

Fear is not an option tonight. Tonight you have a tea-and-crumpets date with your friend Jack Skellington.

Unfortunately for you, Jack's winter cottage lies deep within the dark woods of Halloween Town.

Before you, two roads diverge. Between them, a wooden sign is nailed to a rotted trunk. You can barely make out the faded charcoal letters: "To follow the Path of the Guru, take the left road. For the Path of the Sorcerers, go right."

Jack's cottage surely lies down one of these roads. Which path will you follow to meet Jack?

If you follow the Path of the Guru, turn to page 61.

If you follow the Path of the Sorcerers, turn to page 7.

2

In just a few short hours, you manage to explain the major themes of your new film. But before you can describe the near-certain sequel *Arbuckle*, Mystereo cuts you off.

“We get it. You’re a movies guy.” (He’s right.) “But I lost interest, like, minutes ago. Would you care to share something a little more . . . relatable?”

“Sure. Sorry.” You have always been an oversharer. “What do you want to know?”

“How about your favorite singer?” suggests Cantos.

“Or just tell us where you grew up,” Mystereo adds gruffly.

Cantos’ question is easy. Your favorite singer is the guy who does lead vocals on “I Will Wait.”

As for where you grew up, you’re not sure they’ll know the town. You grew up near the Tufts campus. (You didn’t meet Jack until post-college.)

*If you tell them about the “I Will Wait” musician, turn to page 35.
If you tell them about the town near Tufts, turn to page 23.*

Not a second later, you've unsheathed your rapier and poniard.

One, two! One, two! And through and through! With a snicker-snack, you pin both your foes to a tree. These two-bit spellslingers are no match for an old buccaneer like you!

Mystereo puts up his hands in surrender. "Stop, stop! We yield!"

Their invocation of the Dueling Code is good enough for you. Cautiously, you lower your blades.

After catching their breath, the taller of the two sorcerers asks, "So you're a privateer, or something?"

"I used to be," you answer. "But I retired from that life."

"Retired? What do you do now?"

Frankly, this does not seem like the right occasion for small talk, but the question is harmless enough.

If you are a mandolin player, turn to page 22.

If you are a dabbler in the art of spellcraft, turn to page 53.

4

“Don’t worry. We can make it.” You hope that your false confidence will put your new friend at ease.

“If you say so,” he replies. “Let’s roll!”

You hear the Mini putter a little louder as the spectre somehow pushes his ethereal foot down on the gas pedal.

“Look, up ahead! Do you see that mansion? That’s where my sweetie lives.”

You look through the window, and catch a glimpse of the side-view mirror. “I see the mansion, but look behind us. What’s with that floating casket? And how is it moving toward us?”

Indeed, there is a huge, wooden casket, floating in the air and moving in your direction. And the lid is starting to rise!

“Oh, no! The curse of the creeping coffin!”

The ghost screams. Not knowing any better, you do, too. And it’s the last sound you ever make.

THE END

They asked for it. Normally, you prefer to play it modest. But they asked for it.

You pull out the diadem as Mystereo and Cantos watch in wide-eyed awe. Then you don an ostentatious mantle. Finally, you draw from your bag a glimmering scepter.

“Our liege! Our ruler! We had no idea.” The sorcerers drop to the ground and kiss your feet. “We will do your bidding! Please, forgive us, Your Highness.”

Now you have two magical minions to add to your constituency. It’s good to be the sovereign.

THE END

6

“I have a tune for you,” you offer. “Take a seat.”

Your fingers find C-E-G-C, and you start in on a Halloween Town classic.

You can give a mouse a cookie,

You may serve a troll sapphire;

You might nourish fiercest werewolves,

But please don't feed the vampire!

You sing another two verses. When you look back up at your audience, you see that they have both fallen asleep.

Smiling, you return your mandolin to your pack, and stride merrily on your way. Teatime, here you come!

THE END

The woods are dark, and the path is dusty. Just as you begin to wonder how this path got so dusty, you hear a snickering.

“Ha! Another lost traveler. What should we do with them, Cantos?”

You whip your head around. The path you came down has disappeared, as if by magic! And in its place stand two robe-clad, acne-scarred teenagers.

The two strangers begin to circle around you, eyeing you like a cat eyes a tasty-looking mouse.

“You tell me, Mystereo! Should I make them look like a pig?”

“You could, but I’m not sure it would make a difference!”

The two burst into awful, nasal laughter.

Obviously, these are not friendly folks. Their rudeness warrants a comeback. But you’ve always had trouble thinking on your feet . . .

If you insult the two like you’re Waldorf and that other Muppet, turn to page 10.

If you stumble over your words, turn to page 28.

8

Lightning whizzes past your ear, but you swiftly dodge out of the way.

Haa! Kyaa! Huh-hwaa! A well-placed roundhouse kick knocks Mystereo off-balance. He should have known better than to mess with a black belt.

Mystereo's fireball flies astray and hits Cantos in the gut.

"Waaaugh!" Cantos falls to the ground, scorched. "Help, help! Oh, it burns!"

Mystereo is on the ground, rubbing his head, while Cantos is freaking out about his singed stomach. Neither is an active threat.

You do have an aloe balm in your pack that could help.

If you apply aloe to Cantos' burn, turn to page 11.

If you are too furious to even think, turn to page 44.

Enthusiasm is more important than making sense when it comes to public speaking. You begin to excitedly babble whatever words come into your head.

“Because you’re plant food! We’re all plant food! We’ve all been summoned here, thanks to the deadly experiments of Dr. Eeek, to go swimming deep in the Jungle of Doom. Today, let us not be cruel. If you want to shop till you drop dead, then enjoy your spree; by no means should we become the knight in screaming armor!”

As you blather your bombastic speech, you see the snakes stare at you in baffled bemusement.

After a moment’s pause, one snake yells, “This serpent is screwy! Back to supptime!”

The snakes writhe away to find their prey. But when they do, the ants are nowhere to be found. Your distraction was enough to let the innocent ants get away. Today, you are a hero!

THE END

10

“Seems like an odd insult to come from such pimply teenagers as yourselves. At least I’m not covered in hog-warts! Dohohoho!” A brilliant riposte.

Your interlocutors are not amused. “What’s that? Hey Cantos, our new friend thinks they’re funny.” You see a small fireball materialize in his palm.

“Oh yeah? I hope the laugh was worth it.” The second sorcerer snarls as his hands begin to crackle with electricity.

It’s do-or-die time. You’ve got to fight back—and fast!

If you demonstrate that you know the art of fighting with an empty hand, turn to page 8.

If you demonstrate that you are a high-seas swashbuckler, turn to page 3.

One first-aid sesh later, and Cantos is looking almost battle-ready.

“Thank you,” says the sorcerer. “You are very kind.”

“But we still have bad blood,” Mystereo mutters. “I insist on a second round of competition! As is customary in these woods, we challenge you to a boat race!”

Well, that was unexpected. “A what?” you ask.

“A boat race! Per the Sorcerers’ Bylaws, you are obligated to accept our challenge. Unless you’re some kind of royalty, but get real. You’re not royalty, are you?”

Well? Are you?

If you compete in a boat race, turn to page 43.

If you reveal your crown and scepter, turn to page 5.

“Forgive me,” you say. “I would just have a really hard time finding common ground with you. Sometimes I get carried away and spend hours talking about my movie ideas—there’s just no room for overlap. Now, I really must be going to my friend Jack’s house for tea.”

“You’re saying you’re better than us?” snarls an increasingly enraged Cantos.

“No, not that at all! Quite the opposite, actually. It’s just that I should really go meet my friend Jack.”

Cantos’ brow furrows. “I don’t think so, Too-Good-For-Us McFancyPants.”

You gulp hard. “Uh . . . you don’t?”

Without dignifying that with a response, Cantos summons a huge bolt of lightning. You’re dead in your tracks!

THE END

“Gee, it’s just that folks like me don’t jive well with foresty spellcaster types. It wouldn’t work out.”

“Is that what you think, Wolverine?” asks Mystereo, clearly incensed. “You think we aren’t a good fit? Let’s see what kind of world you fit into!”

The spellcaster mutters an incantation.

Whoosh!

Disoriented, you blink a few times. The sorcerers are gone. Drat those jerks!

Instead, you’re surrounded by an array of comic book villains. Sabretooth, Cable, Secret Agent Grandma, Magneto, and MODOK are all eyeing you hungrily. Your life has become a little comic shop of horrors!

Hope you can run fast, Wolverine!

THE END

Once you settle into the melody, you find it much easier to walk through the darkness. You begin breathing easier as your nerves quiet down.

You hum to yourself until you reach a clearing with no apparent direction. Until now you have seen vegetation on both sides of the path, but now there are four different directions you could go.

But you've already decided to press forward. You are competent and mature and well-equipped to walk through the woods.

In fact, considering your college degree, you are particularly well-equipped to handle this situation!

If you majored in religious studies, turn to page 19.

If you majored in the study of spatial properties preserved under continuous deformations, turn to page 41.

One must have a little more respect than that. It's time for these suckers to learn a lesson.

"I'll show you what I can do," you hiss. You put down your mandolin and reach for your rapier's hilt.

BZZAP!

When you draw your weapon, you find that it wiggles like rubber. That, and the blade is lit up with LEDs.

"Hah!" Cantos is clutching his belly in laughter. "Look, Mystereo, it's the toy terror—batteries included!"

As you're fumbling around, Mystereo utters an incantation—and you're zapped away to another place altogether! This will make it tougher to get to Jack Skellington's cottage. You hope Jack will understand.

You realize that you've been transported to elsewhere in the forest. You hear a low growling. Approaching you are dozens of half-men, half-wolves, all hungry-eyed and drooling. You're about to endure the night of a thousand claws—a night in Werewolf Woods. And your only defense has been turned into a rubber lightsaber! For you, and for your tea date, this is

THE END (sorry, Jack!)

“Surely you’ve heard of *Wolverine*? I played the title character.”

“Oh! Ohmigod!” Cantos jumps up and down excitedly. “Wolverine is SO popular in Halloween Town. Every year you can find a few folks dressed up as you.”

Mystereo, suddenly bashful, asks: “Mr. Hugh, do you think we could be friends? You and Cantos and me?”

That doesn’t sound like such a good idea to you.

“That doesn’t sound like such a good idea to me,” you say.

“Why not?” asks Mystereo. “We’re already here. We may as well make friends.”

How can you express that you would not be a good friend to these forest-dwellers?

If the three of you are like round pegs and a square hole, turn to page 13.

If the three of you are like apples and oranges, turn to page 12.

Everyone knows that brev. is wit.

You took a public speaking class once. This is your time to shine.

All the snakes are looking at you.

A bead of sweat falls from your brow.

“Because killing . . . is murder.”

The snakes stare at you, awed. There is utter silence.

Then one snake starts thumping its tail on the ground. Another snake joins in. You're getting a round of applause from snakes!

After a short meet-and-greet session, the snakes slither on their way. Today, for a small society of ant-people, you were a hero.

THE END

By pouring the ant colony's wealth into its militia, you are able to grow your people's sphere of influence. Eventually your ant-soldiers are the most feared in the forest.

Your scientists develop increasingly advanced technologies. Ant-people begin to live in the treetops. The ant-economy thrives. It is a golden era for ants. Never again will your constitu-ants return to the carnival of horrors in which you found them.

Congratulations on creating a booming economy! You should try playing SimCity.

THE END

Under the thicket of trees, you kneel down and pray. If there is a heavenly being above, you ask that it send you some spiritual guidance.

Gradually, you become aware of a puttering sound approaching from behind.

... putter putter putter putter putter HONK HONK!

You turn around and see a red Mini Cooper on the dirt path behind you. A cute ghost wearing a bowtie rolls down the driver's-side window.

“Hey!” he whispers. “Can you help me out? I’m trying to deliver a letter to my beloved, and I could use a corporeal hand.”

If you offer to be a corporeal person who delivers the note on his behalf, turn to page 56.

If you offer to be a corporeal person who rides shotgun, turn to page 34.

Maybe you'll find some useful lore. The parchment reads:

Years ago, on these very grounds, there grew a knurled oak called the Twisted Tree. Next to the oak stood an old, abandoned motel, which was rumored to be haunted by a fearsome werewolf.

For decades, nobody had the courage to investigate these rumors. Nobody but one brave skeleton named Jack Skellington.

Jack Skellington was born in the east reaches of Halloween Town with a strong penchant for the unknown. When young Jack heard the rumors, his sense of adventure was titillated. He knew that he would be the one to set the record straight.

One foggy Halloween morning, Jack put on his favorite pinstripe suit, hugged his dog Zero tightly, and strode out into the woods to find the Werewolf of Twisted Tree Lodge.

But it wasn't long before Jack realized he had forgotten one crucial piece of adventuring gear: his trusty glockenspiel.

Your eyes glaze over. This story is both boring and contrived.

If you wanted a coherent plot, you should have read an actual book. This one has clearly gone off the deep end.

THE END

“Paaaaa-hahahaha!” you screech. Your laugh sounds more like the scream of the evil genie from *The Outing*, but it will do. “I thought I was the only witch in these woods,” you bluff.

“Is that so, dear?” asks the witch. “You’re a funny-looking one, but I’ll introduce you to the coven.”

Without another word, she turns to walk on and gestures for you to follow. She heads to a dark recess of the forest, where you meet two other old women who burst into hideous laughter at the sight of you.

You spend the rest of the night drinking hot brew and playing rubber bridge. It’s a lovely evening, all things considered.

THE END

Swashbuckling may be practical, but it never fulfilled your passions. From your leather sack, you pull out an eight-string mandolin. “I’ve been learning a couple songs,” you say. “But I’m not that good yet.”

Mystereo seems to perk up at the sight of your instrument. “A tunester, eh? We don’t hear a lot of songs around this forest. What say you play us a verse?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I barely know my major triads . . . ”

“C’mon, you’ve got to!” This sorcerer is unrelenting.

“Really, I would much rather not,” you respond.

“Come on, bard! Show us what you can do!”

It’s time to show them something. Will you put your foot down, or will you indulge Mystereo?

If you show them your blade, turn to page 15.

If you show them a major triad, turn to page 6.

By your estimation, childhood stories are the fastest way to establish a friendship.

“I grew up in a small town in Massachusetts, near a place called Pepi’s Pizzeria. They do a great slice there. Totally underrated.”

“Massa . . . choo . . . chit?” Cantos has scrunched up his face, trying to understand.

“Massachusetts. It’s a commonwealth in the US.”

“The US? Never heard of it. The only commonwealth I’m familiar with is Tax Day Town.”

“You know what? It’s not important. I’ve got an appointment to make, anyway.”

You adjust your backpack and head off into the forest. And you proceed to have a wholly boring walk to your tea date.

THE END

One stone near you catches your eye. It is a different color than the stones you had seen at a higher elevation. You muse about what weather phenomena may have caused these different formations to be visible in the forest.

The wind gives you a chill. You pull a wool blanket from your pack and wrap it around yourself. Perhaps you should stay the night here. There is no rush to reach the cottage.

It would be good to find a tree to sleep against. Someplace to call home for the night.

About fifteen feet away, there's one tall tree that stands out. It just seems like a nice tree to you. But *why*?

If this tree reminds you of Robin Hood's forest, turn to page 46.

If this tree reminds you of the genus Oxydendrum, turn to page 33.

“Over the years,” you say, “I’ve become fascinated by macromolecules that catalyze reactions.”

“Oh! Like proteins?” asks Cantos, clearly excited.

“Well, many of the molecules I study are proteins, but as it happens not all—”

“That’s perfect! We have a question for you.”

Cantos waves his hand, and a cluttered lab bench appears before you.

“We’re trying to replicate life,” he says. “And we can’t figure out what the ACG codon should represent.”

ACG . . . that’s familiar to you. What amino acid should that become?

If the codon should decode to 2-amino-3-hydroxybutanoic acid, turn to page 40.

If the codon should decode to 4-(4-hydroxyphenoxy)-L-phenylalanine, turn to page 42.

Knees shaking, you step through the arch. Everything up until now was training. Now you're really going for it!

You kick your speed up a notch. It's good to have a brisk pace for adventuring. That'll keep you free of monsters.

It sure smells bad in this part of the woods.

Squish, squish, squish.

You're having a harder time picking up your feet. They're getting stuck in the mud beneath you!

Squish, squish, squish.

Your feet are sinking even deeper into the mire.

Squish, squish, squish.

Eventually you can't even lift your legs anymore. You're stuck! You doubt anyone will ever find you here, lost in Stinkeye Swamp. Get comfortable—you're going to be here a while!

THE END

Surely business is not too different from scientific endeavors. And if there's one thing you learned in the lab, it's that the key to success is always to try harder.

"With no disrespect intended," you ask, "is it possible you could be sinking more energy into your bug-selling business?"

"Excuse me?" Cantos stands up, glaring right at you. "Are you implying that we're lazy businesssorcerers?"

Uh-oh. That was not what you meant to imply at all.

"N-no . . . that's not what I—"

BZZAP!

Before you can get another word out, a bolt of lightning falls from the sky and strikes you straight in the noggin.

That's the last time you'll ever disrespect a sorcerer. Not just because it's a bad idea, but also because you're dead.

THE END

“Ah . . . ahem . . . well, you’re, uh. I mean . . . you have bad acne!” A brilliant rebuttal indeed.

Anxious and hyperventilating, you bring yourself to look at the sorcerers again.

At first, they both stare at you blankly.

Then they burst into laughter.

“Oh, Cantos! We can’t hurt this little bugger. They’re as harmless as they come.”

You resent the implication that public speaking ability has anything to do with your combat skills, but you waive the point.

“You’re right, Mystereo. Tell us, traveler: Who are you?”

Who indeed? Who *are* you?

If you’re the guy from Les Misérables, turn to page 55.

If you’re the guy who invented the pH meter, turn to page 37.

Nearly all of the graphemes seem to have semantic meaning, and they can be combined into more complex grapheme-phrases. One particular rune bears a resemblance to the Norse bevigraph meaning “flight.” Which would make sense with—

“Looking at our scribblings, dearie?”

You whip around and see a figure who, you discern, is a witch. You deduce this from her hat, her broomstick, and her T-shirt which reads “I’M A WITCH.”

Time to act fast, before she casts a hex on you! You have some firemaking capabilities in your backpack, which might come in handy. Or you could try to blend in with her.

What will you do?

If you laugh like a witch, turn to page 21.

If you produce a waxy wick, turn to page 51.

“Do you want to live?” you ask. “If so, you’d better promise that you and your friends will never be seen in Halloween Town again.”

Whimpering, the sorcerers nod in assent. You help them to their feet, turn your back to walk away . . . and you hear an incantation muttered behind you.

POOF!

In an instant, your surroundings are changed. There are no more humans near you—only hundreds upon hundreds of rattlesnakes, boa constrictors, asps, and worse! The sorcerers tricked you! Why did it have to be snakes?!

You attempt to pinch yourself awake, hoping that it’s only a nightmare. But it’s no use! You’re alone in Snakebite Canyon!

Here’s hoping your First Aid certifications are up to date.

THE END

Perhaps this path will double back in some weird way. Who are you to distrust a sign?

The shortcut is much thinner than the trail you had been following. It has clearly been walked only a few times before. You spend much of your attention swatting away bushes and branches.

A short ways down the path, you return to a familiar clearing. You must be back on the main trail!

But this time, something is different. There is some kind of doodad laying next to a tree.

This wasn't here before, you think. You're sure of it.

You walk up closer to inspect the object, whatever it is.

If it is a rubber ring, turn to page 62.

If it is a gizmo, turn to page 49.

As soon as you see the snakes, you spring into action. You remove your wool blanket and throw it on top of the snakes.

After a moment, you hear labored breathing from under the blanket. You yell, "Leave this place, and never come back!"

You lift up the blanket to give the snakes a chance to escape. As you demanded, the reptiles scurry away as quickly as they can.

The ant-people crowd around your feet. "You have saved us," one says. "We are indebted to you."

"Yes!" cries another. "Please, be our protector and ruler. We could use someone as big as you."

Humbly, you accept. You had no idea that this night would end with accepting sovereignty over sentient ants, but here you are.

How will you concentrate your efforts as ruler of the ants?

If you concentrate on financial support for the needy, turn to page 60.

If you concentrate on military actions, turn to page 18.

Really, this is one of your favorite types of flora, even if it's small. You're surprised to see it outside of Appalachia.

As you gaze upon the tree's reddish-gray bark, you see some runes printed there. *How curious, you think. I wonder what it says.*

You might be able to translate the runes if you can identify the language, or even some history of the runes. What can you tell from the lettering?

If you observe the way that the runes were printed via a limestone plate, turn to page 58.

If you observe the way that the runes combine to spell words, turn to page 29.

“Sure,” you respond. “Want me to ride with you?”

“Sounds good to me. Hop in!” The friendly ghost opens the shotgun door, and you take your leathery seat.

As you putter through the woods together, you ask, “So, your sweetheart? Is she a ghost, too?”

“Close,” replies the ghost. “She’s a vampire.” You notice him nervously check his rear-view mirror before adding, “And sometimes, vampires come with a lot of baggage.”

You check the mirror as well. You’re being followed by a squad of matching-leather-jacket-clad vampires on motorcycles!

“Those are her old crew,” the ghost whispers to you. “They don’t approve of me. But we’re so close to her home! Should we go for it?”

Ahead of you is a huge iron archway with a hinged entrance, swung open. And the cyclists are getting closer!

If you approach the motorcycle squad, turn to page 48.

If you approach the hinged entrance, turn to page 4.

“Ever heard of the album *Babel*?” you ask.

Mystereo jumps up. “Have I ever! I’ve probably listened to “Lover of the Light” more than any other song.”

“Same here,” you reply. “But my favorite is “Hopeless Wanderer”.”

“If you want, I can put out a rug and we can give it a listen tonight.” You can tell from Mystereo’s expression that he’s not joking.

You *do* have somewhere else to be . . . but on the other hand, *carpe noctem*, n’est-ce pas?

The sorcerers set out a picnic blanket and a pair of speakers. Cantos gets some incense burning. And you spend the rest of the night listening to *Babel* on vinyl.

It’s a killer night.

THE END

Doesn't RED mean STOP? Surely this concoction is no good.

And yet . . . you feel a preternatural force lift your hand. Your lip quivers as the rim of the vial draws near. You want to reject the drink, but your arm disobeys your command.

Finally, the drink splashes against your face. Much of the liquid falls into your mouth, and you swallow hard.

Almost immediately, your knees go weak and you begin to feel queasy. You swear your stomach does a somersault. You feel as if you are falling, forever descending, as if caught in an elevator to nowhere. But when you look around you, all you see is the forest dimming.

And dimming.

Into darkness.

THE END

Even among non-STEM folks, you like to share your passion for the sciences. “My name is Arnold,” you say. “I used to be a chemist, many years ago.”

“Nice to meet you, Arnold,” says Cantos. “My name is Cantos.”

“I had already gleaned that,” you reply.

Oohs and aaahs from the sorcerers, awed at your powers of observation.

“You said you used to be a chemist,” offers Mystereo. “Are you not a scientist anymore?”

“I am still a scientist, but I’ve branched out beyond chemistry.”

“Oh? What do you study now?”

If you have pursued the study of bugs, turn to page 45.

If you have pursued the study of macromolecular catalysts, turn to page 25.

Curiously, you feel drawn toward the sixth building in the fifth row of identical houses. Seeing a ghost must have imbued you with a sixth sense.

You approach the house and thump twice on the door. In a short moment, a cute ghost wearing a pink ribbon in her hair answers.

“Hi, my name is Clair. I wasn’t expecting anybody today. And who are you?” It seems that your dowsing sense was well-calibrated today.

“Hi,” you say with courtesy. “I have a letter to deliver to you.”

Clair takes the letter from you and unfolds it. When she takes a peek inside, she gasps.

“Oh, this must be from my beau! It’s a very sweet note.” The ghost looks up at you and smiles. “I can tell you’re curious to know what it says.”

You meant not to pry, but your eyes must have betrayed you.

“He’s re-telling one of my favorite scary stories, the twisted tale of Tiki Island. I don’t remember where we found the story originally . . . I think it came from the internet. And every time he tells the story, he changes it up for me.”

“That’s sweet,” you say.

Her smile widens. “He really is. Why don’t you come inside and I’ll share the tale with you?”

You happily oblige. And the story scares you right off your rocker! What an exhilarating evening.

THE END

“I am prepared,” you declare, “to turn my skin a slightly bluer shade.”

“O-ho?” Cantos perks up. “That is some powerful magic you’re talking about.”

“Powerful, yes. But nothing I can’t handle. *Blueify sesame!*”

You throw a fistful of faerie dust to the ground. A cloud of rainbow smoke envelops you.

Through the blur, you can hear the two sorcerers coughing.

The cloud clears away, and you are revealed behind it. As promised, your skin is ever so slightly bluer.

“Bravo! Bravissimo!” The two sorcerers give you a hearty round of applause.

Congratulations! You’re the bluest wizard in these woods!

THE END

Sure as you were on the day of your thesis defense, you announce: “That codon should become an amino acid, CHEBI:57926. For sure.”

“If you say so, Arnold!” Cantos pours the contents of one test tube into another and mutters an inscrutable incantation.

POOF!

A smoke cloud appears before you. You cough a little.

When the cloud clears, you see that the lab setup has been knocked to the ground. And sitting on the desk is an eight-foot-tall, nine-eyed, four-armed monster!

“It worked!” yells Cantos, jumping for joy. “We have synthesized life!”

Cantos looks thrilled . . . but the beast looks hungry. And it’s looking at you! Hope you’re a fast runner!

THE END

In fact, you feel well-equipped to handle this particular scenario, based on the geometry of the manifold you've been walking on. Judging by the gradient of the curve up until this point, if the surface is to remain continuously differentiable, you're going to want to bear right at this junction.

You proceed deeper into the woods. The trail takes an unexpected left turn, and you wind up with a heading 45 degrees off from your destination.

You correct your heading so that it will eventually rejoin the main trail.

Farther along the path, you see a thin footpath leading off to the left. Next to the fork is a wooden sign:

SHORTCUT TO COTTAGES

That sure sounds relevant. But something seems off about this shortcut: it seems to be going the wrong way. You're not confident that it will reconnect with the main path.

Which way will you go?

*If you follow the path that is timely and expedient, turn to page 31.
If you follow the path that rejoins the main trail, turn to page 63.*

Once, many years ago, you dabbled in this realm of organic chemistry. Your skills are probably still sharp, right?

“I think it encodes some kind of a deiodinated thyroid hormone. CHEBI:30662, was it?”

“Are you sure?” asks Mystereo.

“Yes . . . yes, I’m sure.” (You’re totally not.)

Cautiously, Cantos lifts a colorful test tube, and pours its contents into an Erlenmeyer flask.

For a moment, there is no reaction.

Then . . .

BOOM!

THE END

No sweat. You can handle a little boat race, right?

Right?

The sorcerers walk you to the dock. You each load into a sailboat, and cast off. The race is on, with each boat deftly tacking around the others. When suddenly—

BZZAP!

Another bolt of lightning shoots forth from Cantos' fingertips, and bursts a hole in your boat! A fight to the death, indeed!

“Haha! Yet another one of the creepy creations of Professor Shock!”

As if someone named Cantos needs to give himself a nickname.

But there's no time to think about that. You only have seconds before your boat sinks! Tick-tock, tick-tock! You're dead in the water!

THE END

Perhaps someone somewhere would be kind enough to help a foe in need. Perhaps. But that person is not you.

“There shall be no mercy!” you scream, furious. “You’ve messed with the bull, and now you get the horns!”

Through the defeated duo’s groans, you hear Cantos plead: “Please . . . spare us!”

Yeah, right. Words alone could not deter you from using your next full-round action to coup de grâce these knuckleheads.

“The Sorcerers’ Guild . . . will grant you your heart’s desire . . .”

Now THAT is a tempting offer. The Sorcerers’ Guild has a reputation for terrorizing the Halloween Townsfolk. You could use this wish to help a lot of people.

What do you desire?

If you demand that the Guild withdraw from the sovereign state of Halloween Town to become an independently governed state, turn to page 30.

If you demand to take the throne, turn to page 52.

“Actually, I study insects,” you say.

“NO WAY!” Mystereo and Cantos both seem very excited by this, for some reason.

“Oh? Are you fellow enthusiasts?” you ask.

“Not quite,” Mystereo explains. “We sell bugs to the rest of Halloween Town. That’s how the Sorcerers’ Guild makes its money.”

“That sounds lucrative,” you lie.

“This may surprise you,” says Cantos, “but it isn’t. Sales are down 50% this fiscal year.”

“Meaning we’ve sold only one bug,” adds Mystereo.

“That *does* sound like a problem,” you say. “Selling bugs doesn’t fall within my usual purview, but may I offer a tip?”

If you suggest the sale of the sorcerers’ wares to residents of other towns, turn to page 57.

If you suggest a little elbow grease, turn to page 27.

The legend of Robin Hood has always fascinated you. You have always wanted to be a noble hero like him, helping the little guy out. This tree makes you feel like that day may be upon you.

“AAAAAAH!”

A high-pitched scream wakes you from your reverie. You look down from the tree and see a small army of ants running across the clearing. But these are no ordinary ants—these ants are eight inches tall, stand on two legs, and carry spears!

And they’re being chased by four big, green snakes!

Today is the day you can be a hero! How will you save the ant-people?

*If you lie on your stomach and move like the snakes, turn to page 50.
If you suffocate the snakes, turn to page 32.*

Holding the vial in your hand, you pop the cork and take a whiff. It smells of pine needles and salamander.

Seems healthy to me, you think. And you toss the contents of the vial down your throat.

Whoof! You feel your blood turn hot. Smoke emerges all around you. When the smoke clears, you see that your body has been transported to a haunted mausoleum—you're trapped in Bat Wing Hall!

You whip your head around. You see your childhood babysitter standing behind you, exactly as you remember her.

A cruel grin creeps across your babysitter's face as she transmogrifies into an eight-foot-tall, clawed, fanged werewolf.

You'll have to run fast to escape the attack of the beastly babysitter! With due apologies to your friend, it looks like you won't be making it to tea.

THE END

Sometimes you just gotta act. This is one of those times!

“I won’t let these blood-suckers stop you!” Your dedication to your new friend is admirable.

You open the door of the still-moving car and jump out, rolling on the ground to protect your fall. You stand to face the cyclists.

You realize that these aren’t all vampires—only the frontmost one is. And not just any vampire—this is Dracula himself!

Flanking Dracula are a mummy and the Creature from the Black Lagoon. You realize that you’re now staring down a whole squadron of invaders from the big screen.

Good luck, hot shot!

THE END

As you investigate the doodad, you see a few buttons and knobs, as well as some indecipherable lettering printed on it. This appears to be some mass-produced, commercial, electronic device, but you cannot glean its purpose.

In the name of science, you crank a couple of knobs to the max and push a glowing, blue button.

ZZZAP!

Suddenly, you feel as if you've fallen under the magician's spell. It's as if all gravity has dissipated and you've been zapped in space.

Discombobulated, you rub your temples and look around. You see that you are surrounded by a half-dozen ten-foot-tall camp counselors, all with jagged teeth. And they don't look pleased that you've pushed that mysterious button.

It's time to escape from Camp Run-For-Your-Life! Good luck!

THE END

“Ssssss!” you hiss, as you lay on the ground and wriggle alongside the snakes. “Sssssssssss!”

“Huh?” asks one of the snakes, bemused. “Where’d you come from?”

Apparently, these are talking snakes. And apparently, you’ve tricked them.

“Sss . . . me? I’ve been here the whole time.”

“Oh, okay,” replies the snake who questioned you. “I must have missed you when we set out for dinner.”

“I can tell they’re a real snake,” says another, “by the way they’re hissing and wriggling.”

“Yesss,” you hiss. “And I think we shouldn’t eat those ant-people anymore.”

“And why not?” asks the first snake.

If you are succinct, turn to page 17.

If you bewilder them, turn to page 9.

For all the good ideas you've had in this book, this is not your most brilliant.

Slowly and methodically, you remove your backpack straps and place the bag on the ground. You unzip the second pocket and remove two objects—a matchbook and a thin, waxy stick. You hold up both to the dumbfounded witch, as if presenting the props for a magic trick.

You hold the wax stick in your mouth while you ignite a match from the book. Deftly, you palm the matchbook as you hold up the match to the wick of the stick. You utter a cool catchphrase: “Welcome to the wicked wax museum!” And behold, the wick is ignited.

You drop the flame like a microphone and take a bow.

The witch looks at you as if you had just smeared yourself in peanut butter and done the chicken dance. She shakes her head and skulks wordlessly back into the woods.

Some people just don't understand art.

THE END

“I demand to be crowned High Ruler of the Sorcerers, or else it’s checkout time at the dead-end hotel for you two.”

Mystereo looks unsurely at his companion. “That’d be tricky. You’re not a sorcerer. If you want us to make you a sorcerer, you’re going to need three cups of eye-of-newt, a diary of a mad mummy, and many years of traini—”

“Make it so, or you’ll have to escape from the carnival of horrors,” you snarl.

The sniveling sorcerers nod fearfully and scramble to their feet.

To make a long story short, you get your wish. You proceed to enjoy a long and fruitful rule as High Ruler of the Sorcerers. Agriculture flourishes under your administration, and public education is really starting to take off. It’s good to reign supreme!

THE END

“Very well, then. Let me show you.”

You brandish a wand from your pack, to a shocked expression from the peanut gallery.

“Hocus-pocus! What’s that behind your ear?” From beside Mystereo’s mystified face, you produce a shiny quarter.

“Ahh, a sorcerer like us, eh?” asks Cantos. “Have you got any other cantrips up your sleeve?”

“A few,” you respond. “I have one trick where I cover myself in bird-bumps, and another one where I can shade my skin blue.”

“Well? Show us a trick!” exclaims Mystereo.

“Yes, show us!”

Which trick will you display?

If you send yourself swanlumps, turn to page 54.

If you add a small trace of color, turn to page 39.

“Everyone, stand back! I am going to attempt something extremely, incredibly dangerous! Abracadabra, fiddle-dee-dee! A couple of swanlumps for this body, please!”

With a flourish and a shimmer, sparks fly from your wand and attach to your body. They feel hot, stinging. You wince as the sparks meld with your skin, seeping into your pores.

Scarcely a moment later, the shimmering light fades. You stand tall, body as beautiful as the ugly duckling, covered in swanlumps.

Cantos and Mystereo applaud. They are awestruck. You have shown them a very special form of magic.

You have sent yourself swanlumps.

THE END

But of course. You're that famous actor from *The Prestige*. And you have been this whole time.

"My name is Hugh," you share. "I'm an actor."

"Huh? Hugh?" Cantos looks confused.

So does Mystereo. "I don't know of any actors named Hugh. Are you involved with any movies I should know about?"

This could be the perfect time to get the word out about your latest film project. In your spare time, you've been writing a new screenplay, a drama about Odie (the dog)'s former owner. It's a tragic exploration into the soul of a man who loses everything and roams the earth, begging for shelter, until he disappears without a trace.

Or you could just talk about *Wolverine*.

If you tell them about Odie's former owner, turn to page 2.

If you tell them about the latest Wolverine film, turn to page 16.

“I could deliver your note for you,” you offer.

“That’s great!” the ghost exclaims. “Thank you so much.” He hands you a folded piece of stationery addressed to a “Clair.”

As you look down at the delicate lettering, you say, “Hey, wait—where does your girlfriend live?” But when you look back up, the ghost and his car are both gone.

Sighing, you set forward toward a gathering of houses just ahead. Just your luck—the houses are all identical. Whether by your dogged motivation or by your ability to follow your gut, you’ll have to find the right home.

If you use your strong sense of purpose, turn to page 59.

If you use your strong sense of instinct, turn to page 38.

To be honest, economics is not your strong suit. But you have common sense. The larger a market is, the larger its potential, no?

“Have you considered selling your bugs outside of Halloween Town?”

“Outside . . . of Halloween Town?” asks Mystereo.

“Yes. You *have* been outside of Halloween Town before, right?”

Silence from the peanut gallery.

You sigh heavily. “Okay. It’s clear that we’re going to have a long ways to go, if we’re going to turn your business around. Take a seat, boys—we’ve got a lot of material to cover.”

You seem to have nerd-sniped yourself. But at least you have a plausible career path as an economic advisor to sorcerers. I hope you like bugs!

THE END

But of course! These runes must have been printed via a polymerized limestone plate. And unless you're mistaken, the original plate should be around here somewhere . . .

A-ha! With only a few moments of digging, you find a slab of stone. On the stone is etched the reverse of the runes you saw on the tree.

Your eye falls to the left of the stone. You see a small trove of trinkets: a broomstick, a pointy hat, and a vial. *To whom might these belong?* you wonder silently.

Contained within the vial is an opaque, red liquid. Is it friend or foe, you wonder?

If you think the draught is a healing elixir, turn to page 47.

If you think the draught is a toxicant, turn to page 36.

If you are clear in your purpose, then surely you can find the right home. You just need to knock on each door until you find someone—probably a ghost—named Clair. How hard could that be?

You start at the first house of the first block. You swallow your trepidation and knock hard on the door.

A gruff voice responds: **“Hwuh? Hello? Who’s there?”**

You gulp. Maybe not the right house. “Sorry!” you squeak.

Before you can turn to leave, the door slams open. Standing before you is a muscular, eight-foot-tall spider. **“Hmm? I wasn’t expecting dinner to arrive for another half-hour.”**

You gulp again. “D-dinner?”

The spider grins. You scream.

And the rest is a well-seasoned history.

THE END

No leader worth their salt would let a needy ant-person go hungry.

You bolster all programs that serve those in need. Whether homeless, impoverished, elderly, or otherwise unable to provide for themselves, you ensure that all ant-people are able to eat and have shelter for the night.

It helps a lot that one apple can feed a family of ant-people for days. All you do is pick a few fruits every couple of days, and the ant-people hail you as the greatest ruler they have ever known.

Not a bad life, eh?

THE END

As you step down the Path of the Guru, the forest seems to grow darker. The trees are thick enough to obscure even the moonlight.

You try to distract yourself from the sounds and the darkness.

The moonlight reminds you of a certain Beethoven composition for solo piano. The tune is haunting, but it keeps your thoughts at bay.

Your eye falls upon a broad stone in the dirt. You start thinking about the layers of sediment that have accumulated underfoot. You have always had a penchant for geology.

You hear a rustle in the brush, and freeze in your tracks. You stand alert, watching, assessing the danger. Is it friend or foe?

The rustle recurs. A raccoon emerges and scurries across the path into the woods.

You let out a sigh of relief. You need to focus your mind on something not-so-scary.

If you return your thoughts to Beethoven's moonlight music, turn to page 14.

If you return your thoughts to the layers of rock, turn to page 24.

Rubber is distinctive. Rings are distinctive. This is definitely a rubber ring.

You inspect the tube a little more thoroughly. It looks like maybe it could have come out of a washing machine.

How could this have gotten here? you wonder.

You gently lay your fingers on the rubber. You feel a coating of unpleasant oozes: a green, viscous slime that feels acidic, and a glowing orange liquid that slips right through your fingers. You take care to beware of the purple peanut butter.

You wipe your fingers off on your pants, and you take another look. Your hands have begun to corrode away! Just how acidic *is* this stuff?

The acid is spreading painfully up your arm. Your bicep has begun to dissolve. Then your shoulder. Before you know it, your hea

THE END

You continue along the path you've set, hoping to offset the turns you've taken so far. This should allow you to rejoin your originally intended path.

Just as the wind starts to blow harder, you come across an enormous archway. Atop the arch, twisted iron spells the words, "ADVENTURERS PASS UNDER." Should you pass through, you would no doubt find yourself on some new exploratory journey.

Posted on the left side of the arch, at eye level, is a framed parchment. It seems to describe the backstory of these haunted woods. You never cared much for lore.

If you pursue the exploratory journey, turn to page 26.

If you pursue the backstory, turn to page 20.