

# **Ace Dominick**

by Aegel-maere Aetre

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## Part One

### Creating an Imaginary World

To start with, there are three main categories of RPG's. First, there are those that take place in the future. Most of the gameplay in these adventures involves laser weapons, electric attacks, psychic powers, space travel, etc. Next, there are the ones that take place in the present era. These are just about the same, except that there's less supernatural and more gunplay involved. First-person shooter games are a variation of this type. And lastly, there are the games that take place in a more traditional Medieval setting. Gameplay here involves swords, magical spells, and either fairies, wizards, or some sort of mythical being.

For my RPG, I choose the medieval setting (this is the most common category anyway). Now that this is decided, I must choose a plot.

The idea of all role-playing games is that it is up to a hero, played by you, the gamer, to save the world from impending doom. Usually, but not always, this means there must be a supervillain working against you. I say "not always" because sometimes that villain is time, and the game is played in a continual race against the clock. But even then, there has to be some evil force fighting against the protagonist. There are three ways to present this situation:

1. The game takes place in a country divided. On one side of the civil war are the good forces, and on the other side are the evil ones. The hero must then complete a series of tasks to thwart the evil troops and save the day, usually by defeating their leader in close-range combat at the end. Then the hero gets a medal of honor, the princess's hand in marriage, or, if nobody else is in charge, he can simply take over the place. So many possibilities, so little time.
2. The hero / heroine sets out on a quest for a mythical object, like an orb that grants its owner control of the universe or something. Often in

this case the villain is searching for—or already has—the orb in question, thus complicating the situation quite a bit.

3. The third option is to combine these two ideas and have the good side of the battle protecting its “orb” from the evil side.

To keep things simple, I am going to stick with the first plot for my game. Hence, the adventure will take place in a medieval nation in the midst of civil war. I'll call this place Aetre's Island (I think that has a nice ring to it). I will call the main battle ground Obliteration Field, and it will be right in the center of the world. And all day and all night there will be fighting on Obliteration Field, the good forces mostly to the east, and the evil ones to the west side of the field. And no matter how long they fight with their cannons and arrows (no guns allowed), it will always come to a standstill.

\*Note: It is generally a good idea to have some sort of open space in the middle of the created universe, so there is always a large central point of reference.

North of the field will be Club Town, where our story starts. This town is filled with people who just want to stay away from the horrors of war and get on with their lives. However, many of the young boys of the town have enlisted in the good army so they can see some real action. In the township there is one boy, Lewis Dominick (the hero), who at age 14 is too young to enlist in the army, but too old to have any fun with the younger kids of the town. Despite his aunt's orders not to, he decides to escape one night and head out into the battlefield where the action is. Between the battlefield and Club Town is the North Road. While he is on this road, there is an explosion behind him. He looks back to see several objects resembling shooting stars fly from the southwest and strike Club Town. The whole place is soon ablaze, people running and screaming helplessly. All Lewis can do is watch as the town is destroyed.

When the bombing stops and the night rain has put out the fires, Lewis goes back to find a town with no survivors. He goes to the smoldering ruins of his home, and sobs quietly under the remains of a tree in his front yard.

Then the enemy army, led by General Dastard, shows up. Dastard sees Lewis sitting under his tree, head in arms. The villain chuckles softly, and gives you that smug grin villains are famous for. It's as if whenever you see this guy, he's always wearing that same old confident smirk. So Dastard greets Lewis, tells him to get up and quit crying. He then comments on Lewis's clothes, saying that dressing in the style of a king's loyalist citizen is no way to gain Dastard's favor. Lewis is wearing clothes similar to a blue karate suit with a black belt.

Dastard is about to force Lewis to join his army when the good army shows up. During the ensuing battle, an officer from the good side tells Lewis to escape into the Northern Woodland, just east of Club Town and to safety. But, since the Northern Woodland conveniently leads to Diamond Castle to the east of Obliteration Field, the officer wants Lewis to carry a message with him to be sent to the king. The officer warns you previous messengers that have tried to go through the woodlands have not come out alive, so Dominick should take care.

\*All RPG's start with an event that causes a sense of urgency. An important message must be sent, a lost item must be found, an enemy has attacked, the good king has died, the cat got out again, we're out of ketchup... the possibilities are endless. And it is strongly recommended that you design the RPG to involve a series of events where one thing leads to another, leads to another, etc.

Now that the sense of urgency has been presented to our hero, Player 1 (the gamer) takes over as Lewis Dominick. Whenever Lewis is controlled by the player, I will refer to the hero as "you." At this time you choose to follow the officer's advice and head into the Northern Woodland. You have no weapon as of yet, and your only item is the message. A ways into the forest, two masked ninja characters suddenly jump out at you. One has a bow staff, and one carries some throwing stars. They see your clothes and the envelope in your hand and attack you. The first to approach you is the one carrying the bow. He is slow, and you can dodge his attacks pretty easily.

On the sidelines is a man in a scaffold who yells for you to come over to him. When you do, he explains that he is the last messenger to come through these parts. He says that while he was no match for these ninjas, a fast young person like yourself might be able to beat them. He gives you instructions for what buttons to press to perform some basic kicks and hand movements.

\*Remember, throughout the game, the hero will learn more advanced techniques for hand-to-hand combat and weaponry. Don't start your game by giving the hero access to the best moves immediately! Save the best stuff for last.

With his advice, you tuck the envelope in your pocket and start fighting. You hit the first ninja, and he drops his bow. You pick it up and the messenger yells once more to you, this time giving you commands for basic bow technique. While he's at it, he tells you how to use throwing stars as well. Once you hit the first ninja a few times, the second curses the messenger for helping you and kills him. Now the two ninjas attack you at once. Hit them each three times and you kill them. And after the one with the throwing stars is down, his weapons are yours for the taking. When the battle is won, you hear a voice calling from the ninjas' tent.

Inside is a girl your age (that is, Lewis's age) tied to a chair.

\*A good RPG rule of thumb is that any character the hero helps out will later help the hero.

Now you've met the girl, and you untie the rope behind the chair. She introduces herself as Alexandra Chi. You can call her Ky for short. She tells you that she was the messenger's daughter, and yes, she heard what just happened outside. Now she wants revenge, and she hopes that you, oh ninja slayer that you are, can help her. She begs for you to take her along on your adventure. And she won't take no for an answer. So you let her come with you to deliver the message to the castle.

\*Now we get to the rules for a sidekick. A sidekick does not have to be, as she is in my game, the same creature as the hero; it can be a fairy, a little bug that follows you and gives advice, a little alien creature you have just saved from certain death, be creative. Also, a typical sidekick has a general knowledge greater than the hero's, but lacks the hero's physical ability and / or weaponry. The idea is that the *sidekick should possess mainly the abilities that make up for the flaws of the hero*. In my case, I picked Ky because she was traveling with a messenger. Therefore, she has experience from being many different places, which makes up for Lewis Dominick's (and the gamer's) inexperience with the world outside Club Town. Perhaps that may come into play later on...

Once the two of you reach the end of the woodland, you come to Diamond Castle, where you talk to the good King Aetre (a.k.a. yours truly), he gives you orders to find something that is missing, and one thing leads to another, etc. The entire strategy guide to the game is not necessary at this point. The important thing is that Aetre's Island has been created, the plot has been established, and we are now ready to address our plans for the hero, Lewis Dominick, specifically, his fighting abilities.

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Lewis Dominick at a Glance:

Hand techniques (from most basic to most advanced; keep in mind he cannot do all of these yet): Block, high block, low block, chop, elbow, choke grip, judo slam.

Foot techniques: Round kick, spinning hook kick, double aerial twister, triple aerial twister, charged lightning kick.

Jumps: Basic jump, high jump, forward flip, backward flip, hovering.

Bow staff maneuvers: Block, strike, double strike, spin, circular trip, charged helicopter attack.

Other weapons: Throwing stars, crossbow, cherry bombs, lightning bombs, arrows for crossbow, lighter for lightning bomb.

Spells: Lewis can use a codebook he finds in the second dungeon to conjure up certain effects. When he gets the codebook, though, it's missing its pages. Lewis must find them while on his adventure.

\*All RPG's have some sort of mythical aspect to them that allows the hero / heroine to perform supernatural feats. Keep this in mind when you go to create the villain and other enemies, who by definition must succumb to certain attacks and repel others, respond to some magical spells and not to others.

The stage is set. I am now ready to create the levels, the challenges, the side characters, and everything else, one by one as they come into play. This is the setup for my role playing game. Next, *Part 2: The Introductory Dungeon*.

## **Part Two**

### **Thickening the Plot**

In Part One it was pointed out that the general plot starts with an initiating event, and then one thing leads to another, leads to another, etc. I hat to sound repetitive, but that is really the important concept to understand when making an RPG. I have used my game as an example for a plot, and now I will develop it further, Once again, this is only one example. Your RPG will, as it should, be much different from mine.

We left off with Dominick and Ky arriving at the Diamond Castle Grounds. Dominick is carrying a message he must deliver to the King. When they come up to the front of the castle, two very large guards greet them and prevent them from entering until they see Lewis's message. Guard 1 then reads the message. Seeing the good general's handwriting, he summons a steward to come forward and take the letter straight to the king. He still will not let you into the castle.

Despite this minor setback, you can easily go around back and climb the gate into the courtyard. Ky stays behind to distract the guards. Once you are in the courtyard, a figure comes out of the castle door, yelling at people behind him that he wants to be alone.

He is a young man, some time into his twenties. In one hand he has the message you brought, and in the other hand he holds a golden crown. Try and guess who this guy is. Yeah, he's King Aetre, and he's a little tired of all the people coming to him lately asking for help and advice. When he sees you, he introduces himself and asks who the heck you think you are coming into castle grounds with a bow staff and all while not having permission. He asks if you are a friend or foe. Answer "foe," and he doesn't believe you, since you haven't attacked him yet. So try again and answer "friend."

Then he asks you where you're from. Once again, he's not letting you out of this conversation without getting the answer he wants. At length, King Aetre knows about what happened in Club Town now, thanks to your letter, and he's sorry. He tells you he's actually making good progress in the war, and his army has had some good victories lately, like that in a place he calls the Heartland. And he promises he will retake Club Town... as a point of honor, since there's nobody left in the area to fill it.

In the mean time, the King says, you look like a person who knows the northern regions of Aetre's Island pretty well. So he asks you to do him a favor and partake on a mission to get something called the *Flying Emerald*. He doesn't know exactly where it is, but it's in some place called the Clubland Temple (take-off on [Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time's Forest Temple](#)) in the Northern Woodlands. And keep it a secret from everyone that you are searching on behalf of the King. Why? There are two equally ranked head knights in the King's court, and they fight continuously over which of them is more qualified for every single mission King Aetre gives them. Aetre would rather not involve them in this assignment. And it would only make both knights angry if they knew such an important mission had been given to an inferior officer or civilian instead. To keep the peace, he prefers to keep this a secret for now.

## **The Introductory Dungeon**

Aetre shows you out the front of the castle, where Ky is currently juggling fifteen balls in front of about twenty castle guards, all thoroughly distracted. The King instantly hires her as court jester. Now both of you have full access to the castle at any time you like. The King gives you each a medal that will act as your passport

into the castle.

Ky does not want to go to the Clubland Temple with you, but she tells you where she thinks she saw a trail back in the woods where the ninja camp was. While you are in the dungeon, Ky will remain at the castle fitting into her job as jester. It's time to tackle the dungeon.

\*As long as it took for my game to get to its first dungeon, many games take considerably longer to get there, especially if there aren't that many dungeons in the game. As in most cases, my hero enters the dungeon because he is in search of something. Other possibilities include the hero trying to help a friend in need, kill a specific enemy, discover a secret, or lift a curse.

The Clubland Temple sits in the Northern Woodland down the exact trail Ky pointed out earlier. It starts with a rope ladder that leads into what seems to be a treehouse. Once up the ladder, you see that you are really in a sequence of treehouses joined to each other by rope bridges. Step forward into the giant treehouse beyond the entryway you started in.

I will now refrain from discussing my game, and instead I will go over the instructions on how to make a good first dungeon. First, you should open with a mediocre dungeon setting. Remember, you want to save your scariest, most complex, and best designs for later. This, of course, does not mean you should make this dungeon suck terribly. Put in some good theme music, preferably something mysterious.

Second, the layout of a dungeon is similar to the plot; one room leads to another, opens the door to another, leads to another. And every room must have a purpose; either it must be the central room, or it must contain a puzzle or enemy of some sort. Use all of the space in the dungeon and you won't waste valuable time programming the game.

Usually the layout is such that some rooms are opened and some rooms cannot be accessed. Either these doors have a lock on them, or as in my case, they are currently out of reach.

The hero must then go into one of the accessible rooms and navigate from one room to another by defeating enemies and solving puzzles. In the first dungeon, these will be fairly easy. At the end of a sequence of rooms is an item. It might be a map of the dungeon, a piece of a puzzle, a key to a door, or something else; be creative. In my dungeon, there are levers which, when pulled, release a section of



a ladder in the central room. Once all of the levers are pressed down, the ladder will be complete and the upper rooms can be accessed. And in the upper rooms, I will have a sub-boss, a weapon (crossbow) as a reward for defeating the sub-boss, and several puzzles that require the use of the crossbow and which introduce the hero to basic items in the Temple, such as vines he can swing on. If there are any such items in your game that you plan on using in more than one dungeon and are fairly simple, you should introduce the hero to them in this first dungeon. The same goes for any basic enemies you plan on including later.

At long length you reach the boss chamber, and on defeating the boss, the hero receives an award, usually an item he cannot use, but something that proves he has defeated the dungeon (a medal, jewel, trophy, mushroom guy yelling “the princess is in another castle,” just to name a few possibilities).

Another important consideration is the game’s subquest, and if present, it always starts in or around the first dungeon. A subquest is the search for an item that shows up many times in the game, and when the hero collects a certain number of them, he receives an award for it. This is purely an extra, and not a necessary element, but it can add to the time spent and intensity of gameplay involved.

If you do not want a subquest, you have to increase the length of your dungeons to make up for the missing side element. Personally, I recommend you have a subquest, even if it is a small one.

With that out of the way, you can create your introductory dungeon. It can technically be as large you like, though your first should be the smallest in the game. Now we are ready to look at the dungeon villains. Here are some of mine:

**Pea Shooter:** Little figures in the corners of a room that shoot pebbles at you. You can easily strike them with your bow or throw a star at ones in the ceiling corners. Just watch out as you enter a room to make sure these creatures do not ambush you.

**Shrubbish:** Shrub that turns its leaves into spikes when you get too close. Then it spins at you in attack. It is vulnerable if you strike first, even when its leaves are spiked. But be careful! It is not long before the Shrubbish regrows its leaves and comes back to attack you. In this respect, this enemy can always recover and is therefore invincible.

**Roacher:** A giant cockroach that tries to run at you and bite. Simply hit it once with your bow.

Strider: Giant daddy long legs spider that shoots venom at you from across a room. It takes three hits to destroy this enemy.

Swarm: Large group of red ants that can overtake and destroy you. You cannot kill these ants; just stay out of their way, don't make them angry, and remember, they cannot cross a body of water, so you are safe as long as you stay on your side of the lake, as it were.

Sub-boss: King Roacher. This animal is a giant Roacher, and he is easy to beat, but takes ten hits to go down. In that time, he calls on several other Roachers to come and help him. Try and avoid these other Roachers and only attack the king, since he is the only one that matters. It is a good idea during this battle to use your bow staff instead of your hand and foot movements, because the bow has more range to it. You could also use stars here, though they only inflict half the damage of the bow.

Boss: Giant Swarm. This swarm of bees works to form the shape of a fist, a gun, and a target, the three shapes alternating. Gee, guess which two you're supposed to dodge, and which one of the shapes you're supposed to shoot at with your crossbow. When you hit the target five times, the swarm scatters, and you are continually stung by the cloud of bees. The solution is to shoot the five target blocks on the far side of the room. Each one releases a cap on a giant aerosol can in the back of the room. When all are released, hit the red button on the wall (with your hand) and watch as the insects fall prey to insecticide foam. The foam is caustic to you, too, so stop the flow of the spray when all of the bees are dead. When they indeed are, you may step into the next room.

There you find a tiny green hummingbird, fluttering away in a birdcage. Congratulations, you have found the "Flying Emerald."

Thus ends the first dungeon of my RPG.

Next time, *Part 3: Out exploring.*

## **Part Three**

### **Victory... Sort Of**

To pick up where we left off, the hero has just defeated the first dungeon, which you have just finished designing for him (or her). Now, the hero has completed his greatest task yet... but his work is incomplete. If you remember from part two in my RPG, Lewis Dominick's objective was two-part (it always is in a role playing game). His first mission was to find the Flying Emerald. But after he finds it, he must bring it back to King Aetre at the Diamond Castle.

\*This two-part nature of the assignment is key. Either the hero must have a person to whom he must report after defeating the first dungeon, or the item that the hero finds at the end of dungeon 1 must be only partial. This idea first showed up in video games way back in the very first Super Mario Bros. game, wherein whenever Mario or Luigi defeated a dungeon, there was always someone waiting to tell them the sad news that the princess was in another castle. It's a concept still used in games today; but it's not in Lewis Dominick's adventure, so I just thought I'd make you aware of it before I go on and never mention it again.

So Lewis Dominick struts happily through the Northern Woodland, proud that he has just defeated his first dungeon, and thinking this errand-for-the-king business is a snap. But when he arrives at Diamond Castle <gasp> something is terribly wrong! Bombs are flying at the castle from the west. The guards are all making way for the king to step into a carriage to flee to safety. Before Lewis can see all that is going on, he is taken aside (and just in time, too, because a bomb explodes right where Lewis was standing) by a familiar face in a jester's outfit. It's Alexandra Chi, and she's warning you to get out of there. Now! Once aside, she and Lewis have the following one-sided conversation.

Ky: Lewis! Am I glad to see you! Look, I was just sitting quietly in the castle, talking with King Aetre when all these bombs started falling on the castle. You went to the Clubland Temple? You got the Emerald? Good. Let's get to the king's caravan and get outta here!

You follow her to the wagon, and the king invites you two inside before the horses speed off along the East Road. Then the king talks to the two of you.

King Aetre: Hey, Lewis, glad you could make it. Look, Dastard decided to attack the castle, and while I'm thinking we might win the battle, Dastard himself didn't show up. So, I'm getting out while I can and supporting an all-out offensive from the south, where I have my troops in the Heartlands. Just wait, you'll see. My army will trample theirs from the south.

Ky: So, you're not staying to lead your troops?

Aetre: No, I'm going to be with my troops, but only when I can lead the majority of them in attack.

Ky: Pardon my asking, but I've heard about the Heartlands before, and, well, aren't they, well, not part of Aetre's Island?

*The screen shifts to that of a movie setup, as Aetre tells the story.*

Aetre: That was until two years ago, when a good fellow named Hector, then king of the land, died heirless and left the country to my control, uniting our people. This was a huge disappointment, of course, to Reginald Dastard, top general of Hector's army, who for years had been seeking the throne for himself. So Dastard attacked my Island, hoping to gain the Heartlands. But when he discovered Hector's arsenal of long-range bombing devices, he got even greedier and tried to take over my whole Island. My army and his were deadlocked until recently in Obliteration Field. But even I saw Dastard's one weakness before long: Dastard could fight and win if he used purely long-range materials. But he couldn't defend against an attack that happened right under his nose. So I attacked the Heartlands, and my troops arose the victors. Dastard Fled to Spade Mountain, a more impenetrable location, and returned to his long-range victory in Club Town. Why he wanted so badly to destroy your town, I honestly don't know. But he's trying it again with my castle. Little does he know his troops are in for a big surprise! See? Look for yourselves.

The two of you look out the carriage window to see hundreds of the king's troops ready and at arms. King Aetre gets out of the caravan and onto his stallion. He turns back to you and asks if you got the Flying Emerald. Respond "yes" and he'll tell you that he could win this war in an instant if only he had the Four Jacks on his side.

Aetre: The Flying Emerald is one of the Four. Bring to me the other three. I don't know exactly where they are, but here's the legend: "One lies in the Forest Halls, one in Hector's hands. One is kept in the safest of vaults, one in the darkest of lands." I trust you two to find me the three remaining Jacks. Can you do it?

You say yes. So Aetre goes on to lead his army in a charge against the enemy. By morning, they have pushed Dastard's soldiers back into stalemate in Obliteration Field. The only real damage done was that to the castle, but you don't know that yet. You are standing by the South Road in front of Obliteration Field with no way to get back to Diamond Castle or anywhere else without being blown to bits by cannons and arrows on the battlefield. However, you can (and must) turn to the

South Road and take it straight into the Heartlands.

\*Note: A multi-part task is a trademark of an RPG. It is pretty standard for a role playing game to have its overall mission be a quest to collect a series of items, which eventually lead the character to the boss battle at the end.

## **Out Exploring**

One of the great parts of playing an RPG is the freedom that comes with it. While certain tasks (mainly dungeons) must be completed in a specific order, the hero is free to wander about the land for pretty much however long he pleases wherever he pleases, with some notable limitations. These limitations become smaller and smaller as the game progresses, until at last the hero has access to every place in the little created universe.

It is also common practice for the second dungeon to have a special or hidden opening, only accessible after the hero has obtained a special item. With this in mind, Lewis and Alexandra cannot immediately go to the Broken Heartlands, the next dungeon; they must first go exploring Heartlandtown, a busy township, actually a desert town by a river.

Alexandra's first item of business is to buy a new set of clothes. She just cannot stand being in the sweltering heat in the wool jester's uniform any longer. You'll find new clothes at the Deuce's Shop for Clothing and Supplies. Ky will go into the girls' section of the store, so while she's there you can take a look at what's selling for men. The shopkeeper tells you he has nothing in your size except a red suit similar to the one you are wearing now. This red suit differs from you blue one, though; it allows you more flexibility, so a young person like yourself can perform certain advanced moves, like the triple aerial twister kick (a combo move). Since you don't have any money, the salesman tells you he'd be willing to trade you the red suit for the blue one. Accept, and you are given the flexibility needed to perform the combo moves of the game.

Also found in Heartlandtown is the Elixir Bros. Pharmacy, where you can buy a better health meter for yourself, complete with extra health elixir, kept in a refillable flask. But you need money to buy this; where do you get the cash?

Well, in most RPG's, money can be found almost anywhere—under rocks, in a hole you dig, etc. In my game, money comes in that form I am sure all of us would like it to be in: it grows on the trees! All Dominick has to do is climb the right tree and he can grab up to twenty Alligons at a time. So have fun.

Other sites in the town include the Town Hall, the grocer, the Heartbreak Hotel, the Dust Bowl Stadium, and the several houses of Heartlandtown residents, each with its own little secrets and playing tips to be found within. So go ahead and explore. Get rich, although you can only hold up to a hundred Alligons at once, and buy whatever you think will come in handy along the way. Ky will finish her clothes shopping at the first nightfall after you enter the shop. She'll wait patiently for you outside the store until you come to pick her up. Then she'll follow you around like always.

\*Exploration is a huge part of all role-playing games. In all, the exploring should make up half of the potential playing time. While most of it remains extracurricular, some of it must be crucial to the plot. In other words, require some exploration of the gamer and the hero. That way, you add to the effort it takes to beat the game, as well as the suspense; the hero should always be on a continual hunt for something, however big or small, whether it's a flying emerald or a missing shoe.

\*Here are some of the basic items that most RPG's put the hero on the lookout for:

1. Energy: Any recuperation device that allows the player to maintain or regain maximum strength for battle.
2. Subquest items: The subquest may start in or around the first dungeon, but it must be continued into the normal gameplay and never take a break, even when the hero appears to be doing little.
3. Money.
4. A map or general overview of the area.
5. Advice and counsel from the locals: This comes into play when you want to find out what problems specifically are plaguing an area. Also, tying this in to #4, one of the best ways to get directions is to ask somebody nearby.
6. Ammunition: This applies to any weapons the character has that require refills of ammo, like Dominick's crossbow or flying stars.
7. Miniquest items: That's right. In addition to the subquest are several miniquests. These are quests that require some time for the hero to complete, but in the end reward the hero with a very helpful item, like a weapon upgrade or a seriously helpful gaming clue. The largest miniquests of the game are sometimes referred to as "miniature dungeons" or "sub-dungeons." These are small tastes of things to come for the hero. Often when a miniature dungeon precedes a larger dungeon, the miniature is designed to resemble the big one in appearance and difficulty. These miniatures are especially handy when an item is needed to enter a dungeon, and the hero is currently seeking that item...

Now I will describe the layout of the town further, specifically the other subquests / miniquests of the game. In the Heartbreak Hotel are several people that badly need professional help. One man, Carlos, is afraid that mob bosses Alfredo and Giovanni will come for him soon if he does not pay off his debt, which he cannot yet do. In another room is a fighting couple, arguing whether or not her mother from Club Town can come down to live with them. Of course, it's your business to tell them the sad news about Club Town's current shape, but how can you even get them to listen to you? In another room, the one right above Carlos's, is Don Alfredo, who is waiting for Giovanni to show up so he can make the "business deal" with Carlos. Come here later after you have learned the "Courtesy Builder" in your codebook.

The town Grocer sells the local newspaper, but also plenty of pack-and-go food items that could come in handy if you needed extra energy in battle. In the newspaper stand you will conveniently find a paper with headlines of the bombing of Club Town.

In another major site of the town, the Dust Bowl Stadium, several people pair up for a two-person obstacle course to compete with other pairs for a Championship Trophy (which could be useful later when you visit other places). You and Ky can enter the event just by signing up at the door. The competition takes place once every three days, so you might have to wait a little. If you want some preparatory notes on the obstacle course, you can always buy tickets to sit in the stands during the event... but what's the fun in that?

Actually, there are a few hidden treasures to be found among the stadium seats, like the Jack's Feathers, my game's special subquest, so everything in the game has a purpose.

Okay, now I'm ready to go on. Keep in mind, gamer, you can return to these events at any time, and there is no reason for you to have to complete all of them this instant. In fact, as with Carlos in the hotel, you *can't* complete all of them now.

When you and Ky have explored the town to your satisfaction, you next search for the serious parts of the game (you have to if you want to reach the end). So you go down the road a ways and you will see Hector's Castle, the miniature dungeon in the Heartlands.

In the Town Hall, several of the King's troops are discussing how they should go

about attacking Hector's Castle, the last enemy stronghold in the Heartlands. Go to this place to find hints as to how you might enter the castle. After you have defeated the castle, you can return here to get hints as to how you should access the real dungeon of the land.

\*You should always design your RPG so that there is some place out there where the hero can go and get game hints in case the player is stumped. This is just good ethical practice in video games, but it also means anyone who should lose when playing your game cannot make a good claim that you made the RPG unfairly difficult. The hardest games to beat in the world can still be some of the best, so don't get me wrong; I'm just saying, a game can only be good if the player has a fighting chance of winning without the aid of a strategy guide.

Until next time, ciao. I'm sorry I couldn't end this section on a note with more action, but it's all coming up. Trust me. Next, *Part 4: The Perpendicular Universe*.

## **Part Four**

### **The Perpendicular Universe**

In the last part we saw how a character must be able to roam freely and explore the vicinity in the RPG. But all this roaming, hunting, and mini-quest-taking has its purpose. Eventually, the goal is for the hero to move on to the next dungeon with greater preparation than he had going into the last. In other words—and this is important—the hero must not be allowed to use the same strategy and techniques in more than one dungeon or major level. He must be forced to learn new fighting skills, earn more energy upgrades, and obtain more powerful weapons in between dungeons if he is to have a prayer of beating the game. As RPG maker, it is your job to adjust the difficulty of the dungeons accordingly, so that while each is progressive (the first is easier than the second, the second easier than the third, etc.), there is also to some extent a gap in the difficulty (the first might be rated a “level 1 difficulty,” so the second should probably be a “level 3.”) Make sure you understand this concept before designing your second dungeon.

If you are like me, however, you want to get to the good stuff in your game, and you're planning on making your second dungeon a pure work of art, a true test of your player's finest skills. For some of you out there this won't happen until your third, fourth, or even fifth dungeon, but at some point it is a good idea to make a clear separation from what I call minor league gameplay and the majors. So from



my second dungeon on, Lewis Dominick is going to have some very exciting battles and trials indeed.

But to jump straight to my level 5 second dungeon would be unfair; I just don't want to go through the work of making a full-scale level 3 dungeon because for my game in particular it would be a waste of time. Hence I will precede my complicated dungeon with a "level 3" miniature dungeon: Hector's Castle.

Now, before I go on, I must explain to you two vocabulary words (no, there won't be an English test on them).

**Parallel Universe:** A secondary world that shares a distinct likeness to an original. This is often employed when a game has a sequel, but it is also useful when a world or dungeon has a mirror image of itself within a game.

**Perpendicular Universe:** A portion of a primary world that is *not* concerned with the main plot, but instead has its own problems to deal with. This happens any time the hero visits a place where the inhabitants couldn't care less if he were sent to save the world; they have too many local problems to care about the big picture. Okay, this is a term I completely made up, but you'd be surprised at how often you'd actually find this in RPG's.

My point is that Heartlandtown is a perpendicular universe. The people there aren't half as concerned with the war up north as they are with the "madman" who has apparently found a "source of great power" and has wielded it in a hostile takeover of Hector's Castle. Dominick learns this information from people in the Town Hall of Heartlandtown. What he also learns is that the castle as it appears now is not nearly what most town residents remember it as. Nobody can explain it, but somehow, the castle is much smaller than it used to be. Hmm... a mystery... sounds like it needs investigation!

You (Lewis) and Ky go to Hector's Castle, but you cannot enter because it is surrounded by a moat and the drawbridge is up. Ky will soon suggest that you enter this castle as you did the last one, though the back. When you go around the moat to the rear of the castle, you see that there is a tree you could climb and jump from to clear the castle wall. Ky says, "You go first," and you get over to the top of the outer castle wall. But right after Ky says, "Okay, now I'll come up, too," she is captured by several guards. She yells for you to run, but there are guards there to get you, too. Luckily for you, though, you have a bow staff to knock them out of commission. When the guards that have Ky go around to the front of the castle, the drawbridge goes down. At the same time, more guards come out of the castle to get you, so the drawbridge stays down. Use this opportunity to get into

the castle and then close the drawbridge behind you so that none of the guards follow you in. Welcome to the miniature dungeon.

\*Here are some general rules for designing miniature dungeons. To all of these rules, it should be noted, there are many exceptions, so if your dungeon does not follow some of them, that's perfectly okay.

1. Unlike a standard dungeon, there is no central room. Instead, the hero is immersed in a series of hallways and doors leading from a central hallway. These doors are split into two categories: those that can be opened immediately (very few) and those that require an extra item to open (the majority of the doors).
2. The miniature dungeon is about 50% strategy and logic problems and 50% physical battles, just like the standard dungeon.
3. The hero is limited in a miniature dungeon to only accessing one series of doorways/halls until he reaches the end of that series and gains an item (in my mini-dungeon, this item is the cherry bomb). The hero gains this item by solving a puzzle, *not* by defeating an enemy.
4. Once the hero has gained the item, he can access all the other doors in the miniature dungeon. Behind most of these doors (in fact, all except one of them) are items that are purely extracurricular, so this is a great place to find subquest items.
5. Beyond one of these other doors, usually a door that is specially marked, lies a creature ready for battle. When the hero defeats this character, he either receives another item, he opens a door to the real dungeon, or something else good happens. Once again, be creative.

In my later reports I will include complete maps and guides to all of my dungeons and miniature dungeons, but not now; I want to keep the general plot of the RPG moving. I will, however, introduce you to the enemies Lewis must face and the basic idea of my dungeon.

### **Common Enemies in and around the Heartlands:**

Guards: All of the guards of the castle have black armor and resemble wolves of some sort. It takes two hits to down them.

Alarums: These creatures look just like the stones in the walls of the castle. Lewis might be walking through a hallway when all of a sudden a stone comes out of the wall and throws itself at Dominick's head. They can be noticed ahead of time by their light appearance, and can be dodged easily. Once an Alarum misses its mark, it never reappears, so Lewis does not have to worry about the things

making a boomerang move back at him.

Boomerang Alarum: Now *these* he has to dodge more than once, or until they run into a wall on either side of the hallway. Boomerang Alarums are slightly darker than the regular Alarums, but not as dark as the stone walls of the castle.

Floor Alarum: This is the “boss” of my miniature dungeon. At random a stone in the floor will pop up and grow arms and try to grab you, shove you under it, and then crush you with its weight. To break this rock, you must use cherry bombs to stun it, then a bow strike to pound it back into the ground without you under it. It takes three hits to end the battle, after which Ky is released from her prison cell in the small castle’s dungeon.

### **The Parallel Universe**

Ky apologizes for getting caught like that and promises never to do that again (on a side note, most gamers find it extremely annoying when the character needs to be rescued more than once. Remember Slippy from Star Fox 64? Don’t make the mistake of letting a major character, sidekick especially, slip into enemy hands a second time). But while she was in the dungeon, Ky noticed that there is an underground door that leads to the outside. Go through this door and you will see two paths: one that leads back to Heartlandtown (bomb the wall so you can pass through) and one that leads to a very opposite sort of place...

The only reason why you might want to go back to Heartlandtown is to once again visit the Town Hall to see people talking about how the castle just collapsed on itself (this happened right after you made your escape) and learn some background information on the next dungeon, which I have talked so much about that I think it’s about time I actually got there.

In the “opposite sort of place” is a land that, contrary to Heartlandtown, which is in a desert, is a bleak, desolate tundra. This is the land known as the Broken Heartlands. There are several collapsed buildings in the same location as the buildings of Heartlandtown, only in a mirror image. And at the end of the road in *this* town is a huge castle, black, and very foreboding. As you walk in, a mysterious voice speaks to you and Ky. There is no way of telling where the voice comes from. Here’s what it says:

Voice: Ah, welcome to the Future! All that you see here is just an image... just a mirrored image of what is to come when I lay waste to the land! And that will happen shortly, very shortly, for my plan is coming to its full potential now! Who

am I, you ask? Dastard, maybe? But no, the dim-witted General does not know the future like I do. Do you yet think I am crazy? Well, I might have the both of you know that I also saw the destruction of Club Town and Diamond Castle before they happened! And you, boy, do you know that those too were illusions? Do you know that they are but things to come, not things that are?

Ky: This is getting weird.

Voice: I have all of my plans set up: Dastard will destroy Club Town, then Diamond Castle for me. I will use the source of power granted to me so that I can turn what is Heartlandtown into what you see before you! Then all I have left is to conquer Spade Mountain and all that Dastard so conveniently won for me will fall into my hands!

Ky: I still don't know who this guy is.

Voice: Don't you, Alexandra Chi? Don't you? You should... after you stole from me my one true joy.

Ky: What? I've never stolen anything in my life!

Voice: Haven't you? Perhaps you know not what I mean... oh well, no matter. But I see before me dilemmas... both of you are here. You therefore have the ability to see into the future, yet you think the events you have seen are in the present?

Ky: Now I get it! Lewis! Club Town has not been destroyed yet, and neither has Diamond Castle! Don't you see? We're in the future! Those events haven't happened yet, but they're about to in a few days or so. Don't you know what this means? It means we can still save the Club Town and Diamond Castle from destruction!

Voice: Ha! Neither of you will do such a thing without control over your sight of what is future and what is present. But like I say, I have dilemmas... you both see into the future, even if you do not know you are doing it! Only two types of people can see into the future: those with a source of power like mine, and those who are of great destiny, according to the legend. But I have said too much, have I not? It is long past my time to destroy the both of you and stop you from hindering my plans... but you are both harmless without my jewel. I advise you therefore not to try and stop me! If you so wish to challenge me, my door is open to you.

The drawbridge of the castle comes down. The entire castle then splits into two parts, the drawbridge splitting, too. The ground tears apart, and Lewis and Ky are separated.

Voice: Sorry to break your hearts there, but I cannot have you teaming up on me, now can I? Oh, and about turning back: I cannot allow that, either!

A boulder falls where you entered.

Voice: Now step into my castle of wonders, and we will have fun... I like fun... I will enjoy watching you die at the hands of my minions... I like fun...

Ky: Lewis, I've learned a little by watching you fight, and as it looks like we have no choice, let me take on my half of the dungeon while you try yours. And don't worry about me... I think I just figured out who this guy is.

And so you're trapped with nowhere to go but into the dungeon. But wait! You're not Lewis anymore! Now you are controlling Chi's actions!

Ky: Lewis, any time you want to take over, press (command button) and I will stop moving and let you start.

In other words, press this command to switch between the two players, but only press it when you are sure Alexandra is safe (in a room marked "shelter") so that she is not hurt by an enemy while she is on her feet standing still as you control Lewis. As hinted by the switch of identity, you must start the dungeon as Ky.

Ky walks into the Heartland Castle to face her first challenge, as a ninja claiming to be brother to the ones Lewis laid to waste much earlier jumps out at her unexpectedly... Next time, *Part 5: The Fourth Dimension*.

## **Part Five**

### **Dimensions**

An important concept of role playing games is that of dimensions. When the first

games were made, as you probably know, they were only in 2D form, either in a scroll-screen view or overhead view. There simply wasn't good enough technology to make a 3D game. To make up for this lack of a third dimension, game makers soon replaced it with a fourth dimension: time. At first, this meant a person playing a game had to complete it within a given timeframe or he would lose a life. Later, the concept of time travel was introduced to the gaming world. Now that 3D graphics are available, most games employ a four-dimensional scheme to their layout in one way or another.

In addition to these four "common" dimensions, consider working in some other possible elements. Here are dimensions 5-9. They are the only other ones I can think of. If you can find any others, feel free to use them.

Fifth dimension: A shortcut (warping from one place to the next).

Sixth dimension: Implosion (this turns an object or world inside out).

Seventh dimension: Growth, expansion (or, the exact opposite, shrinking).

Eighth dimension: Time warping (Literally, the fourth dimension x 2)

Ninth dimension: Explosion (the supernatural ability to completely surround all 360 degrees of an object and view every side at once. This is particularly used for designing villains, bosses usually.).

## **Chi and Ace**

Now to get back to my adventure. Ahem:

Alexandra Chi has just walked into the Heartland Castle unarmed, but capable of all of Lewis's basic and combination moves. As soon as she enters the castle, a ninja character jumps at her and promises to avenge the death of his brothers much earlier in the game. Where the first ninjas, if you remember, had a bow staff and throwing stars, this guy has a sword. He is still easy to beat, so Alexandra can gain the Ninja Sword before going on into her half of the dungeon.

She walks into the next room, the central room of the castle. As soon as she walks in, the Voice laughs and says, "Good! Someone has come over to play!" The room resembles that of the classic optical illusion in which there are stairs and doorways coming from every which direction. Remember how I said earlier there must be doors the hero can open as well as ones he can't? Well, the doors that Chi can open are the ones she can enter, and the ones in other directions are the ones she can't. Next to the door is a switch marked "SWITCH." At first, it seems odd that the sign should be there, but it is actually a pun on "switch."

When you activate the switch, you are no longer controlling Chi's actions, but instead control Lewis Dominick. When Dominick hits a similar switch, your control goes back to Chi.

Lewis Dominick rushes into the castle to find a fourth ninja waiting for him. This one carries no weapon; however, on defeating him you do get an item: a map... or, more precisely, one part of a map. It only shows the areas on Lewis's side of the castle, which because of the optical illusion layout of the castle is only one side out of four. Lewis walks through the doorway to find out that the castle itself did not split when the drawbridge and entrance did; he is in the same room as Chi. The only thing is that they are on different sides of the dungeon, so they look sideways to each other.

I'll admit that this concept sounds complicated, but the dungeon is actually fairly short. Chi must solve two logic problems and defeat one enemy to get her two sides of the map and full access to her two sides of the castle. Lewis has the exact same task. And of course, there are minor rooms with lesser enemies on the way. After all this is done, Chi and the Ace both meet in the same place, a hallway that looks like a funhouse. On one end of the hall is a door that is huge. At the other end is a small door. Walk in either direction and you either get huge or small.

Ky: I think you should take one door while I take on whatever's behind the other. Agreed?

Lewis: Sure. So, which one do you want?

Ky: I'll go for the small door over there. Good luck!

Lewis: Thanks. See ya later, I guess.

## **The Fourth Dimension**

Ky goes behind door number one. You are automatically controlling Lewis at this point. You go through the large door, and this castle's boss, Kamikaze Jester, attacks you. A full description of this boss and the temple in general will come later when I go to design the finer aspects of the game. For now, let's just say you beat him by dodging the balls he throws at you, which are really Alarums from earlier in the miniature dungeon. When he throws a Boomerang Alarum, it comes back and hits him, stunning him for three seconds, in which time you must strike with your bow. Use a combo move or two to make the battle go faster and increase your chances of winning. Win the battle, and you'll find a red bird in a

birdcage: the Flying Ruby.

Before your battle with this joker, he informs you that Chi has gone through a portal that brings her back to the past. And after the jester is done for, it seems as if there's no way to bring her back...

But as you walk out of the temple onto the Broken Heartlands, you see a message waiting for you at the gate. It reads:

Dear Lewis Dominick,

I left this here a few days ago, your time. Of course, I had to make sure it would survive the destruction of Heartlandtown, and I didn't know how to do that, but if you're reading this, I guess that's not an issue anyway. Lewis, I've seen to it that Club Town is safe for the moment. And I also know how we both got into the future in the first place: it seems that King Aetre summoned us from the past by using a spell he found that brings to the future all who are of destiny and all who have a special power vested in them by a Jack. Now I trust you have two of the four Jacks: the one from the forest and the one from Hector's hands. All I was able to find out from looking in the old Legend Books in the Club Town Library (unfortunately not available to you at the moment) is that the one in the "safest of vaults" is in a diamond mine, and the one in the "darkest of lands" is atop a huge mountain. Get these Jacks and send them to me in the past. How, you ask? Here is King Aetre's spell book, in its entirety. Use the Messenger Spell to send me the Jacks, and all that you have will come safely to me, and I will proceed to give them to King Aetre. Got it? Good. I've left some other notes around that I think you'll find helpful. Good luck!

Alexandra Chi

But wait! There's something wrong! The spell book she sent you is missing all of its pages; they must have gone when Heartlandtown was destroyed. There is a clue as to the pages' whereabouts, though...

By now you have hopefully collected some of the Jack's Feathers. These feathers fall into the book automatically to form pages of the book. It takes five jacks to fill one page, front and back, and there is one spell on each side of a page. *You must get all five feathers of a page before that spell is activated for Lewis to use.*

At this point in the game, you may have gotten up to fifteen jacks (if you've been



perfect.) This means you have a possible six spells to begin with (all in all there are fifty feathers, twenty spells).

\*What did we learn from this story so far? Well, to start with, there must be a specific purpose to the subquest. In my game, Dominick is required to obtain the Jack's Feathers to gain spells, but the basic idea of the feathers, as we will see, is extracurricular. I'll explain this later. We also learned, hopefully, that a sidekick must remain a sidekick, and no more. There comes a point at which the hero must do most of his thinking for himself. Ky's notes ensure that she is still giving advice without becoming too involved or too intrusive on Dominick's adventure. Another point is that the second dungeon follows the format of the first so closely that the same rules apply for both dungeons. The only thing that really changes from dungeon to dungeon is the difficulty—and I don't think I need to write out a set of instructions for that.

Now to explain what I mean about the Jack's Feathers being purely extracurricular. In the spell book, the spell that sends the Jacks to Ky is the last spell in the book. Most people, when they play the game, won't get that far into the spell book, so they'll never send the Jacks back, but they'll still win the game. This Messenger Spell is used to bring about an alternate ending, which is a very nice addition to any RPG if you can program it in. Do I have you guessing at the ending yet? If I do, good... very good... I've trained you well. If you're not guessing at it at all, though, that's all the better. We've just gotten past the second dungeon, so don't get ahead of yourself, okay?

In fact, I think it'd be a good idea to summarize the game so far before we move on, since so much has happened in the last few sections.

Lewis Dominick is on an adventure for the Four Jacks, which are all birds trapped in various places. With the help of Alexandra Chi, daughter to a deceased messenger, he has gotten two of them: the Flying Emerald and the Flying Ruby. Now, Alexandra has slipped back into the past, where she has left notes she hopes will help Lewis on his quest. Working against Lewis are the forces of General Reginald Dastard, an evil Spade Mountain opponent to the good King Aetre of Diamondland. To win the game, Lewis must collect the Jacks and defeat General Dastard, thus restoring peace to the land.

Several elements of the latter plot have already been revealed, such as Dastard's weakness at close range attacks and the legend of those who are "destined." The questions arise now as to why Lewis and Alexandra, two seemingly normal people from ordinary backgrounds, could be considered destined as King Aetre or the departed King Hector.

Next time, *Part Six: Advancement*

## **Part Six**

### **Advancement**

We ended the last chapter of this guide with a summary of my game so far. As a general rule, I have started with an initiating event, then developed the characters, then developed their fighting abilities, then developed the plot. From there, I developed character, weaponry, and plot again. Then, character, weaponry, plot again. The cycle is endless until the close of the game. It follows that should you ever get writer's block (and who doesn't?) one of the first things you should do is to go back and look at your last step. Ask yourself whether this was a development of character, ability, or plot, and then just take it from there. If you're still stuck after that, try working out in your head various possibilities along with the effects the advancements would have on your game. Always plan ahead, but be flexible so that you are ready to change some of your ideas at the last second if they don't work out for whatever reason. And trust me: it's impossible to make a game without constantly changing your original plans. I've already done it many times in this adventure, and I've only just gotten past the easier half of my game.

My point is that even if you change the game around a bit, you should still stick to the standard pattern of role-playing games: character, weaponry, and plot. Learn this lesson well and your game will be the better for it.

My last step, for example, was Chi's letter, a character development of Alexandra. She is now serving a different purpose as sidekick. Therefore, my next step is to increase the abilities of Lewis Dominick. And yes, I've done that, too, by giving him the Spell Book. Now I will advance the plot.

If you (Lewis) do not have enough Jack's Feathers to fill the first page of your Spell Book, you must go back into the Heartland Castle to get them. Once you have filled the first page, you can perform two key spells: the Cracker and the Sound of Somnolence. The Cracker breaks any boulder blocking your path (like the one blocking your way out of the Broken Heartlands), and the Sound of Somnolence puts everybody in a place asleep (like the fighting people on Obliteration Field).

Use these two spells to get out of the Heartlands and into the middle of a much calmer Obliteration Field. Now, technically, you can access all four major lands of

Aetre's Island. But there is not much to do in Club Town, you cannot get too far in Spade Mountain without the Lightning Bomb, and you just came from the Heartlands, so why turn back?

Go down the East Road in the direction of Diamond Castle, and you will see several people trying to remove a boulder blocking what they say is a path. You don't see anything except a rock wall, but you help them out by using the Cracker. Sure enough, there was a boulder in the path, which reveals to you another secret of Aetre's Island geography: the East Road actually forks into two directions, which you never knew before. To the left is Diamond Castle (not much there but ruins), and to the right is your next stop, Safe Haven Village.

Safe Haven Village is a small mining town overrun by refugees of Heartlandtown. The Hearts have come and rebuilt almost their entire town, just with everything in a different place. So if you didn't get those extracurricular things done earlier, you can do them now. What catches your attention, however, is that there are also some refugees from Club Town staying here! But didn't they all die? Ask any one of them and they will tell you that they were warned to evacuate by the king himself and a young girl in white (that must be Ky). They will tell you that not all of the town's residents would evacuate when the warning was given, so not everybody made it. The king left the town to lead the refugees here, but the girl stayed behind in Club Town to try and persuade others to come. Nobody has seen her since.

\*This is a character development.

Those Clubs that survived are staying in the newly relocated Heartbreak Hotel. While in Safe Haven Village, you will be treated differently by the Clubs, Diamonds, and Hearts, as I will refer to them. The Diamonds are furious that their town should be infested with the likes of so many foreigners. And not only are you a foreigner, but you removed the boulder they so carefully placed to keep away more outsiders. You won't exactly get preferential treatment from these people. The Hearts are as nice to you as they ever were. And of course, you are recognized by name and welcomed among the Clubs. Note that you can tell the three groups of people apart by their clothing. Clubs wear green, Diamonds wear silver, and Hearts wear dark red.

\*In places with more than one ethnic group of people, always look for signs of tension among at least one of the groups. A recurring theme in RPG's is that of the need for unity in order to succeed.

In Heartlandtown there was a shop called the Deuce's Clothing Store, where you

got your red Loyalist uniform. Go here now and you will find that the “deuce” is no longer in charge. It seems he was one of the unfortunate ones to not make it out of Heartlandtown alive. His brother, a Diamond, now runs the shop. He tells you he doesn’t have anything your size except a black version of your suit. He would normally refrain from selling such a fine garment to a foreigner (notice, he doesn’t address you as a Club), but for a certain price, he’d let you have it. What’s the price? All hundred of your Alligons and your red suit in exchange for the black one. Does this sound like a rip off? Well, actually, it’s not. Take the deal, and you will be able to perform charged combo attacks. How does this work? In a dungeon or miniature dungeon, Lewis can charge up his attack meter by performing his regular combo moves in fights. After he has charged his meter enough, it will flash green and Lewis’s next combo will be an upgraded version of itself, applying twice the damage it would have in the first place. This works for Lewis’s hand and foot movements, but also for his weapons. For example, where you used to be able to perform moves like the double aerial twister kick and the circular trip (bow staff), you can now do the triple aerial twister kick and the charged helicopter attack.

\*This is a weaponry advancement.

\*One element of the plot that you should never forget to implement into your RPG is suspense. Let your character take a break every now and then, but make sure that break is short-lived every time. Just when things look “as safe as a haven,” it is your job to put an end to the peace.

Just as you are walking through Safe Haven Village, you find a mysterious dirt street that is marked “No Thru Street” and seems to lead to absolutely nowhere. Go down that street and you will see how wrong that first impression really is. When you reach the end of the road, the world turns black around you as a giant claw comes up from the earth and pulls you in its palm down into the ground.

Once underground, you see that you are in an ancient abandoned mine shaft, the Tumbledown Diamond Mine, from which Diamondland gets its name. If you want to get out of there, of course, you can. Simply follow the sign that reads EXIT. If you’re fully equipped, though, you probably want to stay and check things out. The second letter from Ky is posted on the wall just past the entrance. It reads:

Lewis,

What you see in this mine was once shimmering with the glitter of thousands upon thousands of diamonds. There were so

many, in fact, that if all of them had been mined, the gems would be so common in these lands that they would be worth less than any other ordinary rock. It was because of this fact that King Aetre decided to temporarily end mining in the shafts about a decade ago. But now, all of the diamonds are gone, and nobody knows why. I'm sorry I can't tell you much about what else is in this underground lair, but I do know that somewhere around here is the entrance to the Chalcedon Caverns, wherein you will find the next Jack, the Flying Amethyst. I also know from King Aetre that you cannot get into the Caverns unless a secret lever has been pulled. Even the king does not know exactly where the lever is, but he tells me it is hidden west of Club Town. You probably can't get there, so I'm going to try and pull the lever. You just worry about getting into the caverns. And while you're in the mine, Lewis, be careful and look out behind you!

Ky

Before you know what is happening, a shadow rises up behind you and blocks out the light. When you turn around, all you see are two red, very big, very angry eyes looking at you. Whatever the thing is, it hisses at you and attacks. Fend it off and you will find that the animal shrinks when hit. Eventually, it backs off and shrinks until it is only the size of an ant and scurries away. When it does, a piece of paper falls from behind Ky's posted letter: a map of the Tumbledown Diamond Mine. As you walk through the cavern, you see several boxes filled with mining supplies. The only two you can use are cherry bombs and matches. Use the matches to light the lanterns in the mine. Even after ten years, most of the lights still work, as they should. The cherry bombs are useful wherever a path is blocked by wood or rubble. But you cannot get through some of the obstacles without the Lightning Bomb.

\*Are you getting the feeling that the Tumbledown Diamond Mine is a miniature dungeon? If you saw that one coming, give yourself a pat on the back. By now you should be able to identify these things when they happen. And if you can't yet, don't worry. It just takes time, that's all.

You walk through the passages of Tumbledown, every now and then finding Jack's Feathers, fighting cockroaches that suddenly grow into giant enemies when they see you, and fending off the rocks that fall from the ceiling in some of the more decrepit parts of the mine.

## **Complication**

Eventually you reach the end of the paths in Tumbledown, and you see the Chalcedon Caverns in front of you. You just can't enter, because there is a vault door covering it. The sign in front of the door reads "Opens only when lever is pulled." That must be the same lever that Ky mentioned in her letter. She said she'd try and open it, but it doesn't look like that's been done yet. There is another sign next to the door, though...

\*Before I tell you exactly what that sign reads I want to explain to you the difference between Advancement and Complication. Advancement happens whenever you build upon the characters, weaponry, or plot of the game. This means that you are merely adding to what you had or what you knew earlier. Complication can only happen to the plot. It occurs whenever you throw a "twist" into the picture.

An example of a plot advancement would be when the wolf goes from the house of straw to the house of sticks to speak to the next little pig. A twist would happen if the second pig had been a member of the NRA and blown away the wolf with an AK-47. What makes that last example a complication instead of an advancement? Simple: the gun changes the potential length of the story. Now the fairy tale ends much sooner than it would have, since the wolf died at the second house, not the third. A complication changes the length of the story, but it can make the plot longer just as much as it can shorten it.

In my game, a plot advancement would have been for Lewis to march right on into the Chalcedon Caverns and take on his next dungeon in search of the Flying Amethyst. A complication occurs when he cannot open the door immediately. This complication is minor compared to the solution process it takes to open the vault, which if you remember back to the rhymed legend is referred to as the "safest of vaults." Will it be easy to crack? No. But you are hinted at the first step to accessing the lever when you look to the left of the door and see the sign, in faded but still visible letters... SWITCH...

Next time, *Part 7: Heroes and Legends*.

## **Part Seven**

### **Heroes and Legends**

"Heroes get remembered, but legends never die." *George Herman "Babe" Ruth*

SWITCH...

*The scene is Diamond Castle in the past. King Aetre sits on his throne as he listens to Ky speak in front of him. Aetre's faithful jester, Kamikaze, stands next to the throne. Cinema:*

Aetre: Yes, I can see you're from the future, because you have a medal with my seal on it, but I've never seen you before. And I know that King Hector had a large variety of long-range weapons, but I don't think that Reginald Dastard would have any knowledge of that. The weapons were top secret.

Ky: Then how do you know about them?

Aetre: Spies. Now, as I was saying, if Dastard had gotten these weapons, as you say he has, he would have used them by now. He would have either attacked me directly, or tested the weapons on some undefended little town somewhere.

Ky: Agh! That's exactly what he's going to do!

Aetre: Are you yelling at me?

Ky: Your Majesty, you have to believe me! Dastard is going to lay Club Town to ruins! Trust me! And now I'm trying to stop it from happening, or evacuate the town, or something... anything. It's just that now I have to do it alone, because the boy that was helping me out is stuck in the future, you see, his name is Lewis Dominick—

Aetre: (suddenly stirred): Hold it there! Did you say Dominick?

Ky: Huh? Um, yes Sire.

Kamikaze: Don't pay attention to this girl, Your Majesty. She's obviously lying. Why, the Dominick line in Spadeland died out years ago.

Aetre: Alexandra, if that's your name, where does this Lewis come from?

Ky: He's from Club Town.

Kamikaze: See, Sire? Even by her account the Dominick does not come from the Mountain.

Aetre: That's exactly why I'm starting to believe the girl, Kamikaze. There aren't any more living Dominicks in Spadeland, so it would make sense that the only survivor would have moved elsewhere. If she had answered "Spade Mountain," I would have known she was lying.

Kamikaze: But, Your Highness, there is no survivor. There never was a survivor. Do you not remember, Sire? The last Dominick in Spadeland died without a living heir, just like the king in Heartland.

Aetre: Good Kamikaze, you forget the legend that the Four Heirless Kings each had rightful successors all along? You forget that it was just such a discovery that helped me to my throne today.

Kamikaze: Yes, but just because you were discovered to be the descendent of the great Diamondland Kings does not mean the legend holds true!

Ky: Pardon my asking, but what legend are you talking about?

Aetre: It is no concern of yours. You tell me that Dastard will strike Club Town. I will therefore authorize a voluntary evacuation of the village. That means I will come with you to warn the citizens, and all that want to leave can go to Safe Haven Village. I will have my soldiers here provide for the transportation. But any people in Club Town that don't want to go don't have to. Understand?

Ky: Yes, Your Majesty. Thank you.

Kamikaze: This is madness! Pure Madness!

Aetre: What? How dare you call the king's decision madness! I don't like your attitude lately, Kamikaze. You've been warned before. Pack your things and leave this castle at once!

Kamikaze: But Sire, there's no way you can possibly run this country without me here as your advisor. You cannot make important decisions without me!



Aetre: It looks like I just did. Now, get! Alexandra, you go to Club Town. You claim to have gotten two of the four Jacks? Then the third is in the Diamondland Dunes, the sandy area to the East. The only way to get there without scaling the East Ridge is through the underground Chalcedon Caverns. To get to those, you must open a vault hidden west of Club Town. I really don't know exactly where it is, though. Don't get me wrong, I think it would be a good idea to evacuate Club Town, but if you really want to help in the fight against Dastard, we will need those Jacks. Good luck finding your switch. Say, Alexandra, are you absolutely sure that this Lewis Dominick comes from Club Town?

Ky: Yes, Your Majesty.

Aetre: And where do you come from?

Ky: Safe Haven Village.

Aetre: I wonder... are you sure you're the daughter of a messenger.

Ky: Yes, Sire.

Aetre: Nevermind, then. Go to Club Town and find your switch.

A discouraged jester leaves as the cinema comes to a close.

Two things just happened here that changed the entire flow of the game. First, before this scene, Lewis was the hero of the story. Now he is part of a legend! Ky also enjoys a promotion, though. Before this scene she was Lewis's sidekick. Now she is a heroine. What's the difference? Now she is fighting completely on her own. Like Lewis, she has had preparation for battle, and even fought some enemies before. She is her own identity now. Keep in mind, though, that as soon as the game switches to Lewis again, she is just a sidekick helping the hero with messages and hints. Besides, Ky's playing time is far less than Lewis's. His battles are harder, he has more extracurricular activities, and Lewis is the only one from here on out to face the real dungeons of the game.

\*When upgrading a role like this, you give an extra boost to the morale of the hero / heroine. It is as if because he is chosen, more is on the line; if he fails to do

his job, there is nobody who can replace him. This is an increased sense of urgency, and it is almost always a plus in an RPG.

You (Alexandra Chi) go out of the castle. Because you cannot go through Obliteration Field (you don't have the spell, remember?) you go back through the Northern Woodlands.

Now you get to meet the good citizens of Club Town while it is still a quiet village of cabin houses, wooden street signs, and shade trees in every yard. There are three main streets: East Leaf Road, North Leaf Road, and West Leaf Road. The North Leaf Road extends to the south and turns into the North Road. The East Leaf of town is the commercial side of town. For example, you will find the local grocer, the oddities shop, the furniture store, and the Deuce Tailors North. Try and guess what wonders you can find in the Deuce Tailors North shop.

That's right, you get a uniform improvement. Ky trades her white suit and fifty Alligons in for a red one. This is Ky's only uniform improvement in the entire game, and it really helps if you get it. Now you can do all of the combo moves and (if you got the black uniform as Lewis) charged moves for your one weapon, the sword.

The North Leaf of town is the residential sector. Go here to find houses of residents and talk to people. Every person you talk to you warn to evacuate, so the more people you warn, the better. It is very easy to warn them all in one fell swoop if you go here and just start talking with people. The only two that don't heed your warning are the mother-in-law of the couple in the Heartbreak Hotel and the aunt and guardian of Lewis Dominick. Strangely enough, you cannot speak to Lewis himself because he is locked in his room 24/7 playing his guitar so loudly the house shakes.

The West Leaf is the sector where you will find the town library. Go here for all your information on local legends, fighting techniques, and anything that might help you. As you read the books, you find that there used to be a castle in Club Town on the exact spot of the library. When you search around the shelves of books, one shelf seems for some reason to be out of place. Remove it by pulling it back slightly, and you will find a door. That door leads to a miniature dungeon: the Cloverleaf Fortress Remains.

The Fortress is a standard miniature dungeon. It is the basement of the library, but unlike the underground diamond mines Lewis must face, this place is more like a sewer. The old castle walls are covered with rot and mildew, and you won't get anywhere without having bought a flood lantern at the oddities shop. Much of

the fighting in this place is done with your lantern in Ky's left hand, your sword in her right.

Villains in the dungeon are quick to spot you with your lantern, so you can attract lots of attention you don't necessarily want. Oh well, you knew this job was dangerous when you took it, right? The bad guys here look like mutant slugs with army helmets. They all claim to be guarding the fortress. Kill them all, get through the corridors, and you will reach the end, where you will find a sign that reads, "Here stands the switch that opens the gate to the Dunes. Guardians of the switch, keep watch until my line reawakens." After the inscription is a seal with the markings of a crown and a clover and the name King Marcus Dastard IV Last King of Clubland. You pull the lever and the vault opens. Then the lever shifts to the side. Behind its original location there is now another thing of interest: SWITCH...

\*That's enough storytelling for now. In our last chapter, you will recall I mentioned exactly how the game is advanced from stage to stage. In this chapter, I have embellished those ideas. The important lessons to be learned here are as follows:

1. When developing character, you are really developing the plot at the same time. You are revealing to the gamer facts about the hero and villain that you did not know before. Some of these developments you should let the gamer guess at beforehand, but some of them must be surprises.

2. To develop the weaponry in the most effective manner, not only should you make the weapons gradually become more advanced and more powerful throughout the game, but you should also make sure that the newer, more powerful weapons can help the hero do more things than he could before in places he has already visited. This is why a person playing a good RPG has to explore the world and revisit old friends and places often.

3. When you go to develop the plot, go about it as if you are in the gamer's shoes. Try and predict what places a person would likely go to first by instinct, what directions they might go in, or whatever tangents they might stray off on. If you can do this effectively, you can protect your game from potential defects. By this I mean you can control what techniques your gamer might try to get past an obstacle, and then you can let only one of those possible techniques actually work.

4. In all RPG's there is a hierarchy of standard roles. From most benevolent to most evil, they are: hero / heroine (Lewis), sidekick (Ky), knowledgeable sources (King Aetre), loyalists (guards, good soldiers), commoners (citizens), enemies

(army slugs), bosses (Giant Swarm, Kamikaze Jester), villain (Dastard). You should include all of these roles into your game in one way or another. And yes, one person can fill two roles. And as I just pointed out, a person can improve their role by becoming a character of destiny, a term that I use loosely, but which basically means that the character is made more influential to the plot and gameplay.

In the next chapter, *Part 8: The Compound Dungeon*.

## **Part Eight**

### **Advanced Dungeon Designs**

This chapter completely deals with the creation and design of the many types of dungeons, temples, lairs, levels, castles, and so on. Designing a good dungeon is essential to an RPG, because these dark, mysterious places present the hardest challenges, the best villains and the greatest rewards for their defeat, and everything your game will be remembered for. Do you really think gamers who have just finished the game are going to talk about how great the story line was? Well, maybe some of them will, and a good story line is essential in its own right, but when people talk about how great an RPG was, the first thing they mention is the dungeon, the bosses, and the enemies. I said earlier that half of the gameplay should be done exploring. This means that the other half is completely done in dungeons and miniature dungeons. Of course, there are infinitely many possibilities for the design of these dungeon levels. And as always, I encourage you to be creative. But there are some notable designs that for some reason seem to be repeated over and over in RPG's. Sometimes, a design may be used to such an extent that all of the dungeons in the entire game follow the same pattern. This works well if you have a theme in mind for your dungeons, which most games do. These setups apply for both 2D and 3D games. Here are all the ones I can think of at the moment. Wherever I have incorporated a design into my game, I will make note of it.

1. Temple Dungeon: These places are mysterious lairs where a spirit or mythical being either lives or used to live. Often in a temple environment the hero is in search of this magical spirit, specifically in search of its help on the hero's quest. The "spirit" is usually known by some different name. I have heard it referred to as "sage," "ghost," "ancient god," "guardian," and "wind fish," to name a few. The boss is then an evil spirit that somehow has trapped the good spirit. The hero has to beat the boss to "free," "awaken," or "release" the good spirit. You can play with names here as much as you want; the concept is still the same. This is the most common dungeon setup for RPG's. In hopes of being a little more creative than to

follow the same pattern throughout my entire game, I have only used it once, in the first dungeon, the Clubland Temple.

2. Castle Dungeon: These work along much the same concept as a Temple Dungeon, with two notable exceptions. First, the boss at the end is not an evil spirit, but rather just a big, evil creature that is stopping you from proceeding in your game. And second, there is no good spirit at the end of the dungeon, but instead a tangible object, something the hero is on a quest for. Luckily for me, my hero is on a quest for objects called Jacks, an invention of mine that qualifies both as a good spirit and as a tangible object. Hence, I can use both of these types of dungeons. And I have in the Heartland Castle. One final difference between castles and temples is that castles are usually above ground, whereas temples can be in caves, underwater, in the clouds, anywhere. This is part of the reason why temples are the most popular of designs: they allow the most flexibility.

3. Miniature Dungeon: I believe I've described this enough already. See part four of this guide for reference on miniature dungeons.

4. Enemy Hideout Dungeon: The hero enters this dungeon so that he can defeat an enemy. This is often saved for the last dungeon in the game, as it is in mine. In the enemy hideout dungeon some games prefer to have a sort of review level. This means all or most of the challenges are ones the hero has already faced. The dungeon therefore is a test of the gamer's memory more than anything else. I personally think this makes the game too easy, so I plan for big surprises in my last dungeon... more about that later.

5. Compound Dungeon: Ah, now *here's* a really complicated dungeon for all of you creators out there that really want to go for the gold. Compound dungeons are extremely hard to beat, because so many things can be hidden in them. A compound dungeon by its simplest definition is a dungeon that the hero must enter, leave, and reenter in order to beat. It is a dungeon so large that it must either be split into two parts, entered at two different times, or as with the latest one I've seen, turned up side down in order to make room for the whole thing. Other than this, it commonly follows the temple dungeon or castle dungeon setup.

## **The Compound Dungeon**

When I first set out to create my third dungeon, the Diamondland Halls, I wanted to create a dungeon with truly stunning special effects and underground suspense. I've already had two miniature dungeons lead up to this event. Remember when I mentioned that the difficulty level jumps from dungeon to

dungeon? First, I had the level 1 Clubland Temple. Then I had the level 3 Hector's Castle. Then there was the level 5 Heartland Castle, the level 7 Tumbledown Mines, and the level 8 Cloverleaf Fortress Remains. Now I will get to the level 10 (that's the hardest possible level) dungeon.

You, Lewis, go through the opened vault door and into a chamber. You have entered the Chalcedon Caverns (cue the mysterious music). The room is a small chamber, conveniently already lit for you. Defeat two guardian Army Slugs preventing you from getting into the next room, then go forward. Strangely enough, you won't find a huge central room. There is only another dimly lit hallway with six doors, one of which you just entered through.

Now you navigate the game by solving puzzles and defeating villains. All of these will be described in full in my strategy guide later. But just so you get an idea of what puzzles a level 10 dungeon might have, here are some examples.

#### Example of an enemy: Chalcedon

The Chalcedon resembles a large black butterfly. It is amazingly agile and swift in its flight. The Chalcedon attacks by sneaking from the shadows, and then closing its wings around you to create a cocoon, where it proceeds to drain you of your energy. You can either get at this creature before it hits you (two hits to destroy), or you can let loose a cherry bomb while in the cocoon. You will take damage doing this, but much less than you possibly could have. These Chalcedon characters are found throughout the Chalcedon Caverns part of the dungeon. An improved white version of the butterfly comes later in the dungeon.

#### Example of a puzzle: the inescapable doors

Once you walk into this room, the door slams and locks shut behind you. In front of you are four doors, all of which you can open. One of them, however, has nothing but brick behind it. If you don't open that one, you will see the brick when you pass through the door and look back. The next set of four doors has three that are reinforced with brick. Once you pass through the one safe door, you inadvertently step on a switch that sets off gunpowder back where you started off. Lewis gulps as he sees where this is going. The gunpowder sets off a chain reaction whereby the ceiling is now falling in a wave-like pattern headed straight toward you. It's off to the races! In all you must pass through ten sets of doors safely. Whenever you run into brick, you must try another door. The placement of the safe doors and the not so is completely random and changes every time you attempt the feat, should you fail on your first try. But there is always at least one safe door to pass through, so there's always hope. Get crushed, and you lose

considerable energy and must try it over again.

At the end of this last puzzle, behind the last door, you step hurriedly forward into a dark room. You realize too late that the room is missing something very important to you: the floor. You fall down the pit for a few seconds, but land in water below. Get out and you will find that this room, unlike the entire dungeon up to this point, is brightly lit, with white walls and golden ornaments. There are two doors out of this room. One is locked, and the other has a sign posted on it: "Here you shall find the power." Go through and you find yourself on an elevator headed up. It leads you to a chamber where you will find the Lightning Bomb and some matches to accompany it. The elevator goes back down where it came from, so you cannot go back that way. Before you jump from this chamber to the platform below, you throw the switch on the wall that reads "POWER." Now you jump and land outside the vault door where you entered.

At this time, you might want to use those lightning bombs to gain access to the extracurricular sites in the Tumbledown Mines, specifically to get more Jack's Feathers. At some point, though, you must reenter the vault. The door is closed, but it is not locked, so walk on in. But when you enter... wait a minute! This isn't the same dungeon, is it? With the Power switch on, the place is now bright beyond belief. The floor is now white marble, not dirt, and there are twice as many lights as before. Welcome to the Diamondland Halls.

Red carpeting leads the way as you pass into the second room. All of the doors you went through before are now blocked off and locked, but there is an elevator waiting for you. Go down with the elevator and you find yourself in the same room as before. Now, the door that was locked before is open for you. Come inside and you will find the real central room of the dungeon. The Halls are filled with enemies, puzzles, and magic carpets that take you on a full tour of the seven levels of the dungeon. Actually, the carpets only go up to level six. To get to the seventh level, you must learn the secret of Hovering, a jumping technique that uses attack power, but can be done at any time in the dungeon, not just in battles. Learn to hover and you will barely be able to get past the gap between the sixth and seventh floors and land safely in front of the boss's chamber.

This is one boss battle I will fully chronicle as an example of an extremely hard boss. Remember the Giant Swarm, and how it conveniently moved into a target so you could shoot it with your crossbow? Well, those days are gone. Walk into the room and a voice from nowhere says, "I don't like this kind of light. POWER OFF!" And the room is black, except for the giant red eyes, even larger this time, glaring at you.

It is Pantomorph, the creature who attacked you earlier in the Mines. Now he is on his home turf, and he has huge advantages here. You might strike at where you think there is a body, but there isn't any. The creature is completely nonexistent except for its eyes. Hit these with a crossbow shot or throwing star to inflict damage. While aiming at one, be sure not to be blindsided by the other eye, which hurdles at you like a buzz saw and takes energy off you in sweeping blows. Hit each eye three times and the "power" turns back on. The room is light again. The eyes come together, and a black creature appears behind them. He changes into several forms, like a bat, a snake, three snakes, the huge claw that pulled you into the mines in the first place, a mace (spiky ball on chain), and in all of these forms, only his eyes are vulnerable. Once in a while only his eyes will show as the rest of Pantomorph disappears. The eyes each then become a Chalcedon that comes to attack you. No matter what the attack, no matter what your defense, five solid hits to each eye and Pantomorph is blinded. Then strike his blind and flailing body without being hit by his many arms going in random directions. Three hits and you win the battle.

### **The Heavyweight-Featherweight**

When you do, go through the door provided you. On exiting, you go up a ladder to the top of a mountain. Perched at the top is an eagle with a purple streak down his wings: the Flying Amethyst. It is not in a cage, though, so when it sees you the first thing it does is fly away. A sign next to the perch hints at what you should do next.

Hover until you reach the giant bird and climb on top for a ride. You'll find that the Amethyst is very willing to let you come along. In the end, the feathered friend takes you to Club Town, where this all began. You dismount at your house's remains to see the third letter from Ky waiting for you, still in tact after the bombing because it was attached to the strongest stone of your building.

Lewis,

I trust you found out what I just learned at the public library: the third Jack is a little big to carry with you. Well, don't worry. The Jack only goes where he is called. Use the Remembrance Spell to call on him whenever you need a hand... or a ride. He will always take you to this spot. How do I know this? Let's just say I've really been studying these birds. Did you know that all four of the Jacks are endangered species? Oh well, I thought I might tell you if you haven't figured it out (and you probably have) that the last Jack is in Spadeland somewhere. Be careful, Lewis! That land is Dastard's stronghold... or at least it is in your time. Good luck, Dominick. Oh, and one more thing. When we meet again, we have to talk about some local legends I've been hearing. Nevermind that for now. Go to



Spadeland, Dominick! Time is of the essence.

Ky

Next time, *Part 9: Ace*

## **Part Nine**

### **The Beginning of the End**

This is probably the most delicate part of any game. Naturally, after you have designed enough dungeons and levels for your game, you too will be looking for the perfect grand finale. CAUTION! You cannot have a good grand finale if you don't lead up to it properly. It's just impossible. And in order to make way for the perfect ending now, you must discard some of the rules we set earlier.

For example, where earlier it was a good idea to expand access to all lands of the created world gradually, now you must reveal all possible paths, roads, and lands. You must keep in mind that this time around, you are expanding for the last time.

Earlier it was also a good idea to start subquests and miniquests. Now you must be ending them. On the same lines, it may have been a good thing earlier in the game to require movement from one place to the next on special missions (e.g. races across the land to deliver something before it expires). Once the hero enters the final land, in my case Spade Mountain, he must never be required to turn back. As soon as Dominick enters the Mountain area, he will never have to go to Club Town or anywhere else in order to win the game. He can turn back if he wants to, or if he has an extracurricular activity he wants to do, but technically, he can stay on the Mountain for the rest of the game.

### **Ace**

A good way to think of this concept is as if the final land is a perpendicular universe. In this universe there are people who have major problems and don't care much for what is going on elsewhere in the world. The one difference is that this time around the concerns of the people are actually your concerns, too. You are about to face the final boss, the evil force you set out to vanquish long ago, and nobody wants him vanquished more than the people of this final land, which I will call "land X" unless I am referring to Spade Mountain specifically.

An alternative used in many games is to have the residents of land X be *loyal* to the evil overlord. This was most commonly found in the 2D games of Sega and SNES, but you can still find it in some of the recent Final Fantasy games. In this scenario, the hero must somehow make his way through the “fortress” and access the inner walls of the castle. The hero is then making his way from the outside to a point in the middle (“point of no return” concept). Some games go as far as to make a maze out of the outer fortress part of the land and force the gamer to find his way through.

I’ll go with the first idea because it fits into my game so well. You’ll probably see why after I explain the plot of the game further.

Now you leave Club Town and go to the West Road past Obliteration field. Surprisingly enough, the road forks in two directions. You cannot get through without using a lightning bomb to clear away the rubble blocking the low road. And as to the high road, you cannot get through the ominous gates without something to put in the large keyhole in the middle. Well you can get to the low road anyway, and once you do, you enter Spade Mountain Metropolis, a large town of burnt out skyscrapers and burning ash heaps. It looks like this place has already seen the worst of the action. Tour the city a little and you will find that some of the citizens here survived the “incident,” although you don’t know exactly what that is yet.

These people have replaced their bombed-out buildings with temporary underground shelters they are still in the process of digging. They are the Spades, and while they look at you with some suspicion as an outsider, they are willing to be on good terms with you. After all, you are wearing the clothing style of a true Spadeland citizen, so you’re probably all right.

From these people you learn that their current ruler, King Reginald, is a fraud and a tyrant. He came into Spadeland with his army (made up mostly of lost souls he has called from the past) and made quick the hostile takeover of the Mountain. In his attack he captured and is holding hostage his own twin brother, Governor Jerry Carmichael.

Governor Carmichael rejected the family name apparently because it had a bad reputation for tyrant kings up north. Hmm... pieces of the puzzle are coming together now. On top of this is the fact that the governor recently escaped from his prison and is now about to give a speech to the Spades at the Underground Festival Hall.

You arrive at the hall just as the speech is starting. Governor Carmichael does not look like Dastard all that much, so he mustn't be an identical twin. He is somewhat short, brown-haired, and still has the broken remains of shackles hanging from his wrist, and yet he is commanding in his speech.

Carmichael: Friends! My brother will soon find out I have escaped, so I will speak quickly. The entirety of our world is at war. King Aetre of Diamondland has stopped Dastard for now, but we cannot be certain how the stalemate will end, or how long it will last. The good King will try to attack soon, so we must be ready to join him. People, this is no time for cowardice. This is no time for fear. Though we face the souls of ages past we must fight, and we must fight now!

Man in Crowd: But how can we win when we face the dead? Who can fight them? Certainly, we stand no chance!

Carmichael: But we must try. These underground shelters are no safety to us now. All one has to do is cover all entryways and we are all buried alive.

Voice from the Doorway: Or we could just come in and slaughter you while you're trapped.

And with that, five Lost Souls enter, armed with bow staffs like your own. You are the only person in the festival hall with weaponry to face them, so face them you must. When you win, the last enemy sets off a bomb device that causes the ceiling to fall on the area.

Carmichael: Quick! Everybody follow me!

The governor leads you and the people through a series of tunnels that eventually helps you escape. Make it outside and the governor will applaud your bravery and ask your name. On hearing "Dominick," the crowd stirs and the governor kneels.

Carmichael: Why, only that name, by the legend, can lead the Spades to victory. I surely would have fallen short of defeating my brother, but you... you faced five Lost Souls and did not even flinch!

Lewis: What is this? I only faced those things because they attacked me. Why are you kneeling to me?

Carmichael: Could it be that you don't even know who you are? Lewis Dominick, you are the rightful heir to the throne of Spadeland!

\*Notice how this comes as no shock to the gamer, but it's huge news to Lewis. This effect is intended because it in a way rewards the gamer for paying attention. Any time the player correctly predicts what is going to happen, so long as it does not happen too often, the gamer is rewarded with the confirmation of his / her suspicions.

Lewis: You mean I'm supposed to be a king?

Carmichael: A king? Lewis, this land, like my own Clubland, is tired of the oppression kings have laid upon it. The people do not call for a new oppressor. They call upon the Ace to defeat the tyrant King. Look around you.

Lewis looks around as the people join the general in kneeling.

Carmichael: You are young, Lewis Dominick, but you have proven your valor and saved the lives of us all. We cannot ask you to do more than you have already done, but the least I can do is offer you the Key to the City. If you accept our cry for help, the key will come in useful.

Carmichael gives you a huge key. Lewis takes a long look at it. Carmichael tells him that the key can be shrunk to fit in a pocket by pressing the red button on the side. Do this and you will have a giant key with you for the rest of your adventure. Gee, what a help. Of course, if you remember earlier, there's a good place where a giant key could probably be handy by the upper path of the West Road. Before you go there, explore Spade Mountain Metropolis and see if you can get some more extracurricular help. You'll meet some intriguing faces in this town, like Giovanni, the long-lost mob boss Alfredo is waiting for in the Heartbreak Hotel, among others.

At long length you take the high road and find yourself climbing Spade Mountain. You must defeat several Lost Souls along the way, some of whom seem to come out of nowhere, so remain on your guard. At the top is a gate that leads into the top of the mountain. Before you can enter, though, four somewhat large guards ambush you. Defeat them and you will hear a more-than-a-little-intimidating voice speak to you. You look up at hearing it to see none other than King Reginald Dastard standing atop the mountain looking down on you.

Dastard: Ah, and who is this? And why are you so hasty to kill my fine guards?

Lewis: I am Lewis Dominick, and I am sent by King Aetre to demand your surrender.

Dastard: Surrender? Ha! I have the king cornered in his wrecked Castle. And I doubt Aetre sent you in the first place. Even the dim-witted Diamond King could not be so stupid as to send a young boy to my mountain alone.

\*A good rule of thumb is that whenever a character insults the author of this story, he's gonna die before the whole thing is over. Count on it.

Dastard: No... I believe my brother sent you. Carmichael, you fool! And to deliver the Dominick into my hands so nicely! (Cruel laugh) And, Mr. Dominick, I have also met your little girlfriend, the one you call "Alexandra." Don't worry, she's fine. You won't find her here, either. You could say I made sure of it she went to a better place. (Chuckle)

Lewis stares in amazement as Dastard drops a badly bent ninja sword in front of you.

Dastard: But a child like yourself is not even worthy of facing an opponent such as I. Then again, you fought well against my guards. I will therefore offer you the chance to come through my castle and prove yourself. < The gate opens. > I will be waiting for you, Lewis.

Dastard opens a hole in the top of the mountain and drops through it, once again laughing in that sinister way he is known for. Here's where I have set a little trap for the gamer. If he goes through the gate, conveniently unlocked for him, he heads to certain death in the Mountain Chamber. If he is smart, though, he will examine the sword laid before him. Hidden under the grip padding of the handle is a message, Ky's last note to Lewis.

\*Remember: earlier I pointed out what a flaw it is for the same person to be captured by the enemy twice. Believe me, that is exactly what I am avoiding here by Ky's letter. You see, something has happened to Ky. Either she is dead (but we all know that's impossible, don't we?) or she's captured (but that's impossible too, right?) or maybe... she's got a plan and the whole death thing is a hoax (yes, that

must be it). But I am too far into my game to start any new paradoxes or complicate the plot too much further, so if I'm gonna use this technique, I had better back it up with an explanation *now*. And I'll have to explain *everything*. This is the time for secrets to be revealed, not presented, to the gamer.

As the letter is read, the screen changes to cinema setup. Roll the movie!

Lewis,

The day I pulled the switch I was trapped in the ruins of the ancient castle in Club Town, under the Library. I was left there to die by a certain roaming jester with the key to the entryway. Fortunately for me, your town just got obliterated, and the library is crushed. To make a long story short, the entire castle held its place except the doorway, so I escaped in the morning. Then I saw all of Dastard's troops outside. I managed to stay unnoticed because their attention was on Dastard, who was talking to a young boy in the Northern Leaf of the township. Lewis, I must say, it took a lot of courage to sit there and listen to such an intimidating man while completely helpless as you were. I tried to evacuate all the citizens of the town (maybe your aunt did not tell you about the evacuation), and by now you've probably seen the survivors at my hometown, Safe Haven Village. Not everybody made it there, but I did the best I could. Anyway, when King Aetre's army arrived and you fled to the Woodlands, I was forced to flee by the North Road. I soon saw there was no escape, as Dastard's troops retook the entrance to the town, and I was trapped inside. I am currently writing this letter from the last tall tree standing in the town; the evil soldiers may know battle strategy, but in their armor, they still can't climb trees! I am using the sheets of paper Aetre gave me to post warnings about the bombing. I guess I can't use the papers for that now, so I am instead writing a series of notes I think will help you on your journey. If I am successful, then you have already seen all of them except this one. By the time I started writing this note, the good army had already pushed Dastard's troops away, so I guess it would be safe to come down from my perch now. But before I do, I must warn you of something: when you get to the top of Spade Mountain, don't go through the gate you see in front of you! It's a trap, Lewis! According to the books in the library, there should be a secret entrance to the mountain lair in the ground below you. Clear the dirt, Lewis, and find the trap door in front of the gate. It's the only way you'll ever reach Dastard alive! Now that I've written this letter, I will try to get it to Spade Mountain somehow. Don't worry about me, Lewis. I have a feeling we'll meet up again soon. Just keep your courage up, Lewis! Never lose the faith!

Ky

(still in cinema) Ky puts her letter under the grip of the sword and climbs down the tree. As she is walking, two men from behind attack her. They are both recognizable as two of the guards Lewis has just defeated. Ky fights, but her sword is knocked from her hands. She runs for safety into the Northern Woodland, the rest of her letters currently in her pocket. The guards cannot keep up with her while they have armor on, so they give up the chase.

Guard 1: (*pant, pant*) It's no use. We'll never catch her. King Reginald will be very disappointed.

Guard 2: (*pant, wheeze*) Don't worry, Bruno. I got the girl's sword. We can just tell his majesty we killed the girl and left her with the other bodies in Club Town. Surely the sword is proof enough we killed her, right?

Guard 1: What? How's a sword gonna prove anything? And how's the king gonna know that's her sword anyway? Any ninja from our side would use such a sword.

Guard 2: I dunno. Just put some blood on it from one of those corpses over there. Then we'll just say we couldn't bring the body back because it was too mutilated. Yeah, that's it. Go get some blood on the sword, Bruno.

Guard 1: Yes, Ben.

Bruno runs off. End cinema. Coming up, *Part 10: Heat*.

## **Part Ten**

### **Heat**

By now we've built up enough suspense to enter the final dungeon. I might recommend that you make your final dungeon unique in some way. Often a final level will be in a special location. I've seen it be placed in the sky, in a separate realm, on the moon; several times I've seen it in a huge castle (not very original) or atop a mountain or volcano. Last dungeons can be especially intimidating, mysterious, large, or difficult. And the more of these it is, the better.

In Part 8 I described the Enemy Hideout Dungeon, but only briefly. I also mentioned that in some games, the final dungeon will be in more of a Fortress

setup, where there are several outer barriers the hero must break down before going to the central point of no return. In my game, Lewis has already reached that point when he enters the dungeon.

You open the trap door into the dungeon like Ky told you to in her letter. When you do, you fall to the floor three stories below you. Luckily, you are in water, so you land safely, but there's no way to get back up and through the door. See? There's your point of no return. Welcome to the Spadeland Bastion. Should you get into trouble in this dungeon, you can call on the third Jack any time you are on one of the outside parts of the dungeon. If you're indoors, there's no way the Jack can save you.

My Fortress dungeon consists of three main chambers with several minor ones. You are in the first chamber now, the Bastion's top floor. This is the battle chamber. There is one door that leads out of the room, but it's locked. To unlock it, you must defeat the enemies in each of the sub-chambers. These enemies include Chalcedons, Lost Souls, Roachers, and other foes you met earlier. Also found here are some new enemies, like the Galleon, a saucer-shaped enemy that attacks your throat in buzz saw motion. There are also some Feathers hidden in some of the chambers, so be on the lookout for them. Beat these enemies and you move on outdoors.

From here, you travel on the side of the mountain down to the next door. Once in, there is again no turning back, because a stone rolls in front of the entrance after you come in. This room is a bit lighter, though it's not clear why that is; there doesn't seem to be any real light source anywhere. This is the chamber of riddles, the second chamber of the Bastion. Here, you have to solve several puzzles within a time limit to move from chamber to chamber safely to keep the roof from falling on your head. Fail, and you must try again from the beginning of the chamber with less defense power on your meter. Succeed, and you move to the final chamber.

\*Does it seem as if this dungeon is moving by a little quickly? Well, that's unfortunately how many game creators make their last dungeon. It's as if they just want to get the game over with. Shame, shame, shame. My last dungeon is going to be anything but short. You'll see.

The third chamber of the Bastion is a battlefield where you meet the sub-boss, General Reginald Dastard himself. The general's weapon of choice is a weapon you probably wish you had right about now: a sword that shoots charged electric beams from across the room at you. The trick to beating him was hinted at earlier in the game. First, you must get within close range of Dastard; he will not shoot



beams at you from back there, because a hit would cause a blast that could potentially damage him as well as you. And when he fights you only using his sword and not the beams, his attack power and skill are greatly decreased. Stay close, and ten hits will destroy him. So you've killed Dastard and ended the war in the land. All of the Lost Souls simply disappear after their leader is slain. Okay, so now what? You still don't know where Ky is, you certainly haven't prevented the devastation of the land before it happened, and you cannot repair the damage now that it is done. But you have killed the rightful heir of the evil Clubland Dastard Kings, and angered a particular Lost Soul waiting in the underworld. Dastard's last words are, "Forefather, I have failed you. Now I fear you shall never be free."

At this, the ground shakes furiously. A voice from below the earth responds, "Reginald... you shall be avenged. Lewis Dominick! You have killed my heir. I therefore challenge you to fight in *my* Bastion. Worthy opponent, my victory will signal the ruin of all your land. Not one person will survive when I take over the Island! And should you want to repair the damage done, you will have to go through me first. So accept the challenge, and prepare to die!"

All of a sudden, the mountain goes volcano and out of the top comes a steady stream of lava. The lava does not fall after going up, though. Instead it molds to form a mirror image / inverted mountain on top. Together, the two mountains form a sort of hourglass shape (kudos to the makers of Final Fantasy 6 for their island in the sky idea).

Before you can do anything, the fourth Jack, a condor named the Flying Onyx, grabs you in its mighty talons and carries you off. Out of Spade Mountain you go, up, up, and away until the Jack reaches the "peak," which is really the bottom, of the inverted mountain, where he drops you off in front of the entrance. Now during this flight, if you had all fifty Feathers, you could use that messenger spell to send the birds to the past. Once you have landed in front of the entrance, though, it's too late and the spell can no longer be activated, since the fourth Jack is no longer in your possession. Technically, neither is the third, but the Amethyst is loyal to you and will send itself voluntarily. The Onyx won't. You must catch it there and then, or no alternate ending for you.

Now you enter my chamber of tricks and treats, the final part of the final dungeon of the final land in the game. A complete summary of the dungeon will be included later. For now, I'll leave you with an example of one trial Lewis must face:

You walk through a hallway of kaleidoscopic mirrors in the maze to end all mazes.

Constantly, you walk into what seems to be a hall, but it's really a mirror (Skinner: Willie, get my Windex!). On top of this, you don't have the map yet. When you navigate the maze and kill the monsters that await you from every side seeing you in the reflections of the mirrors, you finally get the map. Then you have to go back through the maze to get out and up to the next level of the dungeon.

## **Final Boss Battle**

The final boss is the evil incarnation of the old Dastard King of Clubland, who possessed Reginald Dastard and used him to gain power in a violent takeover of Spade Mountain from beyond the grave, with assistance from living carriers like the jester whom to him he had forced to give eternal claim to their souls. Stephen King, eat your heart out.

The King is giant, red and black, carries an enormous broadsword, and wears heavy, red-hot steel for armor with an intimidating helmet to match. You cannot see his face. His attacks mostly involve the sword, but also molten dispatches of lava he will summon on you. To dodge the lava, you must hover and navigate your way through 3D tunnels of the waves surfing on pieces of rock from the ground. When the lava subsides, attack the King either by getting him long-range with your crossbow or short range with cherry bombs and the bow, which is really handy for tripping him so you can hit him several times while he is down. And if you use combo moves, it's all the better. Though it's easier said than done, fifteen hits takes down the king. Defeated, he stumbles to the ground where you can deliver a so-called final blow, only effective when you hit him in the head. With a clang, his helmet flies off, his body shrinks quite a bit, and he begins to resemble somebody you've met before...

## **Closing Cinema**

King Aetre looks up at you, defeated, his eyes a bright, furious red. I won't include all of the dialogue here, but in short, he says first how he is so shocked that a mere boy beat him in combat. Then he explains his evil plan all along. He already had one Jack under his control, so with it he carried out his design to catch all of the Jacks, thus becoming unstoppable, and at the same time kill the three other heirs to the thrones of Aetre's Island, thus giving him ultimate control of the universe. He succeeded in possessing Reginald Dastard, heir to the Clubland throne, and then did the same to Kamikaze, King Hector's long-lost son. His mistake was to let both of the heirs' younger siblings go, so Jerry Carmichael and Alexandra Chi (Heartland heiress) went free. Then when he tried to find the Spadeland heir, all he learned from the legends was that he would be somewhere in Club Town. So he had Dastard bomb the place out. It was a terrible misfortune

that the heir escaped unharmed and even learned his first clues on the way to spoiling Aetre's plans. The Diamond King, bleeding to death right now, swears revenge on Lewis. Opening the door for a sequel, his last words as molten lava from the ground engulfs him are "I'll be back, Lewis Dominick! I will have... my... revenge!"

With that, the king disappears into the mountain. The inverted mountain begins to shake as it crumbles to pieces. Now would be a good time to call on the Amethyst to take you to safety. This is your last action in the game as Lewis.

On Lewis's return to Club Town, he watches in the distance as the upper Spade Mountain collapses. Suddenly, blue skies return over the scenery. The rubble of the town is cleared and the damage undone. Everywhere, things are going back to normal. The screen shows pictures of Diamond Castle once again bright and peaceful, Heartlandtown back in order, the desert sun thawing the icy streets, and Safe Haven Village, where Diamonds are suddenly becoming peaceful with the foreigners. Last, but not least, it shows Spade Mountain Metropolis, a happy city of busy spades digging away at new and bigger construction sites for their town.

There stands Lewis, alone in his small town, looking at the repair being done to the land. All is quiet, when from the woodlands... could it be? He hears the footsteps running toward him. It's Ky! She runs up and hugs you. Kodak moment. She thanks you for stopping the evil Dastard and restoring peace to the land, then asks you if her notes helped.

Lewis: Yeah, the notes were great, Ky! Thank you.

Ky: I'm glad to hear it. Wow, I can't wait to see King Aetre and see what Medal of Honor he has in store for you!

Lewis: Uh, I doubt you'll be seeing a lot of King Aetre in the future. You see, he's, well, disposed at the moment.

Ky: Oh. (Pause) Say, Lewis.

Lewis: Yes?

Ky: I was wondering, so, like, what are you going to do now that you've saved the world from the forces of evil?

Lewis: I'm going to Disneyland!

*Cue cheerful music, show various camera shots of happy citizens of the Islands, and then end with clip of Lewis and Ky sitting next to each other in perfect silence. Cue on-screen text: THE END.*