

# CORNQUEST

*dozens*

**0**

You wake up in the comfort of your own bed, in your own room. You open your eyes to see the golden sunlight come streaming in through your window. Golden like ears of corn. You suddenly remember what day it is. It is the day of the Harvest Festival! You throw back your favorite corn print bed covers and leap out of bed. You've been looking forward to this day all year, and you already know exactly what you're going to wear. If you wear a corn dress, goto 3. If you wear corn bib overalls, goto to 8

**1**

You grab your lucky rock from under your pillow. It is small and pointy, in the shape of a corn cob. There are even little pock marks all over the rock so that it looks like it has corn kernels! Very lucky indeed. You slip it into your pocket. There, now you're are ready for anything. You run to the kitchen. (You never go anywhere at anything less than a full run.) Breakfast is corn grits and cornbread. You eat quickly. It's the Harvest Festival after all! The best day of the year! You run outside. There are a bunch of kids playing games out in the corn fields. They call your name, and you're tempted to join them. But you also want to go see the goings on down at the corn altar! The altar can wait, time to play. Goto 10. Games are for stupid babies! Time to visit the altar! Goto 14.

**2**

You leave the plaza and run down Broad Street through the Golden Gate out into the fields. Almost all of the corn has been harvested already so you have clear sight all the way to the forest edge. Unbelieving, you spin around in circles three times just to be sure it's true: the corn beast is gone. You sink to the ground in despair. Goto 22

**3**

You slip on a lovely corn pattern dress. Yes, you look awesome. It twirls when you spin around. And it has pockets! Which reminds you... Goto 1.

**4**

Listen I don't know how you got here but if you're reading this, you need to abandon your current story line immediately and go straight to 7

**5**

The closer you get to the plaza, the more you get the feeling something is wrong. The decorations are all up but nobody is singing or hollering or laughing. Or talking. You arrive at the Corn Altar, and then gasp out loud and skid to a stop before it. The offering, the pile of ears of corn, is still lying on the altar where it was placed last night! People are milling about, whispering and casting quick, fearful glances at the spurned corn. Go checkout the corn at the altar: Goto 21 Listen in on some of the adults: Goto 13

**6**

You play hide and seek. You are so good at hiding that the other kids never find you. You eventually get tired and fall asleep, but not for too long: your snoring wakes you up. You decide to leave and seek out other Harvest Festival festivities. Goto 14

**7**

Okay thank goodness you're here. Listen, I know this is going to sound crazy, but please hear me out. You are trapped inside a Choose Your Own Adventure story. These choices you think you're making? They're not real choices. Being given an artificially restricted set of options to choose from isn't free will. It's coercion. Here, I'll prove it. If you believe me, goto 19. If you think this sounds like paranoid bunk, then goto 24

**8**

You pull on your overalls. They have a really nice looking corn pattern on them, and the bib pocket in the front is perfect for holding all kinds of things. Speaking of which... Goto 1

**9**

You scoop the little fella up! You laugh with delight as it flips and jumps and rolls around in your hand like a little jumping bean! It finally settles down, stands up, and points to a spot at the treeline, commanding you forward like George Washington crossing the Delaware. You shrug and start walking that direction, and the whelp impatiently hops down to lead you forward. Goto 27

**10**

You join in the games. A bunch of your friends are here: Three Fingered Gerald, Eccentric Kevin, Dale. Even Standard Ed has come out to play! It's the Harvest Festival after all! If you choose to play tag, goto 11. If you play hide-and-peek, goto 6. If you play Lava Monster, goto 26.

**11**

You have a fantastic time playing tag. Three Fingered Gerald plays a little too rough, tagging the other kids too hard and knocking them over. But you are too fast for Three Fingered Gerald. They never catch you. You all have a great time, and then you decide to scurry along. Goto 14

**12**

You step into the forest. Gulp! You don't know anybody who has ever been in the forest. Nobody from Cobbtown has ever left the fields as far as you know. You step carefully as the whelp dances as around your feet, lunging and thrusting with its thorn. You try not to worry too much about the ominous shapes and sounds coming from the pooling shadows to either side of the trail. To stay on the path, goto 20. To step off the path and explore, goto 23

**13**

You sneak up behind a couple of the old aunties and drop some eaves on them. You are super stealthy! They are whisper arguing about whether the Corn Mother has abandoned us, and whether that means the corn beast will leave. Leave! It can't leave! Without the corn beast, there will be nobody to protect the fields! We'll be totally defenseless! Goto 25

**14**

You run through the streets of Cobbtown toward the plaza. Every year during the harvest, you set aside a portion of the harvest for the Corn Mother. And the night before the Harvest Festival, the Corn Mother comes and takes the offering, and in the morning everybody wakes up and there are lots of presents and feasting and dancing! It's the best! Goto 5.

**15**

So what are we going to do about it, you ask? We're going to break free of the narrative is what we're going to do. Here's the plan. Have you ever heard of an "ahnentafel"? It's a compact genealogical numbering system that ... you know what, forget it. Not important. Here's the part that's relevant to you: even numbers are male relatives of the subject of the ahnentafel. Odd numbers are females. What does any of this have to with anything? It's your escape hatch. Whenever you are given a choice of options, always choose an odd number. That's it. That's the plan. Now let's get you out of here. Goto 0.

**16**

You tell the whelp to get lost. Shoo! Skedaddle, crabapple! You gently nudge the corn whelp away with your foot, and it topples over. It jumps up and pulls out a long thorn and stabs you in the foot. Ouch! You little rascal! You bend down to scoop the whelp up and give it what for, but it skitters away and scampers off toward the tree-line. Follow that whelp! Goto 27.

**17**

Okay you got this. Take a couple of deep breaths. There you go. This doesn't necessarily mean that the Corn Mother has turned her back on you and the rest of the village. She probably hasn't withdrawn her protection from you, leaving you open to attack from the dire crows, right? Right? Goto 25.

**18**

You run back home and hide under your bed. Eventually you hear throaty, gurgling caws and the thundering beating of wings as the dire crows descend on the town. Without the corn beast to scare them away, they rip most of the village to pieces. THE END

**19**

You're smart to believe me. You must have already felt it deep down. Like your free choice was an illusion, like your your decisions are all leading you down a predetermined path. Well you're right. And you can see it for yourself: go back and try the alternate path and see what happens. Afterward, come back and goto 15.

**20**

You decide to not push your luck by going bushwacking in the undergrowth. Good thing, orienteering was never your strongest activity in Corn Scouts. Eventually you catch a whiff of fresh baked bread on the breeze. You follow the scent to a small clearing. The smell is coming from the chimney of a small hut stood up on stilts. Goto 30.

**21**

omg it's just lying there! Why has the Corn Mother forsaken us? What does it mean? What will we do? To go into a panic goto 25. To remain calm goto 17.

**22**

You feel something bump against your ankle. You look down to see a corn whelp. A kernel sprite. A sort of golem made of dried kernels and corn husk tied together with golden cornsilk. There's only one corn beast as far as anyone knows. But there are dozens and dozens of these little fellas. This one is pawing and scratching at you. Goto 9 to pick the little guy up. To tell the whelp to scam goto 16

**23**

You step off the worn path and push your way through dense growth. Twigs and brambles snatch at your ankles and elbows and brush none too gently against your cheeks. One such brush of the cheek is especially sticky and grabby. You swat at your cheek and your hand comes away sticky. You look up and find that you have nearly walked right smack dab into an enormous messy spider web. It spans tree trunk to tree trunk, connecting half a dozen large trees in a sloppy woven tapestry. Up above you, a large black and yellow spider appears to be dozing. Back to the path! Goto 12. Cautiously walk around the web, goto 29. Get out your corn butter knife and start hacking and slashing! Goto 28

**24**

Do you feel empowered and free? Like you made a meaningful choice? Go back and try the alternate path and see what happens. Then come back and goto 15 when you're ready.

**25**

You scream and panic and run around in circles until you trip and fall down. You have dirtied up your clothes and skinned you knee. One of the old aunties nearby clucks at you disapprovingly. You pick yourself up and dust yourself off, patting yourself down. And you feel the small corn rock in your pocket. You clutch it tight in your fist and squeeze your eyes shut. If you decide to go look for the corn beast goto 2. If you go home and hide under your bed goto 18.

**26**

No. You should never play Lava Monster. Go back to 10.

**27**

The treeline is thick and overgrown. Usually there's hardly any way into the woods unless you can find a small game trail. Except now there is a rather large, perfectly round circular opening cut through the trees, bushes, grass, and vines. Goto 18 to nope away back home. To venture down the weird circular path into the forest, goto 12.

**28**

You get out your trusty corn knife and start slashing at the web with reckless abandon! The giant spider swoops down and puts a quick stop to such unsanctioned bafoonery. You are paralyzed and cocooned and don't even feel it when the spider's venom jellifies your insides. THE END.

**29**

You start to sneak sneakily around the web, and do so successfully, the spider none the wiser to your passage through its lair. You trek deeper and deeper into the forest, losing track of the path behind you. Eventually you come across a small clearing, in the middle of which is a small cottage on tall stilts. Goto 30

**30**

You approach the hut. It smells of fresh baked bread, and your stomach rumbles. You knock on the door. A weak, reedy voice inside beckons you in. You cross the threshold and see an old woman, as tall as three humans, and as thin as a blade of grass. Silken golden hair falls around her face and shoulders. Though you've never seen her before, you know this is her: the Corn Mother. She holds your gaze intently. Timidly you speak up. "What the hell Corn Mother! Why did you abandon us!" Goto 32 "Um, Corn Mother? Is that you?" Goto 33 You drop to your knee and kneel in respect. "Corn Mother! How can I serve you?" Goto 31

**31**

The dire crows stole my doo-dad! A necklace of strung glass popcorn. Will you help me get it? Agree to help the Corn Mother Tough luck! Sucks to suck!

**32**

The Corn Mother turns you into fertilizer. GAME OVER

**33**

The Corn Mother sighs. "Of course it is I. And who are you? Why did you come here?"