

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons

COMPUTER PRODUCT

HILLSFAR
A FORGOTTEN REALMS™ Action Adventure
CLUE BOOK
with original stories by James M. Ward,
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STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS



THE CITY OF HILLSFAR

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HINTS & QUESTS

INTRODUCTION

HILLSFAR, Strategic Simulations, Inc.'s **ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®** action adventure game set in the **FORGOTTEN REALMS®** game world, is composed of five main arcade events intermixed with various adventures or quests. This clue book provides valuable hints which will help you master each of the arcade events, and reveals step-by-step instructions for solving every quest in **HILLSFAR**. Also included are four original short stories, by TSR authors, depicting various adventures within **HILLSFAR**.

EQUESTRIAN HINTS



The Rod of Blasting, a very powerful item, can destroy obstacles and can only be used when riding a horse. A good player will always search mazes for a rod before spending too much time riding around. Only one Rod of Blasting may be in your possession at a time. Each rod will have between ten and fifteen charges. After all the charges have been used, the Rod will disappear and you will need to find another Rod of Blasting.

Birds and arrows cannot be destroyed with the Rod of Blasting. They must be avoided by ducking. If the horse is galloping at full speed, the birds and arrows will not appear very often.

There are three locations (rock quarry, wizard's labyrinth, and dead dragon) outside the city of Hillsfar, which you may get to only by riding on a hidden trail. Here are the specific hidden trails:

1. From the Hermit's Place to the Rock Quarry
2. From the Ruins to the Wizard's Labyrinth
3. From the Shipwreck to the Dead Dragon
4. From the city of Hillsfar to the Big Tree

HORSES AVAILABLE:

FAITH: This horse is denoted by either a white bridle or a green saddle blanket. Faith, the best horse, does what you tell him, and will stay with you through ten crashes.

LIGHTNING: This horse, denoted by either a blue bridle or a light cyan saddle blanket, likes to speed up on his own if he is not already going full speed. He will stay with you through only seven crashes.

POKEY: This horse, denoted by either a yellow bridle or a light blue saddle blanket, cannot gallop as fast as the other horses and will sometimes slow down on his own. He will, however, remain with you through twelve crashes.

JUMPER: This horse, denoted by either an orange bridle or a brown saddle blanket, will jump on his own and sometimes he won't jump when you want. He will only stay with you through five crashes.

Note: The aforementioned crashes are not cumulative from trail to trail. If you are riding Pokey from Hillsfar to camp, you would need to fall off the horse at least twelve times on that trail before Pokey would run away.

ARCHERY HINTS



I. ATTRIBUTES

A. The character's dexterity affects the random movement or wiggling of the crosshairs. The higher the character's dexterity, the less the crosshairs will move.

B. The character's strength affects the weapon's speed or rate of fire. A higher strength will cause any weapon to fly faster. The faster a weapon flies, the less vulnerable it is to the wind. It is also easier to time your shots on moving targets.

II. WEAPONS

Sling: This weapon is affected only slightly by the wind. However, it is the slowest weapon of all and is not a good choice if any other weapons are available.

Dagger: This weapon is also affected only slightly by the wind. The dagger is a faster weapon than the sling and is therefore a better choice.

Darts: This weapon is faster than both the sling and the dagger. However, darts are heavily affected by the wind.

Arrows: These are the fastest weapons. Careful timing is required with the strength bar (signifying the pulling back of the bow string). Arrows are very vulnerable to the wind.

Wand: This weapon is by far the best choice. It is very fast and is not affected by the wind.

III. ANIMALS

Mouse: The mouse can only be hit when he is standing. He is always worth 2,500 points. He

does not ever need to be hit in order to move up levels in the archery event.

Bird: The bird can be hit at any time, but you must hit him in the head or body area. If you hit his wings, it will not score a hit. The bird is worth more points on the higher levels.

IV. TARGETS

Swinging: This is the target that swings back and forth from left to right. This target has three scoring ranges. It is worth the least when it is hanging straight down. It is worth the most when it is at its highest point either to the right or to the left. You receive a medium score when the target is hit midway between these two positions.

Spinning: This is the big round target that spins around. It can only be hit when it is fully facing you. You need to time your shots.

Swaying: This is the final type of target that sways back and forth towards you and away from you. It is the most difficult target to hit, because it can only be hit when it is hanging straight down. This target is always worth the most points.

V. GENERAL HINTS

You should practice each new level at least once to find out the value of each different target type at that particular level. This will allow you to determine what targets you need to hit and how many times, in order to place on the high score list.

Tanna (the person standing next to the hay bales) can never be hit.

During the first few levels of the archery competition, the targets remain stationary. The high scores do not directly relate to advancing levels. All entries on the high score list will change when you advance a level. There are ten target levels to shoot at, which become increasingly difficult with each new level.

ARENA HINTS



The four monster types you will encounter in the Arena:



Orc



Minotaur



Lizard Man



Knight

A character's strength affects the amount of damage he may inflict on his opponent with each hit. A higher strength will inflict more damage.

Always try to be fully healed whenever entering the arena. The more hit points you have, the longer you can survive. You should always carry healing potions into the arena if you plan to fight more than one monster. Healing potions may be drunk between combat rounds.

The best time to hit the monsters is just when they are starting their own attack. If they are attacking from the right, you should try to attack from the same direction. Sometimes monsters are stunned when hit. This allows them to be hit again, if done immediately.

Detailed clues on how to defeat the first four monsters, are provided in the pubs. Use the "LISTEN TO GOSSIP" option when in the pubs to get these clues. The following is a list of the attack patterns for each of the 16 monsters (The attack pattern always repeats. However, if a pattern is in parentheses there is a 50% chance that the pattern will be repeated before continuing on. Look below at Ssslader as an example. First he will attack right, then left. Now there is a 50% chance that he will repeat the right, left combination before attacking with his tail, followed by a left.).

ATTACK PATTERNS:

LEFTY: left, left, left, right.

RED MINOTAUR: left, head butt, right.

SSSLADER: (right, left), (tail attack, left).

If you hit **SSSLADER** after his tail attack he will be stunned twice as long as normal.

MORIN: (left, left), (right, right), attack to midsection.

OTTIS: left, right.

TAURUS: (left), head butt, (right).

WHIPLASH: left, right, right, tail attack.

KELLER: attack to midsection, left, right.

BONE BREAKER: right, left, left.

SMASHER: (head butt), left, left.

HISSEA: tail attack, (left, left), tail attack, right.

If you hit **HISSEA** after the second tail attack he will be stunned a little longer than normal.

KALLAK: left, left, attack to midsection, right.

BLOODS BANE: right, left, right, left, left.

If you hit **BLOODS BANE** after the last left, he will be stunned longer.

MOODRA: head butt, right, left, head butt, head butt.

If you hit **MOODRA** after the second head butt, he will be stunned longer.

ENOC: (left, right), left, tail attack, tail attack.

SCARHEART: attack to midsection, left, left, attack to midsection, right.

MAZE RUNNING HINTS



Move quickly and keep an eye on the time bar. It is possible to run out of time and still exit, as long as a guard doesn't touch you before you find the exit. Try to avoid getting trapped in a corridor with only one exit.

Secret Rooms: To find a secret room, you should start searching in the upper, left part of the maze. The secret door will always be on a left wall. You must bump into the wall in order to find the secret door to the secret room. Following is a list of all the places which contain a secret room:

1. Castle
2. Mages' Tower
3. Haunted Mansion
4. Wizard's Labyrinth
5. Rogues' Guild
6. Mages' Guild
7. Fighters' Guild
8. Temple of Tempus

LOCKPICK HINTS



You should memorize how your picks are arranged on the screen. You will also realize after repeated use, that some of the pick ends are never used.

The Chime of Opening can be found in the secret room at the Wizard's Labyrinth. It will be in the sixth chest. If the Chime of Opening breaks, you will be able to find another one where you found the first one.

The thief class character, or other characters with an NPC thief accompanying them, will encounter more locked chests than the non-thief character classes.

GENERAL HINTS

You may either go into the Arena or rest in your guild to get rid of the NPC thief traveling with you.

To make time pass, rest in your respective guild.

Save the game (you must return to camp to save) often to prevent loss of progress due to the demise of your character.

When drinking in the pubs, always remember to drink in moderation.

If you forget what your last clue was, you may display it on the screen by hitting the 'R' key when in the city of Hillsfar.

QUEST HINTS

There are four types of quests possible in Hillsfar, and there are three individual quests per quest type. The four types are:

1. Fighter quests
2. Thief quests
3. Magic-user quests
4. Cleric quests

Note: If you enter Hillsfar with a multiple-class character, you will be assigned one of the above quest types randomly. For example, if you are a magic-user/thief, you may be assigned either the magic-user or thief quests, but not both.

Each character has a colored tunic, denoting which quest he/she is on, when riding in the Equestrian event (C-64 version only). Here are the tunic colors and their associated quest type:

1. **Red** - Fighter
2. **Purple** - Thief
3. **Yellow** - Magic-user
4. **Blue** - Cleric

Pubs are the best sources of information in Hillsfar. There are many miscellaneous bits of information to be obtained at the pubs. However, some of the information obtained will be false or misleading. If you think the next clue for a quest should be in a pub, but can't seem to find it, you may need to get "noticed." To get noticed, you should first buy a drink and then try the "LISTEN TO GOSSIP" option. You may need to listen to gossip several times before someone notices you.

If you get stumped at any point during a quest, try a pub, your guild, or search areas (accomplished by hitting the fire button on the joystick or the spacebar) in the city of Hillsfar.

All of the quests are linear; you need to complete a certain activity or step before going on to the next.

WARNING

The rest of this section will reveal step by step details for every quest in the game. The location of where you should be will be listed first, followed by what action you should perform in order to get the clue message. The object you should find, or hint you should receive (if obscure), will be shown in parentheses. Do not read further if you wish to solve the quests on your own!

Note: When seeking a clue in any pub, if the following step by step quest instructions do not ask you to perform a specific activity, you may do any of the following to get the next clue:

1. LISTEN TO GOSSIP: It may take more than one try.
2. HIDE IN THE SHADOWS: (Thief only).
3. PICK POCKETS: (Thief only).
4. CHARM BARMAID: (Magic-user only).
5. GIVE FREE HEALINGS: (Cleric only).
6. BUY THE HOUSE A ROUND.
7. BUY THE BARMAID A DRINK or OFFER BARMAID GOLD FOR INFO.

THIEF QUESTS

THIEF QUEST 1:

1. ROGUES' GUILD: Talk to the master.
2. MAGIC SHOP: Talk to the owner.
3. ANY SEWER: 1st chest, unlocked (find poison fungus).
4. ROGUES' GUILD: Talk to the master.
5. HERMIT'S PLACE: 2nd chest (find misty white liquid).
6. ROGUES' GUILD: Talk to the master (end of the first thief quest).

THIEF QUEST 2:

1. ROGUES' GUILD: Talk to the master.
2. ANY PUB: (hear rumor about stolen amulet by thief hiding in the sewers).

3. SEWER: 1st locked chest (piece together an old note).
4. DRAGON'S LAIR PUB: Listen to gossip (hear information about the Hut).
5. HUT (outside the city of Hillsfar): (discover hint about picking the cellar door in one of the pubs)
6. ANY PUB: Do not pick the cellar door, but listen to gossip
7. SEWER IN THE NORTHWEST PART OF THE CITY: 5th locked chest (find dead thief).
8. ROGUES' GUILD: Talk to the master.
9. TEMPLE OF TEMPUS (in the secret room): 4th locked chest (find the amulet, but have it taken).
10. HEALER SHOP (southwest): Talk to the owner.
11. HERMIT'S PLACE: (find Hermit's diary).
12. ROCK QUARRY: (find a rusty pick).
13. CASTLE (in the secret room): 7th chest (find the amulet).
14. ROGUES' GUILD: Talk to the master (end of the second thief quest).
9. SEARCH OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE OF TEMPUS: (meet the Grey Wolves' thieves).
10. MAGES' TOWER (the secret room): (discover book of Arcane Lore).
11. SEARCH OUTSIDE THE DRAGON'S LAIR PUB AT 4 A.M.: (meet again with the Grey Wolves).
12. ROGUES' GUILD: Talk to the master.
13. ANY PUB: Listen to gossip.
14. DEAD DRAGON (get there by hidden trail from the shipwreck): 5th locked chest (discover a claw-shaped pick).
15. SEARCH OUTSIDE THE DRAGON'S LAIR PUB ANYTIME: (You'll get the next message.).
16. ROGUES' GUILD: Talk to the master (end of the third thief quest).

FIGHTER QUESTS

FIGHTER QUEST 1:

1. FIGHTERS' GUILD: Talk to the master.
2. ARCHERY RANGE: Need to advance at least 2 levels to get the next clue.
3. FIGHTERS' GUILD: Talk to the master.
4. ARENA: Need to have defeated the Red Minotaur to get the next clue.
5. FIGHTERS' GUILD: Talk to the master.
6. CEMETERY: 1st chest, unlocked (hint about the jail).
7. JAIL: 2nd chest, unlocked (find desired documents).
8. FIGHTERS' GUILD: Talk to the master (end of the first fighter quest).

FIGHTER QUEST 2:

1. FIGHTERS' GUILD: Talk to the master.
2. SEARCH OUTSIDE THE CASTLE: Can go one of two ways from here, either to the cemetery (step 9) or the Rat's Nest Pub (step 3).
3. RAT'S NEST PUB: Listen to gossip (hint about looking in the sewers).

THIEF QUEST 3:

1. ROGUES' GUILD: Talk to the master.
2. MAGIC SHOP (when it is closed): 4th chest (discover a wolf's head pick).
3. ANY PUB: Listen to gossip (get hint about the trading post).
4. TRADING POST: Talk to the trader.
5. ANY PUB: Listen to gossip (hint about an orc, Ottis, who fights in the arena).
6. ARENA: Need to defeat Ottis, the orc, to get the next clue.
7. BUGBEAR'S CAVE PUB: Have a drink and listen to gossip (this doesn't happen immediately).
8. ARCHERY: Need to go up about 4 levels in the archery event (Tanna eventually gives the next hint).

4. ANY SEWER: 4th or maybe 8th chest (meet a beggar who gives hint about the arena).
5. ARENA: Must have defeated Ottis, the orc, to get the next clue.
6. HERMIT'S PLACE: (find a poster).
7. RAT'S NEST PUB: Buy the barmaid a drink.
8. HAUNTED MANSION (in the secret room): Will find Jared here and the player will need to decide to help Jared or not. If the player helps Jared, he/she will go to step 15. Otherwise he/she will go to step 17.
9. CEMETERY: Will meet King Maalthiir's daughter and the player will need to decide whether to help her or not. If the player decides to help her, he/she will go to the next step or else he/she will need to go to the Rat's Nest Pub (step 3).
10. SHIPWRECK: 5th chest (will find a letter).
11. HYDRA'S DEN PUB: Buy the barmaid a drink.
12. HERMIT'S PLACE: 6th chest (hint to go to the Haunted Mansion).
13. HAUNTED MANSION: Will find Jared here and assist him.
14. MAGES' TOWER (secret room): Will find the princess' jewels.
15. BUGBEAR'S CAVE PUB: Buy the barmaid a drink.
16. TRADING POST: Talk to the trader.
17. FIGHTERS' GUILD: Talk to the master (end of the second fighter quest).
6. FIGHTERS' GUILD: Talk to the master.
7. ARENA: Must have beaten Taurus to get the next clue.
8. ANY PUB: (hint about the healer).
9. HEALER SHOP IN THE SOUTHWEST OF HILLSFAR: Talk to the owner.
10. ROCK QUARRY: 3rd chest, unlocked (find a bonnet).
11. FIGHTERS' GUILD: Talk to the master.
12. ANY PUB: (hint about the guild).
13. FIGHTERS' GUILD: Talk to the master.
14. RUINS: 6th chest, unlocked (find Arlana).
15. FIGHTERS' GUILD: Talk to the master (end of the third fighter quest).



MAGIC-USER QUEST 1:

1. MAGES' GUILD: Talk to the master.
2. TRADING POST: Talk to the trader.
3. DEAD DRAGON: (take hidden trail from the shipwreck to get there): (find squid remains).
4. MAGIC SHOP: Talk to the owner.
5. DEAD DRAGON: (hint about the Hydra's Den Pub).
6. HYDRA'S DEN PUB: (hint about trader).
7. TRADING POST: Talk to the trader.
8. MAGIC SHOP: Talk to the owner.
9. MAGES' GUILD: Talk to the master (end of the first magic-user quest).

MAGIC-USER QUEST 2:

1. MAGES' GUILD: Talk to the master.
2. TRADING POST: Talk to the trader.
3. BOOKSTORE: First chest (C-64 version) / Talk to the owner (IBM version).
4. MAGICSHOP: Talk to the owner (hint about the archery range).
5. TANNA'S ARCHERY RANGE: Need to attain the third level to get the next clue.

FIGHTER QUEST 3:

1. FIGHTERS' GUILD: Talk to the master.
2. SEARCH NEXT DOOR TO THE STABLES: Will meet Hector Sams.
3. CEMETERY: 4th chest (find a map).
4. BIG TREE: 2nd chest (find a body).
5. ARCHERY RANGE: Must be at the 5th or higher level to get the next clue (this is difficult).

6. HYDRA'S DEN PUB: Have a drink and listen to gossip (clue about going to the ruins).
7. RUINS: 6th chest (find a gold pendant).
8. HYDRA'S DEN PUB: Charm the barmaid.
9. DRAGON'S LAIR PUB: Charm the barmaid (must have at least 500 gold pieces).
10. MAGES' GUILD: Talk to the master (end of the second magic-user quest).

MAGIC-USER QUEST 3:

Note: This magic-user quest has random paths to get to the end.

1. MAGES' GUILD: Talk to the master (this will give a hint that you are tired, so you should rest in order to get the next hint).
2. MAGES' GUILD: Talk to the master. The computer will randomly suggest that the player go either to the MAGIC SHOP (step 3) or BOOKSTORE (step 4).
3. MAGIC SHOP (when it is closed): 2nd chest (will find reddish liquid). From here the player will need to go to the MAGES' GUILD (step 5) or the ROCK QUARRY (step 6).
4. BOOKSTORE (when it is closed): 4th chest.

From here the player will be directed to the DRAGON'S LAIR PUB (step 7) or to the ROCK QUARRY (step 6).

5. MAGES' GUILD: Talk to the master.

From here the player will need to go to the ARCHERY RANGE (step 8).

6. ROCK QUARRY: Need to now go to the ARCHERY RANGE (step 8).
7. DRAGON'S LAIR PUB: Buy the barmaid a drink.

From here the player will need to go to the ARCHERY RANGE (step 8).

8. ARCHERY RANGE: Will need to get to at least the 4th level to get the clue.

From here the player will need to go to the WIZARD'S LABYRINTH (step 9).

9. WIZARD'S LABYRINTH: 2nd chest.

From here the player will need to go to the MAGES' TOWER (step 10).

10. MAGES' TOWER (in the secret room): 1st chest.

From here the player will be directed to either the RUINS (step 11) or the HUT (step 12) or the HERMIT'S PLACE (step 13).

11. RUINS: 2nd chest.

From here the player will need to go to the ARENA (step 14).

12. THE HUT: 2nd chest.

From here the player will need to go to the ARENA (step 14).

13. HERMIT'S PLACE: 2nd chest.

From here the player will need to go to the ARENA (step 14).

14. ARENA: Must beat Taurus, the Minotaur (the 6th monster).

From here the player will be directed to either a PUB (step 15) or the MAGES' GUILD (step 16) or the CEMETERY (step 17).

15. ANY PUB: Charm the barmaid.

From here go to the SHIPWRECK (step 18).

16. MAGES' GUILD: Talk to the master.

From here the player will be directed to either SHIPWRECK (step 18) or the RAT'S NEST PUB (step 19).

17. CEMETERY: 6th chest.

From here go to the SHIPWRECK (step 18).

18. SHIPWRECK: 7th chest.

From here go to the HAUNTED MANSION (step 20).

19. RAT'S NEST PUB: Buy the barmaid a drink.

From here go to the HAUNTED MANSION (step 20).

20. HAUNTED MANSION (secret room): 2nd chest.

21. MAGES' GUILD: Talk to the master (end of the third magic-user quest).

CLERIC QUESTS

CLERIC QUEST 1:

1. TEMPLE OF TEMPUS: Talk to the master.
2. TRADING POST: Talk to the trader.
3. BIG TREE: 1st chest, unlocked (find a dead person).
4. TEMPLE OF TEMPUS: Talk to the master.
5. TRADING POST: Talk to the trader.
6. HERMIT'S PLACE: (find holy scriptures).
7. TEMPLE OF TEMPUS: Talk to the master (end of the first cleric quest).

CLERIC QUEST 2:

1. TEMPLE OF TEMPUS: Talk to the master.
2. SEWER: 1st chest, unlocked. The player will need to decide whether or not to turn the little man over to the Red Plume Guards.

If they turn the little man in to the guards they will not be given the clue to go to the Dragon's Lair Pub.

3. DRAGON'S LAIR PUB: Listen to gossip.
4. HAUNTED MANSION: 2nd chest, unlocked (find a note).
5. HUT: 1st unlocked chest (hint from an old man).
6. RUINS: 1st unlocked chest (find the magical incense).
7. TEMPLE OF TEMPUS: Talk to the master (end of the second cleric quest).

CLERIC QUEST 3:

1. SEARCH OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE OF TEMPUS: (will receive the first clue).
2. TEMPLE OF TEMPUS: Talk to the master (the player must eventually give the donation to Serson in order to continue the quest).
3. MAGES' TOWER: 8th chest (find the wand with blue runes).
4. TEMPLE OF TEMPUS: Talk to the master.
5. SEARCH RIGHT OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE OF TEMPUS: (will get a message to go to the Rat's Nest pub).
6. RAT'S NEST PUB (MUST BE 8, 9, OR 10 O'CLOCK P.M.): Listen to gossip to meet a woman named Dalma.
7. RAT'S NEST PUB THE NEXT DAY: Listen to gossip.
8. TEMPLE OF TEMPUS: Talk to the master.
9. RAT'S NEST PUB: Listen to gossip.
10. TEMPLE OF TEMPUS: Talk to the master.
11. ROCK QUARRY: 3rd unlocked chest (find a dead Dalma and a hint about a mansion).
12. HAUNTED MANSION: 6th chest (find Tina's ring).
13. TEMPLE OF TEMPUS: Talk to the master (end of the third cleric quest).

THE LORE OF HILLSFAR

TANAREVE, THE CLERIC



REN O' THE STAR, THIEF



GRANITE, DWARVEN FIGHTER



MHAL, THE MAGE



TANAREVE, THE CLERIC

by Steve Winter

Tanareve loosened the buckles on the left side of his leather breast plate. Slipping his hand behind the circular target, he pulled the heavy fabric of his robe away from his skin. He fancied that he could hear a faint, sucking sound as the damp, coarse wool gave up its itchy grip on his chest. The day was uncommonly warm for early spring.

"Still," Tanareve thought, "I should reach the trading post before too much longer, and I dare not remove my armor until I gain the relative safety of the post." The roads around Hillsfar were heavily traveled, both by honest men and brigands.

"The latter certainly are involved somehow in my current mission,"

he thought. Graeme ibn-Naif, an elderly acolyte sent on a simple mission, had never returned to the Temple of Tempus. Now Tanareve had to find him. Tanareve was certain the man had been waylaid by bandits, but he could think of no good reason for such an attack. Graeme would have traveled light to avoid giving thieves any reason to attack him. In addition, the scriptures he was carrying – the Holy Texts of Asrigir, the Bearded Seer of the Moonsea – were of no interest to anyone but a priest of Tempus. "Perhaps," thought Tanareve, "Graeme's attackers didn't know and thought the scrolls were valuable. Or perhaps they were simply desperate. In either case, ensuring Graeme's safety was more important than recovering the scrolls, no matter what the priests at the Temple might say."

A broad, red halo was spreading across the sky as the trading post suddenly appeared around a bend in the road. The priest cinched up his armor and spurred his horse on toward the gate.

Tanareve drew a deep breath and smiled. The intermingled smells of roasting meat, cinna-

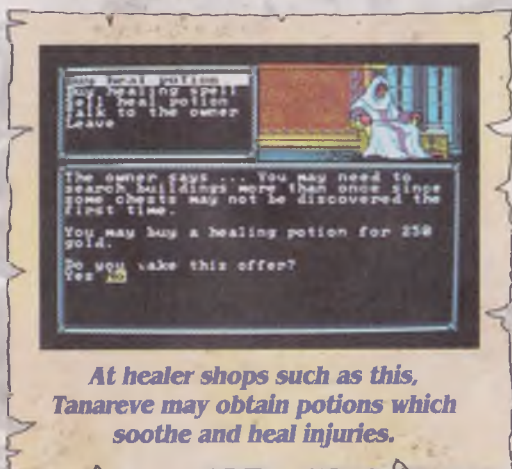
mon, ale, horses, and trade goods – so characteristic of the trading post – always filled him with a sense of exotic adventure. After leaving his horse at the stables, he strolled through the market stalls and past the merchants' wagons before finally heading for the inn.

"Well met, young priest," rasped a jagged voice. "How can we serve a servant of Tempus this

evening?" The voice came from a portly man in a spattered leather apron and spotless bleached blouse. Once again, Tanareve unbuckled the round breast plate, enameled with the blazing sword of Tempus, and sat on the edge of a table.

"A unicorn's horn brimming with ambrosia and a dozen spitted peacocks would satisfy me, but I'll settle for a cup of wine and a platter of stewed goose."

The innkeeper laughed and wiped his hands on his apron. "It's a fortunate thing that you'll settle," he croaked, "as we're fresh out of peacocks and the serving girl broke all our unicorn's horns just yesterday! But, wine and goose we have aplenty."



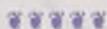
At healer shops such as this, Tanareve may obtain potions which soothe and heal injuries.

As the innkeeper turned back toward the kitchen, Tanareve called after him. "And one other thing, if I may ask?" The innkeeper turned back toward Tanareve, who continued. "An acolyte of my faith, elderly but sturdy, and bearing several books should have come through here some days past. Have you seen him?"

"Certainly," replied the innkeeper. "Two nights ago he dined at that very table and slept under this very roof. When he left, he followed the road toward the Big Tree, and I've seen and heard naught of him since. Is he all right?"

"That's what I'm here to find out," answered Tanareve. "Now, wine and goose!"

"Wine and goose!" laughed the innkeeper, as he returned to the kitchen.



The next morning, Tanareve was on the road before the sun had risen above the treetops. He knew now where Graeme had gone. Tanareve had heard the acolyte talk about the Big Tree many times: how serene and wise it seemed, how sitting in its shade brought understanding and insight. "The old man was a romantic," thought Tanareve. "It's just a tree and nothing more. The warrior spirit comes from discipline, training, and experience, not from lounging in the shade. No wonder Graeme had remained an acolyte all his life." Still, Tanareve worried for the man who had befriended him three short years ago.

"If not for Graeme," thought Tanareve, "I'd still be an acolyte myself. How could someone who acted so little like a soldier know so much about war and battle?" Tanareve knew that without the older man's wisdom and knowledge helping him along, he never would have been ordained. If something had happened to Graeme, Tanareve at least owed him the rites of burial.

Such grim thoughts were cut short by Tanareve's arrival at the Big Tree. He was not a trained tracker, but anyone could see that a fight had recently occurred. The grass was trampled and clods of turf were churned up and scattered; several broken spears were scattered under the tree and three arrows were embedded in the trunk.

Tanareve dismounted for a closer look. The arrows were a common sort, available even at

the trading post. These three arrows bore no identifying marks. "Whoever the bowman was," Tanareve thought, "he isn't much of a shot; assuming he wasn't just aiming at the tree, he missed his mark three times."

Further inspection of the area turned up nothing else. Tanareve sat cross-legged under the tree and closed his eyes. "Maybe I'll have one of Graeme's visions," he thought wryly. Then he chuckled to himself, picturing the elder acolyte squaring off against – how many? Two? Five? Ten bandits? Tanareve had seen Graeme fight only twice and, in spite of his age, he fought with the grace and cunning of a mongoose. Even ten ordinary bandits would have needed an archer to bring him down. But bowmen aren't hard to find.

When Tanareve opened his eyes, he was surprised to see that his horse was gone. Faith was an intelligent animal who had never strayed before. In a moment, Tanareve was on his feet with his hammer in his hand. Quickly he glanced in both directions along the road, but saw nothing. He worked his way around the enormous tree trunk, moving as quietly as he could. Twenty yards away, at the edge of the cleared space around the tree, bushes were swaying. Tanareve jogged to the spot and, peering past the forest's edge, saw Faith nuzzling a large object. There was no one else in sight, so Tanareve relaxed and approached the horse.

As his eyes adjusted to the gloom beneath the trees, Tanareve recognized that the object was a wooden chest, weathered and cracked from long use but still basically sound. The lock was broken and pried loose, but the chest was bound shut with a length of rope. Curious, Tanareve unknotted the rope and lifted the lid. His breath caught in his throat at the sight of the chest's contents: Graeme!

The acolyte lay on his side, bound and gagged, his knees tucked under his chin. Tanareve detected breath, but it was very weak. Gently he lifted his friend from the box and carried him back to the clearing, where he laid him in the shade of the Big Tree.

As soon as Graeme was stretched out on the ground, Tanareve saw the many sword and spear cuts on his arms and legs, and the

snapped-off shaft of an arrow sticking out beneath his right ribs. Grasping his hammer with both hands and raising it over his head, Tanareve shouted his healing prayer to Tempus. When he looked down again, Graeme stirred and groaned.

Before long, fortified by wine, bread, and prayer, Graeme was sitting up, his back against the tree.

"I'm awfully glad to see you alive, old man," said Tanareve.

"The pleasure is mutual," chuckled Graeme.

"So," said Tanareve. "How did you come to be sleeping in a bound chest in the woods?"

"Actually, I was sleeping right here," explained Graeme. "Six men on horses came down the road from the west. They jumped from their mounts and set upon me without so much as a 'How-do.' Oh, they were a sorry lot. I brained one of them and broke another's arm before they fell back. Unfortunately, they all drew short bows from their saddles – all but the one with the broken arm – and tried to pepper me with arrows. Four shots and only one hit, and that below my rib cage. What a sorry lot."

"Still, in the end, they were too much for this tired old body. I guess they thought it was pretty funny when they tossed me in that chest. I thought it was pretty funny that all they got for their pain was the long-winded ramblings of Asrigir and the most stupid donkey this side of Cormyr. What's next?"

Tanareve stood. "What's next is that you walk back to Hillsfar while I go after the bandits. Long winded or no, the Overseer wants Asrigir's ramblings. I was sent to find them, not you. You should be all right if you trek through the pasture lands to the coast road."

"Aye, I'll be fine," said Graeme. "And you shan't have any trouble with that lot. What a sorry bunch. I'll be in more danger walking amongst the sheep herds than you will amongst the wolves."



The next morning, Tanareve found himself again riding out of the trading post before dawn. As he'd been eating his evening meal,

merchants arrived with news of a robbery to the north, near where the hermit lives. Five bandits, one with his arm in a splint, had waylaid and beaten a lone traveler. That could only be the group Tanareve sought.

He rode north as the sun rose over the Moonsea. The day promised to be unusually warm again. Tanareve removed his steel cap so the breeze could blow through his hair.

Then, for no apparent reason, Faith stopped. The cleric urged the horse on, but Faith refused to go forward. Instead, the horse turned to the side. Knowing better than to ignore his horse's instincts, Tanareve scanned the trees along the road. There, behind a fallen tree, he saw what appeared to be a path into the woods. Tanareve led Faith to the path and the horse stepped boldly across the log.

Tanareve rode a short way into the forest and then stopped, waiting for his eyes to adjust to the eternal twilight. A few dozen yards within the forest, the path was easy to follow. Slowly he picked his way along, letting Faith navigate while he scanned the forest in all directions, alert for danger.

He had traveled less than half a mile when Tanareve caught the faint scent of wood smoke. Noting that he was riding almost directly into the breeze, Tanareve realized that someone's camp lay dead ahead. He dismounted.

Guessing at the position of the camp, Tanareve circled to the right, hoping to get between the camp and the rising sun. After circling for 15 minutes, he tethered Faith to a tree and crept forward. Within minutes, Tanareve heard voices chattering and horses snorting.

The cleric dropped to the ground and crawled toward the sound. A few minutes of crawling brought him to within sight of the camp. He counted five horses on the far side of the camp, their reins draped across a tree branch. One of the bandits stood among them, brushing a horse. The other four were seated or lying on the ground around the fire, grumbling and sifting through a meager pile of loot. None of them looked happy; the one with his arm in a sling seemed particularly sullen.

Tanareve noted that one of the bandits by the fire was leafing through a large book with stiff

pages – the Text of Asrigir! "At least one of the volumes is still intact," he thought.

"What junk," grumbled the brigand with the broken arm. "Five days of hiding in ditches and risking our necks and what do we get? A pile of junk. What's in those books, eh?"

The bandit who had been paging through the book slammed it shut and tossed it on the pile. "Nothing," he snorted, "just some nonsense about Tempus."

"I told you robbing priests was a waste of time," said another of the bandits who was lying on a blanket, watching the smoke from the campfire drift past. "Toss 'em on the fire. They're religious books; they deserve a proper cremation."

Tanareve knew he had to act quickly. Pulling his hammer from his belt, he cocked back his arm and mouthed a silent prayer to Tempus. Then he hurled the hammer with all his might straight into the bandits' camp. Suddenly, in mid-flight, the hammer ignited into a roaring ball of flame which immediately reformed itself into a blazing war hammer. Concentrating on the spell, Tanareve

smashed the spiritual hammer into one bandit, then another, and then a third.

The outlaws shouted and cursed in half a dozen different languages. Some drew their weapons and slashed at the air while others threw themselves on the ground and covered their heads. Within moments, all of them were dashing for their horses. The booty was forgotten in their fright. Believing that they were under attack from a mad sorcerer, the bandits fled with their lives and were happy to escape.

Less than a minute after hurling his hammer, Tanareve stepped into the clearing and retrieved the weapon – now returned to its normal state – from where it had fallen. He picked up the Text of Asrigir; it appeared undamaged. Kicking through the pile of loot, he found the other two volumes and reclaimed them as well.

With one last glance around the camp, Tanareve tucked the volumes under his arm and turned to leave.

"Truly a sorry lot," he mumbled, and laughed to himself.

REN O' THE STAR, THE THIEF

by James M. Ward

A dusty, tall young man walked down the road, cursing to himself. The birds, deer, and assorted insects hearing his words all ran for cover. Such was the foul nature of his commentary on the world and his life in general.

"By all the gods, what in the world am I doing wrong?" A cloud of dust proceeded this ranting, as he

slammed his once-stylish cap against his grimy tunic.

"I've been thrown out of Waterdeep; the entire country of Cormyr did everything they could to end my life; the bandits of Yulash killed the best horse I ever had; and now I am almost copperless and entering a strange town. OK, enough is enough. I vow to follow the rules of this new city I'm approaching. I vow to remain calm and not get into fights. I'll find the guildmaster of thieves and play the role of a model guild member. Did you hear that Sune?" Ren shouted to his pretty goddess, "I'll try to be as good as I can be, if you quit kicking me in the backside." He also muttered a silent prayer to Tymora; it couldn't hurt to have a little help from another direction.

At the same time, he rounded a bend in the forest road; the city of Hillsfar was a welcome sight. From a distance, it was a lovely place, set against the gleaming tides of the emerald green Moonsea. Colorful towers rose and touched the clouds in the morning sunlight.

As he approached the town, it somehow felt very right, as if the gods were telling him, "this is your place, young Rogue." In minutes he was at the main gate where several Red Plume Guards were stopping all those entering the town. Ren had heard the city was under a new lord: a merchant-mage by the name of Maalthiir. This self-proclaimed First Lord of

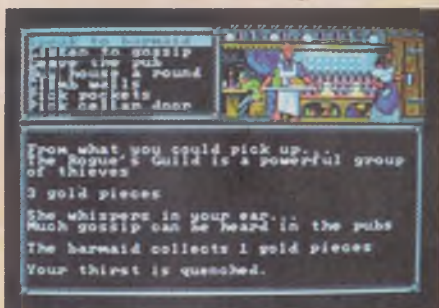
Hillsfar was said to rule the city with an iron fist. That was all right by Ren; iron fists made for golden opportunities. The young thief smiled for the first time in many days at the prospect of a new life here.

"Oh, a jester," one of the Red Plume Guards sneered, taking issue with Ren's easy manner. "We know how to handle your type. Hand over all your

weapons and any magical items you might have, by order of the First Lord, Maalthiir."

Already, Ren's vow of peace was difficult to keep. "Why of course noble lord, I assume my things will be returned to me when I leave your wondrous city?"

Ren noticed the crossbowmen on the upper gates, the ten other guards resting in the shade of the wall, and the alert nature of the two in front of him. He knew the price he would pay for causing trouble. Ren handed over his ten throwing knives, his two short swords, the sack of caltrops, his potion of giant strength, and his teleport scroll. The young thief also noted the mage with the wand of magic detection pointed in his direction. After being carefully frisked for other



**Learn what Ren already knows:
pubs are an excellent source of
gossip and information.**

goodies, the guards looked at the mage and noted the nod.

"You can go now, but see that you don't cause any trouble."

"Trouble, mighty lord, I wouldn't dream of it."

The smiling Ren walked through the gate and turned south. With a jaunty stride he walked down the street noting the secret thief marks on doors and tower walls all leading him south and straight to the Rogues' Guild.



It was very easy to find the Rogues' Guild in the southwest corner of town. The quick passing of a few coins allowed Ren to have an interview with Swipe, the Rogue guildmaster.

Swipe's guild was much like Rogue Guilds everywhere. The outside of the building appeared run down, but the inside was richly appointed with the best of furniture. This was to show novice thieves and bards what could happen to them if they joined the guild. The two huge guards in front of Swipe's inner chambers clearly showed what could happen if the guild were ever crossed. These guards looked like they could kill a man with their eyelashes. One of them opened the door and let Ren in, but neither entered with him.

"Swipe must be a brave man," Ren whispered to himself.

Guildmaster Swipe stood up and stood up and stood up. Ren had never seen such a tall man. As he came to give Swipe the Rogues' grip, Ren – a head taller than six feet – was at least two feet shorter than the giant. Swipe sat in a huge chair and Ren in a more normal one.

The young thief quickly realized that all of this was designed to intimidate those who talked to Swipe. It was working. Ren wasn't going to show his new guildmaster, although.

"So you want to join my guild, lad. Well, that's a right sound idea. All you have to do is prove your worth to me."

"How may I do this, master?" Ren knew that one wrong move would get him killed in one of several nasty ways.

"I've need of a special fungus that has become very hard to find of late. Go to the Magic shop and don't come back to me until you have the fungus."

"Your wish is my command," Ren bowed and left the guild with a new set of lock picks and no idea where the Magic shop was.

The city of Hillsfar was a large place filled with people and Red Plume Guards. Picking purses wasn't going to be easy in a place like this, but Ren didn't care. His specialty was opening locks. He found opening all types of chests a much safer pastime than taking purses or climbing walls to get other goodies. Suddenly, from out of the shadows a magic-user with gold skin and an odd cast to his eyes spoke to him in a whisper. "Good sir, I would show you a magic trick. Are you interested?"

The mage stood about six feet tall and was dressed in black robes. He had long blond hair and whispered all of his words. Ren was careful, having dealt with mages before.

"No, I think not, kind mage. I'm in a great hurry right at the moment. Maybe later." Ren knew such mages were just as likely to teleport you to a prison or battle than give you gold for watching their strange tricks. He rushed past, trying to get out of the mage's sight as quickly as possible.

It took just about an hour for Ren to find the Magic shop. However, the ancient crone who worked there was no help at all. She looked to be about a hundred and could barely talk. Ren was sure she couldn't chew Dart Weed and walk at the same time.

"That's a very rare type of poison fungus you seek, young master. The only place I've ever seen it is in the sewers below the city."

"Sewers," Ren shook his head, not liking anything he was hearing. "There wouldn't be giant rats, ghouls, and monsters of all types in the sewers of Hillsfar, would there?"

The crone laughed. "That and lots more. I was there last week and look at me, he, he, he."

"You look old and ugly, but so what?" Ren asked.

"I'm twenty-four years old," the crone said.

Somehow Ren wasn't surprised.



Sewers in any town of the Forgotten Realms were easy to find. All one had to do was fol-

low one's nose to the worst smelling hole in the ground. Ren wasn't very pleased by the entrance he found. It was a black, bricked hole that had death written all over it. He entered, wishing he had about fifty weapons in his possession. The first thing he noticed was the glowing fungus on the walls. He was strongly tempted to take some of it back to Swipe, but thought better of it after a moment's consideration. The crone had told him the fungus he needed was yellowish. This fungus was a sickly green color. Now that Ren was looking closer, it also oozed a sickening blue slime.

"No, I don't think the good guildmaster needs any of this stuff."

Moving into the tunnels, he heard the squeal of rats. If he heard the roar of rats, he would take notice. Then he discovered a metal-bound chest in the middle of a tunnel.

"What is a chest doing in the sewers?" Ren asked the walls. They didn't provide an answer. Quickly he got out his picking tools. One tumbler, two tumblers, three tumblers later the box was opened. The goo on the lock had gotten all over his picks and there was nothing in the chest!

He kicked the chest and it tipped over. There, underneath the chest, was the golden glow of the fungus he was sent to find. Success! Ren loved it when his plans worked out perfectly.

The young, soon to be great, thief gathered up what he could find of the fungus into two bundles: a large one and a small one. Rushing out of the sewers, he hurried back to the guild hall. Swipe saw him instantly. "Well done, you are truly a master of thieves."

Swipe held the small sack of fungus in his hand. "Naturally, this was only the first step in your becoming a guild member. Now you must go to the Hermit's Place, to the north and west of the city. There you will find a chest containing a potion with a misty white liquid in it. Bring back all the potions you find there."

Ren left, wondering how many more quests he would have to face to please the guildmaster. It took only a moment to steal a fine horse and ride down the roads leading away from Hillsfar. The paths he took were filled with thief traps designed to stall the uncautious. Ren was wise to all of them and either

jumped the walls and stumps or walked his horse out of danger.

Before the sun set, he reached the Hermit's Place and, finding no one outside, he easily picked the lock and entered. The cottage was a strange maze of rooms. There were several chests in the chambers and Ren began picking their locks. Many were easy to open, but all had nothing inside. A few locks had as many as seven tumblers and these usually contained a treasure of gold. Naturally, Ren pocketed these gifts. If the hermit was foolish enough to leave his chambers unguarded, then he would get what he deserved.

While opening one chest, a huge blast of gas spewed forth from a hidden trap Ren hadn't detected. The bold, young thief tried to hold his breath, fearing vile poison, but wasn't fast enough. He fell to the ground and darkness filled his vision.



Much later, Ren awoke. Sleep gas! He wasn't dead, but there could only be one reason for a non-deadly gas. There must be guards in this place and perhaps they were searching for him now. He hadn't finished picking this lock and found it to be extremely difficult.

"Well, my Dad always said there would be days like this; when all the skill in the world isn't enough, it's necessary to use a good right arm." Ren took a rock and, bashing at the chest, broke it open with a few strikes, thereby revealing the misty white liquid he sought. Rushing out of the Hermit's Place, he hurried back to Hillsfar.

Swipe was very pleased with the vial he held in his hand. "You've done a good job. Ren, you've become a welcomed member of my guild. I reward you with 1,250 gold pieces for your efforts. Now go."

Ren smiled one more time as he placed the large sack of gold in the folds of his cloak, careful not to break the other two vials of white liquid. If Swipe was willing to pay so handsomely for one bottle, others might pay even better for the other two bottles Ren had found.

Yes, this was going to be a perfect town for Ren. 🍷

GRANITE, DWARVEN FIGHTER

by James M. Ward

A very angry dwarf tramped up to the gates of Hillsfar. He didn't like humans and he didn't like towns. Unfortunately for him, he was a prince among his people and princes have certain responsibilities. At least that was what his father, grandfather, great grandfather, and the King of his clan of dwarves – his great, great grandfather – kept telling him. Barely a

hundred years old, it was time for his questing journey. All dwarves go on a questing journey to prove their worth. Already, he had killed a band of orcs, rescued a wizard elf from certain death, and out-riddled a dragon. He was on the last part of his quest now and he didn't like it one bit. He had to join a human Fighters' guild and accomplish one task for the master. Granite wasn't looking forward to this last part because humans were all soft and stupid. But, he was a noble dwarf from a race of noble dwarves and he was going to do his duty nobly.

"I'm not going to like it, mind you, but I will do it."

"Like what, little man?" A human guard said, looking down on Granite while he leaned against the city gate. There was a stupid grin on the guard's face.

"I was talking to myself. What do I have to do to be allowed into the city?"

"Nothing much," said another guard coming up behind Granite. "All you have to do is turn over all your weapons and magic items while you are in the city. Then we can let you in."

Granite didn't like the idea of turning over his battleaxe. It had been in the family for ten generations, one thousand human years. Looking at the walls and gate area, he only saw about thirty guards. Briefly he considered killing them all and just walking into the city. But, he rejected that idea because someone was bound to hear the ruckus. Then it would

get around town that he was impolite or something. That wouldn't be good for his chances of getting into the stupid human guild. However, these humans would have to be warned about what would happen if his axe were not there when he returned for it.

Granite gently covered his weapon in soft cloth he found in his backpack and then laid the axe rev-

erently in front of two guards. Then, he walked over to the ebony-colored stone wall by the gate and motioned for the obvious captain of the guards to come over.

"That axe is important to me. Observe this please."

Granite swung back and punched his fist through the wall, up to his elbow. He took out his undamaged fist and blew the rock dust off of it.

"I will put similar holes in anyone who looses my axe."

Having made his point, he walked into town. Granite was an unusually strong dwarf.



Fighters, such as Granite, look forward to the grand ceremonies held after successful quests.

Granite had wandered around the strange human city for most of the day, not finding the Fighters' Guild or anything else of interest. He moved to an archery range, of sorts, and watched the contestants. After a bit, a human woman came up to him.

"Your turn dwarf, what do you want to use?" Tanna asked.

"Do you have any throwing axes or boulders?"

"No, for your type we just have slings, daggers, darts, and arrows. What will it be dwarf?"

Granite didn't like her manner, but he supposed all human women were alike. This one must be young; she didn't have a beard. Looking over the missiles, he selected the daggers because they were heaviest.

Standing up to the throwing mark, he threw five daggers in as many seconds. He threw them so hard they were impossible to follow to the target fifty yards away. When Tanna looked she could see no daggers sticking out of the target.

"Missed with all five!" she laughed.

Granite smiled and threw the other five as quickly as the first group.

"Walk with me for a moment, would you?" he said in a sweet voice.

They moved to the huge target which was round, with several rings painted on it. The wood must have weighed at least four hundred pounds. There were notches all over the target from past throws. Granite put his finger out and gently pushed the top of the target and the top half fell over with a loud crash. There were ten holes evenly spaced through the middle of the target. Fifty yards further, ten daggers in an even row were buried to their hilts in a stone wall. The dwarf had thrown the daggers through the target and cut it in half!

"Any questions?" he asked.

"No, is there anything I can do for you?" she said in a hushed whisper, calculating the

strength it would take to do such a feat as she had just seen.

"I need directions to the Fighters' Guild."

Granite walked away from the target range as two strong men strained to carry the damaged wooden post away. Granite walked into the guild and talked to the guildmaster, Caratacus.

"Well, dwarf, we don't get many of your kind here," said the guild Master.

"No surprise there," Granite snorted. "I want to be in your guild and I want to accomplish a task. What can I do?"

"Well, harump, umm, let's see now. As to getting in the guild, you are already in. We are very informal about that here in town. I don't have anything specific for you to do right now. Why don't you go to the Rat's Nest Pub and keep your ears open. If you hear any news about a certain Jared Jymn, act on it. He is a guild member who is in trouble right now."

With directions to the pub, the dwarf was off. Caratacus seemed like a good sort, for a human, but he didn't look very strong. Granite doubted if the fellow could lift more than five hundred pounds.

Although the dwarf hadn't been in many human pubs, he was really unimpressed with the Rat's Nest. Pulling up a bench, he asked the very young (she had no beard either) serving wench for a barrel of ale.

"You mean tankard, don't you?" she asked.

"No, I mean barrel." He took the platinum coin he was using to pay the bill and pushed it through her metal serving tray to press home his point.

So, for the next three hours he drank his ale and listened to the conversations around him. Finally, he struck verbal gold when he heard the humans at the next table talking about Jared's problems with the Red Plume Guards.

"I can't believe Jared stole any gems," one of the men was saying.

"Yar right, I don't believe it either. Many's the times I seen him fighting in the arena, just for fun. He had a few pals there too. That big minotaur, Taurus, was a buddy wasn't he?"

"I think yar right..."

Just then a huge fight broke out in the other half of the pub and while others went to join the fun, Granite went to the arena.



"You want to what?" the arena attendant asked.

"I would like to fight. Is there a problem?"

"Well normally the Red Plume Guards have to drag contestants kicking and screaming into the arena. We don't get many volunteers here."

"I would like to fight Taurus, the Minotaur, if that's all right?"

"Well there is a problem there," the attendant said scratching his bald head. "You have to defeat Lefty first and he is a mean customer."

"Lefty is the champion of the day?" Granite said not caring how he had to get to the minotaur.

"Naa, Lefty is an orc. He is the best of the first-level fighters."

"An orc?" Granite said smiling for the first time in hours. "This task isn't going to be so bad after all. Where do I sign up?"

It was 10 A.M., but the arena was filled with cheering people. Granite was given a thick quarterstaff that must have been made for a human. He brought the thing onto the sands of the arena and watched Lefty, the orc, come out and wave to the cheering stands. When the orc was within reaching distance, the dwarf broke his own staff in half and smashed Lefty with one piece of it, breaking Lefty almost in half. The crowd was too stunned by the quick battle to react. The crowd instantly started chanting, "Taurus, Taurus!"

The minotaur came at Granite with a rush. Using his horns as well as his staff, he tried a series of mighty blows against the dwarf. Each was easily blocked. When Taurus backed off to try a new line of attack, Granite started talking.

"So, Taurus, I hear you are a friend of Jared's."

Granite blocked Taurus' horns and two strikes to the left and easily defended a strike at his head.

Granite could see that his words had affected Taurus.

"I have been sent by the Fighters' Guild to help Jared. Do you know where he is?"

The minotaur was swinging his quarterstaff with all his might but nothing was getting through the whirling defense of the dwarf's short staff.

"Jared left a message at the Hermit's Place outside town. It is in one of the chests there. Now fight me and quit talking, you little shrimp."

That last comment was probably a mistake. Granite dropped his staff and slammed his fist into the minotaur. The creature landed in the arena boss' seat, twenty feet above the sands of the arena. The dwarf didn't like being called names.

Granite's next stop was the stables.

Up until now, horses, ponies, and mules had always left Granite alone and he had left them alone. But if the dwarf was ever going to quickly finish this task, he would have to use the services of some type of mount to get to the Hermit's Place and back. He decided to sleep in the stables that night and think about the problem.

The next morning, the riding problem had to be solved. Granite solved the problem the only way he knew how, "Give me the fastest horse you have." He figured his task would be over quicker, one way or another.

The beast was named Lightning and Granite was assured that as long as he was on Lightning's back, the animal would go full tilt. That sounded great. However, in practice, it wasn't

The roads were filled with stumps, hay mounds, ponds, and fences. Every time Lightning came to one of these obstructions the horse felt the need to jump it. And every time Lightning jumped an obstacle, Granite

would fall off the horse. After the twentieth stump, the dwarf was very tired of riding. But he did find the Hermit's Place and naturally, the way his luck was going, he didn't find the hermit. Entering the area he discovered several metal-bound chests.

"One of these must hold the message of where Jared can be found."

Each chest was locked, and Granite wasn't good with locks. He was good at breaking things, however. After smashing three locks, he had found his message: Jared was in a secret chamber in Hillsfar's Haunted Mansion.

The long ride back was infinitely forgettable. Parts of Granite's body would never forget it, but his mind put the pain of more falls behind him. Granite told the stable boy what he could do with Lightning and hurried off to the mansion. The dwarf wanted to get there while there was still bright sunlight to be seen. He hadn't had all that much experience with haunted things, but his great, great, great, grandmother had always told him that the undead didn't do much during the daytime.

Getting into the mansion was easy, but finding that secret chamber took quite some time. Finally, in one corner of a room, he located the secret door and went inside. Almost instantly, he discovered Jared hiding among the shadows.

After telling the frightened man he was here to help him, the dwarf heard the whole story. It seems Mordak, the court wizard, had actually stolen the jewels and tricked the Red Plume Guard into believing Jared was the guilty party. Jared had proof of Mordak's guilt but the guards had orders to kill him on sight. If Granite could go to the Bugbear's Cave Pub and give the evidence to the Princess of Hillsfar, Jared would become a free man.

Getting directions to the pub and finding the princess was a breeze compared to falling off Lightning 85 times. Granite collected his reward from the guild Master for helping Jared Jymn, and left Hillsfar without once looking back. His quest over, he thought how nice it would be to become king of his clan, invade Hillsfar, and level the place. But that wouldn't be for a hundred years or so.

MHAI, THE MAGE

by Mike Breault

Mhai drifted lazily through the familiar territory of his dreams, his mind's eye exploring each facet of the scenes dragged up from his subconscious. One of his favorite dream segments was just now appearing, a pleasant pastoral setting of dwarven maidens in a sunlit meadow. (Mhai knew they were maidens because they parted their beards in the middle.) The dwarves were cavorting about in huge vats of milk. Their stumpy, hairy legs were churning the milk into frothy masses of slightly hairy butter. Mhai (who had never been out of the glorious city of Hillsfar) imagined that such scenes took place all the time in the farms outside the city.

Abruptly the scene shifted. Though still dreaming, he was suddenly back in the stable where he was spending the night. His mind's eye hovered in the rafters, taking in his sleeping form sprawled out in the hay, as well as the dimly seen forms of horses in their stalls. The room began to spin, slowly at first, then faster and faster. Two arms formed out of the blur. They were a womans' arms, Mhai was certain, despite the presence of a rose tattoo with the inscription "Mom" on one arm. The arms beckoned to him, and a pair of feminine lips appeared, forming soundless words that he couldn't quite understand. After a while, the lips seemed annoyed at his inability to catch on, and disappeared with a petulant popping sound.

The arms apparently had more patience, for they continued to gesture and in Mhai's mind

a vision appeared of the door to one of Hillsfar's magic shops, the only business in the city that had a perpetual Going Out of Business sale. (Mhai once asked how this could be and he was told it was magic and to beat it if he wasn't buying.) He could see that the door was locked and the street was dark. The arms pointed to Mhai and then pointed to

the magic shop door; Mhai stared blankly. The fingers made little walking motions and then gave up. The arms popped into nonexistence.

When the vision ended, Mhai awoke with a start to find himself staring into unblinking eyes less than an inch from his nose.

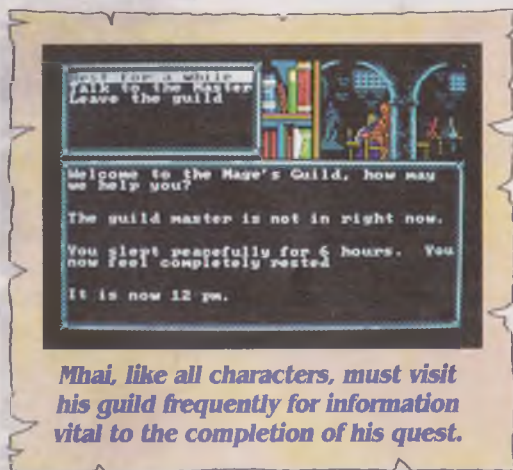
"Aiiiiieeeee," he shrieked, leaping into the air.

Clinging to the barn's rafters, he looked down to see the now-recognizable form of his familiar frog, Dodo.

"Gads," Mhai said, "I've told you not to do that."

"I know," Dodo said telepathically, "but I can never resist watching the sheer, youthful exuberance with which you awaken to tackle each new day. Reminds me of myself when I was just a tadpole."

Mhai told Dodo of his vision and asked the frog's advice. Dodo shook his head sadly and said to Mhai, "You know, you keep forgetting that even though I'm only one year old in human terms, that's really about 70 in frog-



years. Who's going to do your thinking for you when I croak? The vision obviously wants you to go to the magic shop at night and break in. Must be something important in there. Maybe this is what the guildmaster at the Mages' Guild meant when he said that there was a task for you. Remember? He said to be ready for it no matter how you came upon it. This could be your big break. Let's go while it's still dark."

"But what about the Red Plume Guards? You know what'll happen if they catch me breaking into the shop at night." Mhai shuddered at the thought of the pummeling he had taken in the Arena the last time he'd explored an establishment after hours.

"Well, you can outwit...er, outrun them," Dodo said. "I'll help you. Come on, do you really enjoy sleeping on horse-manure pillows every night?"

"OK, but I hope you'll be sorry if ol' Lefty, the Orc, uses me to break in a new quarterstaff again."

Mhai bent over and scooped Dodo into his shirt pocket. He tiptoed out of the stables and into the night. The two hurried down streets, made unfamiliar by the darkness and the fog that had rolled in from the Moonsea – not thick enough to really obscure vision, but just enough to make things eerie. Mhai headed southwest through Hillsfar's zigzagging maze of streets, glancing up nervously at the shuttered houses and businesses as he passed by. After a ten-minute walk that seemed much longer, Mhai found himself at the magic shop door.

Eager to be off the streets, Mhai pulled out one of his knock rings (discovered during an earlier adventure) and used it on the lock, praying that it opened the door before the trap was sprung. When the lock clicked, Mhai heaved open the door. The shop looked different at night, he thought, more maze-like and ominous. After a mental nudge from Dodo, Mhai began to search for anything unusual that might help him figure out what the Arm and Lip Lady (as he thought of her) wanted him to find.

Mhai rummaged through dozens of chests. Most of the items he found were long familiar to him from the many hours he'd spent in this shop. Finally, Mhai found something that he'd

never noticed before – an ornately-carved pick whose handle was inscribed with the word "Stonemaster." The pick seemed to glow faintly in the dim light. Dodo peered at it from Mhai's pocket.

"Well, it appears to be something special all right. Maybe that's what the lady wanted you to find."

"But what do we do with it? It sure doesn't belong here – we'd have noticed it before. Besides, it actually looks valuable and that's awfully unusual for this shop. It must belong to someone. Maybe that's what we're supposed to do – figure out who it belongs to and give it back to them. Who do you suppose it belongs to?"

Dodo sighed and shook his head. "Well now, what does 'Stonemaster' say to you?"

"I know," said Mhai. "It must be the quarry master in charge of the rock quarry west of town! But if we want to see him, we'll have to leave the city and go wandering through dark forests overrun by lions, tigers, and bears!"

"Oh my," said Dodo.

"OK, be sarcastic; some help you are. I guess I have to do it, though. The guildmaster may never forgive me if I don't come through for him on this quest."

Mhai wrapped the pick in a rag and carried it under his robes as he scurried back to the stables. The only person he saw was a mage who suddenly appeared in front of him in a particularly dark portion of Market Street. Mhai stifled a shriek (much to Dodo's disappointment) as Wak Rathar leered at him and asked if Mhai wanted to see a magic trick. Since Mhai had fallen for this once before, and had found himself in the Arena being walloped by Lefty, the Orc, Mhai declined the invitation (even though he'd heard that gold, rather than the Arena, sometimes rewarded the daring). The rest of the trip was without incident.

Mhai reached the stables just as the rising sun appeared over the city walls. He located Damin and talked him into lending him a horse for the journey. Mhai had heard that the quarry was beyond the trading post to the west of Hillsfar, so he set out to visit the trader in order to gather information. The path to the

post was cratered with holes and littered with fallen branches, and Mhai's horse seemed to trip over every obstacle. "My tax gold pieces at work," Mhai thought glumly, as he sprawled on the ground time and again. At last the nightmarish ride was over and Mhai walked shakily into the trading post, feeling much the worse for wear.

The trader was very happy to be of service, for a price. For 5 gold pieces, Mhai was allowed to look at a map that showed a path leading to a Hermit's Place to the north. Farther to the north, with no path indicated, was an area bearing the legend "The Quarry's Around Here Somewhere (I Think)." Reluctantly, Mhai mounted his horse for the torturous ride to the Hermit's Place.

Once there, Mhai discovered that the hermit had apparently taken a vow of silence and would do no more than nod his head to the north and hum maniacally. With a sign, Mhai headed off into the woods, leading his horse along an overgrown trail that wouldn't have qualified as a decent-sized rut in the paths he had ridden earlier that day. Dodo hopped alongside him, happy to be in the woods and free of Mhai's sweaty pocket at last.

After walking through the forest for an hour, Mhai stumbled onto a clearing around a small hill. The entire hill was a beehive of activity. Dwarven and human miners swarmed over it, excavating deep holes into the hillside, clearing topsoil to prepare new dig sites, carting away rock and sorting it into piles, and performing other duties he could not decipher.

Mhai and Dodo approached the nearest worker and asked to see the quarry master. They were told that he was in a small shack near the opening of the largest excavation. Mhai scrambled over the rock-strewn ground to the shack and knocked on the door, setting off a small avalanche of rock dust from the roof. "Well," said Dodo to Mhai, "at least you're going to make a good first impression."

Before Mhai could reply, the door to the shack was flung open and Mhai found himself staring at an extremely irate dwarf.

"Can't you incompetent fools do anything without me leading you around by the hands?" the dwarf snarled. "Well, what is it this time? Speak up, or are you dumb in both senses of the word?"

"Er...ah...I mean...are you the quarry master?" Mhai finally managed to ask.

"Of course I'm the quarry master. Who else around here looks foolish enough to agree to supervise 200 butter-fingered, troll-brained excuses for craftsmen? Now, what do you want – and it better be important!"

"I...um...I have this for you," Mhai said as he unwrapped Stonemaster and held it down so the dwarf could see it.

"Well, I'll be a wart on an ogre's behind! Stonemaster has returned at last." The quarry master glanced up at Mhai almost pleasantly. "Diane told me someone would come bearing Stonemaster. She left this elixir for you."

He handed Mhai a translucent glass bottle that was filled with a red liquid.

"I'm not sure what this stuff is," he said with a grin, "but it's yours now. Many thanks for returning Stonemaster. Now we can really send some stone a-flying."

Mhai led his horse back into the woods and sat down with Dodo to examine the bottle.

"Now what do we do?" Mhai said.

"I sure wouldn't open it if I were you," Dodo replied. "Wait until we can show it to the guild-master. He should know what to do."

Mhai agreed. He wrapped the bottle carefully and placed it inside his robes. Then he put Dodo in his pocket and began the ride back to Hillsfar.

Many a merry spill later, Mhai and the horse limped through the city gates. Dusk was gathering as they finally entered the stables. Mhai bid good riddance to the horse (the feeling was mutual) and flopped down to sleep on the nearest relatively manure-free pile of straw.

The sun was high in the sky by the time Mhai was awakened by a horrible groaning sound. Slowly he realized that he was the one groaning. Even his eyelids seemed bruised as he struggled to open them. He rose to his feet, snarling at Dodo and mentally daring the frog to laugh. Dodo casually snared a few flies for breakfast, oblivious to Mhai's glares.

"How good to see you up, Mhai," he said finally. He was enjoying the moment to the hilt. "All ready to prance over to the Mages' Guild, are we?"

If thoughts could kill, Dodo would have been the frog-leg entree that night at the Ruby Slippers Pub. As it was, Mhai just groaned again and began to half-walk, half-crawl out the door of the stables. Inspired by the sight of his master painfully staggering down the street, Dodo wrapped his long tongue around one of the stable hands' drinking cups. Hopping along with Mhai, Dodo held out the cup to passers-by, most of whom dropped in a coin or two out of pity for the poor soul who seemed to be suffering from some unfamiliar, but doubtless incredibly painful, disease. Since they had to go halfway across town (and past the rich folk who lived around the castle) to reach the Mages' Guild, Dodo had collected almost 96 gold pieces by the time they reached their destination. Mhai was almost walking erect by then, despite Dodo's admonitions to milk the crowd for all it was worth.

After a long delay, Mhai was ushered into the Master's chambers.

"So, what brings you in to see me, Mage Prittee?" said Glinda, Master of Mages.

"This bottle, Sir. I hope that you might be able to tell me what it is and what I should do with it," Mhai said.

"You have found the elixir of Diane! I thought this lost with the disappearance of her daughter. Wonder not what you should do with it, but rather what it shall do to you."

With that the guildmaster uncorked the bottle. A thin, red vapor quickly escaped from the opening. To Mhai, the fragrance was intoxicating. He caught a fleeting glimpse of Dodo frantically leaping out of his pocket. Then his sight dimmed and the floor seemed to rush up to greet his face.

The next thing he knew, Mhai was floating in a dream, watching something materialize in front of him. A tall, handsome woman slowly appeared; Mhai recognized her lips and arms from his vision of two nights earlier. "I am the daughter of Diane," she said, "trapped in a prison. Only a mage thrice honored may release me from my doom."

"The first honor is of exacting aim on the fourth board," she said. With that cryptic pronouncement, the woman began to fade. Her lips were the last to go, lingering for a few seconds to whisper the word, "Tanna," and then fading from sight as well.

Mhai awoke with a bad headache. He put his hand to his aching head and felt a bandage wrapped around it. He sat up and waited for the room to stop spinning.

"What did she tell you this time, Mhai?" Dodo asked, once Mhai felt well enough to stand.

"We have to go to Tanna's Archery Range by the stables," Mhai said weakly. He picked up Dodo, left the guild, and headed northeast through the busy streets.

Once there, he picked up a wand for the target shooting competition and went out to the range. On the first board (or round) of competition, he placed second and won 30 gold pieces. On the second and third boards, he seemed to hit everything he aimed at, even pegging the pesky rats a few times. For once, the running commentary of the announcer didn't disturb his concentration. He placed first in both boards, winning money he didn't bother to count. He cast everything aside but his goal of placing in the top five on the fourth board. After hitting the swinging target a few times, he decided to concentrate on getting rid of the rats. (He couldn't bear to think of hitting the beautiful birds that occasionally flew across the target range.) He had always hated rats, though. He hit four of them on this board and placed second this time. He had done it! "Maybe there's hope for you yet," Dodo said from inside Mhai's pocket.

After he collected his winnings, Tanna took him aside. She glanced around to make sure no one could overhear. Then she whispered, "You are honored this day, bold mage, with the first honor of Diane. Your quest now leads you outside of Hillsfar. You will find more of Diane's elixir in the Wizard's Labyrinth located near the ruins."

Mhai once more resigned himself to a ride through the country. He borrowed a horse from Damin and set out for the trading post. He seemed to have less trouble on this ride and plowed into far fewer obstacles than on his previous ride. Even Dodo was impressed. "Will wonders never cease?" he said to Mhai.

"First a marksman and now a horseman. What new talent will you display next?"

At the trading post, Mhai was told that the ruins were but a short ride to the south. He found the Wizard's Labyrinth at the end of the trail from the ruins.

Using a knock ring, Mhai entered the labyrinth, and he and Dodo set out to explore it. After several hours of peering into rotted treasure chests and exploring dead-end corridors, Mhai and Dodo discovered a bottle with a reddish liquid in one of the chests.

"An elixir of Diane," Mhai said triumphantly. He started to uncork the bottle.

"Wait," said Dodo, "lie down and then uncork the bottle. Once again the reddish vapor poured out and the world dimmed. Mhai found himself drifting in a formless void. Diane's daughter appeared suddenly in front of him.

"The second honor," she said, "is one of freeing the Mages' Tower from a malevolent spirit. You need to open a special chest within the room it inhabits." The woman disappeared in the usual manner – lips last.

Mhai told Dodo about the woman's message as they rode for Hillsfar in the gathering darkness of evening. "Malevolent spirit?" Dodo said. "What happened to your common sense?"

"I am on a quest," Mhai replied, "to earn a spot beside the honored mages of my guild. That's worth a little risk."

"You'll earn a spot beside the other mages of your guild all right," said Dodo. "Right inside that spirit's stomach. I hear there's a regular conclave of your fellows in there."

"Quiet or I'll turn you into a prince." Mhai threatened, and at that prospect Dodo stopped arguing and settled for muttering dire predictions under his mental breath.

The next morning Mhai set out for the Mages' Tower. He headed for the southeastern end of town, clutching his purse tightly as he passed the Rogues' Guild headquarters. Soon he was standing before the entrance to the Mages' Tower. Mhai took a deep breath as he entered the deserted building. He explored the inside of the tower, a feeling of foreboding gathering inside him as he approached the top. Pushing open the shattered door to the uppermost

room, he staggered as if physically struck by the sense of evil that emanated from within. Mhai entered the room and desperately looked for the chest Diane's daughter said would be there. In the darkest corner of the room, an evil presence stirred and began to spread toward him; Mhai could feel his will to move being sucked away. "Get moving!" came Dodo's thought into Mhai's mind. "The chest! Open the chest or your name's breakfast!"

Mhai snapped out of the paralysis that had gripped him, leaped at the chest, and flung it open just as the spirit clutched him. All light and warmth began to leave the world. "It's over," Mhai thought weakly. "It's too late." Suddenly a brilliant light blazed from the chest and stabbed at the dark heart of the evil spirit. Mhai could feel his strength returning as the evil spirit was forced away from him by a good spirit rising up from the chest. As the evil spirit flew out the window, it paused for an instant and turned back to Mhai. "I'll get you, Mhai Prittee, and your little frog, Dodo, too!" And then it was gone.

Mhai stood slowly. The good spirit came to his side and spoke to him: "You are honored this day with the second honor of Diane." With that, the good spirit flew out the window in pursuit of the evil one. Mhai watched the spirit go, but felt at the same time that the essence of the spirit was somehow still with him. Whatever lay before him, he was not afraid.

Mhai looked into the chest and saw a bottle filled with reddish liquid. Mhai and Dodo hurried out of the Mages' Tower, glad to be back in the friendly bustle of Hillsfar's streets.

Once back in the stables, Mhai sat down against a bale of hay and opened the bottle. Almost instantly, Diane's daughter appeared before him. "The third and last honor, my darling mage, is one of defeating the proud minotaur, Taurus, in the Arena. He is the instigator of my imprisonment."

She smiled at Mhai and faded away with a wave. As her lips disappeared, she whispered, "Good luck, my hero."

Mhai awoke the next morning eager to face Taurus. He left the stables as soon as it was light and jogged west toward the Arena. Dodo tried hard to talk him out of it. He pointed out

how poorly Mhai had fared against Lefty, the Orc, who was a much weaker opponent than the mighty Taurus, a gladiator renowned for his strength and cruelty in the Arena. But Mhai was beyond reason, filled with a hatred of Taurus that he could not shake.

Mhai strode into the Arena and bellowed a challenge to Taurus.

Taurus slowly walked over to Mhai and handed him a quarterstaff. "Well, human," Taurus said, "I think it's time for your lesson."

"And I," said Mhai, "think it's time you learned that there's a price to pay for kidnapping and imprisoning humans. Defend yourself, bullman."

With a roar, Taurus threw himself at Mhai. Then he led with two strikes at Mhai's left, then a head butt and then several attacks to Mhai's right side. Mhai was expecting this and easily blocked all the attacks. When he saw Taurus lunging forward to strike to his left again, Mhai dodged and whacked Taurus on the right side. Taurus bellowed in anger, though Mhai's blow hardly seemed to faze him. Taurus' head butt was wildly off-target and Mhai caught Taurus solidly in the face with his counterattack. Taurus stumbled backward but stayed on his feet. Blood flowed into his eyes.

Mhai sprung to attack while Taurus was distracted. Too late he saw the minotaur's staff swing out at his legs. It knocked him off his feet and he watched in horror as Taurus ran forward, holding his quarterstaff as if to pin him to the Arena sand. Then at the last instant, Taurus pitched face first into the sand. Mhai thanked whatever gods were looking after him and rose to his feet, gritting his teeth against the pain in his legs. He brought his quarterstaff down on Taurus' head. Only then did he notice Dodo with his two-foot-long tongue wrapped around both of Taurus' ankles.

"It's the frog god you should be thanking," Dodo said as he painfully retracted his tongue. "You'll have to catch flies for me for the next month or so."

"Just as long as I don't have to do it with my tongue," Mhai said. He picked up Dodo gently and placed him in his pocket.

As Mhai limped out of the Arena to the ovation of the crowd, a richly-dressed woman stepped up to him. She was accompanied by several

servants and men-at-arms. "I am Diane," she said, "and I have watched you master all the trials of this quest. With the defeat of Taurus, you are now thrice honored, my brave mage. Taurus has imprisoned my daughter in a mirror of life trapping. Only an honored mage such as yourself can break that mirror."

"I believe this parchment gives a clue to the mirror's whereabouts, but I cannot read it as it is in magical script. I trust you can read it." She handed Mhai a crumpled parchment, stained recently by a reddish-brown liquid.

Mhai read: "Oh great Taurus, I have hidden the mirror in the haunted mansion where none may find it."

"The last leg of your quest lies before you," Diane said. "Lead us to free my daughter and great rewards shall be yours!"

Mhai lead the group to the southeastern end of town. Across the street from the Rogues' Guild they found the haunted mansion. Mhai opened the first chest he found and saw a mirror lying on the bottom. Hardly daring to believe that his quest might be at an end, Mhai picked up the mirror and smashed it down upon the chest. A cold, sparkling cloud escaped from the shards of the mirror. The cloud coalesced into the beautiful woman of his dreams, Diane's daughter.

She threw her arms around Mhai and hugged him. "Oh thank you, my honored mage," she said. Mhai just stared at her, dazed by her beauty. Diane rushed in and embraced her daughter. She turned to Mhai and told him his reward was waiting for him at the Mages' Guild. With a bow to Diane and a last backward glance at her daughter (whose name he never did learn), Mhai reluctantly headed for his guild house.

Glinda greeted him warmly as he entered. "My boy," he said, "you have made us all very proud. Here is a bag containing 21,500 gold pieces, as a token of Diane's gratitude. In addition, with my ring of wishes, I will make you sturdier, stronger, and able to withstand more damage."

The next day, Mhai purchased Magesteed from Damin and rode off toward Tilverton. Perhaps someday he and Dodo would return to Hillsfar. There were certain attractions to the old place after all.



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