

TOWNIES & TAVERNS: THE BLOODMOON GATE

dozens and the tilde.town players

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Townies & Taverns is an unfinished experimental freeform role-playing game that took place in the spring of 2023 on the internal `list+town@tilde.town` mailing list.

It all started when ~mhj asked the following question:

What are some good play by email games? It would also be cool to do a play by email dungeons and dragons campaign maybe? I dunno how that would work, but yeah... —mhj

What follows is the answer to that question.

27 September 2023

DOZENS

Defeating the demon hordes and sealing the Bloodmoon Gate was King Ardan's greatest accomplishment. Afterward, he shattered the Staff of the Archmage into five pieces and flung them to the farthest regions of the Silver Yonder to ensure that the foul gate would remain closed forever.

Each of the five pieces of the staff were entrusted to one of Ardan's most faithful warriors. They developed over the years into five powerful, secretive sects. Together, they are known as the Hand.

The years that followed the closing of the gate were ones of peace and prosperity. Generations were born and grew old during Ardan's reign. Such was the fey-touched king's lifespan elongated. The terrors of the Demon Plague soon faded into legend.

Now, fools and villains have meddled where they ought not. And the Bloodmoon Gate has started to open once again. Imps, gremlins, and other minor demons—harbingers of the demon horde—have been spotted causing mischief throughout the Yonder.

The king, now wizened and enfeebled, has assembled his greatest and mightiest adventurers to recover the lost pieces of the Staff of the Archmage. For only its power can save the Silver Yonder from the demon hordes.

Unfortunately they never came back.

So now the king's quest has fallen to you! The kingdom's second greatest and mightiest adventurers! You must not fail!

You are at The Famous Shrub, one of the busiest taverns in Woodhome. And tonight is your last night in town before heading into the Flooded Lands to confront the clan of barbarians known as the Pinky and recover the first artifact.

1. Who are you?
2. Why do the Woodhomians fear the Pinky?
3. What terrible creature lurks in the Flooded Lands?
4. What evidence have you seen of demonic presence?
5. How are you spending your last night in Woodhome?

STUX

Oh, sounds like fun!

1. I am Stux RowHammer, nearly renowned worlock
2. The Pinky are rumored to have a weapon able to destroy entire villages. No one's ever seen it or seen proof of it, but it's so scary that no one's every

questions it

3. None have ever returned to tell what dark beasts stalk that land
4. I spend it enjoying food and games with my family
Did I do that right?

MHJ

1. Who are you?

oh! oh dear, i figured we'd met already, but i understand if you didn't se—hey! down here! please watch where you step! gnomes don't have very strong bones you know. my name is tato, the illusion! i enjoy card tricks, and making people disappear

ME I MEAN. PAY NO HEED TO THE RUMORS YOU MAY HAVE HEARD

2. Why do the Woodhomians fear the Pinky?

like my good friend stux mentioned, it is rumo—huh, what do you mean you don't know me either? i've followed you for weeks now

no matter

the destruction of entire villages is actually only the second scariest trick this weapon this is proof enough for me, it's just science! but to be fully rigorous, i sought to investigate further

upon discovering the author and asking where these visions came from, the author replied "hell awaits you for breaking into my house at this hour!", which i believe refers to the coming demonic invasion How are you spending your last night in Woodhome?

woodhome means a lot to me, so i will check in with all of my friends!

none of them are much the speaking type, i do not believe any of them have ever spoken a word to me! but their company comforts me nonetheless

DOZENS

When the world was young, the bountiful earth and the hungry sea fell in love with each other from a distance. The earth would make eyes at the sea, and the sea would bashfully wave. They agreed to meet face to face to consummate their love, and the waters rose up and flooded the land. When the great flood receded, the devastation was total. Great cities were erased. Entire civilizations were wiped out. When they saw what they had done in their carelessness, earth and sea agreed that, though their love may continue to burn, they must never see each other again.

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But see each other they did. Quietly and discreetly, their passions held in check by the fear of losing control once more.

The Flooded Lands are the last place where earth and sea mingle. Endless bogs, wetlands, swamps, and marshes. Neither the children of the earth nor the children of the sea are entirely at home here. Rather, this is home to those born of the flood. Things made of mud and clay. Slimy, scaly things with and fur and gills.

Your goal here is to find the Pinky, Ardan's champion, and recover the first artifact of the archmage.

Two paths lie ahead of you.

One is through the Swamp of Sorrows. It is the most direct route and will get you to the Pinky's monastery the quickest. But it is also the most dangerous. For the swamp is full of Dreadlights, Bog Rot, and Oneirophants.

The more circuitous route is also the safer option. It will take you around the swamp, through the Trollfen, and over Turtle Mound. A longer journey, but one less fraught with danger.

WHAT DO YOU DO

STUX

I look at the rest of the party

"What do you all think? I'm no ranger, I don't know much about the wilderness. I'm not afraid to take the quick route, but I also see the wisdom in the more cautious approach".

KRUNN

1. Who are you?

Me Krunn with club who go BONK!

2. Why do the Woodhomians fear the Pinky?

They too have club go BONK!

3. What terrible creature lurks in the Flooded Lands?

Big thing with big bite that ouch.

4. What evidence have you seen of demonic presence?

Big foot that wide as arms.

5. How are you spending your last night in Woodhome?

Eat drink sleep

KRUNN

Krunn say go swamp more to thing to BONK.

DOZENS

The story thus far: you are on a mission to re-assemble the Staff of the Archmage and seal the Bloodmoon Gate

to prevent the Demon Horde from sweeping across the Silver Yonder. The first piece of the staff is in the possession of the Pinky somewhere in the Flooded Lands.

There is a long footbridge of rotten, moldy, wooden planks that leads out across the fetid water. You follow it into the Swamp of Sorrows.

The swamp is putrid. Almost nauseatingly smelly. A thick carpet of orange algae undulates with the rippling of the water beneath it. Pockets of swamp gas escape the mud far below and belch noisily when they reach the surface. Clouds of insects float above the water, and nip at you as you pass by. Large swamp trees grow here, with gnarled, twisted roots. Moss and thick vines hang from the branches and block your view. Between the trees, in the distance, you can see sulphurous yellow dreadlights bobbing up and down, just waiting to lure an unwitting traveler out into the waters.

Just up ahead, a large portion of the bridge has collapsed. About as far across as a wide road. You look down and see five or eight emaciated, milky white bodies floating suspended in the water below you. Their eyes are closed and their skin is pulled taught across their bones. Their hair spreads out like a halo around their heads. These are Oneirophants, slumbering prisoners of the swamp. If you're lucky, they won't bother you. If you disturb their slumber though, they may try to pull you down into the swamp to join them.

WHAT DO YOU DO?

GLARG

A few paces left of the entrance to the collapsed bridge is what appears to be a boulder with an arm sticking out the side of it. It seems to give off a very faint hum.

KRUNN

Tell Stux and little gnome to stand back. Krunn will roll boulder cause Krunn strong.

GLARG

As you study the boulder you notice the arm protruding from it is made of the same burnt umber stone as the rest of the boulder... peculiar because the ground around it is... well, swamp coloured.

The boulder begins to visibly vibrate. At first faint, but then as if a stampede of horses was going on around it.

KRUNN

Stux what we do ? It might be woo woo magic. Krunn slowly backs away waiting for Stux or the gnomes reply.

STUX

Hmmmm... Something strange is going on here. I'm going to put on my sunglasses of true sight and see if anything becomes obvious.

GLARG

Through the sunglasses you can see the outline of a large bulky humanoid curled up into a tight ball with its arm sticking out.

All of a sudden, with a loud, deep crack, the leg dislodges itself from the ball and starts kicking the ground. Now the boulder is rocking back-and-forth in place with the leg kicking the ground when it gets close.

STUX

"Hey Krunn, its BONKING TIME! Sometimes you gotta BONK first and ask questions when they regain consciousness"

KRUNN

With a solemn nod to Stux, Krunn raises his club over his head with both hands and runs at the rock. BONK!

DOZENS

While Stux and Krunn were fussing around with the leggy one-armed boulder, you inadvertently attracted the attention of the swamp's least desirable denizens.

Three oneiophants—the lanky, clammy, pale drowned creatures who sleep at the bottom of the swamp—have crawled up onto the pier. They slither around on their bellies grinning and grabbing at your ankles.

"Come swim with us!" says the one with no teeth.

"Yes, come sleep under water!" agrees the one with far too many teeth.

"Such sights you will see!"

"Yes, such wonders!"

The third oneiophant's mouth is sewn shut so you have no idea whether or not it has an appropriate number of teeth. It is awkwardly fumbling around with the ankle of the humanoid boulder but seems incapable of getting a hold of it with its cold slippery hand. It looks frustrated and uncomfortable.

One of the bobbing dreadlights—alerted to your presence by the commotion—weaves its way over to the pier and shines brightly in your eyes so that you have to squint.

"hEy dO YoU YoU WaNt tO SeE A WeIrD TuR-tLe?" says the dreadlight. "iT'S RiGhT OvEr hErE, fOl-Low Me. It's rEaLIY WeIrD. yOu gOtTa sEe iT."

WHAT DO YOU DO?

KRUNN

Krunn BONKS! one of the oneiophants that talks to much.

GLARG

****CRACK**** another arm pops out of the side of the boulder. Now the fingers on the hand of the first arm are starting to move. The boulder rocks back and forth, pivoting around where it's fourth leg should be.

The mass suddenly stops wiggling as the oneiophants start talking. It then looks at one clawing at its leg. It bends over at the middle forming a waist until its head is about a foot from the dreadlights. It opens its mouth indentation and makes a noise clearly not coming from its throat, but somewhere deep within it, a noise that sounds deep, guttural, cosmic, and earthy.

"ggglllAAAARRRRRRGGGGGGG!!!"

It moves its arm down towards the oneiophant in an attempt to grab it and throw it back into the lake.

DOZENS

The oneiophant slithers around on its belly, grinning up at you with its sharp little pointy teeth and its large wet eyes.

"Come sleep and swim with us!" it hisses at you. "You can be like a shark! Sleeping and swimming with one eye open and—ACK!"

Meanwhile Glarg is glarging out super hard. As the oneiophant tries in vain to grab your ankle, you in turn wrap your giant rocky fist around its entire torso and lift it up. It hisses and slither wriggles in your grasp. You squeeze a little too tightly, and it pops out of your grasp like a slippery fish. You comically juggle it a few times, squeezing and shooting it from your fist. Until finally it flops onto the pier, and back into the water.

The remaining oneiophants make rude faces and wag their fingers at you, disgusted at your inhospitable behavior. And they too slither off the side of the pier.

Only the dreadlight remains, bobbing up and down in the air. It is a small orb of light about the size of your fist. It glows a sulphurous yellow a couple arm lengths away from the pier, hovering over the water.

It buzzes as it speaks in a slightly muffled, undulating voice, "tHeRe's a tUrTIE OuT HeRe tHaT Is tO-tAlLy wEiRd. It's lIkE, yOu wOuLdN'T EvEn bElIeVe iT. yOu've GoT To cOmE SeE ThIs wEiRd tUrTIE, c'mOn."

Meanwhile, your way forward is still blocked by the washed out bridge.

WHAT DO YOU DO

GLARG

Glarg squints its eye indents at the the dreadlight. Mistaking it for a shiny rock, it walks on to the pier in attempt to grab it.

KRUNN

Krunn like blinky light too. Krunn also like turtle. YUM! Krunn follows Glarg.

DOZENS

Glarg grabs at the dreadlight.

"WHoA ThErE BuDdY!" cries the dreadlight as it dances away, tantalizingly just out of your grasp, luring you closer and closer to the edge of the pier. "lEt's nOt bE So gRaBbY OkAy bIg gUy? I CaN'T ShOw yOu tHiS WeIrD TuRtLe iF I'M AIL CaPtUrEd aNd sTuFf! aNd tHaT WoUID Be sAd wOuLdN'T It? FoR ThErE To bE ThIs tOtAlLy wEiRd tUrTIE, aNd nObOdY GeTs tO SeE It?"

Krunn sees Glarg grasp repeatedly at the annoying, bobbing light. Finally, inevitably, they overextend themselves and start to lose their balance, teetering on the edge of the pier.

And then—KerSPLASH!!—down they go.

Glarg floats like a stone in the water. Which is to say, not at all. A gleeful oneirophant burbles with delight as you sink past, "Yes! Haha, yessssss!", and finally you come to rest in the mud at the bottom of the swamp.

The surface of the water is only five or six feet out of your reach.

You notice that you came to rest near a large, smooth, oblong, patterned stone. And as you watch, the stone opens along its seam and a large, striped turtle head pokes out and looks at you curiously. Then a second striped head emerges from the shell! The second head continues to regard you while the first one extends its neck and experimentally nibbles on your arm with a gentle bite.

WHAT DO YOU DO

STUX

Suddenly you see a rope peirce the surface of the water and make it's way to you. You grab on to it, and someone starts pulling you out. You notice it feels too soft to be a rope, and it's full of knots.

As you come out of the water you see the warlock Stux pulling you to shore. That's when you finally see

that the "rope" is actually a series of brightly colored hankchiefs tied together.

Stux says: "Guys, I have a confession to make. I didn't exactly tell you the whole truth about myself. You see, I am a warlock, but I'm a party warlock. Like kids parties. My deity is Bozo The Clown. I really do have magic, but it's not the cool or useful kind."

He looks down at his feet. "I just wanted to feel cool, like a real adventurer and not a 38 year old party entertainer that live's in his grandmother's basement"

CREMINI

"Did someone say magic and parties?" says a giggling voice from somewhere under the pier. A small round head wearing a flat hat with pops out from among the algae and rocks to peer curiously at Stux with beady black eyes. It smiles softly at the party warlock. "Entertainers are cool! Are you holding a party? That's useful for having fun!"

The round head clammers up to the surface, it becomes clear that the brown flat hat is in fact the top of the stubby creature's head. It is also apparent that they have no arms and legs (or at least no visible appendages), but it manages to wobble closer until it is standing about a warlock's arm's length away.

"This one is Cremini!" It beams. "What a wonderful day for a poolside party!"

It turns to the water and begins to blow bubbles along the surface of the swamp from the top of its head.

GLARG

Glarg looks at, what it perceives to be, a talking rock. Glarg picks up Cremini and holds it close to its bosom turn to look down at the lake and rumbles:

"Twaarrrrr-taaaal"

CREMINI

The talking mushroom rock—or is it a rock mushroom?—giggles when Glarg picks it up. "You're very strong!" It exclaims. They look downwards at the lake as well. "Turtles all the way down!"

DOZENS

recap:

the Bloodmoon Gate has started to open once again and harbingers of the Demon Horde have been seen in the Silver Yonder. Your mission is to recover the Five Artifacts and reassemble the Staff of the Archmage, the legendary weapon that can seal the demon gate forever. You are currently in the Swamp of Sorrows seeking the Pinky, guardian of the first artifact.

And now:

Stux the party warlock fishes Glarg out of the swamp.

Glarg picks up Cremini, the small agreeable mushroom creature whose rock content is currently unknown.

Krunn assesses the landscape for potential things to bonk.

The swamp water bubbles, froths, and churns. As though summoned by the Glarg's words, a two-headed turtle of enormous girth breaches the surface.

Its shell is black and covered in spiraling geodesic patterns. Its heads are also black, and have colorful stripes that run from behind their eyes along the back of their heads and necks.

You think that if you play this right and pacify the turtle somehow with your unique skills and talents, that it might ferry you across the washed out bridge to the other side.

The dreadlight bobs up and down excitedly, "oH HeCk yEaH LoOk aT ThAt tUrTIE! oH MaN It iS So wEiRd hAhA! hAhA, wHeEeEe!"

WHAT DO YOU DO?

KRUNN

Stux even though you party lock I still your friend and won't bonk you. Krunch like to party. Krunch sees turtle and licks lips. He decides not to BONK! turtle but to use ancient barbarian turtle charming technique. He starts to play drums on his club.

CREMINI

From its cozy nook in Glarg's arms, Cremini bobs its small rock-y head to the beat of Krunch's club drums. They send tiny bubbles floating in the air towards the turtle with light popping sounds in sync with the rhythm.

GLARG

Glarg is vibin~~

It feels moved to "sing". A sound emanated from it that is reminiscent of an inactive volcano trying to sing the A-B-Cs to the beat of the Krunch's drum.

DOZENS

The party starts ROCKING OUT.

It is a total raver!

Krunch is drumming, Glarg is singing, Cremini is blowing bubbles. And Stux the Party Warlock is doing all kinds of cool party tricks. Making balloon animals. They even managed to produce a small xylophone from somewhere and are banging out a jaunty melody with a

tiny mallet.

The giant, two-headed turtle freezes in place. Both heads regard you, wide-eyed and silent. And then they both start bobbing up and down in time to the music.

After the performance, the giant, obsidian turtle drifts over to the edge of the pier. You climb aboard, and continue to party hard and rock out as the creature happily ferries you safely across the swamp.

The dreadlight, still bobbing up and down in place, cries out, "oMg tHaT Is sO SiCk! HaHa wHaT A WeIrD TuRtLe! YoU GuYs aRe tOtAlLy cRaZy!"

You land on the other side and de-turtle, climbing out onto the slick grass and mud of the far shore. The turtle sinks back into the swamp with a small smile on each of its faces and settles down into the mud for a long nap.

You follow the path through the swamp and eventually come to a large-ish clearing. It is a small glade full of silvery blades of grass. It is full of eviscerated gilpins—small swamp gnomes that kind of resemble fish-like bunny rabbits; it is kind of unfair how cute they are—strewn about in piles and pieces. The center of the glade is completely clean and clear of the gore that fills the rest of the space. It is empty except for a circle of small toadstools, in the center of which sits a tiny black cat which looks up at you with huge round yellow eyes. It mewls pathetically and rolls on its back.

WHAT DO YOU DO

KRUNN

Krunch looks sternly at the cat. "Why you kill all gnome thing? You going to get a BONK for that. Bad Kitty!" Krunch walks toward the black cat with his club raised. Ready to BONK it.

GLARG

Glarg, is new to being around fleshy lifeforms. It is left assuming that the gilpins must've gotten carried away while playing and fallen apart. It clumsily tries to put one back together and wait for it to turn back on.

CREMINI

Spotting the toadstools, Cremini sends out tiny pink bubbles that land on each toadstool's head in some convoluted pattern that may as well be random were it not for the *blip bloop* sounds. Like a chipmunk's tune, with only 8 bits.

DOZENS

Cremini blows some tiny pink bubbles and plays some dope toadstool chiptune. The toadstools light up in a neon pastel pattern of bright pinks and yellows and blues and purples. You can't help but think that the dreadlight would think this is tOtAIlLy aWeSoMe.

Glarg puzzles over a few gilpin pieces and clumsily tries to assemble them. They end up with a cluster of two or three torsos and a few too many limbs jutting out at odd angles. Almost as an afterthought they thrust a head into its center. It is a furry, scaly, rabbity, fishy abomination. They set it down on the ground and make some coaxing, pleading sounds at it. It sounds like smooth river rocks rubbing against each other.

Krunn severely scolds and chastises the very bad kitty! In reply, it rolls onto its side and does a big streeeeeeetch, clawing at the ground and doing a cute meow-purr.

Krunn crosses into the toadstool circle and the small cat leaps to its feet, arches its back and hisses and spits at the sudden intrusion. It backs away but doesn't leave the circle, and soon it is cornered, and Krunn gives it a solid BONK right on the head, leaving a small gash across the top of its head. It falls to the ground in a heap and doesn't move.

The toadstools audibly exhale, and a pinkish cloud of spores engulf the cat. It yowls and jumps up and puffs up to an enormous size. Its eyes bulge. And its warping, twisting bones outgrow their fleshy enclosure, starting at the skull where Krunn split it. When its transformation is complete, a huge skeletal beast with a mane of black fur across its shoulders stands inside the mushroom circle. It roars, baring its long fangs, and swipes at Krunn with its sharp boney claws!

The spores waft throughout the glade. A few of them drift over and land on the flesh golem Glarg made of gilpin pieces. They seep into its skin and its eyes shoot open. It looks around in apparent confusion, gasps for air, and moans. It cautiously reaches out to Glarg with its tangle of limbs. "Ma... Ma?"

Crimini notices that—although they have stopped making music at this point—the toadstools continue to pulse weakly but rhythmically in a repeating pattern of colors.

WHAT DO YOU DO?

GLARG

Glarg is delighted that the flesh elemental has reanimated! It looks over its shoulder and is alarmed by the new calcium/keratin elemental that appeared out of nowhere. It picks up Jr, the flesh elemental, and puts it in the crook of its left arm while shifting Crimini to the right, and slowly backs backs away towards the entrance

to the grove.

CREMINI

"Oops. Should've started with a demo cut. Hee hee." says Cremini from the crook of Glarg's arm. It emits a few more teeny green bubbles towards the toadstools, just for a few opening notes of an adagio to float out. A midi playing on air.

KRUNN

Wide eyed, Krunn takes a few steps back. "Krunn sorry for BONK. Maybe we can be friends" Krunn says. He reaches into his belt pouch and pulls out a piece of yarn. "Look kitty I have to for you." he says as he dangles it in front of the monster cat.

DOZENS

Krunn entices the skelebeast with a piece of yarn. It stops and cocks its head to the side. It flops onto its side, and bats at the end of string with one big skeletal paw. Its long tail swishes back and forth in a wide arc.

Glarg backs up with Jr in one arm and Cremini in the other. They notice a cylindrical item rattling around inside the beast's rib cage. It is the size of a small torch, or some kind of baton, or maybe a large rolled up scroll. It seems to be made of some kind of a dull silvery metal.

Cremini blows a few tiny green bubbles. The toadstools bop out a little melody.

Jr, the gilpin flesh elemental, smiles happily and groans, and waves their arms around in time with the toadstool song.

WHAT DO YOU DO

CREMINI

Following Glarg's line of sight, Cremini squints at the skelekat's ribs, "Hey, party people! What's that inside the skele? Could it be a treasure map? Should we ask it for a looksie?"

GLARG

"DRaaagaaaarMArrrrrb?"

Glarg squints its eye sockets at the mineral/protein elemental. It puts Cremini down gently and then carefully balances Jr on top of his "hat."

He then starts a sprint/gallop on all fours, faster than you might expect a sentient boulder to move. Its goal is to climb the elemental and grab the curly rock trapped inside.

It tries to communicate in one of the common elemental language that its here to help disloge the foreign body from the chest cavity, which sounds a little like:

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