

ACTION  
CASTLE  
**Parsely**  
PREVIEW N' PLAY

Enjoy  
this  
free  
demo!



Jared A. Sorensen



MENU



**P**arsely games are based on the old text-adventure parsers from the late 1970s and early 1980s—games such as *Colossal Cave Adventure*, *Zork* and *Planetfall*. In this version, a person replaces the computer, and a map and script replace the software.

One person (most likely you) is the Parser, the name given to the program that runs a text adventure. It's your job to relay the game world to the players. You describe what the character sees, the results of their actions and anything else appearing in the game. You also keep track of the character's current location, inventory and score. Refer to yourself as "I" when talking to the players.

Everyone else playing the game shares one character. Refer to each player as "you" during the game. You need at least two humans to play a Parsely game: a Parser and a player. There's no limit to the number of players, making Parsely games ideal for parties, conventions and other large gatherings of geeks who are into this kind of thing.

*Action Castle* was created in 2003, on the fly, at a friend's party. Years later, I'd often bring it with me to game conventions, first with 30 players, then 60, then 200, and eventually over 400! My pal and fellow game designer, Luke Crane, persuaded me to publish it as a Z-fold pamphlet in 2009. Now it's time to delve back into the source code, recompile it all and bundle it together for this book.

Would you like to play a game (Y/N)?

—Jared Sorensen

April Fools' Day, 2017

## HOW IT WORKS

**T**he first step is to welcome the players—sound effects and extravagant gestures are optional. Descriptions and other text to be read aloud to the players is in black, like this text. Information for the Parser (that is not to be read directly to the players) is in **blue**. Sometimes the blue text indicates the room or object, other times the **>** symbol will precede a longer description.

So, after starting the game with a warm welcome...

“Welcome to Action Castle!”

...proceed by describing the starting room, its contents and its exits:

You are standing in a small cottage. There is a fishing pole here. A door leads outside.

**> Sometimes the description of a room will change because of the players' actions. For example, when an object is taken, omit that object from the room's description.**

After the players visit the same room a few times, feel free to go into BRIEF mode and limit your description to just the name of the room. Be as helpful or as vague as you wish. If the players use the LOOK command, repeat the room's full description, with exits.

### Turns & Time

Each player gets to take a turn to give a command—usually a one-word or two-word action in this format: {verb} {noun}.

Examples:

**GO WEST, TAKE KEY, CLIMB TREE, SMELL ROSE**  
or **WEAR CROWN**



MENU



You may allow similar phrases at your discretion. SNIFF ROSE and CLIMB UP are fine. INHALE ROSE'S SCENT and SHIMMY UP TREE, not so much.

Sometimes you'll need more information from the player making the command. Anything you ask may be answered by the current player, as in the following example:

**CATCH FISH:** What do you want to use to catch a fish?

**FISHING POLE:** You catch a fish!

Feel free to allow more complex commands—as long as players don't go overboard (i.e., don't allow “then” or “and” commands)—such as:

**CATCH FISH WITH FISHING POLE**

Unless a player is questioning a character, commands should be statements:

**CAN I GO WEST?** I dunno! Can you?

Characters may be addressed by using the format {character}, {question}; or by using ASK {character} ABOUT {topic}, as in the following two examples:

**PRINCESS, CAN YOU LEAVE THIS TOWER?** The princess shakes her head no.

**ASK PRINCESS ABOUT THE KING:** “Father died several years ago. They say his restless spirit still haunts this castle.”

When a player examines an object or character, read them the description or make one up if it's not important to the puzzle. You can also be vague, play dumb or crack wise:

**EXAMINE POND:** You see fish swimming below the pond's surface.

**EXAMINE POLE:** The fishing pole consists of a stick, some string and a hook.

**EXAMINE HOOK:** It's a hook...a plot hook. \*twirls mustache\*

Once all the players have taken a turn, loop back to the first player and continue until the players win, time expires or everyone gets mad and goes home. Turns aren't the only factor they need to worry about! Each game should last no more than 60-90 minutes. Failing to complete the game within the allotted time span results in a "Game Over" and final score.

## Objects

Objects that may be taken by the players are underlined when first mentioned. When taken, they're stored in the player inventory. Unless it is otherwise noted, players have unlimited space to carry objects. Some objects may also be worn.

**TAKE POLE:** You now have the fishing pole.

**GET STRING:** That cannot be removed.

**INVENTORY:** You are carrying a fishing pole, a crown and a lamp.

> A handy inventory checklist is included with each game.

**WEAR CROWN:** You are now wearing the crown.

## Basic Commands

Every Parsely game shares a few basic commands. They're used to travel the map and to interact with rooms, objects and characters. In the text, they are written in all caps.

### Direction

**EXIT, ENTER, LEAVE, BACK, EAST, WEST, NORTH, SOUTH, UP** and **DOWN**.

A player can also use **GO {direction}**. Some games may allow other directions, such as **NORTHWEST**.

**LEAVE, EXIT, OUT** or **BACK** may be used only in rooms with one exit.



MENU



## Perception

**LOOK, EXAMINE, SEARCH, SMELL, LISTEN, TASTE** and **TOUCH**.

**LOOK** will repeat a room's description, contents and exits.

**LOOK {exit}** will give a player a glimpse into what lies beyond the exit.

**EXAMINE {object}** or **EXAMINE {character}** gives a player a description of that object or character. Commands such as **SMELL** or **LISTEN** may yield a response only in certain situations.

## Interaction

**TAKE, GET, DROP, TALK, KILL, LIGHT, WEAR, USE**, etc.

Remember, as the Parser, you're portraying a personal computer from the 1980s with an 8-bit processor. If players issue commands that are nonsensical or complex or that use unusual words, respond appropriately:

**EAT FISHING POLE:** You can't eat that!

**GO FISH:** You can't go that way.

**TALK TO TREE:** The tree has no desire to chat with you.

**CAST THE POLE:** You don't know that spell.

**PUT WORM ON HOOK AND CATCH A FISH WITH IT:** What?

**HELLO:** Hi.

## Special Commands

Some commands are used to interact with the Parsely game system itself:

**HELP** lists these special system commands:

**HELP**, **INVENTORY**, **SAVE**, **LOAD/RELOAD/RESTORE**, **RESTART/RESET**, **SCORE** and **QUIT**.

**INVENTORY** lists all objects worn or carried. In games with lots of objects, this list can be quite long, so take notes or have a good memory!

**SAVE** stores the player character's current location, inventory and status. If the player character dies, **LOAD**, **RELOAD** or **RESTORE** returns them to their last save point. **SAVE** always overwrites the previous save point, and players are limited to three saves unless otherwise noted in the text. Whenever the players save, be sure to let them know how many saves they have left!

**RESTART** ends the current game and starts over from the beginning.

**SCORE** lets the players know how they're doing. This is usually a number between 0 and 100, based on their accomplishments (such as items picked up, puzzles solved or enemies defeated).

**QUIT** ends the game!

## CONDITIONAL EXITS

Not all exits are immediately accessible or even visible. These exits are marked with an alert symbol (☒). They may be hidden, blocked or locked. Some require a specific command or inventory item. They also may be opened by events that are triggered during the game. Details about these exits are listed in the room description. When you see this symbol in front of the room exit be sure to check the appropriate room description before proceeding.





MENU



## WINNING & LOSING

All Parsely games have a victory condition that ends the game. Although it may be a long and difficult journey, playing the game as designed should always bring the players to an ending—either a loss or a win. Every situation has an out, even if it's fatal! There are no hopeless games.

A flawless victory usually results in a score of 100/100 points. Some games may be completed even if the players haven't earned every point possible.

For example:

**SIT ON THRONE:** You sit on the throne. The people cheer your name, welcoming you as their new ruler. THE END. Congratulations—your score is 99/100!

Players lose when their character is killed by monsters, traps or foolish actions such as **JUMP OFF CLIFF**. When this happens, announce that they've died and tell them their final score. Then, ask if they wish to restart the game, as in the following example:

**ATTACK TROLL:** The troll is much mightier than you, and your attack does little to harm it. In response, it tears you limb from limb. You have died. THE END. Thanks for playing! Your score is 15/100. Would you like to restart the game?

If the players saved the game at any point, give them the option to reload should they meet their demise:

**KILL ME:** You have died. THE END. Thanks for playing! Your score is 15/100. Would you like to reload from your saved game?



## BELLS & WHISTLES

Parsely games are puzzles, but also a kind of performance art. Think of each game like a nerdy version of karaoke—it's more about entertaining the crowd than singing well.

As the Parser, you run the show, interpret commands and give feedback in the form of information, challenges and comedy. This is easier than you might think! Here are some tips:

### **Be cruel but fair.**

One of the great things about text adventures (and a reason why they're remembered so fondly) is that the puzzles were annoying but logical, and the Parser was simple but reliable. Don't coddle the players by allowing sloppy grammar, complex commands or dumb jokes. Respond the way a sarcastic computer would. If a player issues a proper command but at the wrong time, give them a clue:

**MARRY PRINCESS:** The princess will only marry royalty.

The players now know that **MARRY PRINCESS** is an acceptable command, but only if they figure out how to become royalty. Compare that to this exchange:

**KISS PRINCESS:** \*slap\* I'm not that kind of girl!

The princess lets the players know that she's just not that into the player character. When this happens in my games, I slap my own hand and do my "princess voice." It doesn't affect the outcome of the game, but it always gets laughs.

### **Be loud...**

Speak up, especially when playing Parsely games with a large group or in a noisy environment.

This is no time to be a wallflower! You need to be heard above the din. This doesn't mean you have to guarantee all the players are paying attention—



MENU



that's on them. It just means you need to speak loudly enough to be heard.

### **Listen!**

Most of the comedy actually comes from the players. Their expectations colliding with your results generate a lot of humor. You don't have to wink at the crowd, tell jokes or clown around. Just listen to what a player says to you. If there's any room for misunderstanding, irony or humor, take advantage of it. In my experience, gestures, funny voices and sound effects go a long way to make the game come alive:

**TAKE PRINCESS:** \*slap\* I'm not that kind of girl!

### **Be consistent.**

The hardest thing to do is to keep track of everything. The game works best when you can do it all from memory, without writing down notes or consulting maps or game rules. So learn it! And when you do, be consistent in your responses to the player. Every action has a reaction:

A valid response:

**TAKE KEY:** You now have the key.

A question:

**USE KEY:** How do you want to use the key?

A syntax error:

**MAKE A COPY OF THE KEY:** I don't know how to "make a copy."

Or something funny and/or rude:

**WHAT DOES THE KEY LOOK LIKE?:** It looks like a key, dummy.

**Oh, and of course...**

**HAVE FUN:** I don't understand how to "have fun."

**Your greatest challenge  
lies ahead—and downward.**



The original Parsely game! Explore the lands of Action Castle, brave its dangers and claim the throne!

CONTENT RATED BY MMTRB

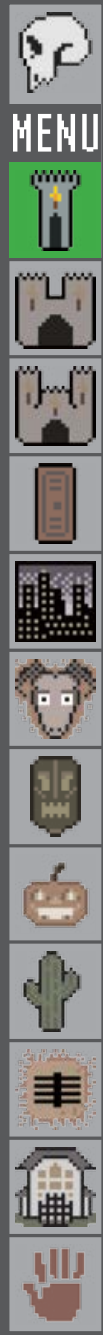
FANTASY

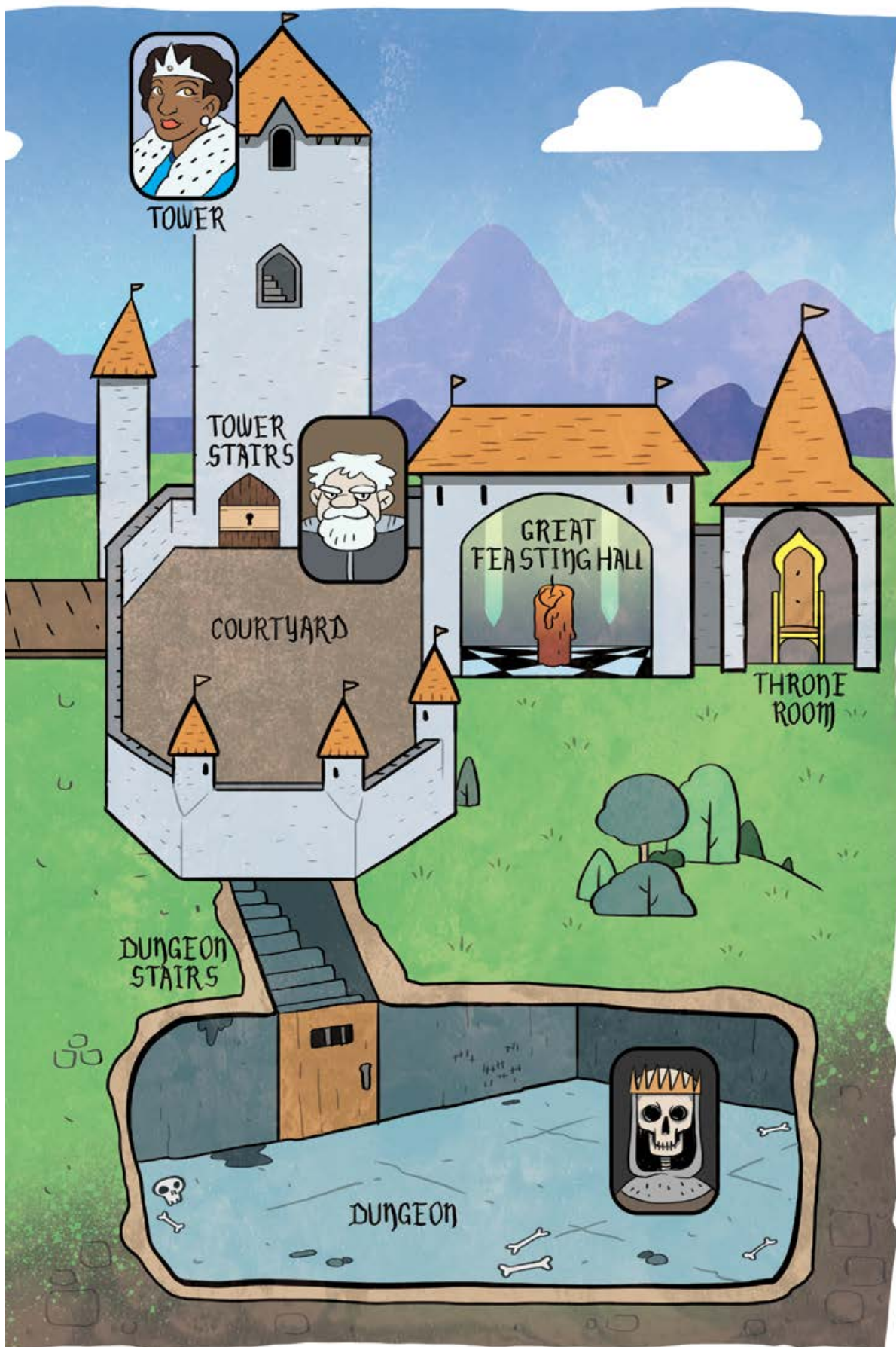
BEGINNER

EVERYONE (10+)











18

## COTTAGE

You are standing in a small cottage. There is a fishing pole here. A door leads outside.

Every new game starts in the Cottage. The player also starts the game with a lamp, although the **INVENTORY** command must be invoked to learn this information. To help newbies, you can add the lamp to the description of the Cottage at the start of the game.

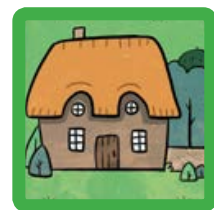
**EXAMINE LAMP:** You see an old lamp; it's currently unlit.

> The player may only **LIGHT** the lamp when it's too dark to see.

**EXAMINE FISHING POLE:** You see a simple fishing pole.

COTTAGE exits are:

> OUT page 18 GARDEN PATH



## GARDEN PATH

You're on a lush garden path that leads north and south. There is a rosebush here. There is a cottage here.

**EXAMINE ROSEBUSH:** You find a single red rose.

> The player can **SMELL**, **GET**, **TAKE** or **PICK** the rose.



GARDEN PATH exits are:

> NORTH page 19 WINDING PATH

> SOUTH page 19 FISH POND

> ENTER page 18 COTTAGE



## FISH POND

You are at the edge of a fish pond. A path leads north.

**USE FISHING POLE:** You catch a wriggling fish!

> The player cannot eat the fish—it's raw!

**FISH POND exits are:**

> NORTH page 18 GARDEN PATH



## WINDING PATH

You are walking along a winding path that leads south and east. There is a tall tree here.

**CLIMB TREE/UP:** You climb up the tree—it takes a long time.

> While in the tree, the player can **EXAMINE**, **BREAK** or **TAKE** the dead branch:

You are at the top of a tall tree. There is a stout dead branch here. From your perch you can see the tower of Action Castle.

**CLIMB TREE/DOWN:** You climb down the tree—it takes a long time.

> Players who **JUMP** will not survive the fall.

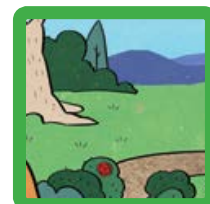
**EXAMINE DEAD BRANCH:** You think it would make a good club.

> If used to **HIT** or **CLUB** something, the dead branch breaks and cannot be used again.

**WINDING PATH exits are:**

> SOUTH page 18 GARDEN PATH

> EAST page 20 DRAWBRIDGE





## DRAWBRIDGE



MENU



You come to the drawbridge of Action Castle. There is a mean troll guarding the bridge.

**CROSS BRIDGE:** The troll blocks your path.

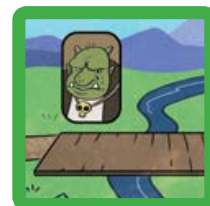
**EXAMINE TROLL:** The troll has a warty green hide and looks hungry.

- > If the player lingers for more than two or three moves, the troll will kill them. The troll will also rip limb from limb anyone who attacks it. It will not leave this spot unless given a raw fish, at which point it will run off to eat its prize.



**DRAWBRIDGE exits are:**

- > WEST page 19 WINDING PATH
- ☒ EAST page 21 COURTYARD



## COURTYARD

You are in the courtyard of Action Castle. A castle guard stands watch to the east. Stairs lead up into the tower and down into darkness.

> If the player is wearing the crown:

The guard drops to his knee and bows deeply. "My liege. Your public awaits you in the throne room."

**EXAMINE GUARD:** The guard wears chainmail armor but no helmet. A key hangs from his belt.

> The player may not go east until the guard is unconscious. The guard blocks the eastern exit. The player may HIT the guard with the branch to knock him out. The guard's key may then be taken.



COURTYARD exits are:

▣ EAST page 25 GREAT FEASTING HALL

> WEST page 20 DRAWBRIDGE

> UP page 22 TOWER STAIRS

> DOWN page 22 DUNGEON STAIRS



22

## TOWER STAIRS

You climb the tower stairs until you come to a door.

**OPEN DOOR:** The door is locked.

- > The player must use the guard's key to **UNLOCK DOOR**. Once the door is unlocked, the player may **GO IN** or **GO UP** to the Tower, or go **DOWN** to the Courtyard.

**TOWER STAIRS** exits are:

- ☒ **IN** or **UP** page 23 **TOWER**
- > **DOWN** page 21 **COURTYARD**



## DUNGEON STAIRS

You are on the dungeon stairs. It's very dark here.

**GO DOWN:** It's too dark to see!

- > Fortunately, there are no grues nearby.

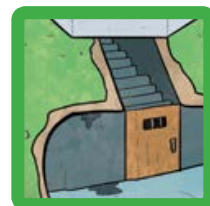
**LIGHT CANDLE:** The candle's flickering flame is blown out by a draft.

**LIGHT LAMP:** You can now see well enough to continue down the stairs.

- > The player is free to continue downstairs.

**DUNGEON STAIRS** exits are:

- > **UP** page 21 **COURTYARD**
- ☒ **DOWN** page 24 **DUNGEON**



## TOWER

You are in the tower. There is a princess here. Stairs lead down.

**EXAMINE PRINCESS:** The princess is beautiful, sad and lonely.

> The player may **TALK** to the princess. She will only respond once given the rose. Then she'll warm up to the player but will not allow herself to be kissed, touched or removed from this room unless the player has the crown.

**MARRY PRINCESS:** "You're not royalty!"

**ASK PRINCESS ABOUT GHOST:** "The guards whisper that the ghost of the king haunts the dungeons as a restless spirit!"

**ASK ABOUT CROWN:** "My father's crown was lost after he died."

**ASK ABOUT TOWER:** "I cannot leave the tower until I'm wed!"

**ASK ABOUT THRONE:** "Only the rightful ruler of Action Castle may claim the throne!"

**GIVE CROWN TO PRINCESS:** "My father's crown! You have put his soul to rest and may now take his place as ruler of this land!" She places the crown on your head.

> The crowned player may then **PROPOSE** or **MARRY PRINCESS** and she will accept. The player's gender is irrelevant. Once married, she will leave the tower with the player. This isn't required to beat the game, but it's fun and gives the player bonus points.

**TOWER exits are:**

> **DOWN** page 22 **TOWER STAIRS**



## DUNGEON



MENU



You are in the dungeon. There is a spooky ghost here.  
Stairs lead up.

**EXAMINE GHOST:** The ghost has bony, claw-like fingers and wears a gold crown.

**EXAMINE CROWN:** You see the gold crown that once belonged to the king of Action Castle.

- > Each turn spent in the Dungeon causes the ghost to drift closer and closer. If not defeated within three turns, the ghost reaches out a skeletal hand and drains the player's life force. THE END.
- > The player must possess the candle from the Great Feasting Hall to defeat the ghost.

**LIGHT CANDLE:** The strange candle gives off a strange, acrid smoke, causing the ghost to flee the dungeon. It leaves behind a gold crown.

- > The player can then take the crown. It must first be given to the princess before it can be worn.



DUNGEON exits are:

- > UP page 22 DUNGEON STAIRS



## GREAT FEASTING HALL

You stand inside the great feasting hall. There is a strange candle here. Exits are to the east and west.

> If the player is wearing the crown, this hall will be full of people.

The people gathered here raise a toast to their new ruler!

**EXAMINE CANDLE:** You see that the strange candle is covered in mysterious runes.

**READ RUNES:** The odd runes are part of an exorcism ritual used to dispel evil spirits.

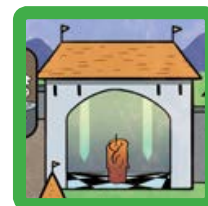
**LIGHT CANDLE:** The candle casts a flickering flame and emits acrid smoke.

> If the player walks down the Dungeon Stairs with the lit candle, the draft in the stairwell will blow out the candle. It will remain lit in the Dungeon long enough to dispel the spooky ghost.



GREAT FEASTING HALL exits are:

- > EAST page 26 THRONE ROOM
- > WEST page 21 COURTYARD



## THRONE ROOM



MENU



This is the throne room of Action Castle. There is an ornate gold throne here.

> If the player is wearing the crown, the room is full of people.

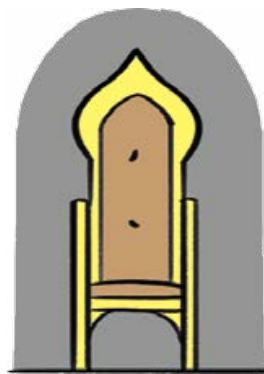
The people gathered here cheer and applaud as you enter!

**EXAMINE THRONE:** You see an ornate gold throne.

> The player may **CLAIM THRONE** or **SIT ON THRONE**, but only while wearing the gold crown.

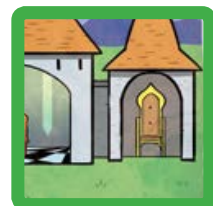
**SIT ON THRONE:** You are now the new ruler of Action Castle! THE END.

> The player then wins the game. See the Scoring section (page 27).



THRONE ROOM exits are:

> WEST page 25 GREAT FEASTING HALL





## INVENTORY CHECKLIST

These items may be carried by the player:

- |  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lamp | <input type="checkbox"/> Branch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fishing pole    | <input type="checkbox"/> Key    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rose            | <input type="checkbox"/> Candle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fish            | <input type="checkbox"/> Crown  |

## SCORING

The players can earn a maximum of 100 points:

Each location visited .....	+2 (total of 24 points)
Each item collected.....	+5 (total of 35 points)
Defeating the troll.....	+10
Defeating the guard .....	+10
Defeating the ghost .....	+10
Proposing to the princess .....	+5
Claiming the throne.....	+5
Finishing without saving .....	+1



# EXAMPLE OF PLAY

