

Herod's Palace Adventure: You are a stonecutter's assistant (either girl or boy) who will visit a different room at the palace each day for construction and repairs. While there you will find yourself advantageously positioned to be made privy, surreptitiously, to some of the goings-on around you. For game purposes, you are given a Countenance stat which begins at its minimum of zero but may be increased by instructions as you progress.

To get started for the first of December, pick a letter between A and W, and turn to that lettered entry to see what happens at your location for the day. From then on, once you've read any entry, note or mark that letter, then choose one of the Next options given in the entry to which you'll be proceeding as your location on the following day. If you go to a letter that you've already marked, you'll move instead to the first letter that hasn't been visited starting at A and scanning forward, marking that as your location for the day. So, when all entries A through W are marked, you'll wind up at entry X on Christmas eve.

A (Chapel) A compact Grecian-style shrine to the Unknown God, simply furnished for individual prayer and communal worship rather than for temple ordinances and offerings. Within stands a priest styling himself after the ancient order of Melchizedek in ceremonial attire, holding a staff of office topped by a resplendent fan of eagle feathers. Although, one side of the fan has been singed, having probably gotten too near a hanging lamp. If you have discovered a source for some feathers he could be advised of to replace the burned ones, your Countenance improves +1. Next D (Dressing rooms), or R (Greenhouse).

B (Kitchens) In honor of Herod's Edomite ancestry, a batch of Esau's pottage is being stirred up to be served upon the return of a party of hunters who've gone in search of a lion that's reported to have mysteriously appeared in one of the Judean precincts. You're told about their leader, the intrepid palace gamekeeper, having purposely set out armed with nothing but a sling. Cook lets you sample the stew during your stay in return for an adjustment of some hearthstones. Next F (Dining hall), or H (Parlor).

C (Infirmary) Apportioned as a sick ward and stillroom dispensary, there's also a screened-off asylum for quarantined patients. You attempt to give cheer to the residents as you proceed with your work, and are interested to see that they're currently being attended by a Roman physician carefully mentoring a child protegee whom he calls Lucas. As you overhear them discussing the bandaging of a patient with an extensive skin abrasion, if you can recount a type of therapeutic poultice that you've heard described, your Countenance improves +1. Next G (Waiting room), or K (Nursery).

D (Dressing rooms) Here, a suite devoted to costume displays racks of fashionable wear, bolts of fabric, cubicles for alterations, some burnished metal mirrors and a couple of makeup tables. The tailor, busily draping a mannequin, normally takes umbrage at any distraction from his haberdashery, but for once gladly demonstrates to a local lady in meticulous detail the approved method for fitting some baby swaddling clothes he's designed for the palace. Next U (Gallery), or J (Dayroom).

E (Drawing room) Its name derived from "withdrawing", is akin to a club sitting room but fitted up like a sheik's pavilion, with rich hangings, reclining couches, plus a sideboard with a ceramic tea service and cups. Curtained alcoves opening off it are something like "green rooms" for privacy in calming & collecting oneself or powdering one's nose. In rising to exit one of these, the acting herald brushes away a small vial of anointing oil which has been overturned on the tabletop, but lying on its side still contains a little; and you may take it. Next B (Kitchens), or O (Throne room).

F (Dining hall) The great hall of the palace, scene of entertaining functions, with its long trestles & buffet. The jester may be found haunting this vicinity with prying eyes, while sporting a plaited crown of thorns over his dangling hood in mockery. If you haven't yet been to work in the Audience bay at any of your prior locations, there's no further effect here. Otherwise if you'd permitted the signal bell's tolling, the jester has learned of it and since your alarm interrupted a session of abuse aimed at him (along with gobbets of food), your Countenance improves +1; but if you'd hindered it the result was that an envoy from Rome happened to enter the hall unannounced around that time and your Countenance worsens -1 when the guard fingers you as a convenient patsy. Next N (Arcade), or A (Chapel).

G (Waiting room) Tasteful yet bland antechamber crowded with many who await an introduction. The secretary emerges to single out a minister from the Jewish temple addressed familiarly as Ez, and reads out what sounds like a cockeyed bill of sale for the transfer to the temple of one goat, mutually adjudicated as unblemished, in exchange for a quantity of the precious aromatic resin Frankincense. As the secretary affixes his seal to the bill, Ez accepts it then bows and leaves the room without, it seems, having spoken a word. Next T (Library), or W (Gymnasium).

H (Parlor) An elaborately decorated and furnished rotunda made for the majordomo's (chief steward's) reception room & interview divan, but typically presided over in casual gatherings and parties by the grande dame (honored matron). Even now planning is underway for the great 50- year Jubilee, and they're seeking someone they can enlist as choreographer to conduct the celebratory procession. If you have witnessed such a dance instructor that might serve, your Countenance improves +1. Next E (Drawing room), or D (Dressing rooms).

I (Workshops) With the smithies outside, the jewelers, carvers and craftsmen maintain communal workstations about this indoor area. The wizened carpenter, who has a cleverly interlocking ornamental star of David set upon his workbench, is engaged in crafting what look like some toy pinwheels in collaboration with the young lady fletcher, who's precisely trimming some elegant eagle feathers from a bagful next to her, along with the more typical goose quills that she fashions. Next Q (Baths), or T (Library).

J (Dayroom) An untidy though fairly well kept up servants' lounge, set with several small card tables ringed by stools. There are rude shelves pegged to the walls, some having musicians' instruments laid on them, and a curiously curled ram's horn shofar trumpet leaning in one corner, indicating this as a sometime rehearsal space. An older couple who figure to be husband & wife sit at their ease, mulling over the need for a bandmate who'd be a proficient harp player. If you have somewhere observed a lyrist you can recommend, your Countenance improves +1. Next S (Ballroom), or B (Kitchens).

K (Nursery) Set close by the harem, the nursery is however usually overseen by midwives. As you quietly creep about your business you watch as two aged religieuses named Anna and Simeon are brought in from Jerusalem's temple to use their reputed powers of augury to perchance forecast the destiny of a newborn. If you've been given a sidelong briefing on the application of swaddling clothes, you can help to replace the infant in its crib and your Countenance improves +1. Next L (Audience bay), or V (Theater).

L (Audience bay) An official assembly hall and staff mustering area, also in use as a lay court for hearing petitions and grievances, incorporates a fairly wide commons below a projecting balcony- like platform. Some shepherds have gathered in a crowd, and those that are arguing seem to settle their business when one takes off a sandal and hands it to the other. After their departure, you see a palace lad sneaking up toward the pull rope for the signal bell mounted outside on the roof above, and must decide whether to shoo him away from here or just wait and listen to its tolling. Next J (Dayroom), or M (Storerooms).

M (Storerooms) An array of lockers, pantries and crates, with stairs leading down to the cellars, supervised and inventoried by the butler. Now there is much to- do occasioned by the unexpected arrival of an exotic caravan with potentates from the east, and the butler throws up his hands protesting that he's faced with an impossible requisition from their agent at such short notice for a supply of some sort of rare, sought- after perfume or incense the palace may provide, even at whatever price he chooses. If you are able to volunteer the whereabouts of a quantity of Frankincense, your Countenance improves +1. Next K (Nursery), or P (Bed chambers).

N (Arcade) An arrangement of a few booths around a courtyard fountain for the drop- off and trading of lost and unused items and materials. The booths are rented by merchants who do the sorting and refurbishing while adding in their own goods for a price. In the act of sponging off a chalked graffito on a wall that reads: "a virgin shall conceive," you catch sight of one of a visiting group of athletes who ducks behind a booth to be handed a folded piece of parchment which he quickly hides in a red sash he's wearing. Next O (Throne room), or C (Infirmary).

O (Throne room) This splendidly appointed presentation venue is used for recognizing dignitaries and emissaries, the issuance of decrees and commissions, and resolution of any questions arising over rightful succession. The cupbearer assumes responsibility for overall maintenance in here, and is agitated over receiving a serving of stew purported to be Esau's pottage for the king, who will be declaring upon Caesar Augustus' census and taxation. If you have gained the familiarity to certify whether it is such, your Countenance improves +1. Next P (Bed chambers), or S (Ballroom).

P (Bed chambers) Interior sleeping quarters and guest apartments, divided with the harem as a separate domain. You chat with the chambermaid, who notes some recent complaints of troubling dreams at night. Says she's been offering for the occupants the use of beeswax candles instead of the smokier lamps or tallows, as it might clear the air; and she whispers to you that these candles are being produced within the harem. Next H (Parlor), or F (Dining hall).

Q (Baths) Pools for both men and women are a feature of the palace, and you and the masons are also working with the plumber on an extension for a steam room sauna. In the portico outside the baths themselves, you take note of the fastidiousness of an ascetic Nazirite gentleman and particularly his care in putting up his long, flowing hair. If you have the partial vial of anointing oil to offer him, your Countenance improves +1. Next R (Greenhouse), or E (Drawing room).

R (Greenhouse) A modest garden fixture on a plaza, in the care of a woman florist rather than gardener, containing a herbarium of collected dried plants and spices which looks to be her delight. She is enthusing to a servitor while arranging a bouquet, about the import of the dayspring in timing and flowering, and especially its influence in healing properties: mentioning a general medicinal preparation for a poultice over potentially infected wounds. Next M (Storerooms), or Q (Baths).

S (Ballroom) Furnishings here are only temporary and easily movable. This dance hall doubles as the playroom for some less strenuous indoor sports and games, although its primary purpose is for instruction and display of either recognized, foreign or intricate patterns of dancing, at times in jovial company. For the space of a couple of hours, you look on as a young girl takes the floor in an exacting rehearsal of steps for soloing, under the tutelage of her watchful mother. Next W (Gymnasium), or G (Waiting room).

T (Library) Central reading room and scriptorium, with register of important documents. Scholars examining prophetic scrolls regarding the birthplace of the messiah fix upon the old- time settlement of Ephratah now called Bethlehem by the Hebrews. If you haven't yet been to work in the Audience bay at any of your prior locations, there's no further effect here. Otherwise it turns out that a student wanted to sound a fire alarm to upset this most susceptible of locales as a joke, and if you'd precipitated its tolling, you find that a scholar injured her leg in the evacuation drill and your Countenance worsens -1 as the fault gets pinned on your workgroup; but if you'd prevented it, the student in question winds up seated on a dunce stool and your Countenance improves +1. Next I (Workshops), or N (Arcade).

U (Gallery) This long, well- lit walkway is dominated by pieces of statuary, one of which is an imposing conceptual model of an angelic figure revealed in an attitude of ecstatic pronouncement. At a bend in the promenade you come across the architect who's fussing over the arrangements for an elaborate, seven-branched, tall menorah candlestick. If you can confidentially inform him where he might procure beeswax candles to accentuate the design, your Countenance improves +1. Next A (Chapel), or I (Workshops).

V (Theater) The proscenium stage is here located in the forefront of a rectangular chest- like room having an arched ceiling, in contrast to the more traditional open amphitheater arrangement. So this also serves as an auditorium for less formal oratory, addresses and debates. For a time a man walks onstage and around it, dressed up in ersatz princely regalia, practicing strumming an attractive tune on a lyre in accompaniment to his recitation of a poetic psalm. Next C (Infirmary), or U (Gallery).

W (Gymnasium) In the recreation room, the coach is impressing an assorted group, all wearing the green sash of the palace, with the necessity for development of the whole person: body, mind, heart and spirit as interrelated. To help get his points across, he tells some parables that have been passed down by renowned thinkers. Coming to you he asks that you'd leave the room for a bit as they'll be discussing their strategy for the upcoming games. If you call to mind an incident involving a red sash for his information, your Countenance improves +1. Next V (Theater), or L (Audience bay).

X (Observatory) You have ascended to the highest turret of the palace, and at the late- night end of a long day are taking a breather in the still evening air. A noticeable brightening of the wondrous star and sudden suspension of cooing from the dove-cote over in the angle of the rampart precedes the appearance of a multitude of the heavenly host arcing across the sky and proclaiming: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

When you rush back down to the palace and breathlessly report on all that you've seen, if you are left at this point with a Countenance of no more than 2 your story will likely be dismissed as a dream that came to you drowsing on the rooftop. However if your Countenance is now 3 or better you'll find yourself accorded a special invitation to attend the approaching festivities of the Jubilee, where you'd be asked by the hostess to relate your experiences for the benefit of those present.