

GIUSEPPE ROTONDO

# OLD SCHOOL GAMING IN SAVAGE WORLDS



Gold  
& Glory





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# Old School Gaming in Savage Worlds

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by  
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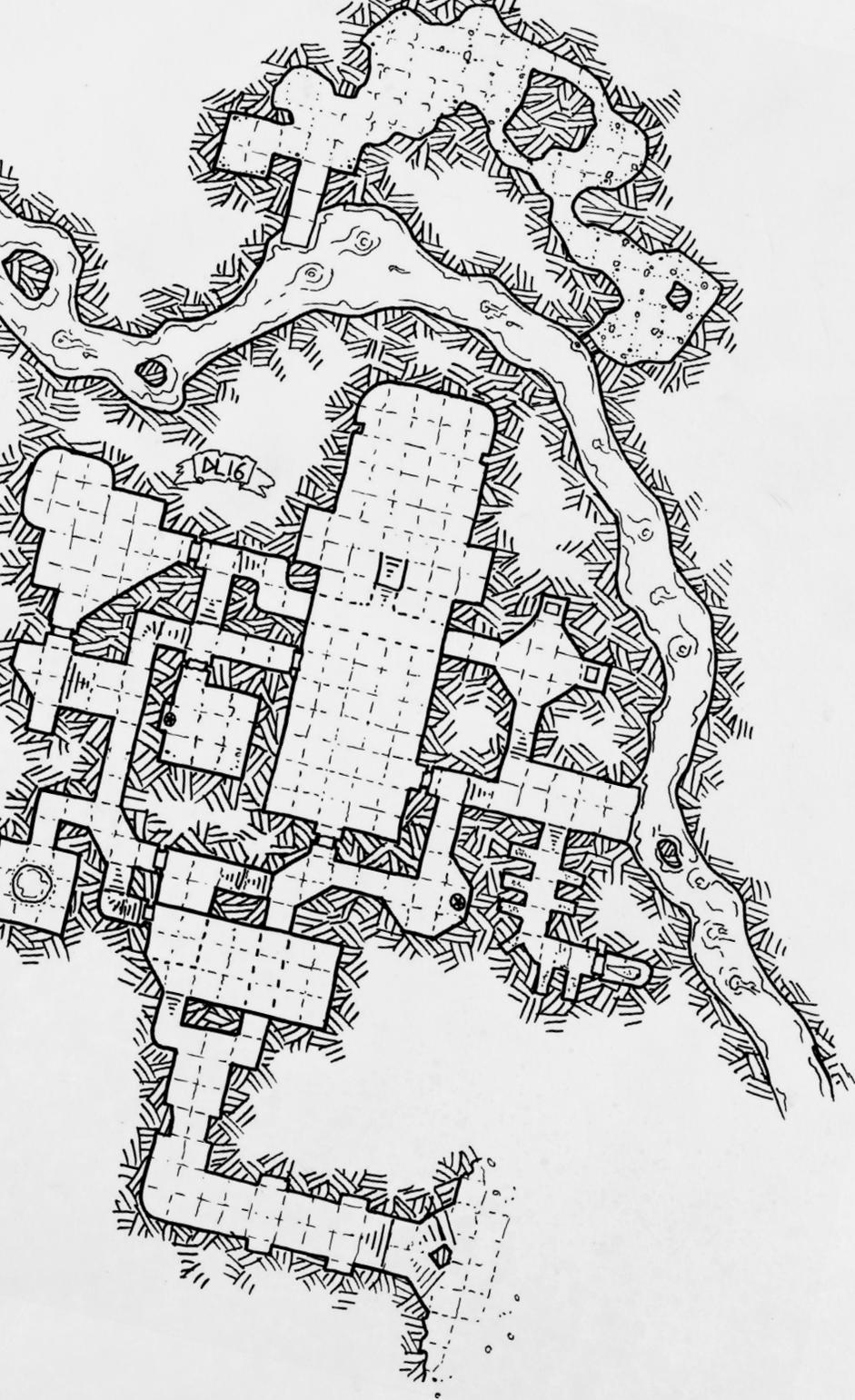
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## Introduction

Gold & Glory - Seven Deadly Dungeons lets you play the probably dishonorable stories of ill-fated treasure hunters who'll soon bite off more than they can chew... unless they manage to return home with enough gold to carouse wildly until their next expedition!

Gold & Glory is a method, and a toolbox, to enjoy the Fast, Furious and Fun rules of Savage Worlds in a game of classic dungeon exploration.

The spirit of the rules and subsystems presented in the book owes much to the innovative ideas and analyses produced by the RPG Old School Renaissance community, and as such it may feel strange or, on the contrary, appear very familiar, depending on your familiarity with that community.





# Gold & Glory

as...





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# ...As a Classic Dungeon Game

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This guide is aimed at explaining the core concepts of “Classic Dungeon Games” and how they interact with the Savage Worlds rules, through the Gold & Glory book!

Gold & Glory has been designed from the start to bring to the table a very specific experience: a classic game of dungeon exploration, with as a quick as possible a set up.

This is the experience all the bits, tables and setting rules aim to, when used together. So what is this “classic game of dungeon exploration”, exactly?

The Old School Renaissance movement has discussed, explored and developed the idea of the original role playing games of the seventies to great length. A general consensus has been found on a few basic concepts which, for the most, revolve around player skill and player agency.

## **Player Skill: The Random Character**

Random character generation was very common in the earliest role playing games. Playing a randomly generated character might be horrible if you plan to enjoy an epic, story-driven campaign. If, on the other hand, the game will be a light-hearted romp through monster infested dungeons, where your wits will be your best ally, playing a character that you didn't choose proves to be perfectly aligned with a basic, simple concept of classic games: a focus on players' skill (rather than characters') to solve challenges. The character becomes, to all effects, one more challenge for the player, inasmuch as it offers only some skills to best face the dungeon.

## DUNGEON DIFFICULTY

Classic, location-based adventures have no linear progression, no predetermined end, and no “balanced encounters”: opposition is just there, regardless of the party’s strength. Following this approach, “the end of the adventure” usually is the moment the party decides to retreat, and “difficulty” is self-regulated as a matter of “penetration”: a Novice group will face two, three, four encounters, and grab the treasure they can, while a Veteran (or higher!) party will probably storm the dungeon and actively look for the most dangerous foes and richest loot, and have their strength tested on such a longer run.

## Player Skill: Notice Vs. Actual Inspection

Classic role playing games focused on players’ skill (rather than characters’) to solve challenges. This means that, when the group enters a new dungeon room, the players are expected to listen carefully to the GM’s description and figure out if anything is odd and might be interesting, useful, or dangerous, and to further investigate the environment by stating *what* they want to do and *how*. This, instead of a simple “I roll Notice”, makes players directly responsible for their successes (and failures!). Most entries in the Seven Deadly Dungeons describe traps and other hazards with a format that states what can be easily seen, and what can be found out with further inspection. If this is the style of play you choose to adopt, no further roll should be required: the player should always be rewarded for figuring things out without letting a die decide the result, provided that a) the way the character inspects the situation is reasonably appropriate to the purpose and b) an actual reward was there in the first place, be it a treasure or a danger that the player has figured out how to disarm, avoid, or exploit against enemies.

## Player Skill: Risk and Reward

Classic exploration-based role playing games focused on players' skill (rather than characters') to make meaningful decisions. This includes evaluating situations in terms of risk and reward, with players deciding all the time whether to push on or retreat, based on two factors: resource management and information.

## Resources

While delving, the group's resources dwindle slowly but steadily: they can be actual resources the characters are aware of, like oil for lanterns or ammunition, or elements outside the characters' world, like Bennies, or something in between, like Power Points, Wounds and even Encumbrance. So "pushing on" means deciding to continue exploring despite running out of Bennies, with wounded characters, or without Power Points available. In other words: accepting an increasing level of risk, in order to get more rewards. All of this is already built-in within the Savage Worlds rules, and is further reinforced within Gold & Glory via the setting rules for Encumbrance, Prepared Spells, and Power Points Recovery.

## ATTRITION COMBAT, SAVAGE WORLDS, OLD SCHOOL

"Attrition" is the word that defines the slow depletion of combat resources such as Hit Points, and Attrition Combat is the type of combat that they produce, where heroes and monsters slowly chip away each other's Hit Points. This allows for "balanced" but routinary, slow, predictable outcomes, and is a staple of the modern iterations of the world's most played role playing game. Was it the same in the earlier editions? Not so much. Starting characters had very, very few Hit Points (and they increased slowly with advancement) and many monsters, spells and effects had the heroes just one roll away from instant death.

This should look reasonably familiar to anyone used to Savage Worlds' swifty, unpredictable (and exciting!) combat.



## Information

Reduced resources play against the decision to push on. Information, on the other hand, is what plays for it, insomuch as the players know, or can make informed hypotheses about, what lies ahead, be it danger or treasure.

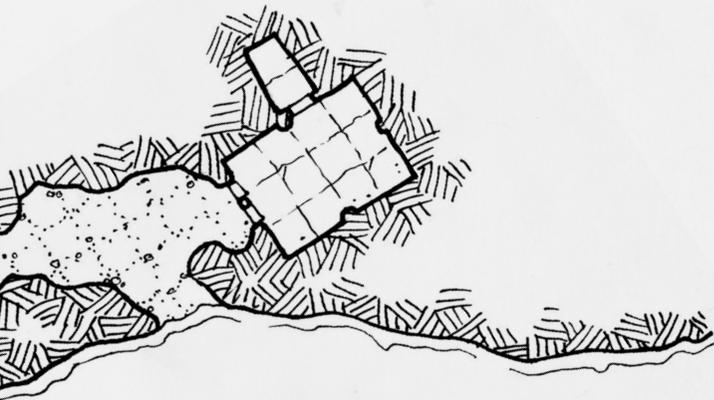
In Gold & Glory, this is achieved on three different levels.

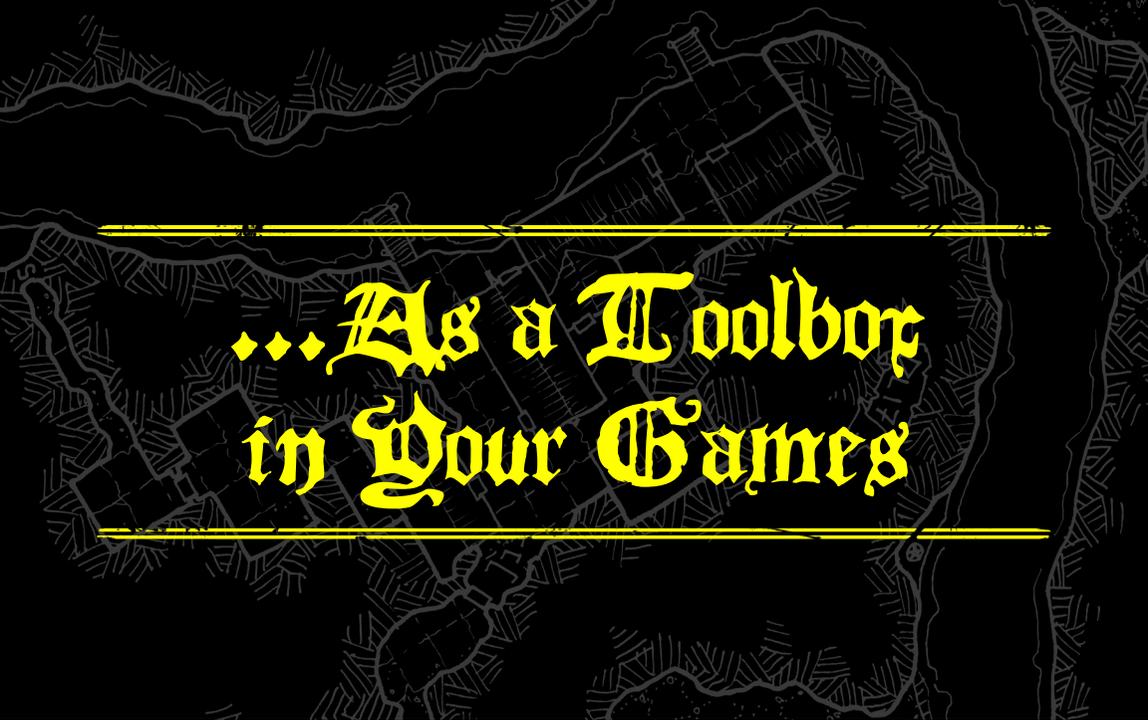
The Rumors tables for the Seven Deadly Dungeons anticipate some of the dungeon features, allowing players to choose any useful gear to bring along, which spells to prepare, some of the specific dangers that they might have to face, and some of the interesting treasures that might be hidden within the dungeons.

Rumors work on a global level. At the other extreme, room descriptions almost always include clues to hidden traps or trap-like features, as well as several instances of clearly visible dangers such as open chasms, pits full of snakes, and so on, which means the heroes get to choose whether to try and navigate the obstacle, or even try to use it against monsters, for example pushing them down an open chasm.

Chasms also work as a “distancing device” that allows to see what is down there and decide if, and plan how, to interact with it.

Unique locations, such as the lairs of very dangerous beasts, are usually “scripted” so that their entrance can be recognized by (clever) players. Other special, “scripted” dungeon features include iron bars that separate one room from another, again distancing the group from treasures or monsters that can only be reached if they find a suitable route to the room behind the bars (or avoided by steering away from that part of the dungeon!).





# ...As a Toolbox in Your Games

Gold & Glory can be used as is, or as a toolbox for your fantasy campaigns. The most useful tools are the random character generation system and the Dungeon Deck.

## Wild Draw Characters

The Wild Draw Characters generation is designed to provide ready heroes in a minute, and as such is a great tool to also generate random NPCs, as long as you are fine with the races and “classes” the system offers, which are fairly generic fantasy staples.

In order to use it in settings which are not that generic, you should make a further step and customize the system to include the races and character types of your world. This can be as easy as rewriting the races and classes table to suit your needs!

It doesn't have to be a full rewrite, of course: you might just swap in and out a few races, or change the “classes” to more accurately reflect the hero types your game supports.

## Connections

The Connections optional rules are as generic as possible, and as such may be used out of the book to enrich any character's background and to create interesting relationships in virtually any game.

All you need to consider is if two characters can be considered “same class”, i.e.

they have at least one similar area of expertise; in a world such as the Deadlands Weird West, where all characters are humans, the “same race” may apply to characters coming from the same area or region (the Union, for example, or the Sioux Nations). And if none of those applies, the “different race, different class” table will still work!

## The Dungeon Deck

At its core, the Dungeon Deck can be seen as a location-based adventure generator. Location-based adventures are enormously different from linear adventures that are structured as a sequence of scenes from A to Z.

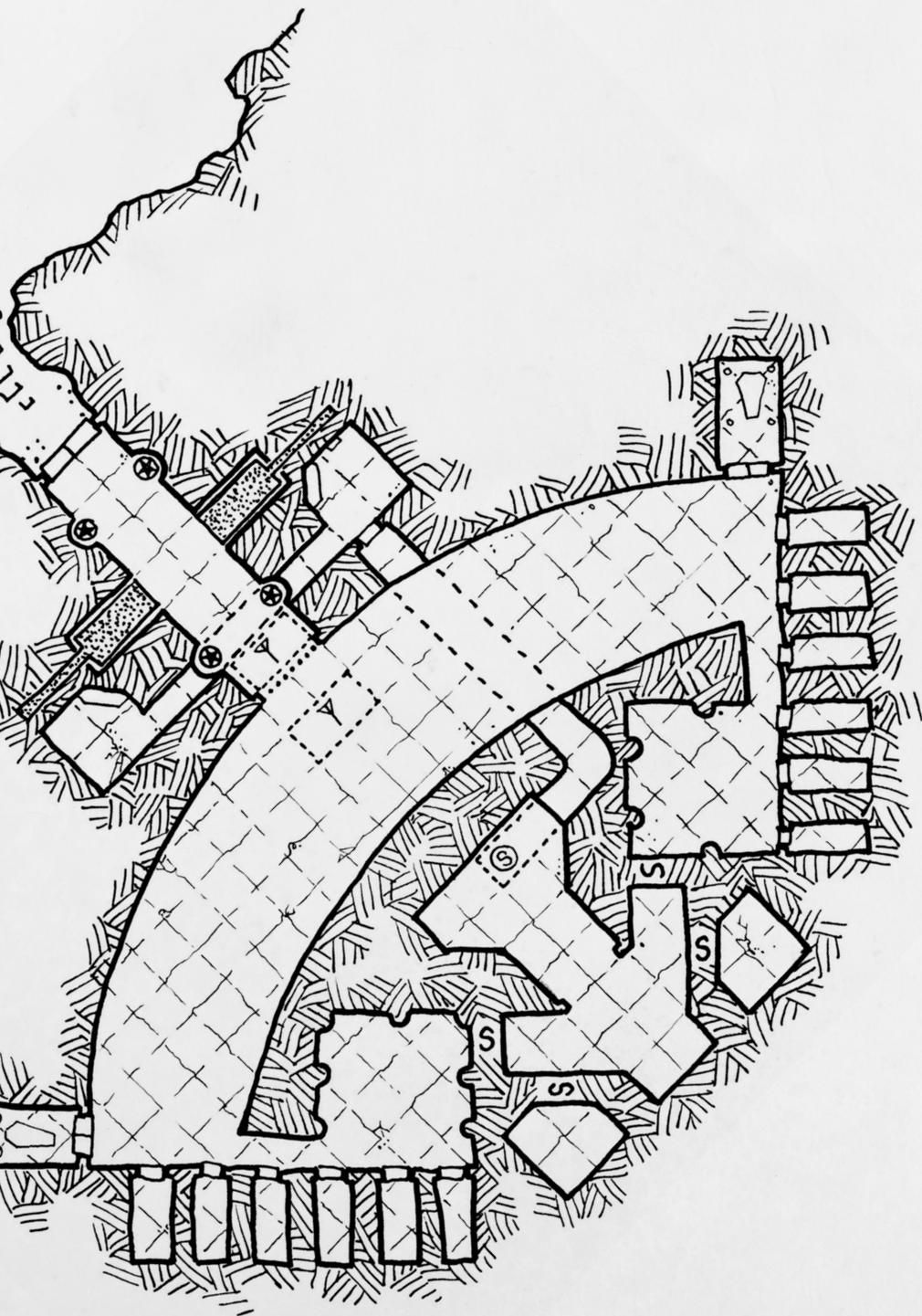
Linear adventures usually are heavily story-driven and “push” the characters from one scene to the other via story devices (ambushes happen at the most dramatic moment, the kidnappers are “programmed” to flee once their hideout is discovered, and so on), with players being offered impactful choices on selected occasions.

Location-based adventures usually have a backstory, but the players usually have more freedom in navigating the scenario. Their freedom of movement within the location means there is an “A scene”, but the following sequence is completely in the players’ hands and, more importantly, there is no predetermined finale, or “Z scene”.

This means the pace and direction of the adventure is set by the group. They get to decide when to push on, when to take a pause, and when to retreat. And it also means the location (i.e. the GM, playing the opposition to the group) is expected to react to the group’s decisions.

The Dungeon Deck system can be easily adapted to any type of location-based adventure: all you have to do is fill in the free Gold & Glory Dungeon Template available on [drivethrurpg.com](http://drivethrurpg.com) with your ideas. In science-fiction campaigns you can have derelict spaceships, abandoned industrial facilities, alien hive structures. Horror games could be set in iconic locations such as infested mansions, zombie-ridden hospitals, and even “non euclidean nightmare dimensions”.







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## ...At Its Best

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Gold & Glory has been designed from the start to bring to the table a very specific experience: a classic game of dungeon exploration. The essence of it, the way it was played during playtests, demos at conventions, and at the author's table, is a unique mix of a roleplaying game and a board game.

It works as a roleplaying game in that the players have the "tactical infinity" that is virtually unique to tabletop roleplaying games: they can interact with anything that is mentioned to be in the game world, and can do it in any way they can think of. Complementary to it, is the role of the GM that allows tactical infinity to be in place.

Gold & Glory also works as a board game in that it needs close to no preparation: you sit at the table with the book, sheets, dice and cards, and you are ready to go. Now, this is perfectly true, and perfectly fun, as long as the players and the GM are fine with two things: following the In for the Gold setting rule (including keeping conflicts between characters out of the game), and keeping most of the game happening inside the dungeon.

At our tables, two narrative procedures have proved particularly successful in making Gold & Glory as close as possible to such procedures: the Flashback Introduction and the Quick Downtime.

## The Flashback Introduction

The Flashback Introduction was born during demo games at conventions and has quickly become the best way to get into the game as quickly as possible while engaging the players and sparking their curiosity. At first it was just the result of the short time available for demo games, but it proved to work perfectly well in any situation, if you want to keep the game focused on dungeon exploration.

So this is how it's done. After the player characters are generated, the GM unfolds the battlemat on the table, draws the entrance to the dungeon and places the characters miniatures right behind the entrance of the first room and, while doing all of that, he explains why the heroes are there, giving any information available from the dungeon introduction: "you've prepared all your gear and now are ready to enter the Moldy Caves where, according to rumors, a band of bandits hid their stolen treasures". After that, the GM runs the Rumors and Research phase, keeping it as a flashback: "So that's why in the last few days you attempted to find out more useful information, at the local inns or libraries". And then proceeds to ask players what they attempted.

This might seem over-complicated, or even useless, but what it actually achieves is to keep tavern brawls, shopping sprees, romantic walks and other detours, out of the game! Are those things bad in themselves? Of course not! But they drive the game towards something else: a bit farther from the quick game of dungeon exploration Gold & Glory wants to provide, and a bit closer to a full-blown rpg campaign with a wider scope (which, again, is perfectly fine, if that's what you are looking for!).

## Quick Downtime

Downtime as codified within Gold & Glory is the time the heroes spend Carousing or making Magical Research or Offerings to Solis. It also includes restocking ammunition and other supplies, as well as upgrading gear buying better armor and weapons. It begins as soon as the heroes are out of the dungeons, and starts with the conversion of Loot Tokens into actual coins so that the loot can be split among the heroes.

Keeping it quick is the GM's job, and it is best achieved with same assumptions Savage Worlds sets for Quick Encounters: a quick description of each situation and, if needed, a general description of each character's intentions, so that action and narration go straight to their consequences.

The "time frame" for such activities is, ultimately, the (natural) healing times characters might need to recover any Wounds. It is also the amount of time characters should pay for lodgings and food! After that, there's no reason why they shouldn't be adventuring again!



