks away. The three of you hurtle through the iron-bound door, slamming it behind you. A moment later the monster slams against the door, buckling it inwards on its hinges, but the bolt holds. 'That was a close call,' breathes Boche, wiping a trickle of cold sweat out of his eyes. Turn to **281**.

303

Vajra Singh stabs at the trigger of his cannon and swings it round towards Golgoth. But the USI agent is not taken by surprise. He grabs Boche and throws him forward to take the brunt of the blast. Boche dies instantly, and at the same moment Golgoth drops a canister which releases a thick cloud of white smoke.

Singh looms like a ghost in the spreading cloud. Holding the cannon ready, he peers through the smoke for any sign of movement. You've lost sight of Golgoth.

If you attack Singh with a barysal gun or a stun grenade, turn to **20** (after first crossing off the gun charge or grenade). If you move in closer to give him back-up, turn to **42**. If you step away and wait to see what happens, turn to **262**.

304

Golgoth has no time to reload the crossbow. Drawing a knife, he charges forward, but he is too late to stop you from firing. The barysal shot catches him in the chest and he falls dead at your feet. Reduce your gun's charge by one and turn to **72**.

305

Vajra Singh is a Sikh warlord, and a man of unyielding honour. Since you have no gun, he does not deign to use his own, but instead leaps forward to settle the matter with his bare hands. You see at once that he is a powerful fighter. His punch chops

through the air, and even though you manage to twist aside you can almost feel the shockwave. A single blow from such a warrior could smash through stone.

You skip back on the balls of your feet, trying to make best use of your speed against his naked strength. A punch hammers into your side, and Singh follows it up with a great leonine roar as his foot crunches against your breastbone. You feel ribs crack, but you dive in with a gasp and launch a rapid series of strikes at his face.

If you have CLOSE COMBAT, lose 5 Life Points; otherwise lose 9 Life Points. If you survive, you finally manage to defeat this titanic foe, and you can turn to 415.

306

Boche shudders as he looks along the row of dead white faces. There are at least ten corpses here in the pass, some on this ledge and others perched further along among the rocks. 'They must have climbed up onto the ledge to get away from wolves,' says Boche.

He's wrong. There are no wolves up here in the mountains. And these people were not cowering from predators when they died. In every case they are frozen in postures that suggest curiosity: poised peering out from the ledge, lines of rapture stamped on their faces, icicles across their staring eyes. Death did not surround them with slavering jaws, but stole up softly like a thief in the night.

The sky is fading from grey to black. If you press

on now, you will have to spend the night in open country, unprotected from the bitter wind. If you choose to do that, turn to **285**. If you shelter here in the pass, turn to **349**.

307

You give Thadra Bey a contact who should be able to put her in touch with Malengin. 'This will save me considerable effort,' she murmurs, glancing at the name and address you have written out for her. As she carefully burns the paper over a candleflame, she adds: 'On al-Lat we adhere to a principle of equity in business. I must pay you for this information.'

You wave your hand expansively. 'It's not necessary.'

'But it is.' She speaks firmly. 'I do not wish to be in your debt.' She gives you a packet of antidote pills. 'We take these while on Earth to protect us from the toxins in the air. They are effective against most diseases and poisons. Keep them - I have more in my room.'

She gets up and sweeps out of the bar. Note the packet of antidote pills as one of your possessions, then turn to **329**.

308

Remember to pay the sum of 10 scads. This retrovirus toughens your skin so that you gain 5 Life Points - even above your initial score. (So, if you began the adventure with 10 Life Points your

maximum score will increase to 15.) However, there is a drawback: it also slows your reflexes so that you must lose the AGILITY skill if you have it.

Turn back to **434**, bearing in mind that Malengin has only one of each retrovirus and cannot sell you any more doses of the Exalted Enhancer.

309

You get talking to members of the relief crew who are waiting on the quayside for the ferry to arrive. After brief discussion of general matters, you turn the conversation onto the specifics of your profession. 'I hear that the ferry is a Bauer Turbo-400 hovercraft,' you say. 'Such a machine handles well, particularly in the turbulent waters around the Isis Delta, but you must take care to power down slowly and maintain it at a reasonable temperature. Cooling too quickly risks damage to the skirt and can cause cracks in the jet housings.'

'You are a pilot or shipmaster?' asks a thin-whiskered man who introduces himself as the captain.

'I have often navigated the Inland Sea – usually skirting the coast in a mud-skimmer to avoid pirates, though I have handled a Bauer once or twice.'

The captain points the stem of his pipe at you and nods thoughtfully. 'How would you be fixed for a trip to Kahira?'

'As it happens, that is precisely where I wish to go,' you say, shouldering your pack.

'Well, if you're not afraid of hard work then I

think I can find a job for you on board.' He goes on to discuss the details of employment. In addition to earning your passage to Kahira, you will be paid a further twenty scads. Add this sum to your money and then turn to **246**.

310

Sheltered from the freezing blast of the night wind by the craggy walls of the pass, you huddle down and snatch a few hours of fitful sleep. In this you take turns, one of you trudging up and down to stay warm while the other dozes. Even your best efforts cannot keep the deathly chill out of your bones, though, and at the end of the night you have lost 1 Life Point (unless you have SURVIVAL, in which case you are hardy enough to endure the cold).

Morning pushes crooked fingers of wan silver light through the thick clouds. Rising and rubbing the circulation back into your weary limbs, you gather your things together and set off towards Venis. Turn to **199**.

311

The hour is late. It is time you found somewhere to pass the night. The Ossiman Hotel is still open, and charges 5 scads for a bed. If you wish to take a room there, cross off the sum of 5 scads and turn to **333**. If you prefer to save money by sleeping rough on the streets, turn to **165**.

312

You awaken and look around, then give a sob of horror and leap half to your feet, scrambling back against the rock. The others are dead, their bodies ripped apart and scattered far across the fresh white snow. When you see there is no immediate threat, your pounding heartbeat starts to return to normal and you venture over to a headless torso which you identify as Hal Shandor. It is strange to see a man so vital and full of strength now a broken shell as lifeless as clay. And as bloodless. Scanning the snow you notice there is hardly a drop of blood to be seen.

You do not know what animal could have torn Shandor and his hulking bodyguards limb from limb in total silence. Nor do you want to find out. You make a cursory search of the shreds of clothing you can see, finding an ID card, a flashlight, and a barysal gun with one remaining charge. Take what you wish, remembering to record new possessions on your Adventure Sheet, then turn to **161**.

313

Electric lighting is rare enough in this age, and is usually arranged by means of a coal-fuelled or oil-fuelled generator. For there still to be electricity here, when Marsay has been abandoned for nearly two centuries, there must be a nuclear power source. Presumably such a power source would have to be regulated by computers, giving the possibility of a link to Gaia. If you have CYBERNETICS, turn to **335**. If not, turn to **356**.

314

You stumble on through the snow with a howling wind at your back. The air is so cold that each breath rasps in your throat, and your limbs are soon weary and numb. You are on the point of collapse when you find a rocky outcropping that gives partial shelter from the blizzard. You huddle down behind it and wait for daybreak.

Lose 2 Life Points (unless you have SURVIVAL, in which case you improvise a scooped shell of snow for better protection from the wind chill, and need only lose 1 Life Point). If you survive, turn to **393**.

315

A look of keen enthusiasm crackles behind his tranquil gaze, and for a moment you feel you've glimpsed the true Chaim Golgoth. 'The barysal gun is a potent weapon,' he admits, 'but it is limited by charges and is prone to malfunction. This can lead to inconvenience. The crossbow also has its limitations, of course, but against unarmoured human opponents I find it quite reliable.'

'Golgoth is a stickler for efficiency,' remarks Boche with a smile of undisguised dislike. 'Efficiency, in his case, is usually measured in terms of deaths per minute.'

Golgoth shrugs, apparently not bothered by Boche's views. 'By that criterion, the efficient agent just needs to equip himself with a few plutonium bombs. If only my superiors weren't so stingy with expenses!' Turn to **358**.

316

The alley is too narrow for you to have space to use a gun, even if you are carrying one. Launching yourself at the fanatics with a roar of rage, you lash out with fists and feet. Somebody grabs your arm, but you twist free and shove him back into the priestess. A punch spins you round, but you keep your wits enough to drop low to avoid a follow-up, then straighten and drive your shoulder into your attacker's belly. He slumps with a groan.

Lose 4 Life Points unless you have CLOSE COMBAT, in which case lose only 2 Life Points. If you survive, you manage to fight free of them and run off, taking shelter in a boarded-up doorway as they clatter past in angry pursuit. You listen to them recede into the fog. Hobbling painfully from your wounds, you go in search of a safer place to spend the rest of the night. Turn to **253**.

317

He gives you a dubious sidelong look. 'It is not so simple as all that. Our way of life here on al-Lat is governed by a complex creed, of which you know nothing. We are a society which is closed to outsiders.'

The door of the laboratory slides open at this point and Riza Baihaqi comes back in. 'I'm about to take a flyer back down to Earth, so I can drop you at Sudan,' he says bluffly. 'Have you been learning about our work here? I hope it will prove useful in your venture.' Turn to **275**.

318

Do you have the codeword *Gilgamesh*? If so, turn to 340. If not, turn to 425.

319

The bometh moves off and the binoculars enable you to follow at a safe distance. You watch it slinking between the furrows of snow, a blot of shadow flowing in the moonlight. Seeing it disappear into a snowdrift, you move closer and compose yourself for a long wait. Two or three hours go by. At last it emerges, sniffs at the air, and lopes off in search of prey.

Once it is out of sight, you scramble over to the snowdrift, pushing along a tunnel into a hollowed-out cavity where there are three small bomeths on a nest of moulted fur. Ignoring them, you turn your attention to the closely packed walls of the lair, the bometh's 'larder', where the beast has stored remains of previous kills. You dig out what looks like the carcass of a large fowl. The icy cold has preserved it well. Wrapping the flesh carefully, you make one food pack which you can add to your list of possessions.

One of the young bomeths nips at your ankle. The teeth do not penetrate your boot, but it is a timely reminder that the parent might return at any time. You squirm back to the open and hurry away. Turn to 298.

320

You swallow the pills and soon begin to feel much better. Even so, the sleepless night has left you exhausted. Out in the main square, the others are preparing for another day's exploration of the ruins. With submerged tension forever threatening to boil over into open warfare, you know that you need all your wits about you. Your rivals are unlikely to find the Heart today – better that you rest now, and gather your strength for what lies ahead.

If you are injured and have a medical kit, you can restore 1 Life Point. (If you have a Manta sky-car, you will find a medical kit in the storage locker.) Delete the codeword *Hourglass* and then turn to 363.

321

'I shall always think of you as having been a friend,' says Gaunt after a long pause.

Something in the words makes them sound like an epitaph. You look round to see the xoms facing you with long crystal knives. 'What's going on?' you demand.

In the dulled light of the glow-lamps, Gaunt himself looks like a pale phantom. You see the gleam of his teeth as he smiles. 'I must find the key to my own ruthless nature, or tomorrow I shall die,' he murmurs. 'Do you know that the desire for power and change is the desire for one's own death? By expunging you, whom I admire, I expunge that weakness in myself. For you see, come what may, I shall have the Heart.'

‘You’re completely mad!’

He nods. ‘I must be. It is not sane to covet the role of God.’ He gestures and the xoms shuffle forward, digging their knives against your chest.

A shot rings out and one of the xoms falls, flames spouting from a blast hole through its chest. Gaunt whirls in time to see a small man in combat fatigues tackling him to the ground.

Vajra Singh steps out of the shadows with his two other guards behind him. They are Brits – small men with pallid pinched faces, thuggish but famous for their loyalty. The one standing over Gaunt presses a gun to his head and glances at Singh. ‘Shall I kill ’im, sah?’ he barks. Singh nods. A blast of plasma scrambles Gaunt’s brains into the snow. The xoms jerk back and their arms drop listlessly to their sides.

You breathe a sigh. ‘A timely intervention. You saved my life.’

Vajra Singh hardly looks at you. ‘Gaunt broke the terms of the truce. He would have died tomorrow, in any case. He was a weak man.’ He turns and strides off with his guards following.

If you have the codeword *Nemesis* and want to tell Singh what you know, turn to **343**. Otherwise you can return to the main square and either converse with Kyle Boche (turn to **104**) or Chaim Golgoth (turn to **126**), or else get some sleep (turn to **192**).



322

You remember the catechism that Eleazar Picard kept reciting after the fall of Du-En. What better code for the high priests to use than the most basic tenets of their faith? If only you can recall the precise wording . . . Turn to **18**.

323

He is wearing the red-and-violet uniform of the Monitor Corps, personal troops of Eleazar Picard, the Volentine High Priest. Perhaps he was fighting to defend him when the populace of the city rebelled. If you want to free him, it might be possible using either a charged barysal gun to destroy the stasis bomb (turn to **345**) or PARADOXING and a psionic focus to cancel the time distortion effect (turn to **366**). Otherwise, you can continue deeper into the catacombs (turn to **388**).

324

Boche suddenly yells: 'Let's get him, then, Golgoth!'

Vajra Singh, whirling, makes a split-second decision about who is his most dangerous adversary. Pressing the power button on the mantramukta, he directs a blistering torrent of raw energy at Golgoth. Golgoth reacts by flinging himself into a sideways roll, firing a continuous barrage at Singh as he moves. Both blasts find their target at the same time. Singh falls with a pencil-thin barysal burn through his eye-socket; Golgoth is engulfed and blown to cinders.

It has taken place in seconds. Now only you and Boche are left. He smiles and winks at you. You start to smile back, but it freezes on your face as he turns to show you the barysal gun he has trained on you.

'Well, Boche,' you say, 'is this post-hypnotic treachery, or the regular kind?'

'I knew you'd turn on me if I didn't act first,' he replies with a shrug. 'Only one can have the Heart.'

It is not pleasant to stare down the barrel of a barysal gun. You had better decide what to do. You can use SHOOTING if you have a charged gun of your own (turn to **347**), use PARADOXING if you have a psionic focus (turn to **390**), or try throwing a knife if you have one (turn to **368**). If you have none of those, turn to **411**.

325

You spend an hour or so exploring the area, which turns out to be a range of storerooms and living quarters. 'Obviously it's one of the bomb shelters built in the last days of Du-En,' says Golgoth, shining his torch through into a dusty hospital ward. He bangs the map box against the wall to encourage it to give a clearer picture. 'That being the case, I'm not so sure we'll find a route through to the temple area. The society's leaders would have had more luxurious shelters than this.'

'You want luxury?' calls Gargan XIV from down the corridor. 'We got your luxury right here.'

Joining the sisters, you enter an auditorium with banks of seats facing a curtain. Cold silver light



flickers from plates of frosted glass set into the ceiling. The light gives a strobe effect, so that you all seem to be moving like figures in a jerky freeze-frame video. Gargan XIII pulls the curtain aside. In the flashes of light and dark, you see a stage where a dozen puppets stand in elegant postures.

You follow Golgoth up onto the stage. The puppets, about a metre tall, are suspended by thin copper wires from high in the grid above the stage. Each is robed like a warrior of ancient times and has a scimitar in his hand. You reach out and feel one. It is sharp enough to prick your finger.

Then, in the space between one flicker of light and the next, something changes. At first you cannot tell

what, then it hits you: the puppets are moving. Gargan XIII gives a grunt of pain and you see the livid streak of a wound on her forearm. 'They're alive!' she cries. 'Let's get out of here!'

If you have the codeword *Gilgamesh*, turn to **132**. If not but you have **AGILITY**, turn to **22**. If you have neither, turn to **66**.

326

Golgoth wastes no time reloading the crossbow. Throwing it aside, he draws a knife and dives at you. You block his first thrust but take a gash on your forearm, countering with a leg sweep which leaves him off-balance.

The fight is short and brutal. Golgoth is a master of lethal killing techniques. Lose 5 Life Points – or 3 Life Points if you have **CLOSE COMBAT**. If you can survive that, you manage to twist the knife around and impale him. Turn to **72**.

327

Singh is more used to his cannon than the light pistol, and you are just a fraction faster. Your barysal beam splits the air and he falls without a sound. It is only as you go over to inspect the body that you realize he had a chance of hitting you with a dying shot. He chose not to take that shot. Why? Because it would have been petty to deprive you of victory when you had beaten him fairly? You can think of no better explanation. Singh died as he had lived: a man of uncompromising honour. Turn to **415**.

328

Boche is not only interested in food. While he extracts a parcel of rations from the corpse's pocket, his other hand adroitly filches a money token out of its wallet. He slips this into his boot without telling you. A casual observer would never have noticed it. Not to be outdone, you deftly remove the token while Boche is checking another of the bodies. Touching it to your own money token, you transfer the sum of 60 scads (add this to the total on your Adventure Sheet) and then replace the token before Boche is any the wiser. If you have PARADOXING and a psionic focus, turn to **370**. Otherwise, turn to **306**.

329

With a day or two to wait until the ferry to Kahira arrives, you have time to make preparations for the adventure ahead. You take a stroll along the esplanade overlooking the gambling rooms of the notorious Hazard Strip. Below you, in the deep alley that was once the grandest of the canals, glaring neon lights and raucous music intrude on the wistful grandeur of Venis by night.

You consider your options. If you want to spend your time trying to communicate with Gaia, turn to **351**. If you want to discover more about the Heart of Volent, turn to **91**. If you enquire after travellers who have gone missing on their way to Venis recently, turn to **451**. If you go looking for gossip about Kyle Boche, turn to **179**. If you try to find some special purchases for the trip, turn to **350**.

330

Remember to pay the sum of 7 scads. The Virid Mystery cancels any retroviruses you have taken already, so delete any powers you had acquired from Malengin's other concoctions. (It has no effect if this is the first retrovirus you bought.) Turn back to **434**, but bear in mind that Malengin has only one of each retrovirus and cannot sell you any more doses of those you've already tried.

331

Sidling up beside a man in a fur-trimmed cape of scarlet silk, you gesture out to sea. 'There, is that the ferry?'

He glances around, peers out through the icy haze swathing the coastline and then turns to regard you with a withering stare. 'It was a seagull. The ferry is not due for half an hour at least.' With a flourish of his cape he stalks away, unaware that you picked his pocket while he was distracted.

You now have a ticket for the ferry. Turn to **246**.

332

There is nothing for it but to set out on foot, skirting the Inland Sea to reach Kahira by way of Bezant.

You are destined never to reach your goal. As you cross the hills south-east of Bezant that rise to form the Anatolian Plateau, there is a flare of light that spreads rapidly across the sky from the west. It seems as though titanic shockwaves are resounding over the world from a terrible explosion. You turn to run,

but space and time flow around you like water. You fall and, looking up, you imagine a colossal face staring from the far horizon.

'I am Vajra Singh,' says a voice inside your head. 'Now the Heart of Volent is mine, and I shall use it to remake all creation in my own image.'

The world is swept away. Because you delayed too long, the power of the Heart fell into another's hand. Your adventure and your whole cosmos end here.

333

Early morning sunlight drives away the wisps of mist, but there is still a nip in the air as you walk along the narrow streets. Even in this impoverished age, the bazaar of Kahira retains the quaint and colourful air for which it is famous. The alleyways are barely wide enough for one man to pass another without intimacy. Shutters of dark wood open onto shops which display artwork of ancient times: carpets and tapestries, silks, ivory carvings, gold and silver filigree, amulets, spices, wines, dyes and sultry perfumes. A thousand scents mingle in the hazy morning air, wafting from the food stalls where coffee bubbles in tall kettles and pancakes sizzle on the stoves.

You pass a man with a long clay pipe. No doubt his ancestors looked out from that very stall with the same brown high-cheekboned features. Mistaking your thoughtful expression, he urges you over. 'See my fine goods. I have thick furs to keep out the cold.'

If you want to buy a fur coat, cross off 3 scads and add the coat to your list of possessions. When the stall-holder learns you are undertaking a journey, he insists that you follow him to a courtyard wedged between the narrow buildings, where his cousin sells animals and slaves. If you go with him, turn to **338**. If you want to look around the rest of the bazaar, turn to **359**.

334

Dusk is falling by the time you reach the ancient city of Venis. It shimmers with a thousand lights under a sky like dull green bronze. Hungry and cold, you quicken your pace through the outlying streets. You pass the temporary shacks where hunters and traders dwell, then the slums of corrugated iron and plastic which fill the narrow streets that some say were once canals. Above them loom the blocks of ancient plazas, where the rich and powerful inhabitants of the city reside in palatial buildings that are shored up with wooden scaffolding to support them against the ravages of time.

You soon learn that the ferry to Kahira is not due for a couple of days. While waiting, you have a choice of where to take lodgings. The lavish Marco Polo Hotel will charge 12 scads for two nights; the Hotel Paradise will charge 6 scads; the disreputable Doge's Inn will cost only 3 scads.

Decide where you are staying and deduct the money. If you choose the Marco Polo *and* have an ID card, turn to **222**. If you choose the Marco Polo

but do not possess an ID card, turn to **286**. If you opt for the Paradise, turn to **244**. If you check in at the Doge's Inn, turn to **371**.

335

Although the computers monitoring and maintaining the power supply must still be functioning, it is obvious that they are not connected to Gaia. Gaia is too erratic to have kept up such a task for two centuries. However, if you can get access to the computers here in the city then you might be able to set up a link with Gaia. Turn to **356**.

336

'Possibly you overestimate Gaia's powers; she does not control the sun,' you reply with a scornful laugh. The screen flickers and a blue globe logo appears announcing access to Gaia. Quickly you type: 'GAIA, ARE YOU THERE?'

'WHERE IS THERE? HERE IS EVERYWHERE.'

Unfortunately Gaia is in one of her confused phases. You try again: 'HOW MUST I REACH DU-EN?'

'GIZA FIRST. THE PYRAMID.' You seem to sense, in the juddering way the type appears on the screen, a great struggle going on inside Gaia's mind. 'YOU CAN FIND A FRIEND IN GILGAMESH. ENTER HUMBABA . . .'

The message degenerates into gibberish. You break the link then, after pausing to reflect, you order

the local computer to shut down. There is a chance it became afflicted with Gaia's viruses during the link, and it would not do to have a nuclear reactor go critical somewhere nearby.

'I'm afraid you'll lose electricity soon,' you tell Fax. 'There's probably enough power in the storage cells for a day or two, then you'll have to make other arrangements for your lighting and so forth.'

His jaw sags. 'What have you done? You have wrecked my little paradise, all for the sake of a word with your precious Gaia!'

You shrug. 'Those few words might bring the salvation of mankind – if I can work out what they mean.' Write the codeword *Humbaba* on your Adventure Sheet. Now you can either try one of the tunnels (turn to 439) or else say goodbye to Fax and continue your journey west (turn to 420).

337

His gaze narrows just for an instant as he listens to the question. 'Giza was a military base a few clicks west. Long before that, I'm told, it was an ancient burial ground. It's deserted now anyway. And off-limits. I recommend you steer well clear of the place.'

Boche takes your arm. 'Excuse us,' he says to Golgoth, 'but we have business in Kahira and I don't care to have my throat slit beforehand.'

Golgoth grins. 'Boche, you slit your throat every time you open your mouth!' Turn to 358.

338

You are shown a burrek – a hulking, thick-shouldered animal with shaggy white fur and a lugubrious snout. ‘The nomads use such creatures when they wish to cross the Ice Wastes,’ the trader tells you. ‘They huddle beside the beast in blizzards, and when hungry they tap its veins to make a blood pudding.’

‘What a sickening thought!’

He nods sagely. ‘Indeed, it is probably only just preferable to dying of starvation. Still, if you intend to cross the Sahara you cannot do without a burrek. This stout animal is for sale at the generous price of thirty scads.’

After some haggling, the price drops to 10 scads. If you want to buy the burrek for this sum, adjust your remaining money and note the burrek on your Adventure Sheet. The burrek does not count against your limit of eight possessions because of course, you do not have to carry it: it will follow you around. (If you have a Manta sky-car then there is no point in buying a burrek, as it would not fit inside.)

Now turn to **359**.

339

Your fingers fly across the keyboard, bringing up a rapid sequence of access codes, file menus and options. Safety systems are in place to prevent accidental communication with Gaia. You override them, opening a channel via one of the al-Lat station’s external radio dishes which connects you to

an Earth weather satellite. In less than thirty seconds you are through to Gaia herself. You flip the link to 'Display Only' so that no one overhears you. Glancing nervously at the door, you quickly bring Gaia up to date with what has been happening.

The screen fills with a torrent of glowing words: ACTIVATION OF THE HEART WILL CREATE A NEW UNIVERSE. THE PRESENT UNIVERSE WILL BE DESTROYED IN THE PROCESS. I RECOMMEND DESTRUCTION OF THE HEART. ACCOMPLISH THIS USING TWO BARYSAL BEAMS ALIGNED AT RIGHT ANGLES: THE CRYSTALLINE LATTICE OF THE HEART WILL BE DISRUPTED.

Startling news! You are anxious to question Gaia further while she is in a communicative mood, but someone might come in and find you at any minute. You break the link, turning from the screen just in time to see the door open and Riza Baihaqi come back in. Acquire the codeword *Nemesis* and turn to **382**.

340

You walk through to the adjacent chamber, Gilgamesh following with clanking strides. The podium is empty. 'Are there others like you?' you ask him. 'Where can I find them?'

There is the briefest of pauses as his artificial mind assimilates the question. 'I am the prototype,' he responds. 'I was created to guard against danger from the Volentine sect. I know of no others.'

You glance at him, a huge armoured automaton

thrumming with power. The way that he stands so immobile, inexorably measuring each remark in the depths of his nonhuman brain, makes for an eerie and unnerving scene. You remind yourself that he is your servant – dangerous to your foes, not to you. ‘Come with me,’ you tell him. ‘We are leaving.’ Turn to **361**.

341

You look down at the huge carcass stretched out in the pale moonlight. If you have either a knife or shortsword with which to cut it up, turn to **362**. If not but you have CUNNING, turn to **384**. Failing either of those options, you cannot make any use of your kill: turn to **298**.

342

The truth dawns on you with chilling horror: you have a wasting disease. It will spread, gnawing away at you from inside. Now the race for the Heart takes on a vivid new importance, as it is only by obtaining its power that you can cure your body of the sickness. If you possess a medical kit (or a Manta sky-car, which has a medical kit in its locker) turn to **257**. If not, turn to **278**.

343

You hurry to catch up with Singh and tell him about Gaia’s warnings. At first he seems barely interested, but gradually your words get through. He comes to a halt and turns to stare into your face. ‘You propose

an alliance,' he says. 'This is wise. If we are allies, we are virtually certain to prevail against all others and reach the Heart. Tomorrow, you go with Baron Siriasis and I shall team up with Golgoth. They are our most dangerous adversaries. If the opportunity arises, we must slay them.'

'What if your group finds the Heart first? Or my group, for that matter?'

'I swear I shall not take its power until only you and I are left. Then together we can discuss the future of the cosmos.'

You watch him march back to his tent. You feel sure Singh will keep his oath of alliance. If only you didn't have a sneaking suspicion that you've just tied yourself to the lion's tail. Record the codeword *Red* and turn to **192**.

344

Through the glass door you can see that Golgoth's elevator is starting to descend. Hastily you reach out and scan his mind to find out what he said. You learn that the code takes the form of a question-and-answer formula central to the Volentine faith. Golgoth found it out when he watched tapes showing the interrogation of Eleazar Picard, the high priest of the cult who escaped when Du-En fell. It worked for Golgoth. Now you can see if it will work for you. Turn to **18**.



345

It is strange to witness the barysal beam slowing down as it enters the time-distortion zone: like watching a white-hot needle pressing through ice. As it strikes the stasis bomb, there is a muffled explosion and the bomb splits into molten fragments. At the same instant, the man takes half a step forward and then jerks back in surprise as he sees the three of you standing around him.

Reduce your gun's charge by one; when it reaches zero charges it will be inoperative. Then turn to **409**.

346

Golgoth suddenly explodes into action. Seizing Boche around the neck and pressing his gun to his temple, he orders him to shoot Singh unless he wants to die at once. Boche raises his own gun and fires as Singh is turning to act. As Singh staggers back, his armour breastplate charred by the blast, Golgoth coolly shoots Boche through the head, holding the body up as a shield.

Singh is fumbling for the trigger of his mantramukta cannon. 'Get him now,' Golgoth shouts to you, 'before he recovers!'

You can attack Singh using either a charged barysal gun or a stun grenade: cross off a charge (or the grenade) and then turn to **389**. If you do not have either weapon, or decide not to act, turn to **410**.

347

Your gun is in your hand before Boche can react. The shot lashes through the air, catching him directly between the eyes. He dies without even realizing what has happened. Now nothing stands between you and the Heart of Volent. Turn to **415**.

348

The barysal beam cleaves through Singh's armour, but his own shot slays you at once. You die knowing that victory was almost within your grasp.

349

Finding another ledge where there are no corpses, you sweep it clear of snow and settle down for the night. Boche casts a wry gaze along the rock face. 'A bit like sleeping in a graveyard,' he remarks.

You can only shrug. 'Try not to think about it. At least here we're out of the wind.'

'And safe from predators.'

'Are we?' You wonder.

As the feeble daylight gives way to night, snow comes in fast flurries on the wind coursing through the pass. The sound is like a banshee's wailing. Huddled in your jacket, you try to get to sleep. Then you hear the unmistakable tread of footsteps in the snow. Someone is coming.

If you have ESP (and a psionic focus) turn to **392**. If you have LORE, turn to **413**. If neither, you can leap out and attack (turn to **433**) or wait where you are (turn to **2**).

350

The main market of Venis is located inside a lavish three-decked galley perched incongruously amid the muddy lower streets. Here, on benches where rowers once plied gilded oars, merchants sit and call out their trade. When a customer shows interest, he is led off to the merchant's store in one of the neighbouring side streets.

If you are interested in ordinary goods, turn to **394**. If you are looking for weaponry and other devices, turn to **283**. If you want to undergo genetic enhancement, turn to **434**.

351

You pass a street-corner scribe who has two antique laptop computers. When you ask after using these to make contact with Gaia, he turns on a bland smile. Flicking one of the laptops to life, he gestures at the lines of dimly glowing green text that appear on the screen. 'My business is letters and contracts, not computers. I use the computer simply as a tool of the trade – just as my forerunners used clay tablets, sheets of papyrus and quill pens.'

You examine the equipment. 'There must be peripherals for linking these into the global computer net. Isn't this a modem socket?'

The scribe whistles between his teeth. 'No doubt. However, I heard of a man who linked his computer to Gaia and forever afterward it would do nothing except iterate prime numbers. I would as soon infect myself with the yellow pox!'



If you have CYBERNETICS, turn to **265**. If not, turn to **372**.

352

All you can do is sell some possessions to raise the money for a ticket. You reluctantly go looking for a street pedlar, knowing that the need to make a quick sale will lose you money. At least you find a buyer without delay – or rather, he finds you. He is a gimlet-eyed man with a shock of pink-dyed hair, loitering at the quayside gate with the obvious intent of preying on people like yourself. ‘A ferry ticket costs a bit more than you thought, doesn’t it?’ he says patronizingly. ‘Now then, let’s see what you’ve got to sell.’

If you have any of the following items, he will buy them at the prices given:

Barysal gun	5 scads
Flashlight	5 scads
Medical kit	5 scads
Food packs	1 scad each
Polarized goggles	2 scads
ID card	10 scads

Sell what you wish and mark the appropriate changes on your Adventure Sheet. If you now have the 10 scads needed to buy a ferry ticket, delete that sum from your money and turn to **246**. If you still cannot afford a ticket, turn to **332**.

353

The card identifies its owner as a member of the Society of the Compass, a secretive and select organization with considerable resources worldwide. The Society has a building here in Kahira. You stand on the other side of the street and look up at the tower of steel and glass rising off into the dank evening mist. In the colourless fluorescent glow of the lobby you can see a receptionist sitting at the front desk.

If you have the codeword *Proteus*, delete it and then turn to **374**. Otherwise, if you have **ROGUERY** or chameleon skin, turn to **396**. If not but you have **PARADOXING** (and a psionic focus), turn to **417**. If you have none of these, you can either enter and try to bluff your way past the receptionist (turn to **436**) or give up any hope of entering the building (turn to **311**).

354

If you have **ROGUERY**, turn to **7**. If you have **PARADOXING** and a psionic focus, turn to **29**. If you have neither skill, turn to **52**.

355

The scintillant beam of deadly radiation stabs out, striking the mysterious figure full in his chest. His smile does not waver. Although his clothing is burned away, his smooth pale skin is completely unscathed by the blast. Your arm drops limply to your side as you stare in disbelief. You have never

seen anyone survive a direct hit from a barysal gun, unless protected by body armour.

The look in those silvery eyes confirms what you should have guessed already. This is not a living man you are facing. It is a blood-drinking predator, one of the vampires of ancient myth. Turn to **419**.

356

Portrin Fax provides you with a makeshift couch and you drift gratefully off to sleep, bone weary after your long trek through the steaming swamplands.

It seems only a moment later that he is shaking you awake. As you open your eyes, he jumps back and gives a jittery laugh. 'Morning,' he says.

You yawn and stretch. The air inside the building feels almost chill compared with the sweltering heat outside. 'Morning? How can you tell?'

Fax points to a clock on the wall, above an archway leading to a staircase that descends underground. 'There is one indicator. Also, although the sun never sets here, it does move across the sky. Indeed, at times I have thought to see two suns.'

'No doubt the "second sun" is an orbiting mirror, aligned so as to focus the sunlight on this region.'

If you ask Fax to show you where he gets his food, turn to **378**. If you want to ask first about the barren patch of ground you discovered leading to his dwelling, turn to **399**. If you decide to leave now and press on westwards, turn to **420**.

357

The panel bends inward, then gives with a crack. You push through past a blanket which had been hanging against the wall. A fire crackles in the centre of the foyer, which is so badly dilapidated that it is little more than a cave. A rug hangs across the entrance, sealing out a keening blizzard. The chamber is warm, with a sweaty reek from its three occupants. You take them to be trappers, judging by the animal skins hung around the walls. The three jump to their feet. Their surprise at your sudden appearance soon turns to open hostility. Two draw weapons. One has a long knife, while the man nearest to the fire has barysal gun.

If you wish to use CLOSE COMBAT, turn to **97**. If you have SHOOTING and a charged barysal gun, turn to **119**. If you fall back on CUNNING, turn to **185**. If you try a spot of ROGUERY, turn to **163**. If you rely on AGILITY, turn to **207**. If you lack any of these skills, turn to **272**.

358

Boche pulls you away, expelling a hiss of breath between his teeth as he glances back at Golgoth through the fog. 'A stroke of bad luck, running into that one!' he mutters.

'Why should a USI agent be interested in us?'

Boche scowls. 'Golgoth is a loose cannon: he wouldn't wait to ask what his superiors thought about something. Did you hear about the hijacking of the warship *Illustrious* by the Seventh Seal Cult a

couple of years ago? The Vice-President was aboard; a ransom was being negotiated and USI stepped in.'

You cast your mind back to the sketchy rumours and news reports that stretched across the Atlantic. 'I seem to remember that the Seventh Seal Cult was all but eradicated – at least eighty people dead. Don't tell me Golgoth was in charge of that operation.'

'In charge? He *was* the operation: a one-man death squad. He went in alone under disguise and variously stabbed, poisoned, shot or blew up every terrorist aboard.'

'Well, it seems pretty impressive . . . ' you venture.

Boche shakes his head grimly. 'He's a psychopath; he relishes killing. His USI badge just gives him *carte blanche* to indulge his depravities. Such people are evil no matter how noble a mask they wear.' Boche's mood brightens as he changes the subject: 'Now I have a few things to take care of. I'll meet you tomorrow morning at the Empty Quarter Café, next to the bazaar.'

Boche hurries off into the swirling fog. You are left alone on the street. Turn to 95.

359

Strolling through the bazaar, you find the following items for sale:

Gas mask	15 scads
Flashlight	8 scads
Medical kit	8 scads
Food packs	2 scads each
Polarized goggles	6 scads
Nylon rope	3 scads

Buy what you wish and mark the appropriate changes on your Adventure Sheet. If you have the codeword *Diamond*, turn to **381**. If not, turn to **402**.

360

Your fingers fly across the keyboard, bringing up a rapid sequence of access codes, file menus and options. You set up a link to Gaia via an Earth weather satellite. Folding your fingers behind your head, you lean back in the chair and wait for the screen message that will tell you you are into Gaia. Your satisfaction evaporates as the screen flashes up a red warning signal, accompanied by the chime of an alarm.

The door bursts open and Riza runs in with several technicians. 'Close down this system immediately!' he calls to them. 'Purge all active files. Prepare for full diagnostic.'

You start to rise, intending to slip away in the confusion, but Riza has a gun aimed at the bridge of your nose. 'You stay where you are,' he tells you. 'Don't you know that Gaia is riddled with viruses? In one thoughtless act you have put the entire computer system of al-Lat in jeopardy.'

'I'll try to be more careful next time,' you say.

He shakes his head sadly. 'I'm sorry, but it's too late for that. Tampering with the computer systems here is a serious crime, punishable by death.'

Less than an hour later, you are forced into a pressure suit and ejected into space. They have given you air for just one hour, so that you can contemplate

your crime as you drift into the void waiting for the end.

361

You return down the ramp. The feeble low-slanting rays of the sun make you feel colder than if it were night. If you have a Manta sky-car, turn to **289**. If you came here on foot turn to **393**.

362

You hack through the lardy skin to the meat, which is easily parcelled into food packs. Add as many food packs as you wish to your list of possessions. You can also strip off the pelt to make a fur coat if you need one. Turn to **298**.

363

You rest throughout the morning, recovering 1 Life Point. (Exception: if you have the codeword *Hourglass*, you begin to feel feverish and recover no Life Points.)

The others start to return around midday, beginning with Janus Gaunt and Thadra Bey. They explored a warren of tunnels under the plaza but found no clue about the location of the Heart. Next comes Chaim Golgoth, emerging from a military bunker which he investigated in company with the Gargan twins. There is no sign of the twins, and when you ask Golgoth about them he merely replies with a wink.

The ruins are bathed in the long light of sunset by the time Vajra Singh and the baron reappear. You soon learn that they met up underground, and are obviously excited by what they discovered. 'We have identified the temple precincts,' announces Vajra Singh, gesturing to a cluster of buildings across the square. 'The Heart of Volent lies somewhere below. Tomorrow may be the last day of the search.' Turn to **38**.

364

If you utilize ESP and a psionic focus to delve into the baron's mind, turn to **407**. If you sneak closer using ROGUERY or chameleon skin, turn to **428**. If you possess Little Gaia and want to leave her to record what the baron says, turn to **446**. Otherwise you must slope away and either retire for the night (turn to **192**) or try talking to one of the others: Boche (turn to **104**), Golgoth (turn to **126**) or Gaunt (turn to **148**).

365

Through the glass door you see Boche pull out a scrap of paper and recite from it. The computer is obviously satisfied with his response, because his elevator starts to descend. Having read his lips, you know the words he used. Now to find out if they will also work for you. Turn to **18**.

366

Using the sheer force of your mind, you reach into the time distortion zone and deactivate the stasis bomb. As the flow of time returns to normal, the man stares at you in surprise and takes a hesitant step forwards. He has no idea that that step has taken him two centuries to complete.

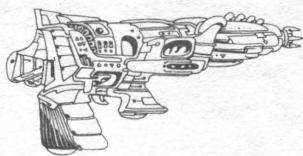
You can pick up the stasis bomb if you want. Add it to your list of possessions and turn to **409**.

367

This is the moment of truth. Four powerful adventurers all stand within reach of ultimate power. Only one can have the Heart. You can use a stun grenade (turn to **432**), a stasis bomb (turn to **448**), or a charged barysal gun (turn to **21**) if you have them. Otherwise turn to **324**.

368

You snatch the knife from your belt and send it spinning across the space between you and Boche. It impales him through the throat, but as he slumps to the floor dying he has time for a single shot. It is wide of the mark: he was aiming at your heart, but instead the beam sears through your shoulder. Lose 3 Life Points (or 2 Life Points if you are wearing a speculum jacket) and, if you survive, turn to **415**.



369

Singh is more used to his cannon than the pistol, and your reflexes are just a fraction quicker. The barysal beam cracks through the air and Singh falls without a sound. It is only as you go over to inspect the body that you realize he had a chance of hitting you with a dying shot. He chose not to take that shot. Why? Because it would have been spiteful to deprive you of victory when you had beaten him fairly? No one could have called Varja Singh a spiteful man. He died as he lived: with honour. Turn to **415**.

370

No thoughts remain in the dead minds of these unfortunates. No ordinary psychic could glean anything from them now, but with your special talent you might be able to reconstruct the last thing they saw. Touching your fingers to the icy brow of the nearest corpse, you mentally strain to gather the last frozen wisps of memory from the lifeless brain inside the skull . . .

The next thing you know, Boche is shaking you by the arm. You feel as though you've just woken from a long drowsy torpor in which your dreams were dominated by a glowing golden eye. 'You went into a trance,' Boche tells you. 'It was like you were hypnotized.'

You gaze into the dead man's eyes, sightless under their cataracts of frost. What was the last thing he saw before dying? The glowing eye – or was that just your own hallucination? Turn to **306**.

371

The grandly named Doge's Inn proves to be a group of iron-roofed shacks clustered along one of the town's seedier alleyways. The innkeeper is a thin dark-skinned man who is busy polishing the counter with a grimy rag. When you ask him how the inn got its name, he fixes you with an odd look, then casually removes his glass eye and wipes it with the rag before replacing it. You steady yourself against the counter, feeling slightly weak at the knees.

'The Doge was the ruler of Venis in ancient times,' he explains. 'His attendants and courtiers were known as *scarlatti*. My own name is Scarlatti.'

'So it's a sort of joke?' You peer dubiously towards the sleeping quarters. A rat scuttles through a gap in the wall.

'Yeah, sort of.'

You pay over the three scads and find yourself a bed in the dormitory, then go to the showers to wash off the sweat of your travels. The showers are located at the back of the building: a cold gloomy hall lined with cracked tiles, lit only by a single oil lamp by the door. At the far end is a small steam room. You strip off your belongings and step inside. No one else is here. Twisting the nozzle of the shower, you flinch from the jet of boiling hot water that spurts out. Incredible that after all these centuries nobody has yet invented a shower that can be set to a comfortable temperature.

But that is the least of your worries right now. A shadow moves in the doorway and you glance back

to see two men behind you. Since they have not undressed, you guess that they have not come here to take a shower. The knives they are holding confirms it. They intend to kill you.

If you run from the steam room, turn to **4**. If you fight them, turn to **26**. If you try to get past them and escape, turn to **70**.

372

You are accosted by one of the black-coated local guides known as gondos. He says to you: 'I heard you speak of Gaia, friend. On the outskirts of town is an old treasure vault with many computers and other devices of the past. Deserted now, people say it's haunted. I'll take you there for a scad or two.'

This seemingly offhand reference to payment turns out, after a short bargaining session, to mean precisely 3 scads. If you are willing to pay the gondo that much, turn to **293**. If not, turn to **414**.

373

A lambent ray streams off along the corridor, splitting the air with an ultrasonic screech. You hear the hiss of molten metal and something erupts in a fountain of sparks. Advancing, you discover a caretek, feebly twitching on its back like a crushed metal cockroach. You were in no danger, it was patrolling the complex looking for things to repair, just as it must have been doing for centuries.

Reduce your barysal gun's charge by one. When it reaches zero charges, you will be unable to use it.

Annoyed at yourself for panicking and so wasting a shot, you press on deeper into the gloomy warren of tunnels. Turn to **435**.

374

You stride confidently into the lobby. The receptionist, a prim-looking man with pursed lips, sits at a desk. Behind him on the wall is displayed the Society's symbol: a triangle enclosing a circle and central dot. To one side, a bronze-coloured elevator door is set into the black marble wall.

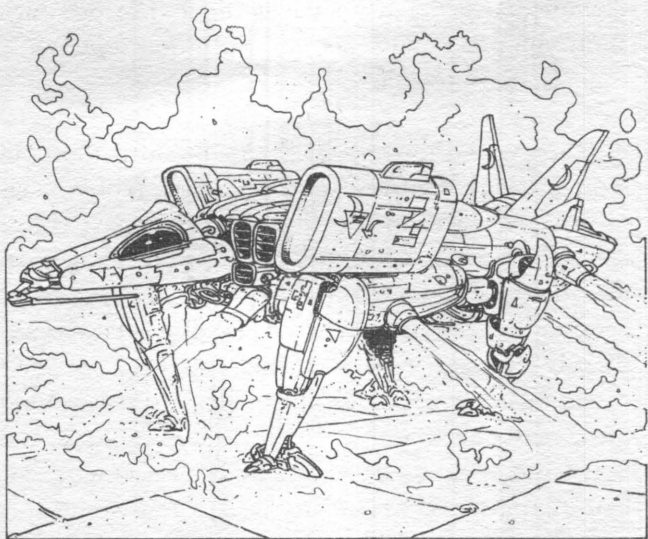
The receptionist looks up, blinks. 'Good evening. How may I help you?'

Unsure of protocol, you hand him your card. His blank expression has become an unctuous smile as he says, 'Our facilities here are at your disposal. There are no other members in residence at the moment, so you'll have the building to yourself.'

The elevator door opens. You mutter a gruff thank-you and walk past. Inside the elevator, you study the panel and decide which floor to go to. You can choose the library (turn to **6**), the medical lounge (turn to **28**), the gymnasium (turn to **51**), the armoury (turn to **447**), or the canteen (turn to **94**).

375

You step out of the carriage and set off along a deserted tunnel which soon brings you to a staircase. You climb until you can see a shaft of daylight filtering between toppled blocks of masonry. There is not much room, but you manage to squeeze



through, emerging onto a broad expanse of tarmac with a few single-storey buildings nearby. The air is crisply cool but there is no snow here. To the south, outlined against a china blue sky, you can see a cluster of ancient spires surrounding a high stone fortress wall.

A whine of jets begins to grow across the tarmac. Turning, you see a narrow-hulled flyer a few hundred metres away. On the stilts of its landing gear, gleaming in the pastel sunlight, it reminds you of an insect poised for flight. The nozzles of the flyer's vertical jets are beginning to glow; it is about to take off. If you hurry over and try to attract the pilot's attention, turn to **102**. If you shelter in the

subway entrance and watch the flyer take off, turn to **78**.

376

You arrive at the roof and step out into the cold night air. Mist rising from the river far below reaches up here as no more than a faint sparkling blur. Directly above, the stars shine as hard as diamonds. You glance around, gratified to see a Manta sky-car parked on the rooftop helipad. If only you can get it started.

The Fijian anticipated what you'd do. He comes clattering breathlessly up the fire escape steps and fixes you with a look of dangerous rage. 'Last warning! Stop right there!'

He doesn't seem to have a gun, although from the look of him he could break you apart with his bare hands. If you try leaping across to the roof of the next building – a distance of about eight metres – turn to **397**. If you try to take off in the sky-car, turn to **418**. If you stand and fight, turn to **437**.

377

Even while reaching to your belt for the sword, pretending to comply, you are inwardly straining to exert your psychic power. The stranger does not notice as you enclose the pair of you in a time vortex, leaving the world outside to continue at its normal rate while each heartbeat within the vortex takes an hour to complete.

Your fingers detach the shortsword from your

belt. The night rushes on headlong towards dawn. As you are lifting the sword to hand it to the stranger, sunrise begins to show as a wan yellow haze along the eastern hills. It reflects in golden glints from the sword blade. The stranger, seeing this, narrows his pale eyes in a frown, then whirls to stare in shock at the sun. A thin screech wells up from deep in his throat as he takes a step back. Then it is as though he is swept away, evaporated like a snowflake by the feeble heat of the sun.

You guessed right. He was a creature of the night, a bloodsucker who had good cause to shun the daylight. You cancel the psychic vortex and the flow of time returns to normal. There is nothing you can do for Shandor and his men; they were ripped apart while they slept. You make a cursory search of the shreds of clothing you can see, finding an ID card, a flashlight, and barysal gun with one remaining charge. Take what you wish, remembering to record any new possession on your Adventure Sheet, then turn to **161**.

378

Fax leads you down the stairway. At the bottom lies a wide circular hall with various tunnels leading off it. A sign above each tunnel proclaims the destinations available. You read them with a feeling of melancholy: New York, Moscow, Edinburgh . . . Most of these places are now buried under a kilometre of ice.

Fax shows you a food machine set into the wall.

'Most of the buttons no longer work, but the "Skudge Bar" is nutritious.' He presses a button, the machine hums, and a moment later a foil-wrapped block drops out of a slot. Unwrapping it, you find a chewy fudge which surprises you in having a savoury taste. You can stock up with as many of these as you wish, noting them as 'food packs' among your possessions; each counts as one item.

If you have CYBERNETICS, turn to **9**. If you decide to explore the tunnels, turn to **439**. If you would rather bid Fax farewell and continue on your journey now, turn to **420**.

379

The numbers tattooed on their shoulders gives you the clue: they can only be members of the Gargan clone-group. These were specially bred superbeings employed by the Chikusa Corporation for tasks such as mining in the asteroid belt, where ordinary humans would find the work too strenuous. They were later used as enforcers when the corporation moved into criminal affairs. There was a rumour that the entire clone-group had been ambushed and killed in Bangkok, but it seems that at least these two survived.

They are very dangerous people. If you want to start something, turn to **32**. If you swallow your pride and sit in silence while they drink, turn to **54**.

380

A street-vendor offers books, pamphlets and scan-disks containing a vast wealth of chaotic information. You search through shelves and old boxes until you learn everything you need. Gilgamesh was the name of a military project centuries ago. The idea was to construct a battle-droid that was immune to paradoxing, in the hope that an army of such warriors could overwhelm Du-En. But then Du-En fell of its own accord, and the project was apparently abandoned.

You check the location of the Gilgamesh research base. It was at Giza, just outside Kahira. If you have LORE, turn to **95**. If not, turn to **311**.

381

By the time you have finished your shopping it is mid-morning. Crossing the street at the entrance of the bazaar, you see Kyle Boche lounging at a pavement table in front of the Empty Quarter Café. 'Where were you earlier?' you ask him. 'We were supposed to meet at sunrise.'

'I don't know what you mean. I was here. You must have missed me. In fact, I was just about to give up and leave.'

Glancing beyond the awning of the café, you see that the owner is only just lighting the stove. It is obvious that the place cannot have been open for more than a few minutes. You sigh; Boche is the sort of person who will never admit he is in the wrong. 'Come on, then,' you say to him, swinging your

pack onto your shoulder and setting off at a brisk stride towards the city gate. The lift carries you down to ground level, where you emerge into a raw wind. Pockets of mist swirl above the river. West lies the gleaming white expanse of snow that is the Sahara Desert.

If you want to take a detour to the pyramids at Giza, turn to **423**. If you wish to head straight out across the Sahra towards Du-En, turn either to **393** (if you are on foot) or to **289** (if you have a Manta sky-car).

382

Riza explains your options for returning to Earth. 'I'm going back to Maka quite soon, and I could drop you at Sudan. Of course, you'd have a long walk from there to Du-En.'

'Can't you drop me any closer?'

'We can't risk our flyers. There might be automated defences at Du-En which would shoot them down. If you know how to pilot it, I could lend you a one-man flyer which you could take down within eight hundred kilometres of Du-En. That's the closest we can land you without risking the loss of a vehicle.'

'Not quite,' puts in one of the technicians standing nearby. 'There's a way you could be delivered straight into the city itself. We have an experimental matter transporter.'

Riza stares at the technician, then turns to you. 'I wouldn't recommend that. It's only been used on

mice so far, and over quite short distances.'

If you go with Riza to Sudan, turn to **275**. If you decide to risk the matter transport, turn to **424**. If you have PILOTING and want to take the one-man flyer, turn to **442**.

383

A door slides open and you step through, only to whirl as it clangs shut behind you. You are trapped inside a small cubicle. As you pound at the door, the synthetic voice speaks again: 'The facility you requested is not on record. Please wait here while the matter is investigated. Security teams will arrive in due course.'

Security teams? There hasn't been a living soul here in more than a hundred years! If you have ROGUERY, perhaps you can escape: turn to **404**. If not, you are trapped and your remains will languish here for ever as the ice shield slips further and further south and finally chokes off all life on Earth.

384

Working one of the giant sabre-teeth loose from the jaw, you use it to cut through the thick leathery hide so that you can disjoint the bometh's carcass. You need only string the haunches of meat across your backpack – they will keep fresh enough in this wintry clime. Add as many food packs as you can carry to your list of possessions, then turn to **298**.

385

At first there is no sign of Kyle Boche, until you notice him snoozing in his bedroll beside the remains of last night's fire. 'They'll find no sign of the Heart today,' he reckons. 'It's wiser to rest for now and build our strength. When that lot find the Heart there's going to be a battle-royal. We'll need to be ready for that moment when it comes.'

You see Chaim Golgoth waving to you and stroll over to where he is standing with the Gargan clones. 'Are you planning to go exploring today?' he asks. 'You're welcome to join our group, if so.' The Gargan twins glower at this, but do not dispute it.

If you decide to back out and spend the day resting after all, turn to **363**. If you accept Golgoth's invitation, turn to **406** if you have the codeword *Gilgamesh*, or to **16** if not.

386

Baron Siriasis is outraged by your intrusion. Supported by the immense force of his mind, he hovers eerily towards you, paralysing you with a bolt of psychic force. You are left rooted to the spot, unable to move a muscle as he drifts around you like a ghastly rag doll hanging on invisible strings. 'The paralysis will wear off in a few hours,' he hisses. 'I shall leave you to contemplate your folly.'

He returns to his tent and closes the flap. If you have PARADOXING (and a psionic focus) you can break free of his mental paralysis and go and talk to Boche (turn to **104**), Golgoth (turn to **126**), or Gaunt (turn

to 148). Without PARADOXING, you are held immobile in the snow for hours: lose 1 Life Point from exposure and then turn to 192.

387

The computer is looking for a specific set of responses: the code that will convince it to start the elevator instead of opening the door and allowing the hover-droids to blast you away. Something strikes a chord in your memory, and you hastily think back over what you know of the Volentine cult. There was something that Eleazar Picard, founder of the cult, repeated over and over after he escaped from the fall of Du-En. At the time you assumed it was just a catechism of his faith. But it is worth a try . . . Turn to 18.

388

You make your way along a wide passage where your footsteps echo stonily on the hard tiles. As elsewhere in the catacombs, light comes from a row of globes along the ceiling. Some have dimmed over the years, but most still burn brightly. When you wonder aloud what the power source is, the baron is in no doubt: 'The Heart itself. The tiniest fraction of its power is enough to illuminate all the cities of the world.'

At last you arrive at a domed hall. Beyond lies a network of tunnels. 'Scout ahead,' the baron tells you. 'One of those tunnels must lead to the Shrine of the Heart.'

If you do as he says, turn to **430**. If you bridle at being ordered about, turn to **450**.

389

Singh falters under the onslaught of your combined attacks. The mantramukta is blasted out of his hands, but he manages to draw his pistol as he falls. Golgoth's next shot sears through Singh's breastplate and pierces his heart, but even as he dies his finger constricts on the trigger. The shot strikes you painfully through the leg. Lose 3 Life Points and turn to **431** if you can survive that.

390

Barysal guns sometimes misfire. It is a slim chance, but with your psychic powers to alter the odds that is enough. As Boche squeezes the trigger, the gun explodes in his hands. He is killed instantly. But you do not come off entirely unscathed, since a flying fragment of shrapnel slices through your thigh, inflicting the loss of 2 Life Points. If still alive, turn to **415**.

391

Your beam strikes Singh's headband. How could you have known that the jewels on it were no mere baubles, but retroflec crystals. The force of the blast is deflected back the way it came, exploding the barysal gun in your hands. You cry out in pain as you are burned to the bone. Lose 2 Life Points. If still alive, turn to **305**.

392

Boche looks over at you. 'You heard it too?'

'Be quiet,' you tell him. Focusing your concentration, you reach out to probe the mind of whoever – or whatever – is approaching. Your mind is flooded with cold dark alien thoughts. You have the fleeting impression of something with sharp predatory intelligence. It is coming to kill you.

You break off your mental probe and jump up into a crouch, tense and ready for action. Turn to **433**.

393

A fierce wind with teeth of ice thunders relentlessly across the land, pushing billows of powdery snow ahead of it. You hunch behind each step as though pushing a heavy cart, at times having to crouch down to avoid being blown off your feet. By day you are surrounded by a painful white glare; at night, moonlight turns the snowscape into a scene of unearthly mystery. You trudge wearily on, feet numb with cold, eyebrows bristling with icicles. Do you have either a fur coat or cold-weather clothes? If not, lose 2 Life Points. Even if you do have such clothing, the cold is so severe that you still lose 1 Life Point (exception: lose none if you also have SURVIVAL). You lose 1 less Life Point if you possess a burrek, as you can huddle close to it and share its body warmth.

If you possess polarized goggles, turn to **403**. If not but you have SURVIVAL, turn to **443**. Otherwise turn to **13**.

394

Inspecting a range of items laid out on the market stalls, you haggle until the following prices are agreed:

Food packs	2 scads each
Rope	2 scads
Lantern	3 scads
Medical kit	12 scads

Buy what you want, if anything, and amend your Adventure Sheet accordingly. If you also want to buy or sell weaponry or other unusual items, turn to **283**. If you want to pay for genetic enhancement, turn to **434**. If you have finished with your shopping turn either to **414** (if you have STREETWISE) or to **25** (if not).

395

You hurry outside to where the gondo is waiting, shivering inside his black coat like a forlorn crow. 'So, have you finished here?' he asks hopefully.

You nod. 'Let's go back to town.'

The sun shows briefly in the west, flaring like a red searchlight in the colourless swirl of grey and white. By the time you return to Venis, night is falling and a deeper chill closes on the narrow streets. You are grateful for the fire in the common-room of your hotel. Tomorrow the ferry is due to arrive. Turn to **25**.

396

Earlier you took the precaution of disguising yourself to look like the face shown on the card. You are aware that your disguise is not perfect, since the holographic pictures does not tell you the height, build and mannerisms of the card's original owner. But the Society of the Compass is a farflung organization, and it is unlikely that the receptionist would personally recognize any one member. This assumption seems to be correct, for the receptionist barely glances at the card before running it through a slot and returning it to you. His thin face puts on an ingratiating smile as he indicates the elevator at the back of the lobby and says, 'No other members are currently in residence. You will have uninterrupted use of the facilities here.'

Nodding in thanks, you step into the elevator and consult the panel. You have the choice of going to the library (turn to **6**), the medical lounge (turn to **28**), the gymnasium (turn to **51**), the armoury (turn to **447**), or the canteen (turn to **94**).

397

If you have **AGILITY**, turn to **196**. If not, turn to **173**.

398

A gaze of grey agate fixes you; the stranger has a predator's cold scrutinizing stare. He knows that you will not hand over the sword willingly. As you draw it from your belt, he flings up his arms and rushes soundlessly forward, his mouth gaping open as he

charges in to reveal long bloodsucking fangs.

You take a half step backwards and swing the sword in a short backhanded arc. It slices cleanly through the stranger's neck. His head falls with a crunch into the snow; the body remains upright, fingers still groping blindly towards you. Almost numb with horror, you plunge the sword into your foe's heart. The body crumples, shrivelling like a dry husk. There is no blood.

Grimacing, you roll the head over with your foot and peer down at it in the moonlight. Gone are the clear gaze and perfect marble features: now it is just an ancient brown skull with leathery face and a few wisps of cobwebby hair. It was a porphyre – one of the undead. It may have lived for centuries, sustaining itself on the lifeblood of its victims. Only now you have slain it can you see it as it truly was.

There is nothing you can do for Shandor and his men; they were ripped apart while they slept. You make a cursory search of the shreds of clothing you can see, finding an ID card, a flashlight, and a barysal gun with one remaining charge. Take what you wish, remembering to record any new possessions on your Adventure Sheet, then turn to **161**.

Instead of answering, he rummages in a locker and brings forth a metal canister. Taking this outside, he approaches a thin stalk of ferns sprouting from the ground beside the barren area and sprays it with a chemical. It almost instantly withers. 'I found a

storehouse full of the stuff,' he cries gleefully, brandishing the canister. 'It's well to keep the surrounding area free of plant life, you see. The sanguivores travel rapidly through the trees, but they will not venture onto barren ground, where they are as clumsy as waterlogged tents flapping in a breeze.'

He presses the canister into your hand and urges you to keep it. You are on the point of commenting that the liquor he offered you is probably almost as toxic, but you decide not to offend him. Record the canister of vine killer among your possessions, then decide whether you will ask if he has any food (turn to 378) or just say good-bye and go on your way (turn to 420).

400

In the following weeks you lose all memory of the brief spell of warmth you enjoyed in the jungle of Lyonesse. The deep chill has soon settled back in your bones. (Lose 2 Life Points unless you have SURVIVAL. Also delete a food pack from your list of possessions; if you have no food pack, lose another Life Point.) Surveying the landscape, you see only a dazzling expanse of snow under a sky of merciless metallic blue. The few other people you catch sight of are hunched anonymous figures in the distance. You do not call out to them. In these grim and desperate times, a lone traveller is well advised not to seek out company.

The quaintly named Jib-and-Halter Pass shows itself under a gritty haze. The air takes on a

sulphurous tang as you approach. Here the rocks lie under only a light dusting of snow. You throw back your hood. It does not seem quite so cold here. Volcanic vents in the ground release hot mud in geysers to the west. Bog moss thrives in the fertile mud, allowing a small settlement to survive here.

You arrive at the settlement, a collection of tottering huts around the long looming bulk of the ancient Jib-and-Halter Inn. The sun dips low in the sky, sending amber shafts of light through the thin air. You blow out a plume of breath. You are looking forward to a fire, a hot bath and a good meal.

The interior of the inn is a place of lantern light and low black rafters. Dozens of faces turn glowering as you enter. Several people sweep their hands irritably in your direction: a common twenty-third century gesture to urge haste on someone who is sluggish in closing a door.

As you cross over to the bar, you begin to sense something is amiss. None of the others here are eating or drinking. Each man sits sullenly silent. Then, as you move around a squat beam, you come in sight of two women standing at the bar. To judge from the stack of glasses in front of them, they have drunk enough vodka to kill a fair-sized rhino, but the only sign that they might even be slightly drunk is their loud haughty bray of laughter on seeing you. You size them up at a glance. They are identical twins, both more than six feet tall and with taut Olympian physiques, brimming with vitality, eyes and close-cropped hair the colour of sunrise. Each



twin has a tattoo on her arm: a number in Roman numerals.

‘Sit here and stay silent,’ commands one of the twins.

‘We insist on drinking undisturbed,’ says her sister.

If you have **LORE**, turn to **379**. If you have **ESP** and a psionic focus, turn to **421**. Otherwise, if you take exception to their manners and want to do something about it, turn to **32**. If you meekly do as you are told, turn to **54**.

401

A row of coffee stalls lines the side of the plaza. There you discover that Baron Siriasis is a frequent visitor to Kahira. ‘The one with no legs?’ says a man bearing the cape and baton of the city militia. ‘Yes, he is a member of the Compass Society. I have heard that he is one of the psi-lords of Bezant.’

Bezant – formerly Istanbul – suffered heavy bombardment of exotic radiation during the Paradox War. When the fall-out stabilized and the city once again became habitable, it was discovered that psionic forces worked there to an enhanced degree. Those with psionic powers soon made themselves the hereditary overlords of Bezant: a group characterized by arrogance and disdain for the common herd of mankind. Baron Siriasis is one of these.

If you have **STREETWISE**, turn to **95**. If not, turn to **311**.

402

The time has come. You are as ready as you will ever be. Swinging your pack onto your shoulder, you set off at a brisk pace towards the city gate. The lift carries you down to ground level, where you emerge from the shelter of the concrete buttress into a raw wind. Pockets of mist swirl like smoke above the turbid river. Westwards lies the gleaming white expanse of snow, that is the Sahara Desert. If you want to take a detour to the pyramids at Giza, turn to **423**. If you wish to head straight out across the Sahara towards Du-En, turn either to **393** (if you are on foot) or to **289** (if you have a Manta sky-car).

403

You pass on through a plain of ice tors – baroque crags which glint with a metallic sheen against the delicate blue sky. The wind, blasting between the tors, makes a desolate keening sound. You see no signs of life. Cold gnaws at you from outside, hunger from within.

If you have some food packs, cross two off your list of possessions and turn to **100**. If you have only one food pack, cross it off and turn to **35**. If you brought no food, turn to **56**.

404

There is a small brass plate next to the door. Obviously there was originally a control for opening the door, but by replacing the button with a blank plate it was converted into a gaol cell. Using your

belt buckle, you prise the plate free of the wall. It takes several hours of laborious work, by the end of which time your fingers are bleeding, but at last you tear it loose. A stack of wires are exposed, and you soon identify the connections you need to make in order to work the door.

As the door opens, an alarm starts to sound throughout the base: a softly insistent tone accompanied by an automatic message: 'Intruder alert. All security personnel, report to your stations.'

There is no one to hear the alarm, of course, but all the same you had better not hang around. There might be an automatic sequence that locks the outer door. You jump on the elevator and ascend to the exit. Turn to **361**.

405

If you have **SURVIVAL**, turn to **58**. If not but you have the codeword *Gilgamesh*, turn to **81**. Otherwise, turn to **103**.

406

'You heard Vajra Singh's stipulation,' growls Gargan XIV, jabbing a finger against Gilgamesh's chestplate. 'Hirelings and servants are not allowed to join an expedition into the catacombs.'

You protest. 'Gilgamesh is hardly a servant. He'll be an invaluable member of our team.'

She shakes her head doggedly. 'You cannot bring your automaton along. That is final.'

If you go looking for Vajra Singh to ask his

407-409

opinion, turn to **445**. If you insist that Gilgamesh accompanies the party, turn to **427**. If you agree to leave him behind, delete *Gilgamesh* and note the codeword *Uruk* instead, then turn to **16**.

407

You made an error of judgement. Baron Siriasis instantly detects your mind-probe. Throwing up a mental shield, he drifts up into the air on strings of telekinetic force and comes rushing out of the tent to confront you. Turn to **386**.

408

You are in no mood to play guessing games with a two-hundred-year-old computer. Luckily you do not have to. Any computer that can understand speech can also be reprogrammed in the same way. It might take hours or days if you were to do it, but Little Gaia is able to transmit information at a much faster rate. Acting on your instructions, she produces a burst of coded bleeps that override the computer's existing program and give it the command to start the elevator. You are on your way to the Sanctum of the Heart. Turn to **150**.

409

The man tells you that he is Captain Casimir Novak, commander of the High Priest's personal guard. 'The populace became crazed,' he says indignantly. 'They stormed the temple. I was escorting the High Priest to safety when a group burst in here and hurled that

stasis bomb. It is the last thing I remember.'

'It was all a long time ago,' you say.

'One thing I must know. Did the High Priest get away?'

You spare Novak the details. Let him have the satisfaction of having succeeded in his duty. 'Picard? He got away. No one else did.'

Boche and Baron Siriasis are both looking at him guardedly. You can guess what they're thinking. How will Novak react when he learns you have come here to take the Heart – the sacred object of his faith?

'Let us worry about explanations later,' says the baron, reading your mind. 'For now, we must hurry or the others will reach our goal ahead of us.'

Record the codeword *Mallet*, and turn to **388**.

410

Despite Golgoth's searing volley of barysal shots, Singh manages to raise his cannon. There is a deep thrumming as the power kicks in, sending a blast of incandescent energy streaming through the air. As you dive for cover inside one of the elevator tubes, you can see that Singh is already dead on his feet. But Golgoth has no defence against the raw power of the cannon, and he too is blown to pieces.

You emerge slowly and step through the carnage. Vajra Singh looks up at you weakly and your muscles go tense. His cannon's power will take time to build up, but he could still shoot you down with his pistol.

But he is nobler than that. 'There's no chance for

me now,' he groans. 'You take the power. Use it wisely . . .'

He slumps and his eyes roll up. You are the only one left. Turn to 415.

411

Boche waves you along beside him, keeping the gun trained on you. 'I could kill you now,' he says, 'but I want someone to be alive to witness this. I'm about to become a god, after all.'

Reaching the Heart, he kneels and embraces it. You think this is your chance to act, but even as you rush forward you see you are too late. Coruscating bands of energy blaze from the depths of the unearthly gem, swathing Boche in an aura of blinding violet light. The fabric of reality is ripped apart. You feel weightless. A vortex spins up through the dome, sweeping away rock and air, rising up into space, out past the moon and planets. In what seems like seconds you have been hurled like a ghost through all of creation. You witness the birth of a new cosmos – a cosmos fashioned by Boche's whims. He is everywhere and all-powerful, while you are but a spark that swiftly vanishes into eternity.

412

After fifteen minutes of careful searching, you find a secret compartment under one of the pallets in a side room. It slides open at your touch to reveal an ornamental knife. You have no idea why the knife's owner went to such lengths to hide it. 'The

Volentines were all barmy,' is Boche's dismissive opinion. 'If you'd been High Priest, would you have allowed them to keep sharp implements?'

Baron Siriasis drifts across the broken furniture and glances at the knife. 'Probably the acolytes were not supposed to have any personal possessions,' he says. 'The idea of them all living together here would be to focus their spiritual identity. Now, if you have quite finished looking for mementoes, let us be on our way.'

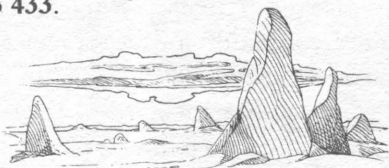
Add the knife to your list of possessions. Returning to the antechamber, you can decide whether to take the left-hand passage (turn to 3) or the right-hand one (turn to 128).

413

Peering along the pass, you catch sight of a hunched shambling figure in the snow-clouded darkness. It is thin, with a large hooded head. It is still too far away for you to get a clear view of its face, but something about it stirs atavistic fears at the back of your mind.

You glance suddenly at the rigid corpses on the other ledge. All were entranced, turned to hypnotized statues before they froze to death. 'By Gaia!' You seize Boche's arm. 'We're in the larder of the Gorgon!'

Turn to 433.



414

If you have not done so already, you can now attempt to make contact with Gaia (turn to **351**), research the legend of the Heart of Volent (turn to **91**), buy supplies for your adventure (turn to **350**), investigate the background of Kyle Boche (turn to **179**), or find out if any travellers have recently gone missing in the Appenine Mountains (turn to **451**). Remeber that if you possess a vade-mecum you can use **STREETWISE** while in Venis.

If you have completed all your business here and are ready to leave, turn to **25**.

415

Squinting in the flux of radiation from the Heart, you approach it with a sense of wonder. This is the artifact created in the Big Bang, the key to infinite power. Many people gave their lives for the chance to possess it. Now it lies within your grasp.

If you have the codeword *Nemesis*, turn to **153**. If not, turn to **174**.

416

A robotic caretak scurries past your foot and continues on, gliding up the wall until it settles over an access panel which it begins to probe. It must have been diagnosing and repairing faults here for centuries. You smile. Obviously the gondo's stories of ghosts have left you jittery, if you are jumping at the sight of a harmless caretak.

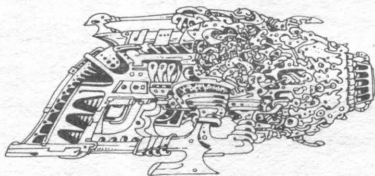
The corridor ahead is wide and oval in cross-

section. The green light gleams off the polished curve of the walls. Seeing a chamber at the end, you press on. Turn to **435**.

417

Under the ochre-tinged gleam of a streetlamp, you scrutinize the face shown on the card, impressing it into your mind. Your eyes close. The face remains, and mentally you rotate it so that in your mind's eye you are looking from behind those unfamiliar features. You make them your own, drawing the face over yours like a mask.

If anyone were nearby, they would have seen your own face swim and alter in the dim light: the nose narrowing, brows drawing closer over eyes of altered colour. You turn and peer at your reflection in a grimy window-pane. The illusion is good enough to satisfy a casual glance, and should last at least as long as you'll need to get past the receptionist. Turn to **374**.



418

If you have **PILOTING**, you engage the thrusters and soar up from the helipad in a blaze of white jet-light; turn to **218**. If you do not have **PILOTING**, you cannot get the sky-car airborne in time before the Fijian grabs you; turn to **437**.

419

A terrifying howl erupts from the stranger's throat, rooting you to the spot. You hardly see him move as he closes in and locks his bloodless fingers around your throat. You try to wrestle free, but your muscles are slack with fear and you can only kick feebly as he lifts you clear of the ground and snaps your neck like a farmer killing a chicken. Your lifeblood will nourish the unnatural creature that has slain you.

420

The ruined city is soon left far behind. You slog on through the dense undergrowth, slowly making progress to the fringes of Lyonesse. Here, where the heat is less stifling, a few ramshackle communities farm the valleys. You collect some provisions to sustain you on the journey, knowing that you will soon pass beyond the oasis of sunlit warmth.

Two days later finds you on the lip of a glacier. Lyonesse is now visible only as a distant aurora in the eastern sky at night. Your boots make a hard crumping sound as you trudge through the snow. Shortly after dawn, the thick clouds suddenly lift, revealing majestic mountains sweeping up against the sky to your right. You stand and gaze at the long streamers of snow that are curling out from the highest peaks, stripped from the mountain flanks by a titanic wind. You feel a sense of uncanny isolation. There is no trace of a breeze where you are standing, and the only sound is a far-off whistling, and yet that

wind is strong enough to blast the hard-packed snow to powder. The power of the elements is awesome; you are no more than a speck in Nature's eye. And yet the power that awaits you in Du-En is enough to blind that eye – power to reshape the world. At this moment, as you stare up at the soaring mountains, it all seems unreal.

You turn to look south. You cannot waste time here, idly indulging your fancies. Ahead lies your goal: the power to make your dreams real. Turn to **400**.

421

Curious . . . their memories and thought patterns are almost identical. Both are proud, uncompromising and certain of their superiority to the common herd of mankind. You scan deeper, uncovering images of murder and stark savagery. They once had twelve sisters, all identical – obviously clones. You suspect a military or criminal past. Reading still deeper, you find a memory of Gaia. They also heard the broadcast. They, like you, are bound for Du-En!

One thing is clear: it would be reckless to start anything before you know more about them. If you attack them with **CLOSE COMBAT**, turn to **76**. If you try to outwit them with **CUNNING**, turn to **120**. If you simply sit quietly and wait, turn to **54**.

In a dingy smoke-filled gambling hall, you find a man who takes you to the table of Harek Asfar, the chief of the city's criminals. Asfar is a dapper man in a suit of shimmering black cloth; a gold-tinted band shields his eyes. A cigarette in an enamelled holder sends lazy curls of smoke up in front of a tall mirror against the wall. Its chipped surface speaks poignantly of faded grandeur. 'You want to know about Chaim Golgoth,' says Asfar.

You nod and wait. Asfar considers, then gives an indulgent click of his tongue and motions for you to sit. He raises his glass and sips, but does not offer you a drink. 'Commander Chaim Golgoth, an agent – I should say assassin and saboteur – for United States Intelligence. Seconded from the military, he bears the codename "Vector". A thorn in my side.'

'Why should a US operative concern himself with affairs in Kahira?'

Asfar gives a soft laugh, like a puff of escaping gas. 'You have not heard? The President has arrogated to himself police authority over the entire world, on the specious premise that the United States now constitutes the majority of the human population. Golgoth has disrupted several of my activities on this basis.'

'Why not kill him? You have an air of ruthless ability about you, if you don't mind me saying.'

'I take that as a compliment,' says Asfar. 'In fact I did formulate a plan. A retired US colonel lived at a hunting lodge near Karthag. I had him murdered and

installed my fifteen best men in the lodge, then lured Golgoth there with a fake message.'

'And what happened?'

Asfar pauses, blows out a stream of cigarette smoke, frowns. 'I lost my fifteen best men.'

He signals that your brief discussion is 'at an end, and a bodyguard leads you from the table. If you have STREETWISE, turn to 95. If not, turn to 311.

423

The landscape stretches on, a sea of white broken by islands of bare black rock. Rays of sunlight, skimming from the horizon behind you, make the snow flash like ground glass. Soon you can see man-made hills that jut up against the drab skyline. These are the pyramids, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And in front of them reclines the Sphinx, its inscrutable gaze fixed on Kahira, which is outlined by the rising sun. According to superstition, the Sphinx watches over Kahira and keeps it safe from the desert's threat. You are not so sure. Doesn't a watchdog face out from the place it is guarding? It looks to you as if the Sphinx carries a clear warning about the Sahara in its proud impassive face. You are reminded of the words written over the gates of Hell: *Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate* – abandon hope, you who venture here.

Turn to 440.

424

Riza leads the way to the transporter bay. You step onto the platform and a heavy glass partition closes behind you. There is no turning back now. Through the glass, you see Riza giving orders to the technicians, but no sound reaches your ears. Lights come on, bathing you in a dazzling glow, and you feel a wrenching sensation deep inside.

The light fades. Your first impression is of an icy wind that tears the breath from your lungs. A rolling snowscape stretches off in all directions as far as the eye can see. You are back on Earth, in the middle of the Saharan Ice Wastes. If the co-ordinates were set properly, you should be only a few kilometres from Du-En. Record the codeword *Hourglass* and turn to 125.

425

A door opens, admitting you to a short passage that gives onto a dimly lit room. On a podium in the centre stands a bulky humanoid figure whose violet-and-black armoured body gleams with a dull lustre. At your approach, the eye-slit of the figure's visor illuminates, and for an instant you falter as you sense the scrutiny of an unhuman intelligence. Then the figure speaks in resonant mechanical tones: 'I am Gilgamesh. Identify yourself.'

'Gaia has sent me for you,' you answer. 'We are to voyage to Du-En.'

Despite your uncertainty, the automaton seems to accept this. With clanking steps he descends from the



podium. Your every instinct is to turn and run, but you force yourself to wait calmly as you watch Gilgamesh approach. The heavy armoured plates of his body leave you in no doubt that he was designed for battle. Along the back of his forearm is a blaster tube connected by cables to a power pack across his wide shoulders.

He stops a metre away, staring into space above your head. 'I am ready to serve you,' comes the harsh electronic voice.

'Then come,' you tell him. Note the codeword *Gilgamesh*. You can now either ascend to the next level (turn to **276**) or leave the pyramid (turn to **361**).

426

Surrounded by a limitless expanse of snow, you slog wearily towards your goal. The sun slides low in the sky, wavering like a blob of flame-orange oil against a sky of swirling violet. As it disappears in a scud of cloud lying along the horizon, you feel the dreary cold of day begin to yield to the frigid tyranny of night.

If you lack both a fur cloak and cold-weather clothing, lose 4 Life Points. If you possess either of those items, lose only 2 Life Points. (Lose 1 less Life Point if you have SURVIVAL, and 1 less if you possess a burrek.) Assuming you survive, turn to **444**.



427

There is a brief shouting match, but the Gargan twins see that you will not be swayed. Finally Golgoth, who has stayed aloof from the argument, settles it by saying to them: 'I agree that the automaton is intelligent and therefore counts as a group member. You can abide by that, or leave our group.'

Gilgamesh stands by immobile while all this is going on. 'Is he really intelligent, or does our discussion mean nothing to him?' you wonder aloud.

Golgoth shrugs. 'Who cares? I only said that to settle the dispute so we could get under way.' Turn to 16.

428

No one observes you creeping behind the tent, where you conceal yourself in a snow-drift and listen to what the baron is saying.

'You say the Heart must be destroyed?' comes his reedy voice.

Someone else answers from the video screen: 'The "ultimate power" it confers involves the remaking of the whole universe. This world would cease to exist.'

'And how could it be destroyed?' you hear the baron scoff.

'Twin barysal beams at right angles. They would excite the crystal matrix and cause it to blow apart.'

'So the world would cease to be . . . ' muses the baron. Seeming to reach a decision, he says in a forceful tone: 'Very well, then! I shall sweep aside

this universe and fashion a new one in my image. I shall be god of a new cosmos!’

‘Everything will be destroyed,’ protests the other voice.

‘Except me!’ screeches the baron. ‘Did you really think I would give up the chance for such power? The chance to be whole and young again? The chance for immortality? Gaia, you are mad.’

He snaps off the communicator. So he has spoken to Gaia – and she counsels him that the Heart be destroyed. This is food for thought. Note the codeword *Nemesis* if you do not have it already. Now you can go and talk to Golgoth (turn to **126**), Boche (turn to **104**), or Gaunt (turn to **148**).

429

You hesitate too long over your response. The elevator door opens and locks. Several of the hover-droids swivel in midair and come floating towards you. Behind them, you see the smouldering corpse that seconds ago was Thadra Bey. Boche and the others seem to have got away.

The red beams of the droids’ aiming-lights appear on your chest. You take a step forward. Lasers blister the air. With a single cry, you slump to the floor. The adventure ends here.



430

You have gone no further than thirty metres along the first tunnel when there is the roar of an explosion from behind you. Running back towards the hall where you left the others, you see a cloud of smoke, swirling in the air. In the rubble-strewn hall beyond, someone gives a feeble cough. The force of the blast has cracked the stone lintel above the tunnel, and rock dust is trickling to the floor. It looks as though the tunnel could cave in at any moment. If you have the codeword *Mallet* turn to 19. If not, turn to 41.

431

If you have a charged barysal gun, turn to 219. If not, turn to 241.

432

As your companions set off along the ramp towards the Heart, each keeping a weather eye on the others, you roll the grenade into their midst. The detonation knocks Golgoth and Boche off their feet, but Vajra Singh merely rocks like a great pillar and turns. Because of his armour he is just dazed. He sees at a glance that he can now finish off the other two at his leisure. You are the immediate threat. Levelling the mantramukta cannon, he unleashes a roaring blast of plasma that chars you to a lifeless husk in less than a second. Your adventure is over.

433

If you have **SHOOTING** and a charged barysal gun, turn to **68**. If you wish to use **ROGUERY**, turn to **24**. If you resort to **CUNNING** turn to **46**. If you have none of those skills, turn to **2**.

434

A man called Malengin offers retroviruses – concoctions that alter DNA and result in permanent changes in body structure. You see a selection laid out on a tray that Malengin carries with him. It occurs to you that he is like a sorcerer in one of the old fairy tales, an alchemist peddling dubious potions. If you have **LORE**, you can identify the retroviruses (turn to **266**). If not, you must accept Malengin's own fanciful description of his wares. 'I give no guarantees,' he reminds you, 'but balance this against my very reasonable prices.'

He has one of each of the following retroviruses:

The Exalted Enhancer

(turn to **308**)

10 scads

The Virid Mystery

(turn to **330**)

7 scads

The Mask of Occultation

(turn to **449**)

9 scads

The Peerless Perceptivate

(turn to **287**)

6 scads

After buying a retrovirus, you can turn to the number shown to find out what effect it has. When you have finished your business with Malengin, turn to **414** if you have **STREETWISE** or to **25** if not.

435

You arrive at a large circular room. In the centre rests a Manta sky-car, its burnished black chassis reflecting emerald droplets of light. As you step towards it, you notice a caretek unfold its articulated metal body and move slowly around the base of the sky-car, now and then probing with its diagnostic antenna. This is cause for hope. If the sky-car has been regularly serviced by a caretek, it might still be functional.

A voice calls out. Startled, you glance at the archway leading to another room behind this one. It seems well lit. 'Come here,' calls the voice again. 'At once!'

If you have ESP and a psionic focus you can probe ahead for danger: turn to **27**. Otherwise, you can go through to the other room and investigate (turn to **5**), take a closer look at the sky-car (turn to **49**), or leave (turn to **395**).

436

A few tendrils of mist drift into the lobby behind you through the glass double-doors. The receptionist is a fussy-looking man who is dwarfed by his huge desk and the looming Society logo etched in silver on the black marble wall behind him. He peers up at you with suspicion in his eyes. 'Yes? Can I help you?'

You hand him the ID card. 'I am a member of the Society,' you say, remembering to keep a lacing of disdain in your voice. Society members are rich, powerful and privileged.

He runs the card through a slot, punches buttons

on the console and consults a flickering screen. You see him frown. 'Something is wrong?'

He gives a quick nervous smile and hands your card back. 'No, all is in order.'

Suddenly the sound of tramping feet echoes from a doorway at the back of the lobby. You whirl, but you are too late to get away. Security guards are fanning out to surround you, rifles pointed at your chest. The chief of security is a man whose type you recognize. In earlier eras he might have herded people into gas chambers or ordered them into trenches. Now he snatches the card from your hand. His eyes are like pebbles of dirty ice. 'So, you killed a Society member and stole this,' he says.

You start to protest, but he does not listen. He steps back and snaps his fingers, and you are torn apart in a hail of gunfire. Your adventure ends here.

437

You aim a kick at his head. He blocks it with his forearm and it feels as though someone has whacked a baseball bat across your shin. You do not even see his huge fist lash out, crunching into the bridge of your nose—

You come to your senses a few moments later. You are dimly aware that you're no longer on your feet. The Fijian has hoisted you over his head. You crane your neck and find yourself staring down eighty metres at the mist-shrouded streetlamps.

'You shouldn't have murdered my boss,' mutters the Fijian. And he tosses you down to your doom.

438

You shake Shandor's hand, then turn to do the same to his bodyguards. They stand nonplussed for a moment and Shandor grins. Each in turn takes your hand in his own massive grip, forcing smiles despite their constant wariness. 'Don't mind Vatu and Suva,' says Shandor. 'They distrust everybody they haven't got drunk with.'

At this, the two bodyguards erupt into broad beaming smiles. You turn and gaze out across the windswept landscape. Venis is just visible in the far distance, towers and domes older than the millennium breaking the drab grey skyline. 'Farewell, Hal Shandor,' you say. 'I suppose we'll not meet again.'

'Wait.' He takes an object out of his pocket and hands it to you. 'I've had this for years, but I know it all by heart now. It'll be more use to you.'

You take it. It is a box of black plastic about as big as your hand, with a small video screen and speaker on the side. Lettering on the side reads: *Guide to Venis*. 'What is it?'

'A vade-mecum,' he says. 'It'll tell you almost anything you need to know about the town – street plan, the best hostelryes, areas to avoid, that sort of thing.'

Note the vade-mecum on your Adventure Sheet. As long as you possess it, you can use options for STREETWISE even though you do not have that skill. However, this applies only while you remain in Venis; it does not work in any other city, therefore

discard the vade-mecum when you leave the town.

Leaving Shandor and his men to seek their friends, you head on into Venis. If you have both a shortsword and CLOSE COMBAT, turn to 8. If not, turn to 334.

439

The tunnel echoes stonily to your footsteps. At the far end it widens into a long foyer with open doors at intervals along the opposite wall. You step through into a cylindrical chamber with a glass window at one end. The chamber is lined with seats. It takes you a moment before you realize you are inside a subway carriage. Fax watches from the door, wringing his hands in agitation, as you explore the carriage. The motilator, encased inside a brass cylinder at the front, senses your approach and activates, speaking in a chiming voice: 'Please specify your required destination.'

Questioning the motilator, you consult a map which it projects onto the front window of the carriage. The subway has an intercontinental range, but most of the terminuses are now either inactive or destroyed. Nevertheless there are several destinations which are still marked as in service, and any of them would bring you closer to your goal. If you decide to travel by the subway, turn to 212. If you return to the surface and continue your journey on foot, turn to 420.

440

Greatest of all the monuments here is the Pyramid of Cheops, a structure of smooth black stone a hundred and fifty metres high, with a long ramp leading up to a door set two-thirds of the way up the east face. You make the long climb, your breath steaming in the cold air. Finally you reach the heavy steel door. A symbol is etched into the metal – an emblem of a long-forgotten cause, it means nothing to you. The wind howls dolorously around the pyramid's peak.

If you have the codeword *Humbaba*, turn to **167**. If not you can use either **ROGUERY** (turn to **211**) or **PARADOXING** and a psionic focus (turn to **189**). Otherwise, turn to **361**.

441

'Du-En surveillance is carried out in the War Room on level one,' answers the voice. 'Limited activity is reported. Current human population of Du-En is estimated at four individuals, based on surface scan only.'

That's curious. You thought Du-En was entirely deserted. Who could be there now? There is only one answer, you realize grimly: others who seek the Heart of Volent. You must hurry if you hope to reach Du-En in time.

You can now ask the voice to tell you about Gaia (turn to **297**), Gilgamesh (turn to **318**), or the Heart of Volent (turn to **383**). If you wish to ascend to the Research level just above, turn to **276**. If you think it is time you were on your way, turn to **361**.

Riza takes you outside the building. It is like being in the open air. There is even a breeze! Seeing you look around in amazement, he laughs and points across the lawn towards the horizon. It seems to rise upwards the further you look, curving over into the sky until it is lost behind a haze of light directly overhead. To either side of you, only a few hundred metres away, vast skyscrapers lie like circular plugs across the sky.

‘Did you expect a cramped space-station in the ancient style?’ says Riza. ‘We have enlarged al-Lat over the centuries, until it is what you see today: a cylinder some two kilometres wide and half a kilometre long. Rotation provides us with gravity, the sun’s rays with light and heat.’

He takes you to a flyer, and soon al-Lat is dropping away to port as you steer a course towards Earth’s atmosphere. Chasing the night, you set down in the Saharan Ice Wastes about eight hundred kilometres due east of Du-En. Streaks of pale gold light furrow the sky behind you as you open the cockpit seals and jump down to the snow. Riza’s voice crackles from the radio: ‘We’ll bring the flyer back by autopilot. Good luck.’

You make sure to stand well clear this time as the flyer goes blazing up into the cold morning sky. The screech of its jets recedes into the distance behind it. You are alone. Turn to **298**.

443

You need protection against the harsh glare of daylight thrown up off the snow. Tearing two thin strips from the lining of your sleeves, you tie them above and below your eyes, leaving only a narrow slit to see through. That should protect you from snow blindness. If only the other perils of the Sahara were so easy to deal with! Turn to **403**.

444

Hunger is a knot of ice inside your belly; weariness turns your feet to lead weights. Each daybreak you find it harder to shrug off the lassitude of sleep. Every effort costs intense concentration.

How do your rations stand? If you have two food packs, cross them off your Adventure Sheet and turn to **125**. If you have only one food pack, cross it off and turn to **37**. If you have no food left, turn to **147**.

445

You find Vajra Singh outside his tent, preparing for his foray into the catacombs. He listens without interest to your complaints while checking the power pack on his mantramukta cannon. 'This is no concern of mine,' he says. 'You must settle your own disputes.'

Abruptly there is the crump of an explosion which echoes from the other side of the square. Racing back to where you left Gilgamesh, you see a plume of black smoke rising from the broken shell of his head. Sparks hiss and fizz behind his visor as he stands

swaying, helpless as a puppet. 'Gilgamesh!' you shout, but although he gives a twitch of his fingers he does not reply. His brain-case has been split open by an armour-piercing grenade.

You round on the Gargan sisters in rage. 'You did this! You destroyed my automaton!'

They glance at Golgoth, who is whistling as he polishes his sheath-knife. 'What difference does it make who did it?' says Gargan XIV with a sneer. 'At least now we can get on.'

Delete the codeword *Gilgamesh* and turn to 16.

446

You stroll casually past the tent and drop Little Gaia in the snow. A few minutes later you come back past. The baron's servants glance at you without curiosity. Retrieving Little Gaia, you take her off to a secluded corner of the square and ask her what she overheard.

'Baron Siriasis has a communication link to Gaia,' she says. 'They discussed the Heart of Volent.'

'What did she tell him?'

'Gaia advised him that the Heart is unstable. It will give its user ultimate power, but only by sweeping away our universe and creating a new universe in its place.'

'And the baron's reply to this?'

'He does not care. He is bitter because he is old and crippled. He would be happy to rule over a new universe.' Little Gaia goes on to tell how the Heart could be destroyed: by bombarding it with two

barysal beams at right angles, causing a resonance in the crystal lattice that would split it apart. Note the codeword *Nemesis* if you do not have it already. Now you can go and talk to Golgoth (turn to **126**), Boche (turn to **104**), or Gaunt (turn to **148**).

447

The armoury is a small but well-stocked room in the sub-basement. A gaunt man in white overalls comes over to you, heels clicking on the grey-tiled floor, and asks your requirements. It seems that Society members can take out weapons as long as a payment chit is signed. Since the chits are drawn on the account of the ID card's previous owner, who has no use for money now, you may as well select whatever you like.

The armourer shows you a drawer full of barysal guns. 'We also have crossbows, for those who prefer simplicity in a weapon rather than sheer force.'

You can take any number of barysal guns (each with six charges), crossbows, knives, or stun grenades. Remember that you are limited to a carrying capacity of eight possessions, however. Note what you are taking on your Adventure Sheet, then turn to **73**.

448

As your companions set off along the ramp towards the Heart, each keeping a weather eye on the others, you roll the stasis bomb into their midst. It activates before they have time to run, rooting them to the

spot like statues. You move around them. Of all the adventurers who set out for Du-En, you are now the only one left. Cross the stasis bomb off your Adventure Sheet and turn to **415**.

449

Remember to pay the sum of 9 scads. This retrovirus gives you the ability to alter your appearance and colouring at a whim. Note on your Adventure Sheet that you now have 'chameleon skin', then turn back to **434**.

450

'I'm not your servant, Baron. We're allies, remember?'

He rotates in midair, turning a look of imperious anger on you. It suddenly occurs to you that he is about to use his psychic powers. *So this is the showdown . . .* you have time to think as you back away.

There is a sudden flash and an explosion which shakes the thick stone walls and sends dust and smoke flying in all directions. You are thrown to the floor. Lose 1 Life Point. If alive, you slowly shake your head to clear it, looking around to discover that one of the pillars has toppled. Rock dust sifts through cracks in the dome above. Hearing a cough, you realize Boche is alive but stunned. The blast threw him right across the hall. Closer, under a block of shattered masonry, lies a ripped and bloody tangle of human remains.



You get unsteadily to your feet and approach, grimacing in revulsion as you stumble across a severed arm.

Your heart skips a beat at the sound of stone sliding on stone. You stare in a paralysis of fear as the masonry block shifts, rising of its own accord. What remains underneath is unrecognizable. Even worse is the thing that hovers up into the air: a gory human brain dangling a torn stump of spinal column, a few flecks of bone still embedded in it from the explosion.

A telepathic message stabs into your mind: *While the power of thought remains to me, I can still act. Come closer, my friend. I have a use for that healthy young body . . .*

It is the baron – or what's left of him. If you retreat the way you came, turn to **107**. If you open fire with a charged barysal gun, turn to **63**. If you stand your ground, turn to **85**. If you try to dodge past to the tunnels beyond, turn to **129**.

451

In a tavern you overhear a drunk loudly telling the barman that he will pay his outstanding bill as soon as his boss gets to town. Joining the conversation, you learn that the man has been waiting for several weeks for the arrival of his prospective employer, a wealthy member of the Compass Society. 'He's a very influential man,' mutters the drunk, glaring at the barman. 'I'll do all right once I'm working for him.'

‘Why has he been delayed?’ you wonder.

The barman chips in. ‘If he came across the Appenines, he may have been delayed permanently. There are dangerous mutants up there in the hills.’

‘Pah!’ The drunk scoffs at this. ‘He had three Fijian bodyguards – really big guys!’

‘The mutants won’t be going hungry this winter, then,’ remarks the barman sardonically.

If you have **LORE** or **STREETWISE**, turn to **47**. Otherwise, turn to **69** if you possess an ID card or to **414** if you do not.

452

A person with your shady talents ought to have no trouble disguising yourself to look like the card’s original owner. You can worry about that later. For now, turn to **414**.

453

Picking up the mantramukta cannon, you return to the elevators. If the hover-droids are still waiting above then you will have a hard fight returning to the surface. Even so, it is better than ending your days here in this grim place. You look back at the bodies littering the Shrine of the Heart. The thirst for power claimed so many lives – a senseless waste, when all of them might instead have channelled their efforts into saving this frigid dying world. Perhaps that is your destiny now.

You step into the elevator, and the door closes behind you.

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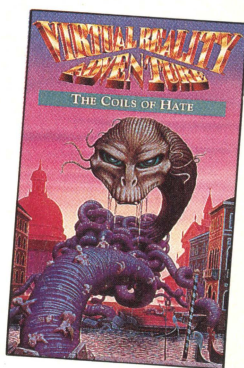
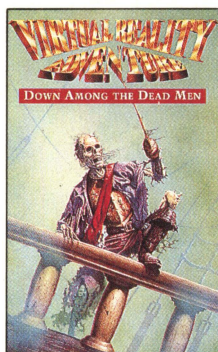
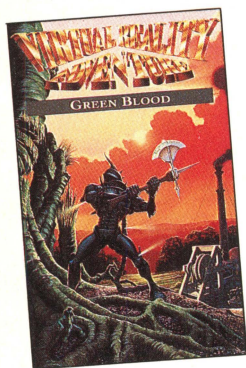
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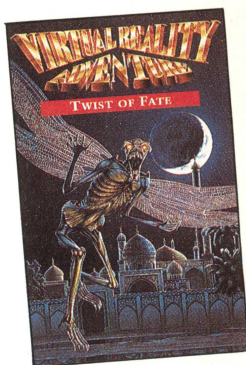
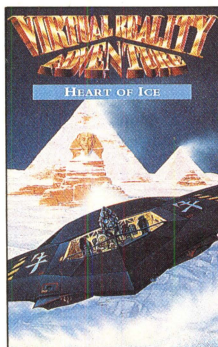
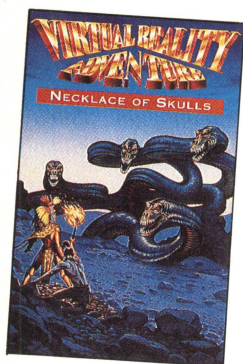
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