

DEATHLORD



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Haikuchi bowed, and as he did so the hilt of his long sword treacherously dropped to the floor in front of him. The young man banged his head into the ornately wrapped hilt.

"Ow," he yelled, removing all dignity from the bow.

The Master resisted the impulse to smack himself in the forehead, and the stronger impulse to take the youth's own sword and dress him out on the spot. As Haikuchi bowed before him, the old man's eyes came to rest on the long wooden box against the wall to the right. Within the box was the crushed hang glider that was the instrument of the man's entry into this maddening alterworld of magic and terminally clumsy apprentices. *Why me?* he thought, and his memory replayed the scene...

He was gliding to a beautiful landing in the hills overlooking Berkeley, California, when the strange turbulence hit, thrusting him back into the air. He struggled with the glider as it was twisted and thrown about. The craft was as stable as a boy's rubberband prop plane, and he frantically tried to regain control. And then...the outlandish colors filled the skies, swirling like Easter egg dye. He shut his eyes tightly against them, and prayed to his god, holding onto the bar with aching fingers. He lost consciousness, and when he awoke he was in the alterworld, a bizarre cultural mixture of Shogun, Star Trek, and Chuck Norris movies.

Now he was a part of this world, and a Master of the Mahotsukai. He had had several apprentices, but never one as challenging, promising, and outrageous as the boy before him. He allowed himself a small sigh, and then returned his attention to his apprentice.

"Haikuchi," he said, "what am I going to do with you?"

The boy looked up, a small smile playing about his lips. "You could just give me the spell book you guard so carefully, Master, and bid me be on my way!"

The old man forced back a smile. "It was a rhetorical question, you little snit."

"Snit, Master?"

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"Never mind. I sense something is troubling you, Haikuchi. Tell me what it is."

The boy sat back on his heels and frowned. "I am still as clumsy as ever, Master. I am not blaming you for my evil fortune. But I am losing hope that this will change."

Me too, thought the old man. Aloud he said, "My son, it is not evil fortune, or any inherent lack in you that causes this clumsiness. It is a lack of self-confidence. You need to believe that you are capable."

"But if I go into a dangerous situation to prove myself, and it happens that, no disrespect meant Master, it happens that you are wrong, I will be killed. And I would rather live a life without hope than not live at all!"

The old man smiled at this blurted remark. "I think it's time to bring out the heavy guns, kid."

"Pardon Master?" The boy looked confused.

"It is of no importance, son. I have magic that will answer your question with little risk to you and none to me." The old Master rummaged through a leather bag under the table. He brought out herbs, small paper packets of colored powder, and a small bowl. He made sure he was upwind from the bowl, and began to mix and mutter and wave his hands. A rainbow of smoke billowed forth from the bowl into Haikuchi's face. The boy choked and spluttered, and all his muscles relaxed as he slumped to the floor in a clatter of bamboo.

The old man reached again into the small leather bag and pulled out a small paper booklet, one of the few things he had brought with him from the real world. *What dumb paradoxical luck,* he mused. He glanced again at the title, *The Deathlord Cluebook*, and shook his head. "Well, here goes. Haikuchi, can you hear me?"

The boy stirred, and whispered, "Yes Master."

The old man grinned. "Ok, kid. You know that the Emperor has had a real hard time lately with the renegade forces that have invaded his castle and realm, right?"

"Yes."

"And any samurai who rids the realm of this

menace would be honored by the old Son of Heaven forever through time and all that stuff?"

"Yes, Master."

The old man raised his eyebrows a la Groucho Marx and said, "Well, I am going to read to you, kid, and as I do the words will enter your mind and become your reality. You will feel, and see, and know just how well you will be able to accomplish this task for the Emperor, without leaving the privacy of your own home. You will awaken, and you will feel very confident in your abilities. That will banish your clumsiness. Or so I hope. Are you ready, my son?"

"Yes, Master. I am ready."

"Good. Ok, here we go. 'Long ago, in a galaxy far, far away...'"

"I'm sorry, Master?"

The old man grimaced. "Never mind. Dumb joke." He sighed. "The party of young adventurers found themselves outside the castle of Kawa, in the empire of His Royal Highness the Emperor Nakamoto, Lord of all the Heavens, etc., etc..."

Kodan, Town of Kawa

The party entered the city through the north gate. Haikuchi was satisfied that the friends he had chosen to accompany him on his quest had skills that complimented each other nicely. Haikuchi himself, the elven leader of the party, was of course a Mahotsukai, as was his most perfect of Masters. (Haha, thought the old man as he read, *threw that one in to boost the old ego, eh?*) The two human brothers, Ishota Haga and Ishota Oma, were kishis, excellent fighters who tended to be a bit annoying at times, bleating on and on about the "ethical" thing to do. Urami was a secretive and mysterious shizen, a druid with healing powers. Urami's woman, Naguri, was also a member of the party. She was a shisai, another cleric but with different skills and spells. Haikuchi was grateful for their presence and their much needed healing abilities. The last member of the party was Elwood, a fellow elf. He was a genkai, an illusionist, and except for his penchant for practical jokes and his passion for gold, he was also a useful person to have along.

Haikuchi figured that it was mostly due to the richness of their garb and the excellence of their weapons (that he had provided, as all of his friends were in the mild-to-severely poverty stricken category) that they were not challenged by the guards as they entered the city. The six young adventurers, following a hunch of Naguri's, continued to the southwest of the town, where Elwood discovered a secret door in an east wall. They went through, and proceeded north, until they were set upon by a large party of Yakuza.

"Ooomph!" grunted Haikuchi, as he tripped over his long red sash and was bowled over by the first wave of the thief-warriors. The kishi brothers stepped forward, drawing their long blades with gusto. "They attacked first!" Haga shouted gleefully, and with his brother proceeded to dispatch most of the enemy into the Beyond. Haikuchi, still a bit out of breath, fired a series of fiery red bolts at the remaining thieves. Soon they were surrounded by bodies and gore, yet none of the party had been scratched. Elwood rifled the bodies for gold while the others looked on in mild disgust.

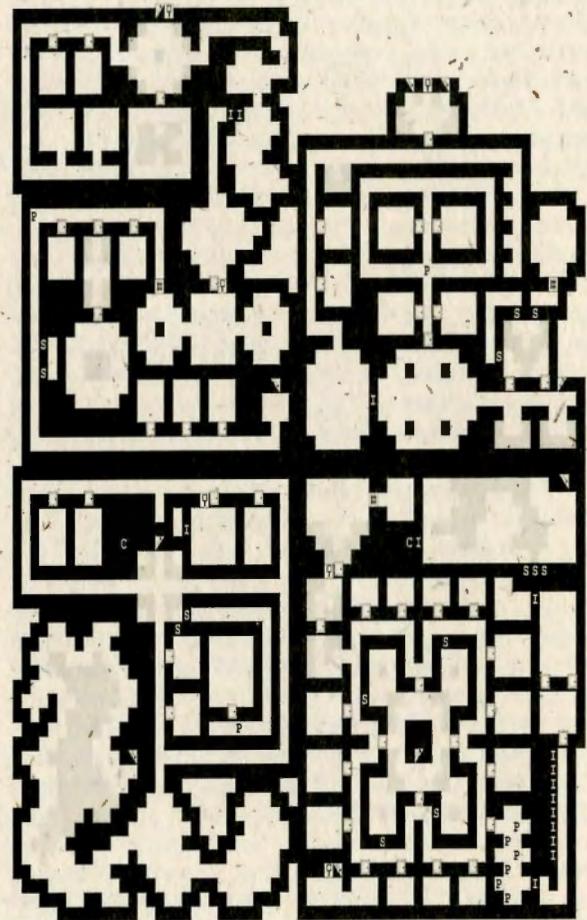
"Well everyone," said Haikuchi, rising to his feet, "we must be getting to something important if so many warriors are trying so hard to kill us. Let's continue."

The party moved on, and discovered to their delight that the thieves had been guarding chests filled with gold. At the end of a corridor they found stairs descending into darkness. They secured their weapons and continued downward. Here on the second level, they found even more gold. After gathering up their booty, the party left the town of Kawa and made its way northwest to the Emperor's castle.

Kodan, Emperor's Castle

After another tough encounter, the party entered the Emperor's castle from the south. They proceeded due north until they found the Emperor. He was just having some new clothes fitted and had time to see them. He told the party to go and find information regarding the infiltration of evil creatures into his castle, and showed them a parchment sent to the

Castle Catacombs, Level 1-4



Deathlord Dungeon Legend

- S = Secret door
- P = Pit trap
- C = Chute
- S = Sinkhole
- D = Door
- A = Stairs up
- B = Stairs down
- M = Portcullis
- I = Illusionary wall
- W = Watch your step/water
- = Dungeon wall

Emperor by the Deathlord. The information from the Emperor was not very helpful, but the Deathlord, in his extreme arrogance, mentioned two vital clues that gave the party some specific direction. They would now search for seven words and six items to help them defeat the Deathlord. But just where would they find the Emerald Rod, the Ruby Ring, the Lantern of Vorek, the Sharktooth, Blue Crystals, and the Sunspears? They bid the Emperor farewell and soon found an entrance to some catacombs in the southeast section of the castle.

Kodan, Level One, Castle Catacombs

The party wandered in the northeast section of the catacombs and seemed to be stuck until Elwood discovered illusory walls in the northwest section of a large room. Haikuchi led the way bravely, squinting in the dull light provided by Naguri. They avoided fighting several monsters by fleeing, and then the party fell into a pit trap in the northernmost end of a long corridor.

"By the Great Kami!" hissed Oma, trying to untangle his weapons and arms and legs from everyone else's. "Haikuchi-san, you..."

"Hush!" whispered Urami. "Listen."

The party froze. They heard many shuffling feet moving past the pit in which they were effectively hidden. The sound faded into the distance.

"Well...I guess it was lucky I found this great hiding place, huh?" Haikuchi asked with an impish grin.

Naguri socked him in the stomach before she scrambled out of the pit. The others ignored him and followed her out.

"All right, all right, so it was just luck. Let's keep going!"

They continued south for what seemed to be forever, and would have been forever, if Elwood had not discovered that they were in a teleport trap. They circumvented the trap using the secret doors in the east wall. In the southeast section of the catacombs, the party again descended.

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Kodan, Level Two, Castle Catacombs

The party went west along a narrow corridor which led to a large room. A door in the north wall led to the north section of the level. They found gold but no descending stairs, and so returned to the room of fire.

Haikuchi stamped in frustration. "How are we to get anywhere if we are this inept at finding hidden doors and exits?" he asked as he leaned against the middle of the west wall, and disappeared. There was a loud clatter of bamboo armor.

"Seven devils!" A muffled curse from Haikuchi could be heard through the illusory wall.

The party exchanged glances and laughed. "I think we found a most wonderful way to discover secret doors and entryways," Naguri giggled. Then she ducked to avoid Haikuchi's flung bamboo breastplate. The party stepped over the armor and followed their clumsy leader through the illusory wall. They proceeded north through another large room and up a long corridor, searching for rooms along the way. Urami discovered a sign between two stairwells. "One stair leads to your doom," he read aloud, "the other descends to the next level. Choose one."

Haikuchi frowned. "I choose the right stair," he said. Without a word the party headed directly to the left stairway and descended.

"Hey! Hey!" Haikuchi protested. "Oh, seven devils," he hissed, and followed his friends...

The old man stopped in his reading and stared at his sleeping apprentice. "Ah, Haikuchi," he said sadly. "Perhaps this was not a good idea after all. I really thought it would help to see yourself in a real quest situation, but you are fouling up so badly I'm afraid the lesson will just reinforce your bad opinion of yourself." The master sighed.

To the old man's surprise, the boy nodded in his sleep. "Do not worry, Master," the young man whispered. "Perhaps the lesson I am learning is just not the one you wanted to teach."

The master smiled, and grasped the boy's hand. "You may be clumsy, kid, but you are wise beyond your years. Now, let's return you to your companions."

"Yes Master."

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Kodan, Level Three, Castle Catacombs

The party found itself in a tiny rock-walled room with no exit. Haikuchi even leaned on all the walls, but to no avail.

"So now what?" Elwood complained.

"Be silent," Oma commanded. "Listen."

The party fell silent. There was an ominous rumbling, the sound of stone grinding on stone. Naguri paled and moved to stand nearer to Urami.

Elwood grimaced. "This isn't the garbage chute, is it?" he asked. Before anyone had time to answer, one edge of the floor dropped down; and the party again descended — very quickly.

Kodan, Level Four, Castle Catacombs

The party landed, hard, in another tiny room. This time, Haikuchi quickly found that the east wall was an illusory wall, and the party stepped through into a large cavern containing a lake. They could barely make out an archway in the northeast wall of the cavern, on the other side of the water. In front of them was a boat beached on the shore.

Haikuchi stood gingerly and rubbed his derriere. "Looks like the only way to go is to take the boat to the other side and go through that archway. Let's go." The party made their way across the cavern to the archway on the other side. This proved to be a stairwell. They beached the craft and descended the stairs into a strange darkness.

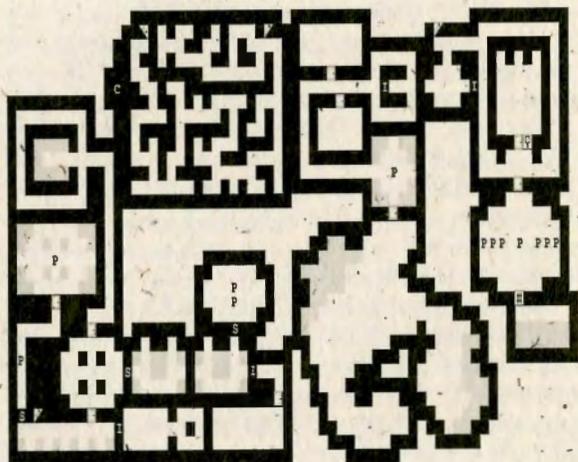
Kodan, Level Five, Castle Catacombs

Naguri was puzzled as they entered the level. "My Akari spell is not working properly," she said. The corridor remained cloaked in darkness despite the young shisai's effort to cast the light spell.

"Never mind, Naguri, we will just proceed with caution," said Haikuchi, smiling to reassure her. "You are doing really well...this is not your fault."

Naguri smiled back, and the party continued south down the corridor. They came upon a maze, and continued even more slowly in the magical darkness. Suddenly, they were attacked by undead monsters,

Castle Catacombs, Level 5-6



Haikuchi found himself filled with the fever of battle for the first time, the heat surging into his limbs. He swung his bo staff like a madman, fighting alongside Oma and Urami, who regarded their leader with a new respect as Haikuchi slew foe after foe. The party was attacked several more times before they solved the mystery of the maze, and discovered descending stairs.

Kodan, Level Six, Castle Catacombs

Upon entering the lowest level of the Emperor's catacombs, the party moved south down a long corridor, which then turned to the east. There they discovered a door, with the message: PRIVATE CHAMBERS OF THE WARLOCK KAWAHARA. TRESPASSERS WILL BE THROWN TO THE LIONS.

The party exchanged glances. "He's bluffing," Haikuchi declared. "Lions my eye!" And with a yell he threw himself against the door — and fell back when it refused to yield. "Ouch!" he yelled, rubbing a bruised upper arm.

Elwood stepped forward. "For Pete's sake," he said, disgustedly. He reached out and turned the knob. The door opened easily, and the party found themselves in a room with pillars of fire. They skirted the pillars to the right, and were confronted by the evil warlock himself! They dodged his spells easily as Haikuchi tried to speak to him.

"Please, oh Great and Powerful Kawahara! Speak to us!" Haikuchi ducked as a whizzing lightning bolt singed his hair. "Seven devils!" he yelled.

"The guy isn't very sociable, is he?" asked Elwood with an impish grin.

"Blast him!" Haikuchi yelled as he cast a Todo spell. Fiery red bolts zipped through the air and found their target. The evil warlock fell to the floor in tiny, smoldering bits.

The party was silent for a moment. "Hey, that's a cool spell," said Elwood. "I'm beginning to think you're a pretty handy guy to have along after all."

Haikuchi reddened. "Th...thanks," he stammered, and promptly tripped on his bo staff.

Naguri smacked her forehead in exasperation.



"Don't compliment him any more, he's liable to kill himself! Let's keep going. And watch out for all the chunks of warlock."

The party discovered a chest behind the remains of Kawahara. They opened the chest and found a scroll, a letter to a mysterious unnamed person. The letter contained references to the words and the items the party was seeking, and implied that killing Kawahara was not enough to give them the right to feel cocky. There would be a foe to deal with, before the end, that would make killing Kawahara seem like child's play.

"Who could the letter be from?" asked Naguri.

"The Devil," Urami said immediately. The others looked at him in surprise.

"How do you know?" Haikuchi demanded.

Naguri answered for her mate. "Urami has been granted by the gods the gift of Divine Insight," she explained. "It does not come upon demand, or very often, but when it does come, it is always correct. You may believe that the letter is from the Devil."

The party was silent. Urami placed the scroll into his sash, and the party explored the chamber.

Kodan, The Ascension

The party discovered a teleport in the middle alcove of Kawahara's chambers, and were transported to level five of the catacombs. They proceeded east, and then south down a long corridor, through a room containing pedestals. They continued south through the room, and turned west at the end of a short corridor. There they found ascending stairs, and climbed to level four. They proceeded north, and then east for a short time, and then took a jog in the corridor which led them to the east, and to the south, and to the east again. In the north wall of the corridor they found more stairs. These took them back to level three of the catacombs, where they discovered a huge lake. They skirted the edge of the lake to avoid a water monster within, and discovered a long corridor leading north. They followed the corridor and found stairs leading to the next level. They found themselves in the room with the sign on the wall between the two stairwells, and

from there they returned the way they had come. The Son of Heaven was pleased to see them, but when he saw the scroll he paled.

"Do you realize the significance of this letter?" he asked them.

Urami nodded. The party remained silent, waiting for the Emperor to speak.

"The problem is much greater than my worst fears." He paused, considering the party through narrowed eyes. "Are you prepared to go on a quest for your Emperor? A dangerous quest from which you may not return?"

"What's in it for us, Son of Heaven?" asked Elwood. "I mean, I haven't heard 'rich rewards, land, fringe benefits' mentioned and...oof!"

Haikuchi had stepped forward and clouted the genkai on the side of the head. Elwood certainly reminded him of his master sometimes! "I apologize for the disrespect of my companion, Son of Heaven. Please tell us your wishes."

The Emperor frowned, then relaxed. "You may wish to first explore other cities and ruins for clues to help you complete your quest, but do not tarry needlessly. Continue quickly to Tokugawa, where a vessel will await you. Hunt down Kawahara's master and do not return until he is no more."

"We will proceed at once, Son of Heaven. Thank you. We are honored," Haikuchi said.

The old man paused in his reading. He looked down at his sleeping apprentice, and he could swear the boy's shoulders were held a little straighter. He was assuming the responsibility of his command, and with it came greater self respect. He smiled at Haikuchi, and continued to read aloud from the cluebook. *Kodan, Wakiza. Once outside the castle...*

Kodan, Wakiza

Once outside the castle, the party journeyed south toward Wakiza to explore the ruins there. Elwood informed the party that Wakiza was once a pirate's den and thrived until the forces of Nakamoto stormed the place and destroyed it.

"Their treasure was never found," Elwood said with a grin. "The Son of Heaven wouldn't mind if we picked up a little extra gold and priceless stuff on our journey, would he?"

The party was thoughtfully silent as they made their way to Wakiza. They discovered it to be as Elwood described, just ruins. There were few inhabitants, and they were not very helpful. The party questioned everyone they encountered, and then made camp just outside the ruins to go over the information they had garnered.

Naguri, the scribe for the party, consulted her notes. "There were several references to the gates of Hell — seven of them. Urami tells me he believes that these gates can only be passed by the use of the seven words for which we search. Without them we will perish if we try to gain access to Hell. Uragi knows that this will indeed become necessary before the end of our quest."

Haikuchi gulped. "Go on, Naguri."

"One man told Oma that Ossiria lies due east of here. I don't know to what he referred, and no one else in Wakiza was able to shed any further light. That's all."

"A fine job, Naguri," Haikuchi said. "Any other comments?"

Elwood said excitedly, "I found the entrance to a huge cavern below the ruins. It is to the north, past a poisonous swamp. There are illusory doors in the side of the mountain! I am convinced that I found the location of pirate treasures!"

The party was excited, until Haikuchi reminded them of the Emperor's advice about tarrying needlessly. "The gold will still be there when we return from our quest, Elwood," he told the dejected genkai. "We will all be wealthy beyond our wildest hopes, I promise you. But first let us complete our quest."

After much discussion, even Elwood agreed, and the party slept. On the morrow they would proceed to the Yokahama ruins.

Kodan, Yokahama

The usually silent Oma had some information about the ruins of Yokahama, which he related to the party as they marched.

"The ruins were once the home of the wizard Senju until he was destroyed by the forces of Kawahara. There is an area of wizard darkness in the northwest, where Senju cast a parting shot at the attacking forces. It should prove an interesting place to collect information."

There were not many people living in the ruins of the wizard's domain. Naguri recorded some information about the wizard. One man told them that Senju had left his domain, which was more than apparent. Another told the party that Senju must be given a Blue Crystal, one of a set of magic crystals which would enable a person to pass through...something. On this point the man was vague, and the party could get no more information.

Kodan, Tokushima/Tokugawa

The party explored the village, questioning the inhabitants. Haga was delighted to discover a bakery, and had to be bodily dragged out before the portly kishi ate up all the party's hard won gold. They noticed an island lying off the eastern shore of Tokushima, and decided to explore it. After acquiring a small vessel, the party sailed to the island where they found a strange hermit. The old man was senile and told them the same thing over and over...that Senju was to be found to the north, between two rivers. The party spent the night in Stonebrow caverns, and left in the morning for Tokugawa.

A sturdy oceangoing vessel, the *Titanic*, awaited them in Tokugawa. It was docked in the northernmost slips, the one farthest to the west. The party rested the night on board, and in the morning they set off on their journey, northeast, to the continent of Chigaku, to try and discover more clues about the mysterious Blue Crystals.

Chigaku, Crystalmist

The party sailed to Chigaku and docked in the town of Crystalmist, on the northeast shore of the continent. The Ishota brothers had been violently ill on board, and walked like sick kittens on land. Haikuchi decided to stay in Crystalmist until the kishis had recovered, and assigned Urami and Elwood to go and search for clues regarding the Blue Crystals and any of the other artifacts. Toward sunset the two returned. Urami was strangely silent, but Elwood was excited about what they had discovered.

"We had about given up on finding anything worthwhile in this town, when we came upon this guy standing just outside the city walls to the northwest. He was pretty scared, and we had to pay him to talk. The guy told us that the crystals could be found in a lagoon, and I know where there is one! The Lost Lagoon on the continent of Narawn! I say we leave in the morning!"

"No." This was spoken by Urami. "We have other business here before we depart. I sense that one of the words we seek is on this continent, in a place called Troll Hole, and I will not leave until we find it."

Haga grunted. "If these words are important to gain us access to the Evil One, I agree with the shizen. We stay until the word is found." Oma nodded his agreement with his brother.

"But...but..." Elwood spluttered. "I know we can get the crystals, I know they are there. I think we should go for realities, not chase after shizen butterfly dreams." He turned to Haikuchi in appeal. "What is your decision, master?" The title came easily and naturally from the genkai's lips.

Haikuchi was stunned. All the party waited his decision. He was the leader, and they really accepted him! A shy smile lit his face. He cleared his throat, straightened his shoulders...and the first word he spoke touched briefly on random notes through several octaves as his voice broke. He cleared his throat again, and continued. "We will spend a little time in the Troll Hole following Urami's lead. But if we find nothing tomorrow we will continue on to Narawn."

This was fair and acceptable to all. The party rested, and in the morning proceeded southwest to Troll Hole.

Chigaku, Trollhole

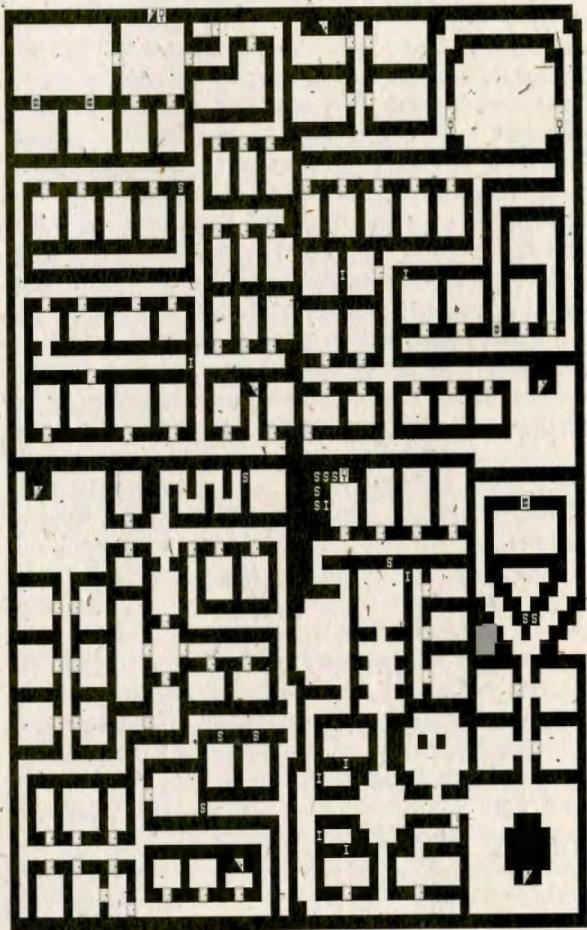
They found the north entrance to the Troll Hole and entered. The entire subterranean complex was flooded with water and Elwood's loud complaint. As they slogged along, they attracted waiting parties of trolls and skeletons. The party was attacked several times until Haikuchi threatened to make Elwood eat his tanto, point first, if he didn't remain quiet. The noxious fumes rising from the swampy floor made most of the party sick. There were treacherous sinkholes that the party avoided with the expert guidance of Haikuchi. They descended stairs which they found in the southeast section to a lower level, and then made their way north. Naguri discovered an illusory wall near the center of the level, and the party passed through and continued north. Haga and Oma had fun bashing in a few doors that stood in the way of the party. They had several more encounters with trolls ("Great name for this place, Troll Hole," Elwood grumbled), and again descended stairs to a lower level.

The third level of the Troll Hole would have been easily traversed, were it not for the myriad troll parties that seemed to ooze from the very walls of the foul hole. The party battled their way to a final set of stairs in the southern section of the level, descended, and entered a large area filled with sickening fumes. They proceeded north, leaving a trail of troll gore in their wake. The Ishota brothers broke down a door that led the party into a room of noxious gasses. They passed through an illusory wall and through secret doors before Urami's hunch paid off. In a little room beyond the secret doors the party found a sign on the wall. The sign read FUSHIN.

"That's it," Urami said triumphantly.

"Nobody likes to hear 'I told you so,'" Elwood grumbled as the party trekked out of the Troll Hole, returning to Crystalmist and the Titanic. In the morning they set sail for Narawn.

Troll Hole, Level 1-4



Narawn, Kawisha

The party sailed into the port town of Kawisha and roamed the town, engaging the villagers in conversation. Haikuchi visited the mayor of Kawisha, and at the end of the day they sat in the inn to compare notes.

"Sake all around," Haikuchi ordered. "And sushi, and pickled fish. Now," he said, turning to his companions, "I learned about another magical word that supposedly is to be found under a pyramid. The pyramid can be found by sailing north and due west. It sounds like directions to another of the words we need to accomplish our quest."

Urami nodded. "The seven words that are needed for access to the seven levels of Hell."

"Uh...yes," Haikuchi gulped. The prospect of going to meet the Devil in his domain still did not appeal to him. He wished fervently that the grim shizen would stop mentioning Hell so often.

Haga spoke up. "We spoke with many people, but only two spoke any words of interest. One told us to search the Shrine of Chaos, and another told us that Malkanth lies in a fiery pit. Malkanth is a town of legend, inhabited by fiends from Hell. A place called Demonguard prevents the demons from leaving Malkanth. Whether you will accompany us or not, my brother and I intend to search out this town and destroy its evil denizens."

Elwood smacked his forehead. "Aw, come on you guys, this holier than thou stuff is getting a bit nerve wracking. We are going to find enough trouble without seeking it out!"

Hot words were exchanged, and it would have come to blows had not Haikuchi stepped in to stop the impending fight. "That's enough!" he bellowed. All action ceased, and all eyes turned to him. "We are on a quest, and if any personal needs conflict with that quest, they will have to be set aside. Understood?" Everybody nodded. Haikuchi was afraid that his hard attitude would cause ill feelings, but it seemed to only increase the respect he was starting to receive from the party. With a light heart, he retired for the night. In the morning the party would search for the Lost Lagoon.



Odd name for it, since everyone seems to know where it is, Haikuchi thought as he drifted off to sleep.

Narawn, Lost Lagoon

The party found the Lost Lagoon due north of Kawisha. There were buildings and residences scattered throughout the lagoon, and the party questioned the inhabitants. The Ishota brothers asked everyone about Malkanth, and were rewarded when they were told that there was a mighty artifact hidden there. They also learned that in Malkanth it would be wise to keep to the shadows, to avoid being burned by fires.

"Ok; ok," Elwood sighed. "I was wrong. Now can we look for the crystals?"

Haikuchi grinned at the plaintive note in the genkai's voice. *I hope we do find the crystals here, he thought, or Elwood will go mad!*

He needn't have worried. In a small abandoned building in the western section of the lagoon, Elwood discovered an illusory wall. The party passed through, and came upon a man in a garden. They hailed him, and he responded with a cunning smile.

"Look at all the crystals," he said, with a broad sweep of his hand.

The party looked, and saw nothing. Elwood scowled. "I know they are here," he muttered, and went down on all fours, hunting under every bush in the garden. He surfaced from under a thorny blood red rose bush and his hands were filled with glimmering Blue Crystals.

Urami smiled. "Now it is your turn for I-told-you-so's my friend." The shizen knelt and helped Elwood collect the crystals. The gardener offered to let them pass the night in his garden, and in the morning the party set off south to Fort Demonguard, the gateway to Malkanth.

Narawn, Fort Demonguard, Malkanth

They entered the fort from the west. Repeatedly, they were met by the guardians, and warned away from Malkanth. But the party continued east through the watery fort, keeping to the high ground. They came

to a portcullis, which the Ishota brothers tore down, and another, which met the same fate. On the other side of a door (which was also kicked in by the eager kishis) the party discovered a force field that mysteriously sapped them of their strength. They fought through it, and Elwood discovered an illusory wall to the east. The party followed Elwood through the wall, through another door, and into the fires of Malkanth...

There was a short corridor, filled with fire, that the party had no choice but to go through. Once through, they continued east, and then proceeded south, avoiding areas of fire. They saw demons, but the creatures did not attack them, and Haikuchi ordered the Ishota brothers to keep their swords in their scabbards. The brothers complied, but vowed to return and rid the world of the evil servants of Hell. They passed through a secret door and continued south, until they found a sign on a door that read SHRINE OF CHAOS. The party exchanged glances.

"Well, nice of 'em to label it for us!" Elwood exclaimed. "Let's do it!" He kicked in the door, and Haikuchi led the way into a room of darkness. After searching within, the party found the artifact they sought...the magic Sharktooth. "Two down and three to go!" cried the irrepressible genkai. "Let's boogie!" Elated, the party returned to Kawisha, boarded the Taitanic, and set sail to the nearby continent of Akmahr.

Akmahr, Sultan's Palace

As they sailed along the coast of Akmahr, Urami seemed to fall into a trance. "Kobito, Kobito," he murmured. Naguri was unable to wake him, but as they docked near the sultan's palace in the southeast, he awoke. He did not remember having said the word, but Naguri recorded it faithfully. The party left the ship and went to explore the sultan's palace. They asked about Kobito, and learned that the Kobito mines were found to the west of the palace. Urami's eyes lit up when an old woman told them that the mines hid a word. They were also told that the Emerald Rod is said to confer immunity to acid, and they should search for it in the tower. They proceeded mostly south through

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a secret door, south again through another door, and into the tower. In the middle of the tower was a dragon!

"Uh...master," Elwood whispered. "What do we do now?"

The dragon eyed them calmly.

Haikuchi frowned. "It doesn't seem to want to harm us. Let's continue toward him...slowly." They proceeded toward the dragon, until they came upon another force field, similar to the one in Fort Demonguard. They invoked the power of the Blue Crystals to help them through the field, but they were still zapped by a magical force that sapped them of strength. They fought through it, and once on the other side, the dragon, fire in its eye (and shooting out its nostrils!) attacked.

The weakened party fought the creature grimly. Haga and Oma slashed at it with their swords, while Haikuchi readied his spell. "Get clear!" he shouted, and raised his hand. The dragon turned to face him as the kishis scuttled out of the way, and as Haikuchi unleashed a deadly spell. It had been a while since he had been called upon to use his magic, and he was surprised to find that he was much deadlier than before. He cast Hitama, and a ball of rosy flame danced towards the dragon and exploded before it. The party ducked as steaming pieces of the creature flew in all directions.

There was a pause.

"Well," Elwood commented wryly, "I hope there is something left of the rod after all that."

Haikuchi bit his lower lip. "I didn't know it would be that strong," he said meekly.

Elwood grinned. "I'm glad we're on the same side, master!" he said. He got up and searched the area that had been vacated by the dragon. He found a box and opened it. "Here we are!" he said, holding aloft the rod. "Let's get out of here before the sultan realizes we barbequed his pet."

In the morning, the party returned to the Taitanic. They sailed east into a large bay and dropped anchor. They rowed to shore, and hiked east to the Kobito mines.

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Akmahr, Kobito Mines

The entrance to the mines was in the north. The party entered and was immediately attacked by a party of Kobitos. They defended themselves well, and Naguri healed all wounds. Avoiding areas of belching fire, they proceeded south. On the other side of an illusory wall they found descending stairs. On the second level of the mines, Elwood insisted that he sensed the presence of gold, and made a wild dash to the north. Through four illusory walls, the party did indeed find an enormous amount of gold. Elwood was ecstatic. They returned to the south, and descended to the third level of the mines. To the left, they found stairs to the fourth level. Crushing a portcullis, they made their way north and discovered a string of illusory walls. At the end was a small room, and within the room was a sign.

NIKUMU, the sign read. Naguri recorded the word in her journal, and the party left the mines. They boarded the Taitanic and sailed southwest to Sirion.

Sirion, Greenbanks

The continent of Sirion was almost a chain of islands. Urami again fell into a trance as they sailed in among the small land masses. "Roomy Dungeon, Forest Dungeon," he groaned, while Naguri frantically wrote the names down in the journal. They docked the Taitanic at some ruins called Greenbanks.

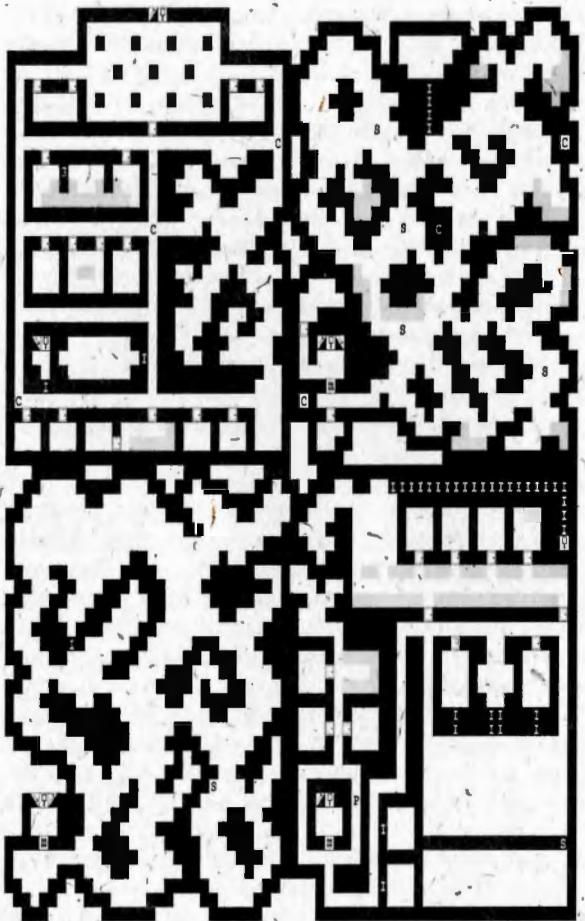
"Greenbanks, 'Greenbanks,'" Elwood muttered. "Where have I heard of this place before?"

"There is a legend," Naguri said. "There was once a king named Vorek who drove back the dark hordes who threatened the realm. He had mighty wizards who fashioned for him many wondrous objects. But the most wonderful of all was the lantern...the Lantern of Vorek. The lantern we seek. Vorek is buried somewhere nearby. Legend says that his lantern was buried with him, to light his way in the afterlife."

Elwood said, "Just point me in the right direction."

And so the party wandered the ruins of Greenbanks. In the cemetery they found the grave of Vorek. It was less grisly than Naguri feared — rains had

Kobito Mines, Level 1-4



exposed the lantern. Elwood extracted it from the damp earth, and the party continued to roam the area. They learned from the locals that there was, indeed, a dungeon to the northwest. Something was hidden on the sixth level, and they would have to walk on acid to obtain it. The party spent the night in Redbeard's Tavern, and in the morning returned to the Taitanic to continue their quest.

Sirion, Forest Dungeon

After much searching to the northwest of Greenbanks, they found the entrance to a subterranean complex. Trolls attacked them as they entered the dungeon and they got stuck in a teleport trap that would have defeated them had Haikuchi not figured out what to do. They proceeded due south, went around to the east, used the teleport to transport them where they wanted to be. Then they continued south and discovered descending stairs.

They spent two days in the second level, working their way through a maze that nearly defeated them. Illusory walls and secret doors made solving the maze nearly impossible, but at the end of the second day they found descending stairs. They slept at the top of the stairwell, and in the morning descended.

Immediately, they descended another stairway directly to the east, and then Urami said "Don't move." The party froze, "There is magic here," he said. "If we make a wrong move we will be forever lost here."

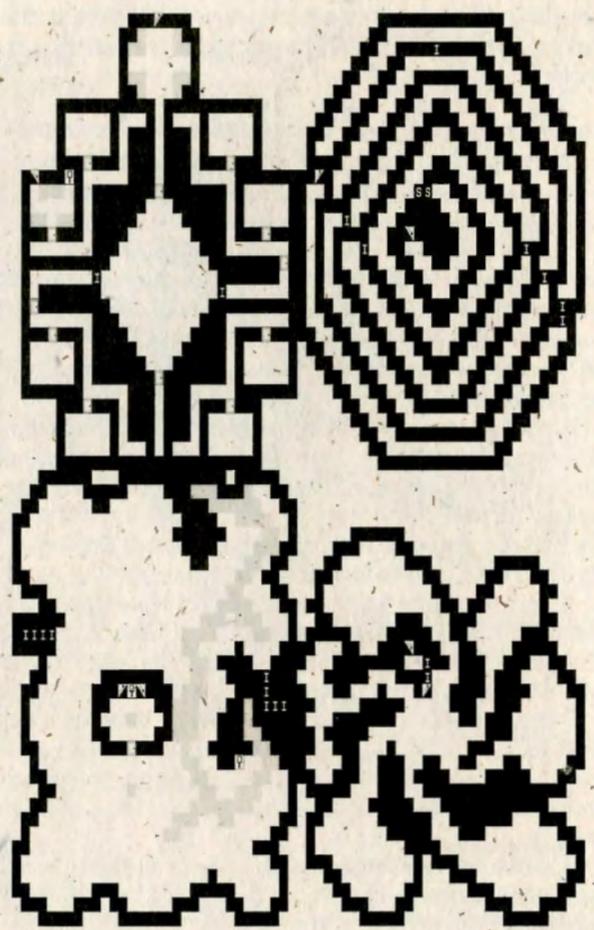
Elwood was examining the walls. "Master," he said to Haikuchi, "there is an illusory wall to the north. We can only go in two directions...north or south. It seems to me that the hidden way is the correct way."

Haikuchi was silent. If he chose incorrectly it would mean the failure of the quest, and the death of his friends. Finally he spoke. "North," he said. "We go north." He took a deep breath, and plunged through the wall. The others followed. Beyond one more illusory wall was a stairway going down. Haikuchi sighed deeply. He had chosen correctly. The party once again descended.



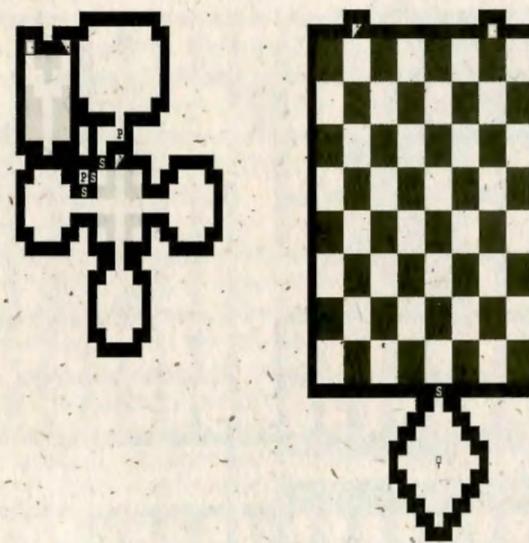
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Forest, Level 1-4

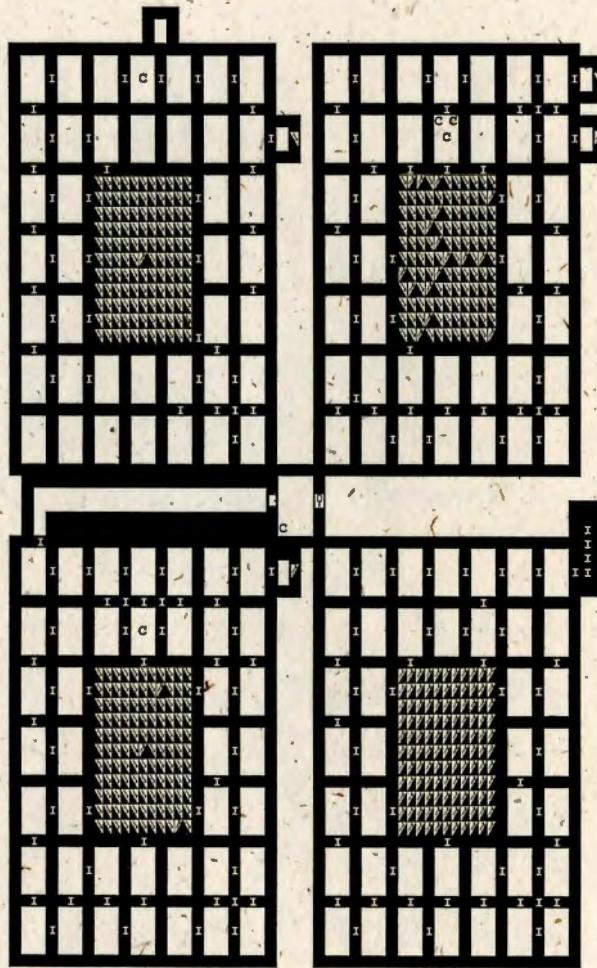


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Forest, Level 5-6



Roomy, Level 1-4



After traveling south and then east, the party was teleported to another area. Here they discovered descending stairs.

This area was laid out like an enormous chessboard: Squares of fire alternated with squares of brick floor. The party made their way south, doing battle with fierce monsters. They went through a secret door in the south wall, and discovered a beautiful garden room. In the room was a sign that read YOKUSEI.

"The third word," Urami breathed. They left the dungeon and returned to the Taitanic.

Sirion, Roomy Dungeon

They sailed for two days amongst the islands of Sirion. Urami stayed in a trance, standing in the bow, hoping for a sign from his gods as to the location of the other dungeon. Finally, on the third day, the shizenn woke from his trance and pointed to the shore.

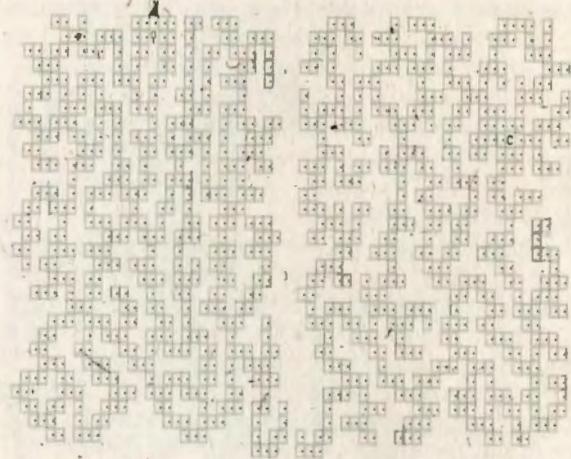
Haikuchi gave the command to drop anchor, and the party went ashore. Right where Urami pointed they found the entrance to another dungeon, completely hidden from view of the water. The party had entered Roomy Dungeon.

They were teleported instantly to an area filled with stairwells. There was no where to go but stairs! They descended a level, and discovered more stairwells. They realized that this was an area of magical stairs, and they needed to get beyond the stairs to get anywhere on any of the levels. They ascended and descended stairs, moving north as they did so, and ended up on the third level, facing an illusory wall. They went through the wall and northwest through a series of rooms containing more illusory walls. A long east-west corridor led them to a door which the Ishota brothers gleefully smashed...only to discover a group of demons waiting behind!

The demons were quickly dispatched, and in the room behind them, hanging on the wall, was a sign that read CHIJOKU. The party ascended and descended stairs, and left the Roomy Dungeon. They returned to the Taitanic, and sailed north. They were caught in a terrible storm, and nearly lost their lives. When the



Hidden Dungeon



rain finally ceased, a small land mass was visible to the south. They dropped anchor, and landed on the mysterious Black Island.

Black Island, Red Shogun's Citadel

From the east they entered the citadel and talked with some of the inhabitants. They were told that something of great value, a Ruby Ring, had been hidden by the evil Shogun, and that the ring would give the bearer and his party immunity to fire. The party searched the citadel and finally discovered a man in a large room who told them to search the walls. They did, and discovered a secret door in the east wall. They passed through the door and entered a small room still under construction. There they found the Ruby Ring.

"Four down and one to go," said Elwood. They left the citadel.

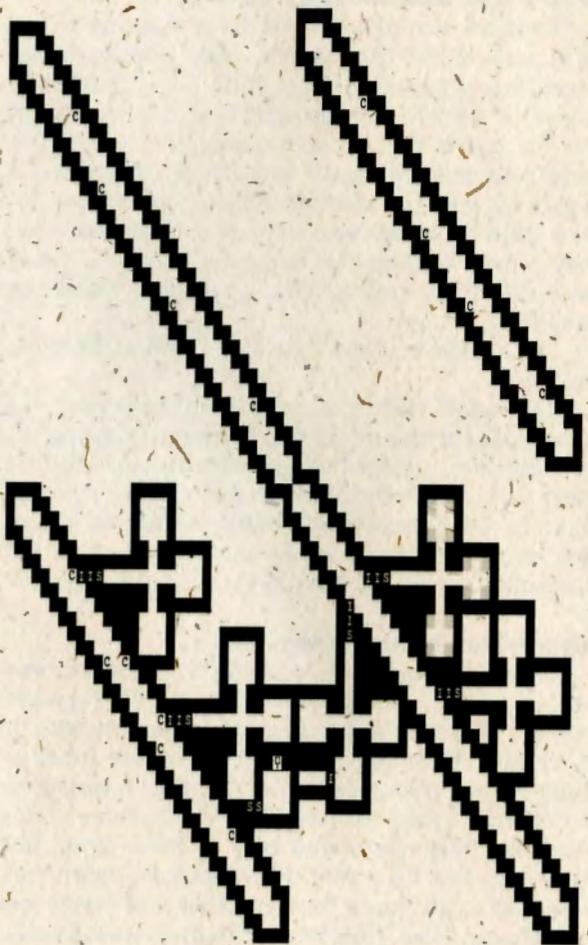
Urami told Haikuchi that he felt the presence of another one of the words they sought. Following his lead, the party returned to their ship and sailed to the north side of the island, where they entered into the mountains and discovered a hidden dungeon. It was late, and so the party made camp just outside the dungeon. They would enter in the morning.

Black Island, Hidden Dungeon

It was a dungeon of doors: At first the party was amused by the abundance of them, but after a short time the novelty paled, and annoyance gave way to anger and frustration. Elwood picked the locks of many before his lockpick broke, and then it was up to the Ishota brothers to break them down. Some of the doors were very sturdy and hard to break down; the kishis were injured many times. After an eternity of locked doors, the party found a chute and descended into a lower level. They were teleported immediately down a long corridor, and teleported again. They continued warily down the corridor, and Elwood discovered an illusory wall toward the middle on the south wall. The party traveled south, through illusory walls, secret doors, and darkness. They discovered



Hidden Dungeon, Level 5-8



treasure, and on the wall of a small room, a sign that read DARAKU. Urami smiled grimly, and Naguri recorded the word. The party left the dungeon by travelling west through another area of darkness, through another secret door and two more illusory walls, until they came into another corridor. They followed it southeast, and were teleported to another identical corridor. When they traveled southeast down the corridor, they found a way out to the first level. Thankfully, they took the stairs up and out of the dungeon.

Isle Of The Dead, Pyramid

The party sailed south and came upon an island. They needed to find water, so they dropped anchor and went ashore. Haikuchi spotted something odd in the distance and headed toward it, the party trailing behind him.

"Pyramid," Haikuchi soon announced. Through a northern entrance, they entered into the most dreadful labyrinth yet encountered. At last they discovered descending stairs. The party halted to decide whether or not to continue.

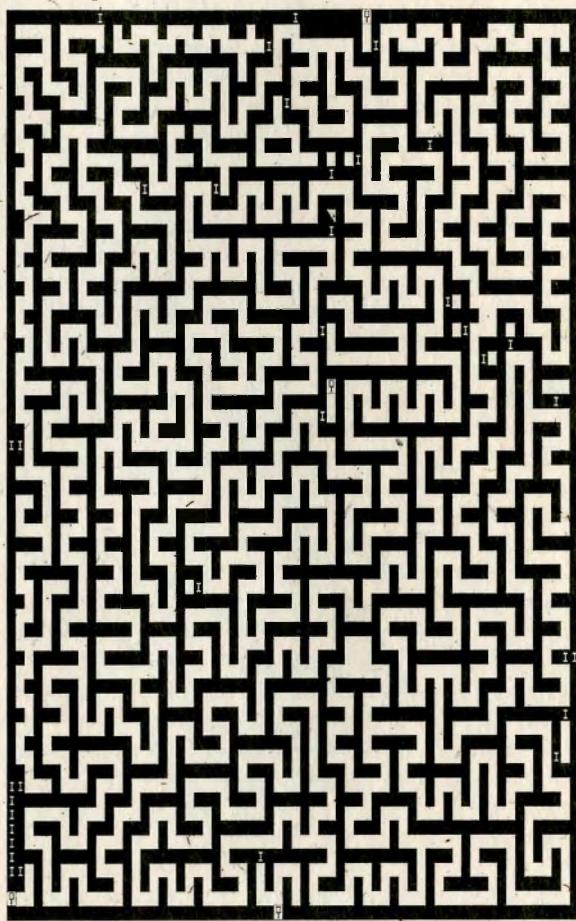
Haikuchi stared at Urami, who stood with head bowed. "Urami?" The shizzen lifted his head. "There is a word here, isn't there?" The shizzen lifted his eyebrows in surprise, and nodded. "Then we go forward. There is no other choice." He led the party down the stairs.

Through two illusory walls, the party found themselves in another maze. Again they fought their way grimly, finding scrawled messages of lost hope on the walls and bones on the floor, picked clean by rodents. They stumbled across a chute and found themselves on the next lower level. This level was the worst of all...it started out as an entire huge area of illusory walls. Elwood quickly became exhausted, searching for the illusions, but he kept going tenaciously. Finally, they discovered a stairway that led to the next level.

This level was a normal maze. The party proceeded warily, not trusting the seeming normalcy. Unexpectedly, they were teleported to the next level, and teleported again to a maze of darkness. They

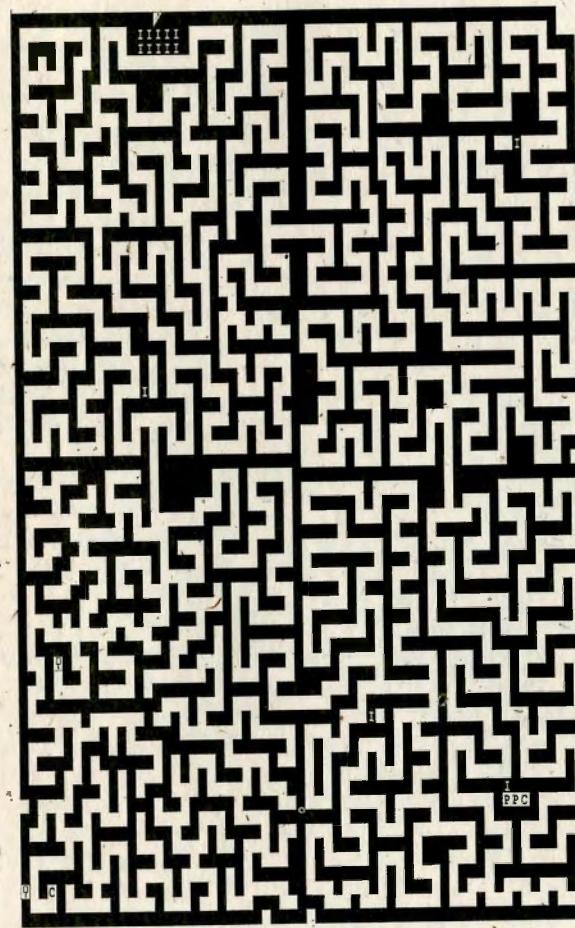
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Pyramid of the Dead

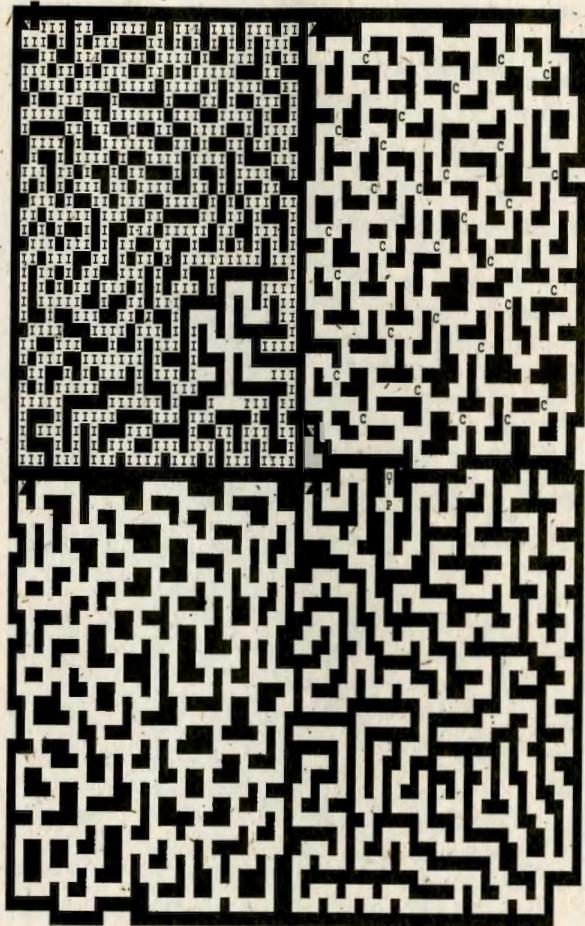


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The Maze, 1-4



The Maze, Level 5-8



solved the maze, and discovered the next word, SEIYOKU.

After they made their way back out to the cool air and bright sunshine, they returned to the Taitanic where they met a small band of adventurers who were awaiting their return. Haikuchi bowed to the samurai leader and asked, "How can we be of aid to you?" The samurai returned an even deeper bow, which made the party proud of Haikuchi.

"Master, we have just come from the continent of Nyuku. We were seeking the Sunsppear for the Emperor, but we were told by the Wizard Senju, who holds the spear, that we needed a token to prove our worthiness. We have searched long for such a token, and we have not been successful. But everywhere in our journey we have heard of a great band of adventurers who have collected all of the other artifacts required by the Emperor. We have reached the limits of our abilities, but we may be able to at least offer you some aid by leading you to the Wizard Senju."

Naguri recorded the vital information as detailed by the samurai leader. In the morning, the Taitanic set sail for the continent of Nyuku, to the village of Two Rivers to find the Wizard Senju.

Nyuku, Two Rivers

Nyuku was many leagues to the northwest, and it took them several days to journey there. By a stroke of luck, the first village they saw off the coast was the village of Two Rivers. They dropped anchor, went ashore, and started questioning the inhabitants. They found out that Senju lived in the southeast area of the village, and that the token he required was a Blue Crystal. They found the Wizard, and received his blessing...and more importantly, the Sunsppear. The party then retired to the Twin Rivers Canteen and Steak House to decide where to go next.

"What are we missing?" Elwood mumbled, his mouth full of excellent steak.

"One more word," Urami breathed. "We need one more word. I feel that if we journey south, we will find it. In a place..." his voice trailed off. The party waited.



Elemental Dungeon



"In an elemental place. A...dungeon of elements? Ah!" Triumphantly. "The Elemental Dungeons, in the Lost Isles." He shuddered, and collapsed against Naguri. Elwood patted his shoulder softly. In the morning they set sail for the Lost Isles.

The old man paused in his reading. He eyed his apprentice, who snored softly while he slept. "Are you still with me, Haikuchi?"

The boy stirred, and nodded.

"Are you satisfied that you only need confidence...that there is nothing wrong with your abilities?"

The boy nodded again.

"All right, son, I will awaken you now." The master moved his arms in an involved pattern, and whispered some magical words. Haikuchi awoke, and smiled at his master.

The old man smiled back. "I am proud of you, Haikuchi. I have one task for you before you choose a real quest to prove yourself. Go and find your friend Elwood and bring him here."

"Yes, master," the boy said happily. He rose and left the room without stumbling, falling, or breaking anything.

"Ah, magic is a wonderful thing," the old man breathed, and settled back down to read the rest of his book.

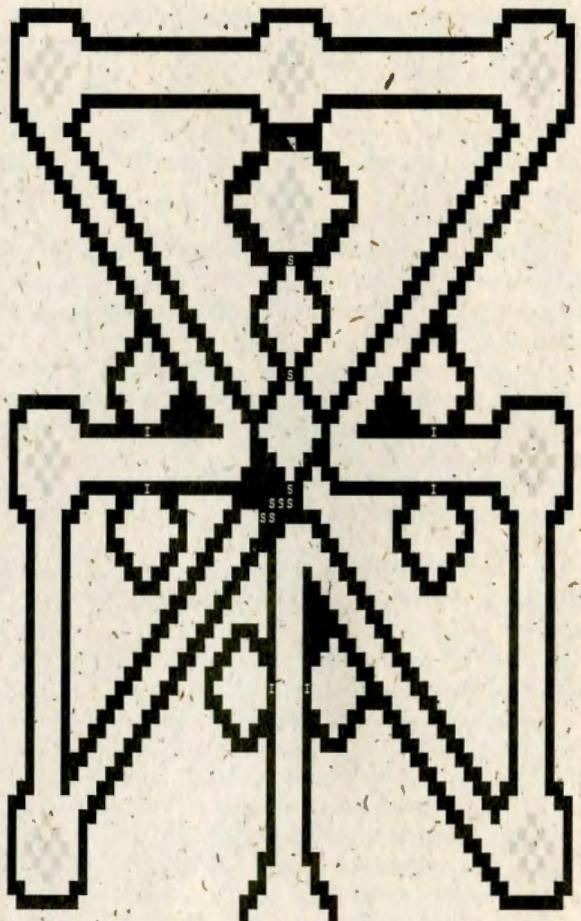
Lost Isles, Elemental Dungeons

The largest island contained the Elemental Dungeon. The entrance to the dungeon was a cave. A sink hole that the party discovered in the center of the dungeon was the means of descent to the next level. There they were distracted by annoying teleports before they finally found descending stairs in the northeast section of the dungeon.

The party explored the next level, which was riddled with fire and illusory walls. The only way to the next set of stairs was through fire, illusory walls, a teleport, and more illusory walls. With the help of the Ruby Ring, which conferred immunity to fire, they were able to traverse the fire areas safely.



Skull Keep



The final level was a huge spiral of water. Fortunately there were boats docked at the entrance of the level. The party took a boat and started their circular journey where they encountered more water monsters than they had found in all their sea journeys. They docked near the center of the spiral and searched to the north. A secret door led to an illusory wall, and as they passed through Urami halted the party.

"We must use another illusory path here," he stated firmly. "If we do not, we will be teleported back to the first level." He blinked. "I...believe that this is truth."

"Works for me," Elwood said, and found an illusory wall to the east. The party moved through the wall, traveled north, and found a sign that read OSORERU.

"The last word," Urami sighed. "Now we can go to Hell."

The shizen noticed the party staring at him, and coughed in embarrassment. "Well, you know what I mean. Let us return to the teleport trap, now that we want to return to the first level."

Hell Island, Skull Keep

Hell Island was located northeast of the Lost Isles. They stood at the rail of the Titanic, staring at the dark, forbidding island. Haikuchi had to goad them into action, and then they were on their way to Skull Keep, the entrance to Hell. They paused to read the sign at the entrance: VIA AD INFERNUM.

"Through the inferno," Elwood loosely translated. "Uh, we haven't misplaced that Ruby Ring, have we?" Urami displayed it solemnly.

The party entered into the darkness of the mountains, and into Skull Keep between the legs of a giant standing statue. A pall had fallen over the group that even Elwood could not lift.

They fought their way through dozens of fierce demons and they discovered a series of secret doors that led to even greater numbers of demons. They continued north, through more demons and more darkness, until they came at last to an odd shaped



room that had force fields lining the walls. The center of the room was water, and Haikuchi decided that braving the force fields with the help of the Blue Crystals was safer than challenging a body of water in Skull Keep. The party hugged the walls and went north, and met a huge black dog with two heads. It growled at them with great menace, daring them to come closer. The dog guarded descending stairs.

"Well," Elwood said, "I guess saying 'nice doggie' and offering a dog bone wouldn't help, huh?"

"No," Haikuchi said shortly. "We'll have to kill him. It's Cerberus, the dog of Hell. Stand back, everyone." He readied his spell, Toki, and cast it at the animal. Time stopped, and the party advanced to attack. Haikuchi cast a Taiyohi, and the creature was bathed in searing flames. The party rested for a short time, and descended the stairs.

Hell Island, Plane of Darkness

They entered the plane of darkness, and drew forth the Lantern of Vorek. Their way was dimly lit by the magic of the long dead king, but it was enough to help them through the four levels of darkness. They were attacked by demons, but fought on. They discovered a teleport that took them to the next plane. From there the party traveled southeast, through two illusory walls, and into a huge area of darkness. They searched for hours, battling hordes of Lost Souls. At last they located descending stairs to the next level, where they found the first gate. Urami held the party back, and stepped forward alone.

"Yokusei," he said. The party was transported to the other side of the gate. Due north was the next set of stairs, and north of the stairs was the second gate.

"Nikumu," Urami said, and again they were teleported to the other side. Just north, and east of the gate, the party stopped in front of the entrance to a large room.

"Another trap," Urami said. "If we do not follow the illusory path and avoid waking the monsters within this room, we will die."

Elwood stepped into action and discovered an

illusory wall. The party went through the wall, and moved quietly through the deadly, sleeping monsters. The fiends did not awaken, and the party searched for and found descending stairs.

Hell Island, Plane of Flames

The Ruby Ring did indeed come in very handy here. The entire area was blanketed with scorching flames. The party explored the level, and came at last to a teleport that transported them to another section of the dungeon. They explored further, and came upon descending stairs.

More flames, more demons, more illusory walls...and at last descending stairs.

The party came across two gates on this level. Urami first said "Seiyoku," and at the second gate he said "Daraku." The party continued north and found descending stairs.

Hell Island, Plane of Acid

The Emerald Rod allowed the party to pass through this plane. They discovered a teleport that took them to another section of the level, and yet another teleport to another section where they found descending stairs. The party continued, avoiding pits and fleeing from every encounter they could. They came upon another gate, and the word that allowed them to pass was "Fushin". They continued north, and west, and south, and discovered another gate. Urami spoke the sixth word, "Osoreru," and the party was transported to the other side of the gate. They proceeded south, and north again, until they came to more descending stairs.

"This is it, guys," Elwood said. "Most folks spend their mortal lives trying to avoid having to descend these stairs, and here we are. Let's go!"

The party descended.

Hell Island, Palace of the Devil

They came across a teleport beyond a series of illusory walls, and beyond darkness. After being transported, they traveled through darkness to find another teleport, which brought them to a large square

room of darkness. They left the room and traveled north. After many battles, they discovered the final gate. The word "Chijoku" passed them through the gate and into the final level.

Through a maze of darkness, the party came into a chamber guarded by force fields. With the help of the Blue Crystals, the party entered the chamber and found the Deathlord.

The party was stunned to inaction, and the demon got in the first hit. Haikuchi shook his daze and cast Unmei, but the Deathlord's booming laugh mocked his effort. Urami followed with his usually successful Komaru spell, but the demon's laugh only grew louder. The kishis, seeing the ineffectiveness of magic, stepped forward. To the party's surprise, Haga was able to strike the evil monster again and again with the Sun spear. Those of the party who were able to do so cast protective spells on the kishi. After a short, fierce battle, the Deathlord was defeated. His chilling scream filled the chamber as white flames consumed his undead flesh. Amid the ashes, the party discovered a pulsing black orb. Haikuchi pocketed the orb, and the party retraced their steps back through the dangerous levels of Hell.

They returned to Kodan and presented themselves, with the orb, to the Emperor.

"And so the age of Tyranny has ended, brought to a heroic close by six brave adventurers..." The Son of Heaven continued at great length, going on about the fame and glory that the party had achieved, and telling them about the six statues that would be constructed in their honor. He drew his speech to a close (through which Elwood fidgeted), and handed each a large pouch of gold (at which point Elwood stopped fidgeting). After a final word of thanks from the Emperor, the adventurers were shown out.

"Now what?" Elwood asked Haikuchi.

The master mahotsukai grinned. "Now we go home," he said. The Titanic sailed home, following a beautiful rainbow.

Epilogue

The old man closed the book thoughtfully, and soon heard a knock at the door. "Enter," he called.

Haikuchi entered with Elwood in tow. The genkai carried a mysterious large and heavy package under his arm. The master dismissed his apprentice, and he and Elwood were alone.

"Ok," the master said. "How did you get here, and where are you from?"

Elwood grinned. "From New York, the Bronx. You?"

"California. Berkeley. How did you get here?"

"I was working with my computer one day and suddenly zappo, I was hit by an incredible charge of electricity. I found myself here. I had my computer, but I had no idea where I was or how I got here. I've fit in pretty well, but I really want to go home. I have an idea of how I could do that, but I don't have the power. Literally."

"Explain," the old man said tersely.

"If I could somehow find a power source for my computer, I could get us home. I'm sure I could." Elwood paused for a moment. "Listen, I have to level with you, I made friends with Haikuchi to get to you. I heard you were a powerful wizard, a little quirky, but powerful. The quirks led me to believe that you were in the same pinch that I was. Look, I can get us home, but I need your power. Can you help?"

"Show me your machine." Elwood brought out the computer. The old man studied the keyboard, the power source, and smiled. "Piece of cake, I believe you would say." Elwood wanted to shout for joy, but contained himself. The old man cast a spell, and the screen lit up. He closed his eyes. "Do what you must," he said, and concentrated his energies.

Elwood fiddled for hours, trying various programs, to no avail. The old man lost color in his face, became very pale, but continued to supply the energy needed. Finally Elwood gave up.

"It's no use," he said dejectedly. "I can't do it. It doesn't work."

The master opened his eyes and glanced over the

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keyboard. A secret smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. "You young people are too complex," he said. He leaned over the keyboard, typed his name, a space, and typed ELWOOD. "Are you ready?" he asked the young man.

"Uh, yes. What are you doing?"

"Sending us home," the old man smiled as he hit the RETURN key...

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