

# SECRET DOOR


## AN IMAGINATION GAME

Proof of concept

ERIC BRANDON ETKIN

# SECRET DOOR





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# The Explorer Section

Whereupon you learn how to create your  
Imaginary Self, and prepare to explore the  
endless worlds and places Beyond the Door







## Introduction

You've discovered a Secret Door. It could be hidden within a closet, in the basement, or in the attic. Every so often, it calls to you and your friends, beckoning with promises of mystery and adventure.

Stepping through this door, you become an Explorer, discovering fantastic places that shouldn't exist – but do! And they're filled with dangerous enemies, new friends, and endless surprises.

The Secret Door awaits. Are you ready?

## How to Read and Use this Book

This is *your* book. You'll write in it and record things that happen in the game – like a journal. Always use a pencil with an eraser! Over time, as you play this game, you might make changes to the things you've written.

The glossary at the end of your book will help you as you read Secret Door. If you don't understand a word, try looking it up in the glossary! The glossary is super-helpful if a word doesn't look familiar to you.

Your book is divided into five parts: the **Explorer** part, then the **Doorkeeper** part, *Escape the Mansion*, the **Extra Help** part, and the **U-Pages** at the very end of the book. In Secret Door, Explorers often take turns being the Doorkeeper, so it's important to read almost everything, even if you don't think you'll be a Doorkeeper right away! Reading this book teaches you how to play Secret Door. It's also a rulebook to use while you're playing the game.

In this book, **anything marked with a door picture  and in dark text like this is a rule.**

Rules are things you *must do* to play the game. Rules are numbered and marked like this to help you find them easily during play. Everything else

in this book that *isn't* marked with a door gives you more information about *understanding* the rules.

To make it easier during play, all the **rules** you need to look up are gathered and printed again toward the end of this book in the **Extra Help** part as the *Secret Door Rules Collection*.

## What Is Secret Door?

Secret Door is an imagination game. When you play Secret Door with your friends, everything that takes place happens within you and your friends' shared imagination.

The choices you make – what you do, what you say, how you solve challenges – are all up to *you*! It's like an amazing story you're all helping create together!

Ready to start your journey? First, you'll need to answer some questions about a very important subject: yourself.







## Making and Changing Plans

Now that you understand the basics of how Secret Door is played, let's begin looking at each part of the game more closely. We'll start talking about the **game rules** and how you use them during play to create exciting, unpredictable adventures!

First, we'll talk more about *Plans* - How to make them, how to figure out how hard your Plan's success might be... and what to do if you realize your Plan is probably too difficult to succeed.

## Making a Plan

In Secret Door, before you do something important, heroic, or special, you *Plan* what you want to do. A Plan is how you want to use your Qualities and Talents to tackle a challenge.

### **1. Always use your Qualities and/or Talents when making a Plan.**

In Secret Door, “making a Plan” means talking about what you want to do with the other Explorers, and how you’ll each use your Qualities or Talents to tackle the challenge. Once you’ve all made your Plans, *then* you tell the Doorkeeper. If you’re the *only* Explorer, making a Plan simply means thinking about what you want to do before telling the Doorkeeper.



## ■ 2. You only make a Plan when there is a clear chance of failure or danger.

For example, you might make a Plan if you have to climb up some stairs in the dark, and some of the boards are loose and dangerous. You would *not* make a Plan if you were just climbing normal stairs with the lights on.

Here's a Plan example: Carlos and Mia have traveled far back in time and are exploring a strange jungle near a mountainside. As they peer through the leafy plants, they spot a Tyrannosaurus rex nearby! The Doorkeeper tells Carlos and Mia that the T. rex also spotted *them*! Carlos and Mia talk about what they'd like to do, making a Plan:





Carlos and Mia have each made a Plan. Carlos will distract the T. rex with a candy bar and climb up the mountain-side. Mia will climb with Carlos after he throws his candy bar.

Once you've made a Plan, the Doorkeeper decides the Difficulty

of your Plan. Some plans are harder than others, depending on what you're trying to do! We'll talk more about Plan Difficulties later.

## Plans – Using Your Qualities and Talents

When you make your Plan, you'll need to figure out what Quality or Qualities you want to *use* for your Plan. For example, if you need to escape from a ghost, you might make a Plan to run away from it. Since your FOX Quality determines your quickness, that's the Quality you use. If you want to sew a torn magic cloak back together, you'd use the BADGER Quality, since BADGER best determines your craft skills.

**3. Always use the Quality best for the task.**

So, for example, if you need to patch a hole in a boat, that would be a FOX-related task, since it requires some smarts to get the job done. If you want to lift a heavy rock, use your BEAR Quality.



**4. The Doorkeeper has final say whether or not the Quality you want to use is really the best Quality for the task. But...**

**5. If you have a Talent that is perfect for the task, you may use your Talent instead of a Quality.**

For example, if you're trying to escape a vampire and you have a *Running* Talent, you can use the Running Talent instead of the FOX Quality.

Why would you use a Talent instead? Using Talents instead of Qualities is helpful because your Talents often are a higher Rank than your Qualities.





Whenever you make a Plan, it's because you *want* or *need* to do something challenging in the game world.

**■ 6. Only Explorers choose the Qualities or Talents they want to use in a Plan.**

You might come across a dark, rickety staircase and want to climb it. Or something might happen, and you must choose the best way to tackle the challenge. For example, you come across a troll in the woods, and choose to run and hide from it.

Remember, Explorers only make Plans when there is a clear chance of failure or danger. For example, Pete has to climb some stairs in the dark. Some of the boards are loose and dangerous. He makes a Plan to climb carefully, using his Climbing Talent. Pete would *not* make a Plan if he was just climbing normal stairs with the lights on.

All Plans have a Difficulty, which the Doorkeeper decides. The Difficulty is how easy or hard it is to beat the Plan. Explorers always choose the Quality and/or Talent they want to use for a Plan, and the Doorkeeper always chooses the Plan's Difficulty.



## Plans – Figuring Out the Difficulty

All plans have a Difficulty. A Plan might be Easy, Average, Hard, Very Hard, or Nearly Impossible.

**7. The Doorkeeper always chooses a Plan's Difficulty. After you make your Plan, the Doorkeeper figures out how hard the Plan is, and picks the fairest Difficulty.**

The Doorkeeper must always be fair in the Difficulty selection. Remember: The Doorkeeper isn't trying to beat anyone or "win," but instead, to make things fun and fair!

Plans are always one of these five Difficulties:

**1: Easy** – You could do this Plan without a lot of effort, but you still might make a mistake.

Examples:

*Climbing* a staircase in the dark with things on it you could slip on

*Hiding* from a troll, alien, or witch who is far away and hasn't yet noticed you

*Riding* a horse you are friendly or familiar with

*Using Karate* against a weak goblin



**2: Average** – This Plan needs some effort and has a decent chance of a mistake.

Examples:


*Climbing* a ladder in the dark while having only one hand to hold on

*Hiding* from a troll, alien, or witch who is nearby and hasn't yet noticed you

*Riding* a horse you are unfamiliar with, or is difficult to ride (a stubborn horse)

*Using Karate* against a normal goblin, a few weak goblins, a mean dog, or a bully about your size



 **3: Hard** – This is more difficult than Average, and requires effort and care

Examples:


*Climbing* a ladder in the dark, with no hands, while the ladder is moving slightly back and forth

*Hiding* from a troll, alien, or witch who is nearby and has noticed you

*Riding* a horse you are unfamiliar with, who is stubborn, scared, and doesn't trust you

*Using Karate* against a small troll, group of normal goblins, or a bully larger than you



 **4: Very Hard** – This is a difficult Plan, with the possibility of a lot of mistakes.

Examples:

*Climbing* a cliff wall, with no ropes or hooks

*Hiding* from a troll, alien, or witch who is nearby, has noticed you, and is coming closer

*Riding* a friendly magical beast you've never seen before, such as a griffin, giant eagle, or hippogriff, or riding a friendly alien monster you've just met

*Using Karate* against a troll, Doomicorn, alien bounty hunter, or evil knight







**5: Nearly Impossible** – This Plan is practically impossible, with almost no chance for success.

Examples:

*Climbing* a wet cliff wall in the dark, with no ropes or hooks

*Hiding* from a tracking dog or guard robot who is nearby, has noticed you, and is coming closer

*Riding* a stubborn magical beast you've never seen before, such as a dragon, or riding a stubborn, possibly dangerous alien monster you've just met

*Using Karate* against a cyclops, evil wizard, alien gladiator, or security robot

*Let's look at some Difficulty examples:*

Pete wants to leap from the roof of one building to the roof of the next building. The Doorkeeper tells him it's about six feet between the buildings. Pete decides he wants to use his Jumping Talent. The Doorkeeper decides this is an *Average* Plan.

In another example, Davina wants to use her BADGER Quality to sing well enough to impress the mean, old Duchess of Miranda. The Doorkeeper says the Duchess is very difficult to please, and decides this is a *Very Hard* Plan.

## Changing Plans – What to Do If the Difficulty Is Too Hard

Sometimes your Plan might be *too* difficult. Things you thought might be easy aren't as simple as you expected. If the Doorkeeper tells you the Difficulty of your Plan, and it's so difficult you don't want to try – change your Plan! This might mean coming up with a completely different idea, waiting for a friend to help, or changing your Plan just enough to make the task easier.

**■ 8. You may change your Plan after the Doorkeeper tells you the Difficulty, but you may only change your Plan *once*.**

After the Doorkeeper tells you the Difficulty of your second Plan, you *must* choose the first Plan or the second!





## Many Explorers and Plans

When you play Secret Door with your friends, sometimes everyone wants to make a Plan at the same time! When this happens, the order of which Explorer does *what* and *when* can get confusing.

Let's discover how Explorers work together, using teamwork and some simple rules for making Plans in the right order.

## Many Explorers, Many Plans

The order of things may be confusing if more than one Explorer makes a Plan at the same time!

For example, Advik wants to *hide* from an alien monster, but Mike wants to *fight* it... And Davina wants to try to talk to it and see if she can *make friends* with it!

As the Explorers discuss their Plans with each other, they realize Advik should *hide first*, and Davina should try talking to the monster *second*. Mike realizes he shouldn't make any Plan yet until he knows if Davina is successful or not... It would be silly to start fighting a monster if one of your buddies has made friends with it!



**15. If more than one Explorer is making a Plan, the Explorers must make their Plans together.**

By planning together, Explorers figure out who is doing what, and in what order they should do things.



Once the Explorers have made their Plans in the order they want, the Doorkeeper goes around to each Explorer and decides the Difficulty of each Plan. Each Explorer attempts their Plan, using the Sundial.

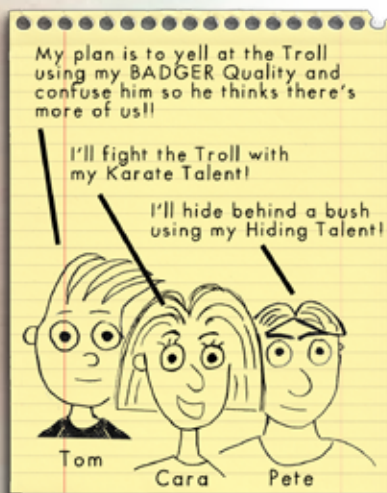
When each Explorer has had a turn and knows whether their Plan succeeded or failed, the Doorkeeper tells the Explorers what happened.

If every Explorers' Plan succeeds, things go the way the Explorers wanted. If some Explorers fail their Plans, things might go differently than they wanted.

So, if more than one Explorer is making a Plan at the same time, follow these steps:

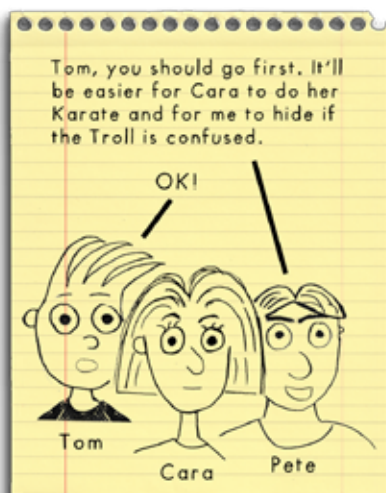
- A.** All Explorers make their Plans *together*. Their Plans determine who is going before whom.
- B.** In the order the Explorers decided, the Doorkeeper goes around to each Explorer, telling the Explorer the Difficulty of the Plan. Each Explorer then tries the Plan using the Sundial *before* the Doorkeeper moves on to the next Explorer.
- C.** Once all Explorers have had a turn trying their Plans, the Doorkeeper tells the Explorers what happened.

For example, a troll surprises Cara, Pete, and Tom.



They make a Plan.

But the Explorers realize Tom needs to go *first*, since that will make it easier for Pete and Cara to attempt their Plans.



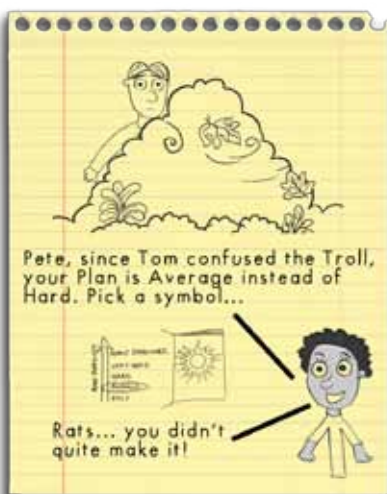


The Doorkeeper starts with Tom, and tells Tom his Plan's Difficulty is Easy, since trolls aren't usually smart and are easy to distract.

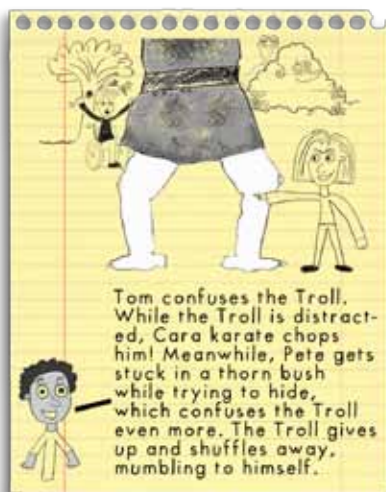
The Doorkeeper moves on to Cara. Since Tom distracted the troll, Cara will have an easier time fighting the troll with a karate chop.



The Doorkeeper then finishes with Pete. She decides that since Tom distracted the troll, Pete's Plan will be a little easier, and makes it Average.



The Doorkeeper then tells everyone what happened:



Things to remember:

**■ 16. If Explorers are attempting to do the same thing, their Plans' Difficulties are always the same – even if they are using different Qualities or Talents.**

For example, if Cara and Pete are hiding from a troll, then Cara and Pete have the same Difficulty, even if Cara is using her FOX Quality, and Pete is using his Hiding Talent.

*But* if each Explorer is doing something different, then each may have a different Difficulty, depending on what each Explorer is trying to do.

For example, if Pete is hiding from a troll, his Difficulty might be Average, since trolls aren't very smart. But if Cara is using karate on a troll, her Difficulty might be Very Hard, since trolls are big and tough.





## More about Settings

The Secret Door can lead to any place you can imagine. Let's explore more examples and ways to create amazing Settings for your Secret Door adventures!

## Settings: Any Place You Can Imagine

If you want the Secret Door to lead to a fantasy world ruled by a queen with magical ice powers, make it happen! If you want the Secret Door to lead to a special place where monster trainers compete against each other by catching and training monsters for battle, make it happen! If you want the Secret Door to lead to a strange underground maze full of goblins ruled by a singing goblin king, make it happen!

Don't be afraid to experiment and try new things. *Your imagination is the most powerful tool you have.* You can make any Setting you imagine, or if you want, use a place you've seen in books, movies, video games, or on television.



## More Setting Ideas

The Settings in this section are all simple ideas to get you started, but the best ideas come from *you* or suggestions from the Explorers!

**Dragondia:** Far away in a fantasy land of castles, keeps, and dungeons, ruled by good and evil dragons

**Wizard School:** Somewhere in Great Britain, at a magical school for young witches and wizards

**Haunted House:** Somewhere in your own town or city, inside a haunted house creeping with scary monsters

**Fairyshire:** In a forest realm of fairies, goblins, and other strange fantasy creatures

**Starcruiser:** On a starship, traveling through deep space and exploring strange new worlds and civilizations

**Lost in Time:** Back in the past, during ancient Egypt, Greece, China, or India; or maybe some time during the American Civil War, Great Depression, or the 1980s

**Cloud Castle:** In a magic castle high above the clouds, with stables of winged horses

**Highway Nowhere:**  
Traveling in a bus,  
along a strange  
desert highway. On  
Highway Nowhere, it's  
usually dark, always  
creepy, and there's  
no telling what weird  
things you might run  
into!



**Invasion of Cooper Street:** In a nearby town or city, invaded by aliens or monsters from beyond

**Ultra-City 26:** Far off in the future, in a floating city on planet Earth



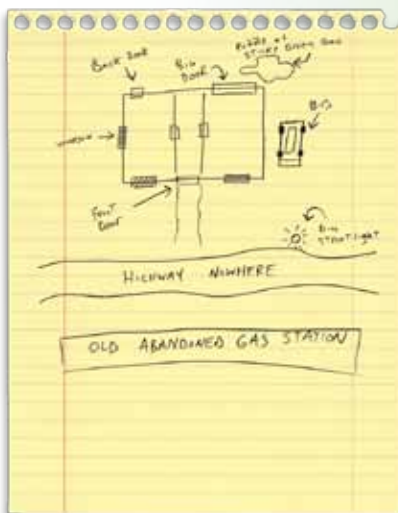
## Describing Your Setting Using Maps

It's often helpful using maps to describe a place in your Setting. Maps and drawings can help you figure out exactly where things are, so you easily can describe them to Explorers. You don't *need* maps to play Secret Door, but sometimes they're useful if you have a big adventure in mind!

For example, a simple drawing of an area such as a building, cave, or forest can tell you where the Explorers are when they move around. This is called a *Place Map*.

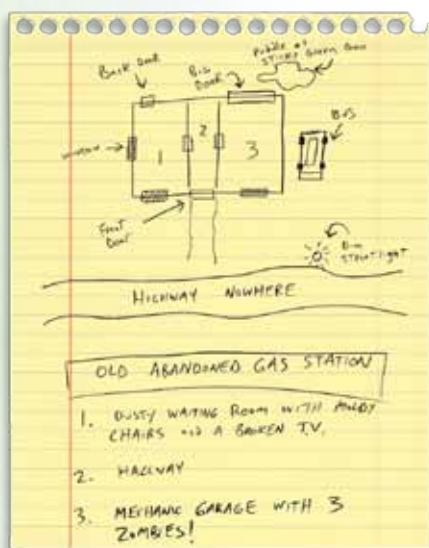
Here's a Place Map of an old, abandoned gas station alongside Highway Nowhere.

The Doorkeeper has quickly drawn the important parts of the area: the doors, the windows, the tour bus the Explorers arrived in, and a mysterious puddle of sticky green goo!





Usually, you keep your Place Map secret! You don't show the Explorers your Place Map, since they need to explore each *Spot* on the map to discover what's there! Instead, the Place Map helps you figure out where everything is that your Explorers might find as they look around. Place Maps help you describe Explorers' surroundings and environment to them.

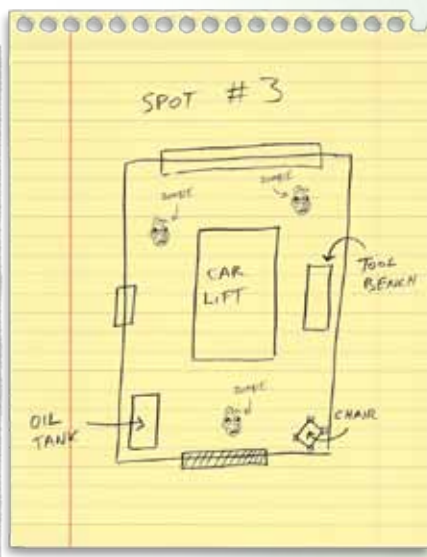


You also may add *more* details to your map, numbering each Spot where important things are, like the Place Map on the left. In this map, the Doorkeeper has decided there's three main spots, and labels them – 1, 2, 3. Then, it's simple to just label each number and note the important parts about each spot!

Spots usually are rooms or smaller areas on the Place Map. A map like this can help you decide what is in each Spot, where your good or bad Characters might be, or any other challenges and Small Events you might come up with in advance. Plus, drawing a map is fun!

If you want, you can draw specific Spots, either ahead of time, or as your Explorers find them. You can draw a *Spot Map* on paper, a whiteboard, or any other handy place to draw something.

For *this* Spot Map, the Doorkeeper decided to draw Spot 3 from the Place Map in more detail so the Explorers have something to look at. Since there are three zombies in this Spot, the Doorkeeper thought it would be helpful for the Explorers to see everything in the room!



Unlike your Place Map, you *want* to show Explorers the Spot Maps as they discover each Spot! Since the Explorers find each Spot as they move around the Place Map, showing them a Spot Map may give them a better idea of what's *in* the Spot. A Spot Map gives Explorers a better idea of where they are, without giving away the secrets on your Place Map!

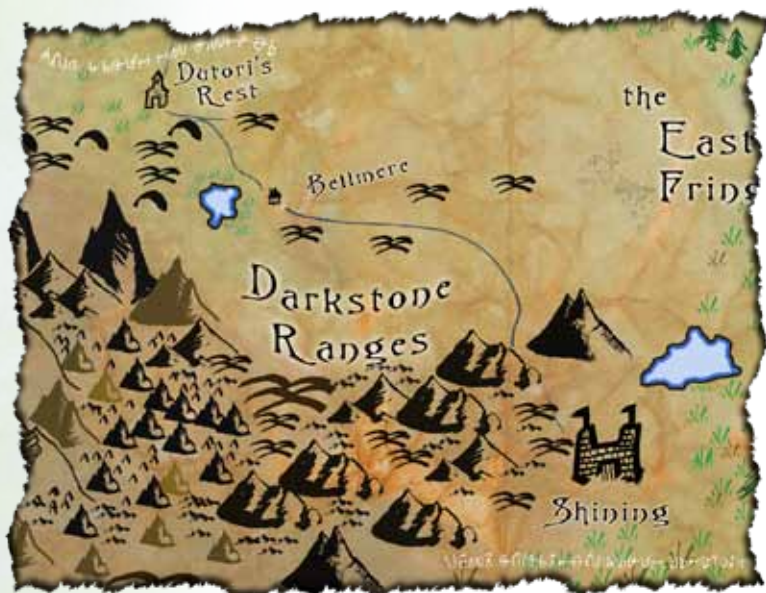
Remember, *you don't have to draw every Spot!* What you decide to draw is up to you, but think about what might be helpful for the Explorers to see.



You may even ask the Explorers to take turns drawing the Spot Maps based on how you describe them.

And don't feel like you need to just draw! Creative Doorkeepers can build important Spot Maps using Lego® blocks or inside a construction videogame such as *Minecraft*.

Drawings, models, or just great description and imagination — there's no right or wrong way to describe a place and show Explorers where things are. Let your creativity shine!







# Adventure Creator

## Setting

The imaginary place, time period, or world the Explorers arrive in.

Where is it?

When is it?

## Portal

How Explorers enter the imaginary worlds through the Secret Door.

Where does it appear?

What is it?

## Characters

Important people and creatures the Explorers might meet.

Who?

What are they like?

Who?

What are they like?

Who?

What are they like?

Who?

What are they like?

## Story

**Big Event:** The main plot or main challenge of an adventure.

**Small Events:** Things that happen requiring Explorers to make a decision.



# The U-Pages

Pages that are all about YOU!



## About these U-Pages

These next few pages are very important, because they're about someone very unique: *You*.

On these critical pages you'll keep on-going notes of your ever-improving Qualities and Talents. You'll also record the items you bring with you on your travels and *Special Stuff* you find in the worlds Beyond the Door. And you'll make notes of your heroic deeds, amazing adventures, and strange Characters you meet!

Your *Quality pages* keep track of your BEAR, FOX, and BADGER Qualities. Following each of those Quality pages are the *Talent pages* related to those Qualities.

After, you'll see the *Backpack* page, where you keep track of the stuff you bring with you on your adventures.

Finally, are the *Adventure Journal* pages, where you keep track of anything important that happens during your adventures.

Every Secret Door Explorer should have their own U-Pages. Ideally, each Explorer should have their own copy of this book. But when that isn't possible, you can photocopy or hand-copy any of these following pages.

Date

**Legendary!**  
+5 spaces

**Amazing**  
+4 spaces

Date

Date

**Spectacular**  
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**Fantastic**  
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Date

Date

**Outstanding**  
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**Good**

Date

# BEAR

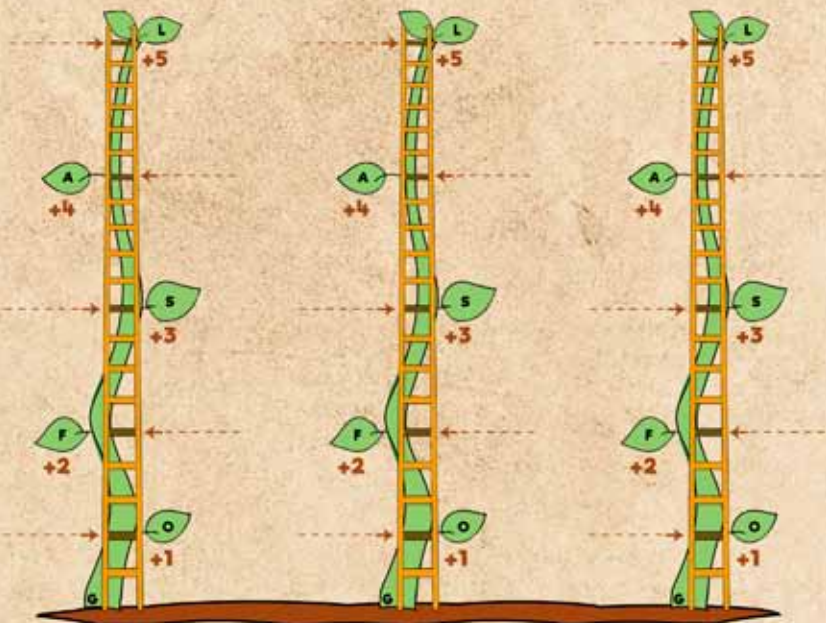
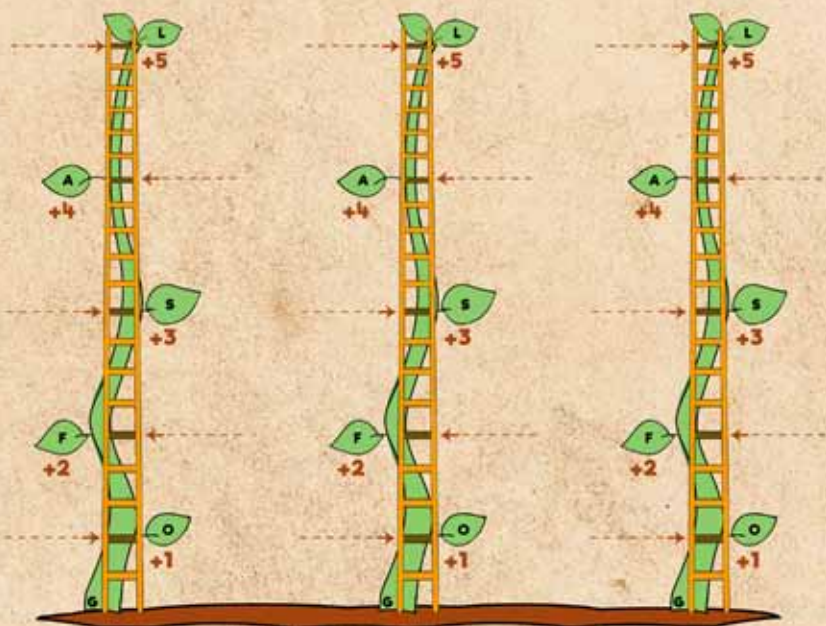


**BODY**

**STRENGTH**

**WISDOM**





Date

**Legendary!**  
**+5 spaces**

**Amazing**  
**+4 spaces**

Date

Date

**Spectacular**  
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Date

Date

**Outstanding**  
**+1 space**

**Good**

Date

# FOX

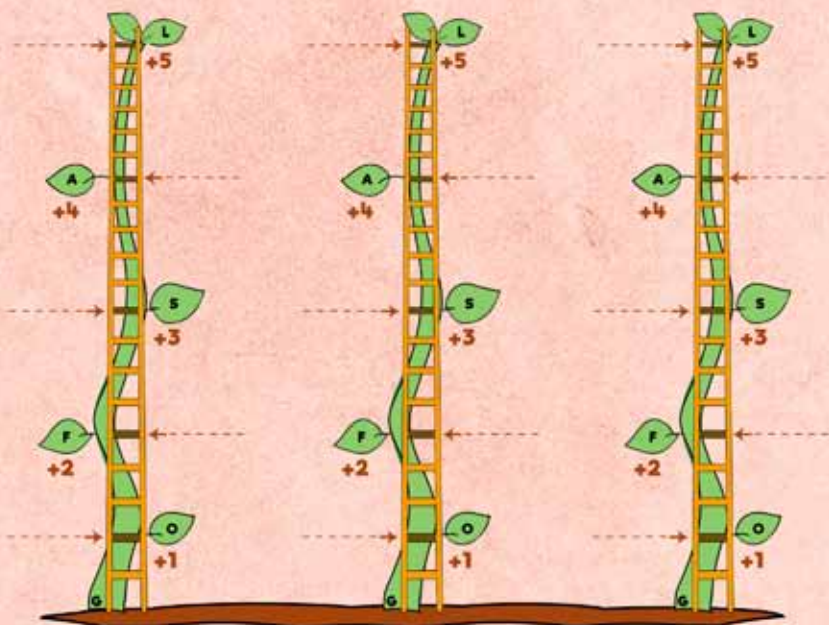
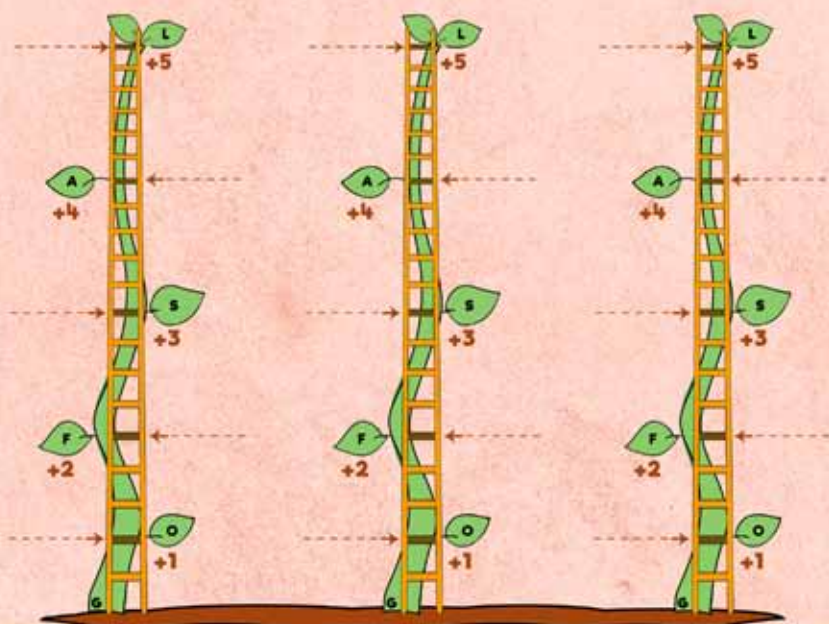


**SMARTS**

**QUICKNESS**

**INSTINCT**





Date

**Legendary!**  
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**Amazing**  
**+4 spaces**

Date

Date

**Spectacular**  
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**Fantastic**  
**+2 spaces**

Date

Date

**Outstanding**  
**+1 space**

**Good**

Date

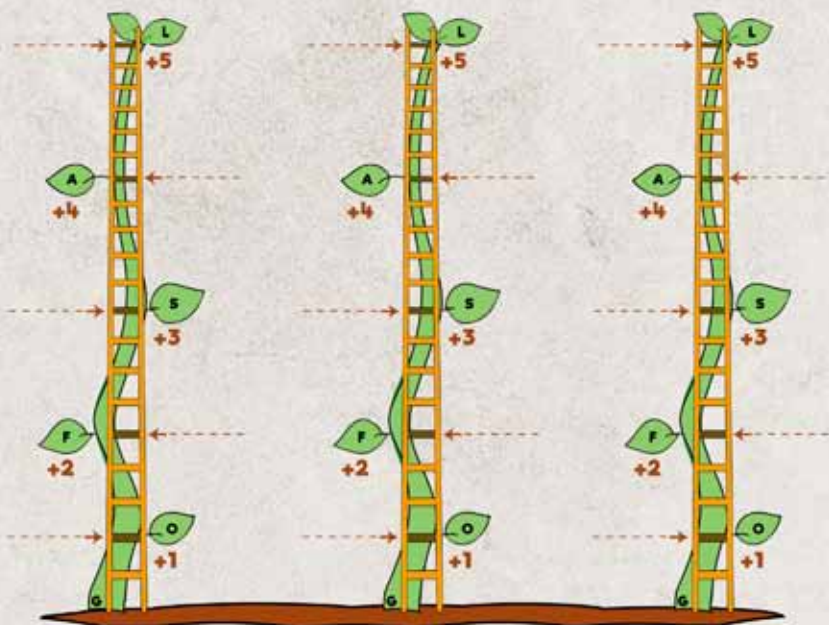
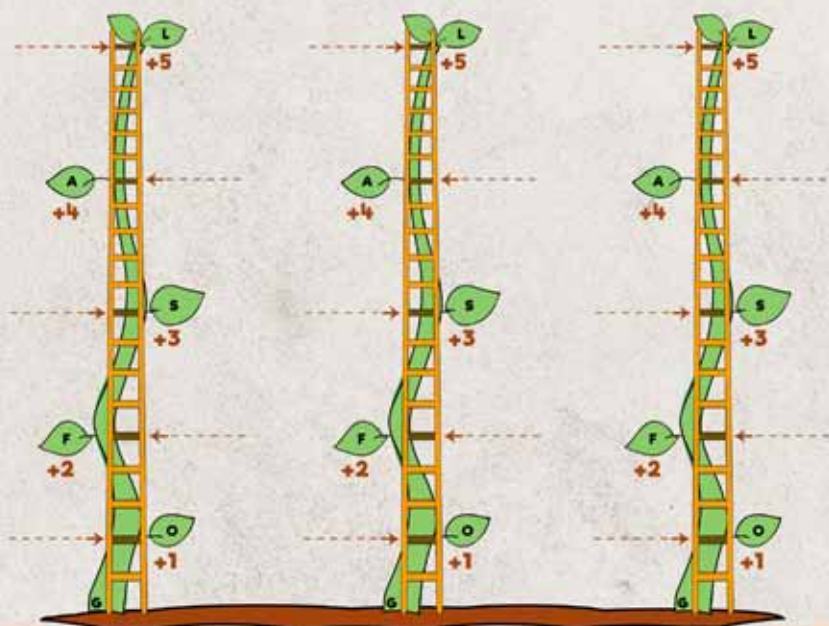
# BADGER



**CREATIVITY**


**COURAGE**

**FRIENDLINESS**









# Adventure Journal