

The Warlock of Firetop Mountain

Written by Christopher Griffith

*Based on the Fighting Fantasy gamebook **The Warlock of Firetop Mountain** by Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone and © Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone*

‘That’ll be the Warlock’s sanctuary, then.’

‘His treasure room?’

‘With a sturdy chest in its chamber holding a thousand Gold Pieces.’

‘Jewellery too.’

‘Diamonds.’

‘Rubies.’

‘Pearls.’

‘And the Warlock’s spell book, more precious than all of that finery combined.’

‘Instructions,’ the landlord whispers, ‘for control of the creatures and secrets of Firetop Mountain.’ He leans in. ‘You, Adventurer, could become master of Zagor’s domain.’

‘But I seek only his riches.’

‘You may have both, if you slay him. Yet the journey ahead is dangerous. Few have made it back to Anvil, and of those who do none have contemplated ever returning to Firetop Mountain.’

‘Tell me of Zagor.’

‘He is old.’

‘No, young.’

‘A sorcerer of great power...’

‘...who draws his strength from an enchanted set of cards.’

‘I thought it was from the silky black gloves he wears.’

‘What about the mountain itself?’

‘Goblins guard the entrance...’

‘...but they’re stupid, and prefer food and drink to their duty.’

‘As you move deeper into its depths, the inhabitants grow more fearsome...’

‘...and to reach the inner chambers, you’ll have to cross a river.’

‘There is a regular service. The ferryman enjoys a good barter, so best save a Gold Piece for the ride.’

‘Keep a map, too. Without one, you will end up hopelessly lost in the mountain.’

‘But the treasure is worth it?’

‘For a thousand Gold Pieces, I’m surprised more fools don’t pass through here.’

‘You think me foolish?’

‘Even if you make it to the treasure room, the Warlock’s chest holds three sturdy locks upon it. The keys are guarded throughout Zagor’s dungeon so you will have to search them thoroughly, with all the danger that entails too.’

‘Then I had better rest well here tonight,’ I smile, ‘before my onward journey.’

After a hearty breakfast in the morning, I make preparation to leave Anvil for the two-day walk to Firetop Mountain. As I walk through the village, everyone turns out to wish me a safe journey, tears coming to the eyes of many of the women, young and old alike; I can't help wondering if they are tears of sorrow shed by eyes which will never see me alive again.

And then at last, my hike is over. I unsheathe my sword, lay it on the ground and sigh with relief as I lower myself down on to the mossy rocks to sit for a moment's rest. I stretch, rub my eyes and finally gaze up at Firetop Mountain. The very exterior is menacing, its steep face in front of me looking as though it has been savaged by the claws of some gargantuan beast, and the summit where eerie red colouring, probably some strange vegetation, has given the mountain its name. Perhaps no one will ever know exactly what grows there as sharp, rocky crags jutting out at unnatural angles make climbing the peak surely impossible?

Anyway, my quest lies ahead, not above, for across the clearing is a dark cave entrance. I pick up my weapon, get to my feet and consider what dangers may lie ahead of me but with determination I thrust the sword home into its scabbard and approach the cave, peering into the gloom to see dark, slimy walls with pools of water lying on the stone floor in front of me. The air is cold and dank. I light my lantern and step warily into the blackness, cobwebs brushing my face as I hear the scurrying of tiny feet, rats most likely. Soon I reach a T-junction, the passage running east-west before me. I take the latter route, approaching a right-hand turn in the passage cautiously for there is a sentry post on the corner and asleep at his duty on it a strange Goblin-like creature in leather armour. I try to tiptoe past him, stepping clumsily on some loose gravel with a loud crunch. His eyes flick open and he scrambles to his feet trying to grasp at a rope, but this leaves him exposed and with one swipe I cut deep into his flank killing him on the instant.

Heading north now, I reach a rough-cut wooden door in the west wall. I put my ear to it, and hearing a rasping sound like some sort of creature snoring I enter a small, smelly room in the centre of which is a rickety wooden table with lit candle standing upon it, underneath a small wooden box. Asleep on a straw mattress in the far corner of the room is a short, stocky creature with an ugly, warty face, similar to the one I have just dispatched at the sentry post. He must be the guard for the night watch. I creep into the room to try to take the box without waking him but my luck is no good this time either as he suddenly rouses himself. Startled, he jumps up and rushes at me unarmed, his sharp teeth looking vicious, but he hasn't time to bite as an upward thrust of my sword fatally runs him through. I take the box, leave the room and open my prize in the passage. Inside, I find a single Piece of Gold and a small mouse which must have been the creature's pet. I keep the coin and release the mouse which scurries down the passageway. For some reason, I feel as though my luck may have changed.

Further up the passage along the west wall I see another door at which I listen but hear nothing. I open it to enter a small room with stone floor and dirty walls. There is stale smell in the air and in the centre of the room is a makeshift wooden table upon which again stands a lit candle, once more a small box beneath. In the far corner of the room is a straw mattress but no inhabitant upon it presently. The box is light but something rattles within so excitedly I open the lid. Without warning, a small snake darts out to bite at my wrist, though I manage to take its neck in my hand snapping it with a satisfying crunch. The box falls to the ground and out of it clinks a bronze-coloured key with the number 99 carved into it. I take the key with me and leave the room, resolving to be more careful in my curiosity.

Further up the passage, again on the west wall, I see another similar door listening to grimace at the worst singing I have ever heard in my life. I feel as though I must investigate this hideous din, opening the door to reveal a small room, dirty and unkempt. As before, a straw mattress lies in one corner and there is a wooden table upon which candle burns, lighting the room with its flickering flame. Once more also, a small box rests underneath the table around which are seated two small creatures with warty skin dressed in leather armour. They are slurping some sort of grog and by the way they stagger to their feet upon my arrival they seem to be very drunk. I draw my sword and leap forward hoping to catch them off-guard. Alarmed, they fumble around for their weapons but in their state they are far too clumsy and with ease I hack the first down through his foaming chops, slashing the second to pieces across his chest, piercing his heart. I wipe my sword on the mattress which leaves a slimy stain of green blood on the straw. Stepping over the bodies towards the table, I flinch at the foul stench of the creatures and pick the box up from under the table to examine it. Small, wooden and with crude hinges, the name 'Farrigo di Maggio' is inscribed on a brass nameplate on its lid. I open it to see a small leather-bound book entitled *The Making and Casting of Dragonfire*. I begin to read the tiny handwriting of its author in which he tells the story of his life's work, the creation of the Dragonfire spell with which to fight evil Dragons. In his last years, Farrigo finally perfected his spell but by then was too old to make use of it so he completed this book, locked it in a chest and hid it in the depths of Firetop Mountain, afraid that it might fall into the wrong hands:

And so, you who now hold this book, you have my life's works in your hands. The power of destruction is yours if you wish it, but do not waste it. Unless you use the spell for the purpose for which it was intended, you shall be consumed by evil itself and die by the fire from your own hands. Remember, only when the dragon breathes its fire at you should you raise your arms and say, 'Ekil Erif, Ekam Erif, Erif Erif, Di Maggio.'

I say these words slowly and softly. Suddenly the pages seem to glow and as this light disappears so do the words on the pages of the book. I repeat the spell to memorise it and leave the room, picking up the passage which soon ends at a T-junction. Heading west from here, I reach a wooden door to hear angry shouting coming from within. I burst into a large room, an imposing chair behind a solid-looking table suggesting that someone, or something, of rank uses this space. A chest in the centre catches my eyes, and in a corner of the room stands a man-sized creature with a warty face looming over a smaller creature of similar race. With the whip in his hand, this Orc Chieftain has been beating his servant who is whimpering beneath him. I spring at the Chieftain hoping his servant will aid me and indeed he rises to his feet, picks up a hefty wooden stick and joins the melee, but to my surprise and disappointment he attacks me! Ungrateful wretch! Now I have to fight them both, but I am so enraged I make quick work of the slaughter, their green blood smelling foul as it seeps from their bodies. I step around the corpses and investigate the chest, a sturdy affair made of strong oak and iron looking firmly locked, but that measure is quickly proved inadequate as I smash it open with my sword, the lock flying off to land on the floor several metres away. I lift up the heavy lid and my eyes widen as I see the gold sheen coming from a fair number of Gold Pieces within. In one corner lies a small black bottle with tight glass

stopper containing a liquid of some kind. Also in the chest is a silky black glove, but as I am admiring this treasure I hear a soft click and wince in pain as a small dart shoots forward into my stomach. I sink to the floor managing to pull the arrow out before bandaging the wound. It gives me some relief but I still feel weak and annoyed with myself. I return attention to the chest, scooping up 25 Gold Pieces and what turns out to be a Potion of Invisibility, good for one dose. The glove is a mystery to me at present. I put everything in my haversack and leave the room.

Heading east now, I cross over the junction leading south before reaching another one with branch northwards but there is a solid wooden door with metal hinges ahead so I continue east until I reach it, listening to hear strange mutterings and the clatter of what could be pots and pans. Whatever is in there, there are several of them so I carefully walk into a large room which can only be the dining room of the same warty-faced creatures I now know as Orcs. Five of them are sitting around a large table busily drinking and dribbling their bowls of rat-gizzard soup. All are involved in a rowdy argument as to who will get to chew the rat bones left in the large soup cauldron, so they do not see me enter. I advance to catch them unawares, chopping through their flesh with my mighty sword, the second of the five scalded to death as I throw boiling soup in his face, the last two falling together with reverse thrust of my weapon through both their bellies at once. I pull it clean, satisfied with the thump as their slain bodies collapse to the ground. I search the Orcs but find only a few teeth, nails, bones and knives in their pockets, then I search the cupboards around the room seeing only crude bowls, plates and spoons. Under the serving hatch however there is a thin leather case, half a metre long, which I open easily to discover a magnificent bow with one silver arrow. An inscription on the case reads: *'The giver of sleep to those who never can.'* I put the bow, arrow and case in my pack, take Provision, and leave the room heading west then north at the junction before I see a well-used door on the right-hand side of the passageway.

With my ear to the keyhole I listen to hear a man screaming for help from inside. The door is locked but with a shoulder charge I manage to burst through it, a nauseating stench immediately hitting my nostrils. The floor is covered with bones, rotting vegetation and slime, and a wild-haired old man clothed in rags is rushing at me screaming. His beard is long and grey and he is waving an old wooden chair-leg, but he looks insane rather than dangerous so at the top of my voice I shout, 'You are freed, old man!'

Instantly, his rantings cease. He stops dead in his tracks and sinks to the floor, weeping loudly. 'Thank you,' he begins to say over and over again, 'thank you so much.'
'How do you come to be here, in such state?'

He sighs. 'Many years ago I came in search of the Warlock's treasure. I was captured by the Orcs and thrown into this solitary cell as a pet for the creatures.'

'I too am adventurer,' I smile, 'also seeking Zagor's riches. Will you come with me?'

'No. I just want to leave and see the world again.'

'Could you advise me then, on any traps and dangers ahead?'

'Alas,' he breathes, 'I know little.' His face brightens. 'You should pay your respects to the boatman.' He pauses. 'At the end of this passage, to open the iron gate, you must pull the right-hand lever on the wall.' He stops again. 'And I have learnt that the keys to the Boat House are guarded by a man and his dog.'

'Thank you,' I say shaking his hand and leading him from the room.

‘Good luck, Adventurer,’ he smiles, sniffing the air.

We go our separate ways, he south whilst I continue up the passage. Further along, I see a door in the east wall but listening hard can hear no sound. It is locked so I hit it squarely with my shoulder, the wood splitting along its length. I wrench the rest of the timbers apart to let myself in, seeing a torch hanging from one wall lighting up a small armoury room stocked with swords, shields, helmets, daggers, breastplates and the like. Examining the weaponry, I find nothing appearing superior to my sword but a circular iron shield with golden crescent at its centre catches my eye. I pick it up, feeling its weight on my arm. It is heavy but valuable so I leave some of my Provisions behind in order to take it with me.

I carry on up the corridor seeing another door on the east wall, this time made of solid metal. I hear the sound of tortured screams coming from within, bursting into what seems to be a small torture chamber with various devices around the walls for that purpose. In the centre of the room, two small hunchbacked creatures are having their fiendish way with a Dwarf who is tied to a hook in the ceiling by his wrists. The two hunchbacks are poking and cutting him viciously with their swords at which the Dwarf lets out a final scream and falls silent, eyes closed. His captors make disappointed noises and look round angrily at me as though it was my fault that the Dwarf has died. Incensed by their malice, I leap forward to finish them the same way they have their victim before cutting down the Dwarf. Going through the pockets of the two Goblins I find a large piece of sweet-smelling cheese which I place in my pack, leaving the room northwards.

Arriving at the end of the passage, I see another one crossing east-west but an iron portcullis blocks my way and no amount of charging is going to budge this one. On the wall to my right are two levers, so remembering what the prisoner told me I pull the right lever to hear a deep rumbling noise as the ground starts to shudder and the portcullis rises slowly and noisily into the ceiling. At the junction beyond I turn west before taking a passage north, walking for some distance that way before the path begins to open into a large cavern with rough walls. There appears to be no way through but I enter nonetheless, suddenly hearing loud footsteps behind me crunching heavily on the rocky floor. I crouch down beside the entrance in a small alcove in the rock as the steps grow louder and I see a great Ogre enter the cavern, standing over two metres tall, dressed in ill-fitting garments made from some sort of hide and carrying a large wooden club. I leap from my hiding place, drawing my sword as it swings the club at me. My new shield bears the blow impressively. I spin round and try to drive my sword into its flank but the beast is agile as well as tall and avoids my foray, unable though to drive off my next harried assault until bleeding badly it stumbles back whereupon I swipe its legs clean off and drive my sword into its throat. The slaughtered creature crashes to the ground on its stumps before falling head first to the floor. Going through its garments I find nothing but a pouch hanging round its neck containing a bronze key with the number 9 cast into it, which I take. Nothing else is of value in the cavern so I return southwards to the main passageway and head on west before the path turns north and I see a narrow way running off again westwards.

I follow it, walking along to see that ahead it is narrowing further. At one point I stoop, and as I do a deep, resonating laugh starts up around me. Eventually the passageway becomes too small for me to walk along so that I have to get down on my hands and knees to crawl, and soon I can get no further as there seems to be no way through. I decide to return to the main

passage wondering to whom that laugh belonged, unsettled now by the thought that someone may be watching me.

Several metres on I arrive at a junction where I can turn east or west. Set in the rock on the north wall is a small recess where I take Provision. Then I head east, following the passage until it turns north before reaching another junction at which I continue north, the path ending at a wooden door trimmed in iron, various inscriptions adorning it but none that make any sense to me. I listen and hear nothing, opening it into a small room comfortably furnished with a table, several chairs and a large bookcase that covers one wall. Seated at the table is an old man with a long grey beard and squatting on his shoulder is a small winged beast. This creature is no more than six centimetres tall with two arms and legs, its skin a dusty grey colour; it has tiny sharp white teeth and its wings are folded behind its back. The old man says nothing as I walk in through the door but he beckons me over to sit down at the table. He is tossing two small white objects in his hand. I remain standing. The old man does not look up from the table but his devilish little pet eyes me suspiciously, and starts chattering in a small squeaky voice. The old man grunts and asks me whether I am game for a wager. I haven't come here to gamble so I draw my sword and rush at him but the winged gremlin flaps into the air to draw my attack whilst his master rushes over to the bookshelf, touches a book and escapes through a secret doorway that opens for him. I slay his pet easily, but try as I might I cannot find the secret switch to open the door in the bookshelf and conclude the old man must have locked it from the inside. I search the rest of the room, finding five Gold Pieces in a drawer in the table, deciding to return south and take the first passageway east which runs for several paces before turning north and ending in a door at which I listen but hear nothing.

Trying the handle, I find that the door opens to reveal a large, square room completely bare but for the floor which is covered in a mosaic of tiles. Two shapes stand out, star-shaped tiles and hand-shaped tiles. A door on the opposite wall is the only way through. I decide to start walking across on the hands but the moment my foot touches the first tile I feel a vice-like grip on my ankle and look down to see a ghostly white hand gripping my leg. I fight for balance and manage to regain my footing but to my horror I see that from every hand-shaped tile in the floor a similar apparition has appeared, and the floor across to the door is now scattered with ghoulish hands flexing and snatching in the air. I draw my sword and chop at them, cutting one so that it withers and shrinks back into the ground. At the same time, the other hands stop dead and slowly fade away downwards into the mosaic. I decide this time to step on the star-shaped tiles and tread carefully across to the door in the north wall. It opens, and I follow the passageway northwards until I reach another junction, continuing northwards until that path ends in a solid doorway.

I am surprised to see a leather skirt tacked along the bottom of the door and listen but hear nothing, entering a small room with bare, rocky walls. On the far side hangs a golden key. There appears to be no way through so I go for the key but as I step into the room the door swings shut behind me and there is a click and a hiss as from the centre of the ceiling a jet of gas fills the room with an acrid vapour. I start to cough deeply, looking at the door and then the key, holding my breath and dashing to snatch it from its hook but my lungs are bursting so much now that before I can reach the door again I am forced to take a breath of poison gas. Choking, disoriented, I stumble from the room and miss the turning westwards, instead

heading back south into the mosaic room, barely noticing the hands groping and grasping as I cough my way south then west then south again and west across the second junction until after fifty metres or so the passage turns northwards.

I have just noticed the number 125 inscribed on the key when I hear a crumbling beneath my feet. Trying to leap back as the ground gives way I am too slow and fall over two metres down into a pit, a little bruised but not too seriously hurt. I look around and can see two passageways, a short one to the south which opens into a small chamber and another heading northwards. I am a little worried about the crash my fall has made, even more so by the grunting I can hear coming from the chamber to the south. Before I can collect my thoughts, a large ugly head pokes around the corner and a Troll emerges from its chamber. My ankle is sore and I cannot get to my feet quickly so I rummage round in my backpack for the Potion of Invisibility, just managing to uncork and drain it as the Troll is upon me, now looking round in abject confusion. I think about striking him myself but instead stand and walk away, heading on northwards along the passage for quite some time until I reach the foot of a staircase cut into the rock.

I ascend the stairs which end at a wooden door behind which I can hear scratching sounds. I try the handle and the door creaks open into a bare room scattered with bones, three Giant Rats gnawing at them. They stop to look at me as I enter. Each is at least one metre long and their tatty coats indicate that they are fighters. Thinking quickly, I find the slab of cheese in my backpack and toss it across the room, the Rats scrambling for the food, nipping and scratching each other as they fight each other for it. Having distracted them, I pass through the room and leave by the door in the north wall which opens into a wide passageway. I follow this for some distance before reaching a junction and continue north as the passage widens into a large cavern.

I can hear noises coming from ahead and proceed cautiously. As I approach, I can make out a large figure in the distance and draw breath as I realise that this oversized human must be at least three metres tall! Dressed in a leather tunic, the creature is absorbed in a meal he is eating at a table. The cavern is at least a hundred metres across and must be the home of this Giant. A large table and two chairs are along one of the walls and it is here that the creature sits, intent on his meal, a large pig. He hasn't noticed me. Around the rest of the cavern I can see his straw mattress, a great furry pelt which may be his blanket or a shawl, and a huge stone-headed hammer which I know I would have no hope of budging. A fire burns in one corner of the cavern under a hole in the ceiling. There appears to be no other way through the cavern so I decide to take on the brute, drawing my sword and entering his lair. The Giant stops in the middle of a mouthful, raises his head and sniffs the air, swinging round to catch sight of me approaching. Roaring loudly he flings the pig's carcass in my direction. It misses. Then he picks up his hammer and prepares to club me with it, although luckily for me he is off-target with this weapon as he was with his first aim, wildly swinging it so it smashes into the floor and great reverberations echo round the cavern juddering through us both. I try to pick the carcass up to throw at him but it is far too heavy so instead I take hold of one of the chairs and shatter it across his bulk. He is unmoved. With all might, I lift the table above my head and do the same, but still he is unhurt so I take hold of his pelt and light it from the fire, trying to torch him into submission. As the flames scald him he howls in pain, picking his mattress up to smother them then returning attention to his hammer, determined to squash me

into the ground with each wild blow. But I have had enough now, so taking a chance I wave my arms at him hoping he will stoop to pick me up and have me for his meal. My plan works but not before I feel crushed by his grip, approaching his disgusting food-encrusted mouth quite unable to free myself and my sword arm. Instead, I smack him on the nose with the shield, his grip loosening just enough for me to free myself and plunge my sword deep into his neck. He grips the wound, gurgles and then collapses to the floor, his fall echoing round the cavern. I roll out onto the ground myself. The mighty Giant lies dead! I search his cavern and find little of use although a purse in his belt contains 8 Gold Pieces. I am a little concerned about the second chair and to whom it belongs so I decide to leave the cavern the way I came turning eastwards at the junction before arriving at another junction where an arrow on the wall points northwards.

I proceed in this direction and can soon hear the splashing of an underground river, the air cooling and freshening as I reach the wide opening of its sandy banks. Looking across I see no way through on the other side though to the east the river flows through a cave in the rock. I sit, rest and prepare Provision, noticing a movement in the sand a couple of metres to my left which quickly becomes turbulent. I spring to my feet, sword at the ready when suddenly a large tubular head breaks through the surface, twists round in the air and picks up my scent. The smooth, segmented body of a Giant Sandworm, it rears and sways over in my direction, a large orifice with short, spiky teeth opening in what must be its head. I aim for that with my sword, but it soon becomes stuck and in the end I am forced to use the weapon as a carpenter's saw, at one point almost losing my arm in the folds of this huge invertebrate, though finally I divide it in two so the wretched thing sinks back into the sand to revitalise itself. Panting after the struggle I sit down to collect myself and finish the Provisions I started.

Eventually I pack my bag and wade into the stream, letting the current take me downstream until I am washed ashore on the southern bank where I notice a gleaming sword lying several steps in on the river bed. I wade back in to collect it. It is light in my hand, far less cumbersome than my own weapon and it has a keen edge. A mysterious voice speaking directly to my mind seems to be telling me to throw my own sword into the river. I do so, and as my sword splashes into the water a bubbly voice says, 'Thank you!'

Standing on the pebbled bank wondering what sort of place this is where mocking laughter and kindness reside together, I barely hear the fluttering of wings as three Giant Bats swoop down to attack me. Ducking their onslaught, I race away from the river bank south down a narrowing passageway hearing them caw and holler behind me as the path turns sharply east and continues on past a turning to the south before widening into a large cavern. As I shine my lantern round I can see crude stone weapons on the floor and a smouldering fire in the centre of the cave, though there is no way through and I am concerned because the Bats have called off their chase. Turning as quietly as I am able to make my way back I stop in my tracks to see two Neanderthal Cavemen barring my exit. They grunt aggressively and I ready myself to fight but the expected struggle proves easy as their combat skills are no match for my new sword which cuts smoothly through the pair of primitives. A brief search of the cavern reveals nothing of interest, yet I am pleased with my new weapon; the sword and shield acquired within the mountain make me a hardier opponent to face now.

I arrive back at the junction, this time turning south and then east, the passage twisting and turning until it eventually ends in a solid iron door. I listen but hear nothing, walking into an unoccupied room with no other means of exit. In the centre of the floor stands a table upon which are two helmets, one of bronze, one of iron. Both are about my size but I am wary of putting them on, particularly the former which looks tempting in its decoration. I could do with extra armour though, so in the end I place the iron helmet on my head. It fits well and a glow begins to fill my body, as though I possess a power and confidence beyond anything I have felt before. The helmet must be blessed with magic.

Noting my luck, I avoid the bronze helmet and leave the room, returning to the junction where I head on westwards before the passageway turns south and I enter another small room, bare except for a fountain in the middle. Not a particularly grand affair, it is carved in the shape of a small fish with a short jet of water coming from its mouth. A wooden sign hangs from this fish bearing a message written in Goblin tongue. I cannot understand the first word but the others read, ‘...NOT DRINK.’ I am extremely thirsty however and decide to drink, after a while deeply as I find the water refreshing sensing further glow spreading through my body. The fountain of death for evil Goblins is of course the fountain of life for humans.

I take Provisions and leave through the south door to enter a large, square room, flashing my lantern around to catch a quick glimpse of some murals on the wall before my light suddenly goes out. I try to rekindle it but it will not catch, and in the blackness I begin to hear a succession of frightful noises, howls, screams, cries and wails getting louder and louder until they reach the pitch where I have to cover my ears. I grope in the dark for a wall but can find no way of escape, screaming in agony as my ears burn with the noise, and then just as I reach a state of desperation I find a door, fumble with the handle to open it and light pours into the room stopping the howling instantly. For a moment I can see the walls, and upon them figures moving in the murals mouthing silent screams as though trapped in a two-dimensional hell.

I slam the door shut heading south again, soon approaching on the left-hand wall a rough timber doorway at which I listen to hear, thankfully, a jolly sort of humming sound. I knock on the door and a voice bids me ‘Come in!’ I walk into a small room furnished with table and chair, shelves, cupboards and the like, all of which have seen better days. Plates, bowls, cups and hundreds of old books line the shelves and in the midst of all this clutter I see a little old man in a grubby white gown swaying to and fro in a rocking chair, still humming happily to himself, his eyes fixed on me but seeming at peace with the world. He bids me ‘Good day’. As I start to reply, he rises quickly to his feet.

‘Oh my, oh my, a stranger!’ he starts. ‘Well, do come in, the shop is open. What can I get you? What would you like to buy? What takes your fancy? Which way are you headed? North? Well? Oh yes, in that case you will undoubtedly need one of my Blue Candles. That will be 20 Gold Pieces please. Cash if you don’t mind. Yes, I know it’s expensive, but isn’t everything these days? Not so long ago these were only 5 Gold Pieces each; but you know what has happened to the price of candle wax since the Long Dark Night – oh, but you probably don’t since you don’t come from these parts. Never mind. I can guarantee it’s still worth the price. You might need it sooner than you think...’

Getting tired of his constant prattling I leave the room, heading south then turning west at the next junction until the passage visibly widens so that I find myself standing at the mouth of a rough cavern, a natural cave in the rock. It appears to be about thirty metres deep with no visible exit. I enter and look round to see dozens of beautifully coloured stalactites and stalagmites bordering the perimeter. Numerous drips can be heard but the whole place seems like a magic grotto. Near the back of the cavern I come across a pair of boots which seem to have been made quite recently. I am just deciding whether or not to try them on when I hear a scurry of steps behind me and swing round to face the grotesque black shape of a giant spider which has been stalking me. Its body is at least a metre across and I quickly draw my sword to defend myself; in the end though our battle is short, for the creature bites at my iron helmet withdrawing in pain to leave itself off-guard. I remove its mandibles with my sword before driving the weapon into the arachnid's swollen guts, its life spilling away along with its stinking intestines.

My own boots are worn but sturdy so I decide against trying the ones on in the cavern, instead heading back to the main passageway and onwards south before the path turns east, then meets one running south. If my calculations are correct, this one leads back to the portcullis so I carry on east and cross over a passageway running north to find myself at a sturdy wooden door, which I open to enter a small room. My eyes widen as I look round to see that the walls are covered in ornate stonework, mosaics and marble inlays giving the space a kind of beauty I have never seen before. In one corner is a large metal statue of a one-eyed creature and in its single eye is a sparkling jewel. I approach cautiously, a scampering behind me making me spin round, but only to see a rat! I feel at the jewel but it is solidly in place, though as I try to work my sword in behind it I hear an ominous creaking noise. To my horror, the statue is beginning to move. I jump down and draw my sword as the Iron Cyclops cranes its head round towards me, but it is slow in stepping down from its pedestal and clumsy also as I draw it across the room. An idea forming in my mind, I suddenly drop sword and shield, take my helmet off and use it to swipe at the Cyclops catching it a glancing blow across the jaw which sends it reeling, then bending down to pick the creature up overhead. Using all my strength, I fling the animate metal at the marble stonework. My gamble works, the iron cracking, splintering and then shattering against the hard inlay. I sit back and rest, taking Provision before prising the jewel from its still current housing. It is heavy in my hand and I estimate it must be worth at least 50 Gold Pieces. I put it in my pack, exploring the rest of the room and then the statue again, noticing that one of its breastplate sections is loose, opening it to discover a small key with the number *III* which I pocket also, leaving the room with renewed vigour heading west then north now before the passage ends at a sturdy door. I listen but hear nothing, trying the handle and entering the room to hear a loud cry from behind, swinging round to see a mad Barbarian leaping towards me wielding a large battle axe. I throw my sword so that it spins end over end, planting itself in his chest and pinning him to the door. A search of the room reveals nothing of any value although an old box in the corner contains a wooden mallet and five short stumps of wood, sharpened at one end. I bag them, then leave through the door in the north wall which opens into a short corridor ending several metres ahead at another door, similar to the one I have just come through. Listening, I hear nothing so I turn the handle to enter another room of a similar size but this one splendidly decorated with polished marble floor and rough walls painted white. On each

of the four walls hangs a painting, and there is another door in the north wall. I stop to look at the paintings, portraits of men, my spine shivering as I read the nameplate under the one on the west wall, that of Zagor the Warlock whose treasure I am seeking. I am pitting myself against an awesome adversary here, his piercing eyes following me as I am drawn towards him, my fear rising. I fumble in my backpack, grab the Eye of the Cyclops and hold it in front of the Warlock whose intimidating stare turns to an expression of pain, his eyes white and his expression limp, my own confidence soaring as I realise I have won my first real battle against him.

I place the jewel back in my pack and open the north door into a narrow passage, following it until some metres up the passageway it turns eastwards and then north again. At this second bend I see a small alcove in the rock. It seems a convenient hiding place and a large rock forms a comfortable seat so I stop here and eat Provisions. Then I continue north arriving at another wooden door, this time a small one with carved bone handle. I listen but hear nothing coming from inside so I try the handle and enter a pear-shaped room with rough stone floor, making walking across it somewhat awkward. In one corner of the room is a pile of rubble, mainly stones and dust, but there are also two odd-shaped pieces of wood and a length of rope. I go for the rope, absently picking it up but as I attempt to place it in my haversack it comes alive in my fingers, snaking quickly up my arm and wrapping itself round my neck. I struggle to cut it with my sword before its grip tightens, finally managing to defeat and drop it to the ground. Rubbing my neck, I feel annoyed once again at my foolish spontaneity in this labyrinth of danger.

The passage ahead leads northwards again, its rocky floor softening until eventually I am walking on a sort of coarse sand. I notice the passage is widening and ahead I can hear a flowing river, probably the same one I swam part way down earlier, continuing on until I find myself on its south bank facing across black depths. There appear to be four ways of crossing. To my left a rusted bell bears the sign '*Ferry Service 2 Gold Pieces – Please Ring.*' There is a small raft in front of me on the bank with a long stick resting beside it. I could punt across the river. A rickety old bridge crosses on the right. Or, I suppose I could swim. In the end, I ring the bell which gives a dull clang, and after a few moments I see a withered old man climb into a small rowing boat moored on the north bank. He rows slowly across, moors the boat and limps towards me. 'Three Gold Pieces,' he says gruffly.

I sigh. 'It says 'Two'.'

'Inflation.'

'Here's two.' He glares at me. 'Just take me across,' I threaten, 'or I'll take your boat and row myself over.'

He growls. 'Give me three, treasure hunter.'

I move towards him but notice a transformation suddenly taking place. He begins to straighten up and grows physically stronger in front of my very eyes. His face and arms grow hairy, his teeth become sharp and pointed, his eyes flash, his fingernails are sharp claws and his nose has become a rat-like snout. He is a Wererat, now standing just under two metres tall. We engage firmly, he trying to bite and stab me whilst I manage to get under his attack to drive him hard into the rusted bell. It clangs dubiously, more so as I start to bang his head against it repeatedly. And then somehow he is free, trying to throw me in the water whilst we grapple our way to the raft. Soon we are upon it, our balance uneven, he managing to grab the

long stick as feeble weapon against my sword with which I chop it in two. However, we now float away approaching the bridge. I gain my footing upon it first but he is after me until he treads on a feeble piece of wood and disappears into the river. I am about to dive in after him when I see commotion in the water and the unmistakable frenzy of a piranha school rushing quickly to have their fare. I do not look, instead walking carefully back over the bridge to the south bank where to my amazement he is standing there. But he is in dreadful shape now and I am quick to take advantage, slicing off his snout, his claws and his teeth then burying my sword in his heart. He slumps to the ground and I search his body finding 2 Gold Pieces, guessing this was his fare from the last crossing. I curse him for trying to overcharge me, rowing myself across the river and mooring the boat on the north bank. Thinking of his strange reappearance on the southern side of the river, I look back for his body, but it has vanished! The rock face northwards is smooth and glistening with moisture, moss of many different hues growing on the surface whilst an eerie silence is punctuated only by the splashing of the river as it flows behind me. A passage runs off to the north-west ahead. There is a large timber door directly in front of me and another passage runs out along the river eastwards. I decide to take each in turn, the north-west passage narrowing quickly and ending a few metres ahead at a doorway.

I walk through into a small, foul-smelling room, noticing another door to the west. The furniture in the room is sparse and has been made mostly from bits of old boats. There appears to be nothing of value in here, but a bunch of keys hangs on the wall and an old man in ragged clothes is slumped asleep on a 'bench' made from half a rowing boat snoring loudly. Next to him is a vicious-looking brown dog with red eyes and black teeth which I have awakened, and who is now eyeing me suspiciously. A deep growl is coming from its throat so I fight his fire with my own leaping across the room with sword drawn to cut him down. The dog springs as I move though, its hideous black teeth coming straight for my throat. Two metres from me, a blast of fire shoots from its mouth right at my face but I duck to avoid and spin round to thrust my weapon into its stomach. At the sound of wailing and whimpering, the old man wakes from his slumber and is understandably furious at my killing his dog. His eyes turn white with anger, he slowly rises from his seat and as he stands he appears to gain in size and stature. He is changing in front of my eyes, sprouting hair on his face and forearms, his nose lengthening and becoming dog-like, his teeth pointed. He is a Werewolf and he advances towards me though he is still drunk which allows me the time to reach into my backpack and take the bow in hand. Cocking its arrow and pulling back to shoot I let the weapon go just as he is upon me, the silver puncturing his skin and into his heart, killing him instantly. I walk across to the bunch of keys. The Prisoner was right, one of them is marked 'Boat House'. None of the others are numbered. I take them, then head for the west door opening to find the Werewolf's larder, a miscellaneous collection of bones and decaying meats. The smell is nauseating, although a jar of pickled eggs seems to offer fairly palatable food. I take these, enough I think for two meals.

Back in the room I leave by the south door heading now for the middle of the rockface, opening the door to find myself in a short, narrow passageway with another door ahead to the north, squeaking open on rusty hinges. The room is dark, my eyes beginning to adjust as I hear a shuffling, then a blow to my head knocks me senseless. I awake with a throbbing head and look round. The room is about eight metres square and I have been dumped in the south-

west corner. Standing motionless in the centre of the room are four men. At least, they appear to be men. Their skin is a greeny-grey colour, their clothes tattered and torn, and they are all staring vacantly at the ceiling. One carries a club, one a scythe, one an axe, one a pick, and they are ignoring me completely. Around the room are various peasant-style weapons, pitchforks, axe-handles, pointed sticks, one or two shields and several barrels. In the north-east corner is a human corpse with a sword in one hand and a shield in the other. I move my hand up to my head to feel for signs of blood and am relieved to find none, but as my hand moves the strange creatures in the centre of the room turn their eyes down towards me. I jump to my feet and charge them with my sword, their vacant eyes suggesting that their actions are controlled by a will which is not their own. The first of them reaches me and prepares to swing its club but I snatch it from the dormant and bash in its head. Using the same strategy with the others, I am soon looking down at the poor wretches who almost look happy to be relieved of the burden of life. As I continue to gaze though, I sense that I am not the only one to know of their deaths. I go over to check the body in the north-east corner. The poor adventurer was obviously caught in the same way that I was but his weaker skull shattered under the club's blow. He wears a suit of leather armour no better than my own, holds a wooden shield on one wrist and clutches a steel-bladed sword in his other hand. In his pockets are 8 Gold Pieces and around his neck is a silver crucifix which I take. Next I check the barrels which contain a clear brown liquid. I sniff it. It smells like rum. I taste it. It is rum, and by golly, it's good!

Moving through the north door I find myself in a dark crypt of some kind. At one end is an altar and various coffins are strewn about. There is a door in the west wall but I want to investigate here first. The silence is deathly. A slow drip startles me as I creep around the coffins. The altar is ornately carved and studded with jewels, beautifully woven drapes hanging from the walls although they are threadbare in places. There are three coffins in the room and a creaking noise makes me whirl round, the light from my lantern falling on the largest coffin. It is opening! As I watch, a tall man with a white face sits upright, his gaze falling on me and his expression changing from one of tranquillity to abject hate. His mouth opens and through his wolf-like teeth a terrifying hiss comes from his throat. He beckons me to come over, but I reach into my bag and grab the crucifix holding him at bay as he climbs from his coffin whilst I use the wooden stake and mallet to form a cross, moving towards the Vampire and backing it into the corner. It hisses and snatches at me but cannot come near, yet as I advance I happen to stumble and fall forwards, the stake flying from my grasp to plunge into the shrieking creature. The undead is merely grazed by the wound though and it flings me backwards across the room towards the west door. Now it catches my eye with its gaze and I find myself unable to control my own actions. It beckons me forward. I move slowly towards it with my mouth gaping open. It tells me to throw down the stake, but as I look down at the weapon I suddenly feel a surge of power returning to my own will and flinging the weapon at it from range so close I cannot miss I catch it unawares, the stake sinking into its heart as it shrieks in agony. I leap over and thrust it further into its body, its death cries growing weaker and its lifeless body slumping to the floor, turning visibly older in front of my eyes, the face looking fifty, then ninety then well over a hundred years old. As I watch, the skin rots and the eyes decompose, a movement coming from the creature's chest as the remnants of the Vampire decay and a small black face breaks through its chest. It resembles a

small shrew but as it frees itself and unfurls its wings I realise it is a bat. I lunge at it but it flaps away into the darkness. I search the whole chamber quickly, mindful there are several other coffins here, and find 30 Gold Pieces. Pocketing the treasure and leaving the items behind, I head out through the west door to find myself in a narrow corridor with crossroads ahead.

I head on west over the crossroads until the passage turns round a corner to the south, seeing just before the bend a signpost which reads 'Under Construction'. In front of me is the beginning of a stairway leading downwards where only three steps have been built so far. A number of shovels, picks and other tools are lying on the ground nearby but as I turn the corner they suddenly flurry into action and begin working on the steps. I am now watching various tools digging and hammering as if being handled by invisible workers. A humming chant becomes louder and I recognise it as 'Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, it's off to work we go...' As I stand watching I start to chuckle, the scene really quite amusing. I sit and watch and even manage to chat to some of the magical tools, thinking all the time once more what place this is in which malevolence and beneficence alike coexist.

Then I head back to the crossroads and almost turn north. But I remember I have the Boat House Key and would like to explore that area, so I head back through the crypt and past the zombies to the riverbank, taking the passage eastwards which ends at a solid-looking door, the sign above confirming it is the 'Boat House'. The door is firmly locked but a small barred window allows me to look inside to see a number of Skeleton-men working on building a boat of some sort. They move in a series of quick, jerky actions, rather insect-like. My key fits the lock and I open the door into this large boathouse, various vessels in different stages of construction lying around. There is a door in the north wall. As I enter, the Skeletons stop their work and crane their bony necks around to look at me, picking up planks of wood and hammers with which they advance. There are five of them, and I think to tell them I am their new boss, ordering them back to work. They look at each other, then obey! Amazed at the success of my bluff I decide to push my luck a little further by examining the Skeletons' tools, although I do hear a noise from behind the north door and realise I will have to hurry. Coming across a mallet with hardwood head and chisel with solid silver blade, I leave some Provisions and bag them, the noise from the north door getting louder so that I move up to investigate, seeing a short corridor about fifteen metres long. I now realise what the noise was, more Skeletons! Four of them, armed with swords, running my way down the corridor, although they don't appear to have seen me and there is a slight recess in the wall which may be a useful hiding place. I decide to try it and the Skeletons don't notice, disappearing through the door into the Boat House.

Breathing a sigh of relief I press on to try the door at the north end of the passage, entering a large room with various bits of wooden debris strewn untidily across the floor. There is another door in the north wall. In one corner is a crude wooden desk with a box on it. In another corner, apparently asleep (or dead) is a hideous-looking man-sized creature with warty skin, wild hair and long claws for fingernails. As I tiptoe across to look at the box the creature's eyes flash open. He sees me and slowly gets to his feet. His breathing becomes heavy and he stalks towards me. He is a powerful adversary – a Wight! He is large, strong and evil. I draw my sword, inflicting first wound upon him but something is not quite right. I landed a fair blow on him yet he appears not to have noticed the wound. Maybe this undead

creature is not vulnerable to normal weapons so I pull from my pack the most recent acquisition I have made, tossing the mallet in my hand and smashing with all force the silver-bladed chisel into my opponent's heart. It works, killing him instantly, the Wight now lying in a heap in the corner of the room. I approach his desk and open the box, finding 18 Gold Pieces which I manage to jam in my haversack with the other treasure, then I head for my exit north, the door slamming shut with a loud bang behind me. I find myself in a passageway running ahead northwards, following it for several metres until it bends to the west. Some way down that passage I come across a narrow opening in the north wall, deciding to go through it.

I find myself at the top of a narrow staircase leading downwards. Cautiously I descend the narrow steps, each cut into the rock with about twenty leading down. At the bottom of the stairs a passageway leads me into a large open chamber which stinks of putrefying flesh, the smell so bad I am tempted to turn back. Three bodies lie in the chamber. I search the first one to find 5 Gold Pieces in its pockets, moving towards the second and trying to avoid looking at the terrible face, grey and decomposing, maggots crawling from its nose and mouth. I move back but accidentally kick the third corpse on the floor, its eyes flicking open. It quickly sits up and slashes at me with its long, sharp fingernails, springing to its feet, eyeing me with a sadistic leer spreading across its mouth. The creature now standing before me is a semi-decayed man. His quick eyes dart from side to side watching me, his tongue flashes out with a hissing noise, his teeth and nails are sharp and he doesn't seem to be afraid of my sword. He should be, for as he lunges again at me I spin round to gain as much momentum as possible and then swinging as hard as I can I swipe his head clean off his shoulders. The Ghoul twitches and dies at my feet. I search its body and find little of interest. Stopping to search the second body I find 8 Gold Pieces, a bottle of liquid and an old piece of parchment. The parchment is well worn and almost illegible. It is a map of some sort headed '*The Maze of Zagor*'. I can make little sense of it, although a room to the north is marked '*...GER*' and another to the east is marked '*SM... P...LE*'. I fold it up and put it in my pocket now testing and swallowing some of the liquid. It is smooth and watery and as I drink it I begin to feel the glow, euphoric and a little drunk at the same time. My confidence grows and my weariness disappears. I have heard of such before, Holy Water blessed by the Overpriest of Kaynlesh-Ma, though how on earth it would come to be here in the possession of these Ghouls I have no idea.

I leave the room northwards, walking down a short passage to reach a staircase going up. I climb the stairs and arrive at the top in a passageway which turns sharply to the east. Just as I pause to get my bearings I hear a creaking in the rock behind me, spinning round to see a heavy portcullis drop and seal off the passageway behind me. My only way now is forward. I head east, turning a corner northwards to see a passage coming from off the east wall. This I follow until a short passageway leads off to the north, which I follow to a large wooden door. Opening it I find myself in a small, smoke-filled room. Sitting around a wooden table are four tiny men, each about one metre tall but all apparently fully mature with weathered skin and long, bushy beards. They are cursing, laughing and joking as they play a card game. Each one is leaning back on his tiny chair puffing a long clay pipe. On the table are a number of copper coins and four mugs of ale. As I walk in, their merriment stops. They are on their guard but

don't appear to be too dangerous. One stands up and makes some comment about my lack of manners, not knocking before I came in. The others nod their agreement.

'I apologise,' I say laying my sword down, 'I wanted to take the undead in here by surprise, but am delighted to find you good Dwarfs instead. How do you come to be here, in the midst of such evil?'

'We are lonely against it,' says their leader proudly, 'yet happy always to help visitors of lawful disposition.' He puffs on his pipe. 'You are in the Maze of Zagor. Now the only way out is to go deeper into the dungeon.'

'Do you know the way through?'

'From here,' says one of his companions, 'turn right, right, left, keep going straight...' He drinks some ale.

'Well,' I smile, 'thank you for trying to help me.' I pick up my sword. 'Deeper into the dungeon, then.'

I leave the room heading south then west to the T-junction, turning north and following the corridor until it bends west and I hit a crossroads. To the north is a door which I open into a large square room. Broken pottery lies scattered all about, one large clay vase untouched and full of clear liquid. A large bowl is full of gold coins. Suddenly the door slams shut behind me and I swing round to face a strange-looking creature, half man, half bull who is glaring at me. It is a Minotaur, stalking towards me, lowering his head, horns pointing at my chest. He charges! I drop down and roll along the floor crashing into his legs which give way under the pressure, then I leap to my feet swinging my sword hard to cut off both his horns in one swipe. The beast is crestfallen, reaching for his head and leaving his body exposed. Another thrust of my weapon sees him slump to the floor, life expired. I sort through the broken pots and find little of interest. The liquid looks, smells and tastes like water. The coins in the pot are a fraud. I take 8 genuine Gold Pieces which lie on the surface of the pile but underneath are merely painted pieces of pot. As I tip the vase out it slips and breaks. A red-coloured key appears, hidden inside a false bottom in the bowl inscribed with the number *III*. I take it. I head back south to the crossroads then cross over south following a long, narrow passageway which turns east then south again, until I find myself at another crossroads. I decide to carry on south along a cobbled passageway which swings west then south then west again until I find myself at a three-way junction. This time I go north to find a door in the western wall of the passage, another passage opposite going east and to the north another door some metres ahead. This I head towards, entering a large square room where a grey-haired old man is sitting at a desk covered in papers and parchments of various sorts. He holds a long quill pen and is surrounded by books, thousands of them lining the shelves around the walls from floor to ceiling. As I enter he glares up at me, so I demand that he answers my questions. He shrieks and hides behind his desk, terrified of my aggressive manner.

'I am the Mazemaster,' he squeaks, 'in charge of the Maze of Zagor.'

I smile. 'I mean no harm. Come out from behind there. Come.'

He sits back down, his manner noticeably becoming more firm and self-assured. 'Book,' he says pointing his finger at one which slips from the shelf to float on the desk in front of him. A wizard of some power, I surmise, perhaps even the dungeon Master himself come to investigate me. Then aloud, 'How do I escape this maze?'

He looks up from the book. 'Leave by the south door, walk past a door on your right until you can go no further and turn left. Go over a crossroads and turn left at the next one.'

I leave through the south door but heeding him not take the eastwards passage which turns north before I arrive at a crossroads. Now I really am using my nose! I turn west thinking to double back above the Mazemaster guessing that he would be positioned near the exit, but the westward passage turns north and then I reach a junction. Ahead, north, the passage ends at what looks like a dead end so I turn west once more to arrive at a three-way junction. North or south? If in doubt, climb up. I head northwards, walking up a long corridor round a sharp hairpin bend and finally to another crossroads at which I continue north, the passageway eventually bending to the west and beginning to narrow.

I reach a small rocky arch which I have to stoop to get through and on the other side I pause, looking around. I am in a large cavern which disappears into distant blackness. It is partially lit by natural light which streams in through a hole in the roof. I cannot see a way through. As I shine my lantern round I hear a rumble, a dull glow flickering in the blackness. Suddenly, a jet of fire shoots from the depths narrowly missing me and singeing the mossy growths on the wall. I throw myself on the ground and look up to see a large Dragon stalking out of the darkness towards me. Smoke curls from its nostrils, its scaly red skin glistening with an oily covering. The beast is some fifteen metres long! Remembering Di Maggio's small, leather-bound book I silently mouth the spell contained within its pages, then shout loudly at the Dragon which stops in its tracks, cocking its head to one side and eyeing me suspiciously. I fling a stone at its head that bounces off its nose, the beast letting out an angry cry. It breathes deeply, a roaring sound being created from within its throat as between its teeth another fireball builds up. I prepare myself and as the ball of flame shoots from its mouth I cry '*Ekil Erif, Ekam Erif, Erif Erif, Di Maggio.*' The fireball continues no further. With an agonised scream the Dragon tries to shake the flames from its snout but there the burning continues. Squealing in agony, it turns its back and leaps into the blackness flailing its head from side to side.

Safe for the moment, I investigate the cavern and find a passageway which continues to the west along a long, narrow corridor. After several hundred metres the passage ends at a large wooden door which is slightly ajar. Carefully, I ease it open a little further and poke my head round to see what is in the room. A small old man sits at a table by himself, playing with a pack of cards. He looks quite a harmless old soul, grey-haired and bearded. I burst through, sword drawn in attempt to take him unawares but he turns to look at me not in the least troubled by my intrusion. Suddenly he vanishes! He reappears against the wall and as I spin round to see him he laughs, not the feeble cackle of an old fellow but the booming laugh of a much younger man. Again he disappears, and reappears in another corner of the room. He is now of imposing height, his tattered old rags robes of velvet and gold, glaring at me with black eyes and taunting me with his evil laugh, disappearing again to reappear in the air above me, slowly floating down, his hypnotic black eyes making me shiver as he nears. I grip my sword firmly but at the same time work my backpack round in front of me. His booming voice calls out, 'Poor fool. Do you think you could match my power with your puny weapon?' I smile and set the sword aside. 'If it is a simple brawl you want, stranger,' he mocks, 'then I shall give you your last!' He vanishes and reappears behind me.

In one motion, I swing round pulling out the Eye of the Cyclops and holding it in front of him, the jewel giving off a dull glow. He shrieks and backs away, a beam of light shooting at him from the jewel so that he sinks to the floor, a remarkable transformation then taking place - he starts to shrivel and grow visibly old in front of me, his skin wrinkling then cracking as he slowly becomes an amorphous heap in the corner.

After some moments the jewel stops glowing and I approach the lifeless bundle of cloth; his robes are all that remain. With the Warlock now defeated I know my quest is almost over. I approach the door with two locks, retrieving two keys from my pack to try them. They turn! I open the door and peer round to see a small, dimly lit room. The walls are hung with ornate curtains laced in silver and gold. A single flame burns in one corner throwing light on a low table in the middle of the floor, upon which sits a large chest. I step up to investigate it, and from all around yet from nowhere a mysterious sound fills the room like the rumbling of thunder clouds preparing to make storm. I approach the chest and can see that it is held shut by three locks. As I near, the noise gets louder but I am unperturbed, retrieving all the numbered keys from my haversack and trying them each in combination until they click and turn in the locks. The lid of the chest comes free and I open it. The villagers were right about the treasure, at least a thousand Gold Pieces, jewellery, diamonds, rubies and pearls, and of course the Warlock's spell book. As I leaf through the pages I realise fully what the inhabitants of Anvil meant when they said this tome is probably more valuable than all the riches in the chest. I sigh with relief. Zagor is no more and I am now the owner of the sorcerer's riches and all secrets and creatures of Firetop Mountain. I could remain as master of this domain. But I have conquered it all and want only to enjoy my treasure!