

First published in the UK in 2025 by Nosy Crow Ltd
Wheat Wharf, 27a Shad Thames,
London, SE1 2XZ, UK

Nosy Crow Eireann Ltd
44 Orchard Grove, Kenmare,
Co Kerry, V93 FY22, Ireland

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ISBN: 978 1 83994 524 3

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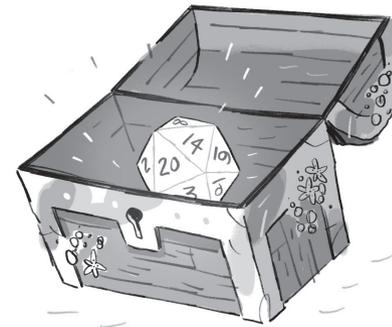
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To Lacey, Alfie, Annie and Thomas
K.L.





MAP OF ZERB

INFERNUS

DEADFROST ISLAND

TROLLMIR

THE TWILIGHT OCEAN

HAWKROOST

VOSTOVIA

REDPEAK MOUNTAINS

NEVERLEAF FOREST

CRIMSON HILLS

CLOUDROOST

THE DEEP WOOD

BLOODSTONE

DANKSPLAT MARSHES

SOLA

WITHERWEB

DANKMIRE

UMBRA

GROTVILLE

GOLDSPIRE

PHANTOS

THE TWININGS

THE REND

TROGTON

RIVER GROT

IGNUS

THE ELF CITIES

LIBRIS

THE SPELLSANDS

BLADE CITY

PRICKLETON

SALTPORT

THE ORB

SEASNAKE

THE SECRET SEA

THE COG EMPIRE

DON'T MISS OUT ON THE LATEST ACTION FROM
THE BOTTOM FEEDER LEAGUE!

WHERE DOES YOUR FAVOURITE TEAM
RANK ON THE LEADERBOARD?

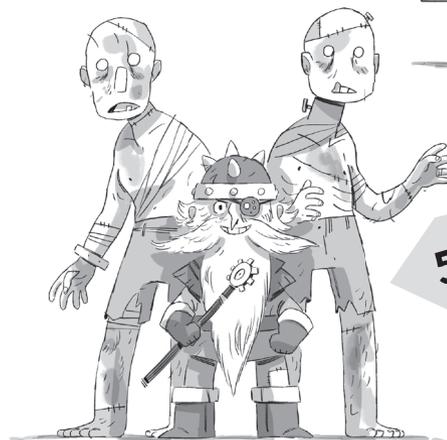
1ST TROGTON
TERRORS



4TH YARN
STORMERS



2ND ROOST
RAIDERS



5TH GRAVEDIGGERS

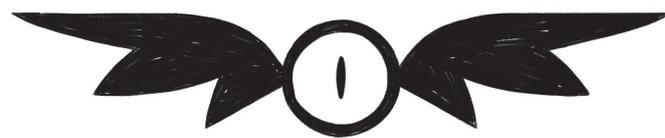
3RD TRIPLE
TROUBLE



6TH THE
MEDUSAS



COMING TO YOU LIVE ... THE ONE AND ONLY
DUNGEON RUNNERS! WITH YOUR HOSTS ...
DIRK THE ORC AND JENNA THE GIANT...



1

PREPARE FOR THE ORB



...and with that move,
Peggy Suss of the
Hawkmoor Harriers steals
the points for the loot and
the boss! It looks like this
team are going for a clean
sweep today, Jenna!

Incredible, Dirk.
I can't believe my
eyes. At this rate, the
Harriers are set to
climb their way into
the Master League.





They sure are. They're giving the Knights of Neverleaf a run for their money. Competition in the Almost There League is very fierce this season...

The voices of the NDL commentators, Jenna the giant and Dirk the orc, could be heard from outside his grandad's door as Kit Kitson walked up the path. Grandad Klot always had the crystal screen on very loud so he could hear it over his soup bubbling.

Kit didn't bother to knock. He just opened the door, stepped inside and was met with a big surprise.

There, standing next to his grandad's crusty armchair, was an elf dressed in

shining plate armour, with a mane of lilac hair. Her eyes were gleaming purple and there was a scar on her cheek in the shape of a cross. She was a sword elf – the fiercest warriors of all the elf tribes – and Kit recognised her straight away.

“S-S-Sylvar Blade!” Kit stammered. “Three-time winner of the Most Valued Player cup! Owner of the Vorpall Sword! You're in the Hall of Fame!”



NAME: SYLVAR BLADE
SPECIES: SWORD ELF
COMBAT SKILLS: 99
MAGIC POWER: 25
CLEVERNESS: 75
FAME: 100

“Ah,” said the elf. “You must be Kit. Your grandad sent for me.”

“H-he did?”

“Yes,” said Klot, shouting over the crystal. “Thought she could teach you a thing or two. Like how to use that new feathery blade of yours. Might stop you getting flattened on your next dungeon run. Where are you off to, by the way?”

“The Orb,” Kit said.

“The Blorb?” Klot leaned closer as the crystal blared out, cupping a hand around one of his large ears. “Never heard of that one. Thank Zerb, though. I thought you said *the Orb* for a minute.”

“I did, Grandad,” said Kit, raising his

voice. “I DID SAY THE ORB.”

“Oh dear,” said Klot, pulling a face.



“Why? Is it bad?” Kit’s grandfather had been a famous mage in his day, a great Dungeon Runner who had won loads of trophies. “Have you been there?”

“Yes.” Klot nodded. “Many times. Nasty one, that is. All underwater and full of sea monsters. Kraken, octowolves, flame eels, seaweed golems ... and the bosses are always a nightmare.”

“Which ones do they have?” Kit asked.

“Depends,” said Klot. “Might be a dragon snapper. Sometimes it’s a giant blobfish. If you’re really unlucky, it’ll be the Narghoul.”

“Narghoul?”

“Great big undead thing.” Klot waved his arms in the air. “Horn on its head. Huge sword. Terrifying.”

Kit gulped.

“Anyway,” Klot said. “Head out the

back and Sylv will teach you a trick or two.”

“Th-thank you,” Kit stammered.

“You won’t be thanking me in a bit,” his grandad chuckled.

A few hours later, Kit was sitting in **THE AXE AND SPOON**: a café in Grotville where Dungeon Runners liked to hang out when they weren’t adventuring.

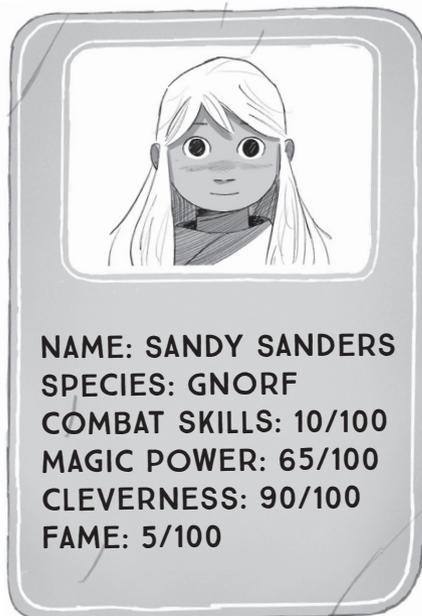
There wasn’t a single part of his body that didn’t hurt. He had more bruises than a barrel of smashed apples.



Sylvar Blade had kept him practising until he could barely stand and he *still* hadn't managed to hit her. Not once.

And – worse than that – Kit was going back for more lessons tomorrow, the day before he and his team, Triple Trouble, left for the Orb.

Across the table from him was Sandy, the mage from their team.



She was feeding Mister Pinchy (her pet crab) crumbs of cake and looking a bit worried.

“Are you sure you don't need to

see a doctor?” Sandy asked for the seventh time.

“I'm fine,” Kit tried to say, but he was having trouble speaking as his jaw, nose, cheeks and forehead were all covered in egg-sized bumps.

“You don't look it,” said Sandy, shaking her head. “Oh, here's Thorn. He might be able to help you.”

Kit squinted through his swollen eyes to see Thorn, their team's healer – who was also a vampire – walk into the café. Luckily, he had his medicine bag over his shoulder.



“What happened to *you*?” Thorn said as soon as he noticed Kit.

As Kit explained, Thorn rummaged through his bag, pulling out a glass pot of bright green paste.

“I’ve been experimenting with some new plants,” he said. “This is a lotion of ghostbane and angel leaf. It should heal just about anything.”



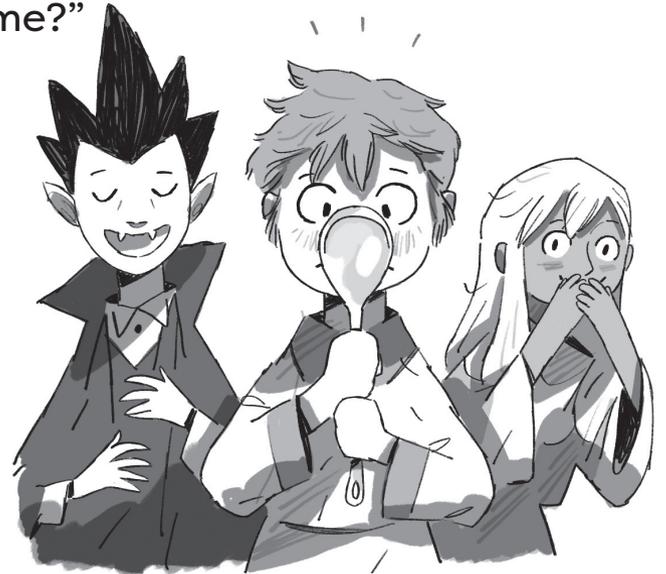
As Kit grumbled, Thorn smeared some of the green stuff all over his bruised face. He felt the pain begin to vanish right away.

“That’s better,” he said, sighing. “Thanks, Thorn.”

“There may be ... um ... one or two side effects I need to fix,” said Thorn. He quickly put the pot away and moved to the other side of the table.

“Kit...” Sandy started to laugh. “You’ve turned orange!”

Kit picked up a spoon and looked at his reflection. The bumps had all gone, but his skin was the same colour as a satsuma. He gave Thorn an angry look. “What have you done to me?”



“It’ll wear off,” said Thorn. “I think. I’m still working on the recipe.”

“Well,” said Sandy. “You’d better hurry up. We’re off to the Orb very soon.”

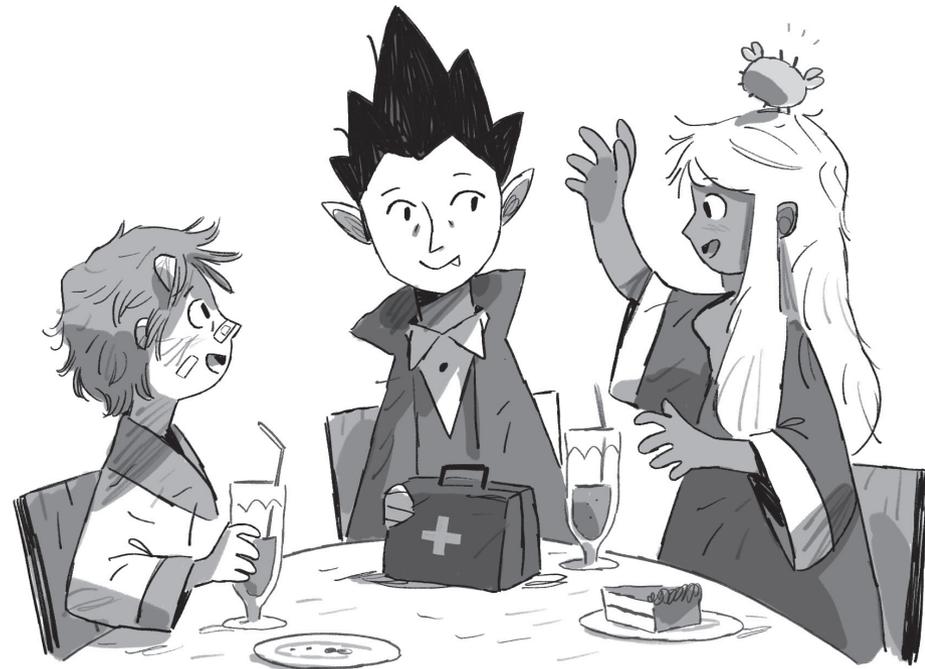
Kit sipped his milkshake. “Do we feel ready? It’s our second ever professional dungeon,” he said. “I’ve been training with my grandad – and *Sylvar Blade*, the famous Dungeon Runner, in case I hadn’t mentioned it – Thorn’s been improving his healing potions ... Sandy, what have you been doing to prepare?”

Sandy bounced up and down on her chair, excited. “I’ve been to see my auntie – she’s a sea hag, remember? I thought, seeing as we’re going to

an underwater dungeon, she could teach me some ocean spells.”

“And has she?”

“Yes!” Sandy beamed. “I’ve learned *underwater breathing*. I had a go at some of the ripper-summoning ones, but they were a bit tricky.”



Kit breathed a sigh of relief. Sandy's summoning spells hadn't gone so well in the last dungeon when she had accidentally called forth an evil imp called Heximus.

"Did you get any other tips from your grandad?" Thorn asked.

"Well," said Kit. "He said that the Orb has lots of deadly fish monsters and scary bosses. There's one called the Narghoul which sounded *really* bad."

"I'm sure we won't get that," said Sandy. She always saw the bright side of everything. A skill that Kit wished *he* had.

"I'm sure we *will*," he muttered.

"Instead of worrying about

narghoul," said Thorn, "perhaps you should concentrate on ducking the next time Sylvar Blade tries to hit you."

"Ducking is my special move," said Kit, as he finished his shake. "Or it will be by the end of tomorrow."



He rubbed one of the bumps on his arm and winced.