

in
Looking-Glass Limbo

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One fine day in the positively topsy-turvy world of Wonderland, Miss Dorothy Gale paid a visit to Queen Alice at Heart Castle. The two friends had set up a playdate as respite from their adventuring. But they knew merely a few hours over tea would not suffice and so a slumber party was called for. Alice ordered they not be disturbed under any circumstances for an indefinite time and authorized the Knave to enforce it by threat of execution!

"And so this is a rook. They move this way..." explained Alice, seated on the floor of her bedroom in front of a chessboard with Miss Gale adjacent to her.

"Okay," Dorothy replied, though a bit befuddled. "So if it makes it over here and knocks over the big one...do I say queen me?"

Alice rolled her eyes and reached for the Red Queen piece. "Nooo, that's checkers again. And this is a queen. It's like the most important piece on the board. It's not just, "the big one," and the King is the one you're really after."

"Sorry, Alice. I'm sure I'll get the hang of it. I'm just a little...distracted, that's all." Dorothy blushed. Her unchristened eyes had been unintentionally gravitating towards Alice's bosom. The Queen was wearing a deep red, silk negligee that somehow showed more cleavage than her normal attire. Dorothy had opted for a more modest, light blue pajama smock that covered her chest and shoulders but draped only to the knees. This made sitting down or walking on elevated places an equally revealing potential as Alice's, though in a different way. But Dorothy hadn't even considered it. All she could think was..."Hey, Alice. I've got a question."

"Shoot."

"It's not that I'm not enjoying this...believe me, I am! But I was just wondering...should women our age be sitting around having slumber parties and eating sweets all night? Is it not...unbecoming of us?"

"Nonsense! I do this sort of thing by myself all the time. And what's this "women our age" stuff? Who's to say we're too old for it? Is there a cutoff date for sleepovers?"

"Well, no. I suppose not. I just hadn't done anything like this since I was...I dunno...maybe 13 or 14?"

Alice made a sly expression with a devilish grin. "Alright. If that's your criteria, then we're well within those parameters."

"What do you mean?"

Alice crossed her arms and closed her eyes. She turned her nose up to the side and declared, "I say we're not aging up anymore. I'm turning 13 next week. And you're right behind me at 14."

"Huh?! How's that make sense?"

Alice's eyes opened and she bursted with joy. "It doesn't! And that's the beauty of Wonderland. I'm the Queen and I say how age works. If I wanted to, I could put out a royal decree tomorrow stating that anyone who views you as older than 15 gets their head cutoff!"

Dorothy cringed. "That's quite alright. I can be 15. 22 even... since...that's my real age."

Alice's shoulders slumped, followed by a deep sigh. "I get it...Wonderland can be a bit much. But I do hope you're enjoying your time here!"

"Mhmm, I am!" Dorothy's face lit up with a sincere smile. "And chess too. I just need to play more. But first...I have another question."

Alice could clearly see that Dorothy was squirming a little in her place on the floor. She cautiously asked, "Yes?"

"Well...I kinda need to tinkle..."

"You've gotta pee? Ah, well in that case." She pointed to the bedroom door. "Make a right and two lefts down the hall to the lavatory."

"Thank you! I'll be right back." The long legged, barefooted yankee sprang up and pranced to the hall. She muttered under her breath, "To the right, two lefts, down the hall. To the right, to the left, down the hall. Two to the right...no, wait..." No sooner than her feet touched the cold marble outside of the Queen's bed chambers, Dorothy had misremembered her instructions. The draft did no favor on her bladder and she quickly reasserted her goal and said, "Make a right, to the left and then down the hall."

About 15 minutes passed without Dorothy's return. Alice was laid back on the carpet with her hands behind her neck, kicking her feet into the air when she realized... "The hell's taking her so long?" She looked at the door, anticipating it to open any moment. "Hmm...maybe she had to do more than a number one?" Alice tossed another bon bon into the air and caught it with her mouth. She rolled over to one side, facing the door with one hand under her cheek while the other fiddled with chess pieces. Finally, she got tired of waiting. "Ugh. Please don't tell me some lower pip card ran into her and is giving her a hard time." She sprang to her feet and stomped off to find out what was holding her friend up.

As Alice turned the corner and made her way towards the second left, where the bathroom was, she made a quick glance at the first left. About five feet back and in the recess of the wall was a tall, full body mirror. Alice had placed it there to allow for one last vanity check before going downstairs as she passed. Out of habit, she turned towards it and was briefly taking note of how her ass looked from that angle when something caught her eye. Panic washed over her. There in the reflection was not only the fit and youthful queen, but Dorothy. She was walking towards another hallway, behind Alice, seemingly unaware of her presence. Alice quickly turned around and her fear had been confirmed. Dorothy was nowhere in sight. Nowhere except in the reflection of the mirror!

"Oh, no...this is bad," Alice said aloud. Her lips quivered and her body shook. Alice's mind flashed back to her time in Looking-Glass Land. It was the greatest test she had ever been subjected to. What started out as a mere curiosity unfolded into the very event that led her to becoming queen in the first place. Alice had taken what she'd achieved while in Looking-Glass Land and used it to defeat the old Queen of Hearts here in Wonderland. But her seizure of the throne in this world felt like child's play compared to what she had endured in the Mirror World. For but a moment, she hesitated. Though her fear of returning to the place that nearly claimed her life years ago was outweighed by the concern for her friend. "Dorothy must have turned too quickly and stepped right through the mirror without even realizing it. She's strong. But she's not prepared for what's in there. I gotta go help her!"

Meanwhile, Dorothy had been walking aimlessly down hallways that still looked like the familiar Heart Castle at first. But once she had made a turn past the furthest entryway that was visible to the mirror, an entirely new arena awaited her.

"Huh? I don't remember this."

The walls seemed to go on endlessly as if they were silver, translucent sheets. There was no ceiling to speak of and there were more than a dozen mirrors within view, all of them standing on their own, with no walls to support them. Just as Dorothy was about to turn back, she saw Alice stomping towards her. She seemed angry.

Before Dorothy could even react, Alice was approaching with her hands outward to grab her. She began shouting obscenities at the poor farm girl! "What the fuck is wrong with you, you little nincompoop?! Airheaded, waste of space, cry baby, loser!" Dorothy stood in shock with her mouth agape as Alice grabbed at her pajama's shoulder sleeves. "I hate your guts, but let me show you what I really think of you!"

A tear was just about to fall from Dorothy's eye as she wrestled to get free of the Queen's grasp. But then something strange happened. Dorothy realized she wasn't being assaulted. She was being forcibly turned towards a nearby mirror and made to see her own reflection with Alice beside her. Instead of an angry woman, she saw a scared friend. Her own reflection wasn't one of fear, but hope.

Then she could hear Alice's voice match the movements in the mirror. "Here, you see that now. Don't turn away! Keep looking at me in the reflection. Avoid looking at yourself. You've wandered into Looking-Glass World. Everything works in reverse here. It probably sounded like I was saying some pretty awful things. But what I was trying to say was, "How the fuck did you end up in here, sweetie? It's not your fault, but you've got to be careful. Let me show you before it's too late."

Dorothy was stunned trying to take it all in. She stood shoulder to shoulder with Alice. The two sidehugged without breaking their line of sight at one another's reflections. "Oh, Alice," Dorothy sobbed. "I didn't know what was going on!"

"Shh shh, it's alright. I know this place all too well. This is where I underwent the majority of my training before returning to Wonderland. It is not for the faint of heart. As long as you look into a mirror, you can understand what someone is really saying, since it's the equivalent of how they'd behave on the outside. But if you try to communicate using this world's rules, it won't be pretty. Go ahead and give it a try. Look at me in the mirror and use one word to describe what you think of me."

Dorothy did as Alice suggested. She looked right at the blonde bombshell, who she now noticed was wearing a crown, despite still being in her nightgown, and uttered, "Beautiful."

Alice smiled at the compliment. "Now...I want you to turn towards me and with all the strength and focus you have...I want you to say the same thing to my face."

Though confused, Dorothy complied. She broke her side-facing embrace with Alice and looked at her directly. After a moment's pause, she opened her mouth and said the last thing that would ever have crossed her mind to say... "Bitch!" Dorothy gasped and slapped her hand across her mouth in shock. Alice frantically pointed to the mirror to direct Dorothy's next utterance. "Alice, I'm so sorry...I would never..."

"It's okay. I know. Now you see why this world is so difficult. The simplest of gestures are misconstrued. The very physics of the world are inverted. To get somewhere fast, you have to slow down. Consequences occur before actions. But as long as there is a mirror nearby, you can make it work with whoever you're trying to communicate with. Just don't look at yourself too long. Your own reflection will lie to you. Anyone else's is fine. Still, we need to try and get out of here before someone else approaches." Alice's eyes darted around suspiciously.

"Well, can't we just go back the way we came?"

Alice pointed back in the direction Dorothy had been walking from. "Ha! And where might that be?" Instead of a hallway that led back to the Queen's cozy bedroom, all that could be seen was more of the same. Infinite walls and a dozen randomly facing mirrors.

"Then how do we leave?!"

"Unfortunately, the only way out is to win the game."

"What game?"

“Problem number one...you don’t even realize you’re playing a game until you’re knee deep into it. There’s no one to even tell you the rules. Just my telling you puts you at an advantage over 90% of the people who ever come to Looking-Glass Land.”

“Gosh, Alice...this is scary!”

“It is...but we can do this. I can come and go whenever I please, since I’ve won the game before. But until you win, you’re here until the board resets and you try again or something kills you.”

“So what is the game, exactly?”

Alice smirked. “You’re in luck...chess.”

“Chess?”

“Yes. The entire world is one giant chessboard. We’re in one of the squares right now. Let me check...I think over here...ah, yes, here it is...” Alice showed Dorothy a big etching on the floor over in a corner between the back of a mirror and infinity. “G2. That’s what square we’re in. That means you’re trying to get to E8, since you started on a white square. I can move anywhere on the board I want, since I’m a queen. But since this is your first time, you’re limited to pawn movements, unless another piece helps you.”

“So you can help me?”

“I can. But just in case we get separated, there are some other things you should know. If you see the other queens, they’ll likely not mess with you, since you’re a pawn. The Red Queen might try to waste your time though. But whatever you do, stay away from the Red Knight at all costs! Just trust me on that.”

“He’s the horsey guy, right?”

Alice sighed. “Yeah, that’s him. But the White one is okay. In fact, let him know you’re with me. Just remember to use a mirror to do it. Because everything is reversed. Which reminds me, if someone attacks you, let them.”

“Let them?”

“Yes, your reaction will be the opposite of what it looks like. And if you see someone worth attacking, approach them unarmed.”

“No problem there...I am unarmed. I don’t have the axe or the amulet.”

“Here...” Alice reached under the little tutu of her night gown and retrieved both of Dorothy’s items.

“Alice! You’re amazing!”

"I figured you might need them. But my point was that everything will come out the opposite of how you intend. Like when I was grabbing you earlier. If you approach someone unarmed, you'll attack them if they are someone to be attacked. And if they attack you, then not putting up your guard will actually be a defensive move."

"Okay, but how will I know if someone needs to be attacked or not?"

"You'll know. Oh and one more thing...if you run into two brothers, Tweedledee and Tweedledum...just avoid them and don't let them know you know me." This response seemed peculiar to Dorothy but she nodded in agreement. "Okay, that's it. Let's get going. Hopefully, with my abilities, we can end this thing sooner rather than later." Alice looked off into what seemed like a random direction to Dorothy but she just quietly stood by. "Okay, let's see. We're in G2. I can get to E4 pretty easily from here. I think our best bet is to go there, look around and go up to E5. This early in the game, unless there are any knights around, the resistance should be pretty easy towards the Red King."

"How on earth did you survive when you were here before?"

"I used the Pocket Watch more than I ever had. It's how I found out it can work against you when overused. But that was before I learned the rules. I don't think we'll need to use it at all this time."

"Gee, Alice. I sure am glad you know what you're doing."

Alice smiled at her and extended her hand. "Shall we?" Dorothy took Alice's hand and the two started walking. With no effort at all, they began moving at what seemed like the speed of light. Entire environments, far different than the mystical-looking infinity zone they were just at, flew right past them. Alice's speed as a queen was truly remarkable. Then all at once, they slowed down and found themselves in a large field, with windmills and crops on a hill blowing in the wind. "Damn it!"

Dorothy, forgetting she needed to speak into a mirror, asked Alice what was wrong. But she soon saw a battle up ahead. Alice had misjudged the state of the board. Hundreds of White Pawns were rushing into battle against an equal number of Red Pawns and there looked to be a Bishop present as well! Alice frantically looked around for a mirror to properly redirect Dorothy, but before she could, she heard Dorothy say, "I'm not going anywhere with you!"

Alice drew her Vorpall Blade, knowing that it would come across to Dorothy as a friendly gesture. But it was too late. Dorothy was in full retreat towards a neighboring square. Everything had happened so fast that she hadn't had time to process her actions. But Alice couldn't do anything about it at the moment. A squad of Red Pawns had descended upon her and she was forced to fight. She quickly sheathed her sword under her skirt and a split second later, five pawns collapsed with wounds across their chests. It had been a while, but Alice felt satisfaction at seeing her use of this world's logic put into action properly.

However, a scared Dorothy, axe in hand, had made it into another domain. She was in a forest now. There was a dense canopy overhead. She felt as if she'd been running around aimlessly for hours but it had only been five minutes or so. Dorothy then remembered the way the rules had been explained to her. If she was feeling the consequences before the action, then she needed to center herself and make sure she consciously decided she would do the opposite of what was needed in order to get the desired outcome. So she made up her mind and decided to panic and run aimlessly in a random direction. All at once, everything slowed down and calmness descended over her. She was able to get her bearings. Under the shade of the trees, it was evident that the sun was going down. If everything was flipped, then that meant the direction of the sunset was actually east, not west. Dorothy tried to remember which way she had run from Alice and the battle in the field.

But before she could recall, she saw someone in a clearing up ahead. Not just anyone, it was the Red Knight! He was sitting down by a fire and his horse was grazing nearby. Alice had warned her to avoid him at all costs. But all of a sudden, Dorothy felt herself being toppled over on the ground. In a flash, the Red Knight was on top of her, holding her by the neck with one hand and reaching up her pajamas with the other, trying to remove her panties. It was clear, he was trying to rape her! Fortunately, elastic hadn't been invented yet, so the button that fastened them together made it difficult to slip over her hips. But she knew that whatever her next action was had better be the right one. It became painfully clear what had happened to Alice during her encounter with the Red Knight. Either she had been taken against her will or had chosen to do what she needed to in order to survive.

There were four possibilities for Dorothy. If she resisted now, she'd surely be overpowered by the brute. But in order to even try, she'd have to submit. Because if she tried to fight back, she would actually submit. However, doing so would lead the knight into a false sense of security. If he believed she was willfully consenting, then he'd slow his force against her. But she'd have to do more than submit and choose to proactively invite him in order to pull off a deception. A very complicated world this was. And in the milliseconds Dorothy had to decide, as the Red Knight pawed at her clothing on the forest floor, she thought of Nick. She thought of Alice. She thought about winning this stupid game and going home.

And so it was decided...Dorothy chose to fight back as hard as she could. But as expected, the decision caused her to loosen her body. The Knight's chokehold on her loosed as well in response to the ease in which he was able to slip her underwear down off of her legs. Phase one was a success! Now, if she were to take advantage of the situation, she'd have to do the unthinkable. She chose to sit up and welcome the Knight's advances and committed to pleasing him however he wanted.

Suddenly, the Knight was thrown backwards away from Dorothy. It looked as though he'd taken an uppercut to the chin from the head of Dorothy's axe. But she had deliberately set it aside when submitting to the Knight's advances. Everything worked exactly as Dorothy intended. Because she had chosen to do the opposite of her intent. The game was starting to make sense to her now.

Then abruptly, she found herself in another part of the forest. No Red Knight to be found. She was walking along calmly, which meant she must have hurried away from the site of the encounter. Up ahead, Dorothy could see a vertically standing mirror. It was very out of place, just stuck there, upright amongst the trees with nothing to support it. But it was a welcome sight to her, so she ran over to it in order to see if it could somehow help her find where she should go. Upon approach, however, she froze in place. The reflection in the mirror was not what she'd expected. It was her, but not as she was there in the forest, wearing light blue pajamas. No, this image of Dorothy was one she had seen before but chosen to ignore.

A wicked smile was plastered on the face of the reflection. She wore all black with a tightly laced corset. Her pigtailed were down and replaced by the brim of a pointed hat. And in place of Dorothy's bare feet, black and white striped leggings followed all the way down to the legendary Silver Slippers. The scariest thing about seeing her reflection was not the fact that it showed a different image than how she appeared there in the forest. What frightened her was how alluring it was. It was not at all how Dorothy thought of herself on a day-to-day basis. Meek, timid, unremarkably prosaic. This Dorothy was confident, powerful, commanding... and sexy.

Across the board, Alice had finished hacking her way through the battlefield, otherwise known as E4. Rather than advancing to E5 as planned, she ventured towards D5 in the hopes of finding Dorothy. This space was somewhat similar to the area the girls had first entered. But instead of translucent silver walls that seemed to go on for eternity, everything was pure white. The mirrors were fewer and further between and there was no one around. But as Alice moved along, the mirrors became more numerous. Eventually, it was as if she had entered a hall of mirrors at an amusement park, with only white light separating the individual panes of glass. That's when she heard something startling. A familiar voice called out to her, "It's good to see you again, Alice."

Up ahead, there was a staircase that pointlessly went to nowhere. At the top was a single mirror, propped up by itself. The voice seemed to have come from there so Alice cautiously ascended the steps to look inside. Before she even reached the top of the stairs, she replied in acknowledgement of who she was sure to see in the mirror's reflection. "Hatter...what are you doing here?"

Just as the mirror came into view, the voice answered, confirming her suspicion. "I'm here to play the game, of course, my lovely." She could now see the full image of the one and only Mad Hatter, smiling back at her as she stepped in front of the lonely looking glass.

"But how? I banished you down the Nega-Rabbit Hole."

Alice stood a few feet from the glass. The Hatter's reflection appeared as if he was standing behind her, though he wasn't. "That you did, my dear. It was to a world very different from Wonderland. But one that also had mirrors. I simply tried them all until I found one that would bring me here."

"So what's your plan? Play the game and use your crown to find a way back to Wonderland and overthrow me?"

The Hatter started laughing maniacally. "Overthrow you?! Where did you get such an idea? Alice, I don't want to see you deposed. Wonderland was never better before your reign. The way you run the place...is positively mad! Hahahaha!!!" His laughter continued for a moment before he composed himself. "I wish to join you...as the new King of Hearts. Of course, I don't mind living in your shadow, like the old King did. The spotlight can remain on you, as I know you'd prefer. That's something you share with your predecessor."

Alice interrupted him, "First of all, what makes you think I'd allow that? And secondly, do you really think you can even win the game?"

"No...actually, I don't expect to win. I figured I'd just lurk about and wait out each reset. Sooner or later, Haigha would come back to this world and he could take me back to Wonderland. I don't need a crown from Looking-Glass Land to become the King of Hearts."

Looking unamused, Alice reiterated, "Again, what makes you think I'd even let you?"

Hatter's expression changed and his tone became more serious. "Because, as crazy as you were before we met, you know that only I can unlock your real potential. Face it Alice, it's boring in Wonderland without me."

Alice's cadence fully reverted back to her classic English accent. "That's where you're wrong. I rid Wonderland of you because there was only room enough for one of us. Just as I did the Cat and the old Queen. I can fill all of your shoes by myself."

A smile crept back upon the Mad Hatter's face. "Oh, Alice. You've still not explored the depths of your madness. I have such sights to show you."

Internally, Alice made a conscious decision to lean in and kiss the Hatter's lips on the mirror, knowing she'd achieve the opposite. Instead, she swiped her Vorpall Blade across the glass, shattering it into hundreds of pieces. The sound of mad man's cackling could be heard echoing throughout the gallery.

As Dorothy looked on at the intoxicatingly seductive iteration of herself, she forgot Alice's warning to avoid looking too long. Before she'd had a chance to remember, the reflection spoke to her. "Why do you suppress me?"

Surprised it could speak directly to her, Dorothy took a moment before replying. "Because...I could never be you."

"And why not? You are me."

She suddenly remembered that Alice said the mirrors only lie when looking at your own reflection. "No, I'm not," she affirmed, then abruptly walked past the mirror to ignore it. But it wasn't long before she came upon another. That same reflection stood looking at her as she attempted to walk by. But her curiosity caused her to glance in its direction. Dorothy thought she looked so pretty as she appeared in the mirror. More than she'd ever felt looking into one back at home. She'd often wince at the sight of her plain brown hair, long legs, modestly-sized bosom and farmer's tanned skin. Even though she was found to be quite fair by the local men folk in Kansas, she'd never considered herself in the league of women such as the ones on Broadway. Unlike Alice...

Seemingly able to read her mind, the reflection said, "Alice is the one lying to you. I am your true self. It's the world that is a facade."

"That part might be true, but you're not me. I could never be so..." She stopped there before saying the thought that crossed her mind. She wanted to say "evil" but that wasn't really what she was thinking.

The mirror finished her thought for her. "Beautiful? Like Alice? You know why Alice wanted to spend time with you, right? Because she thinks it makes her look better having someone like you standing next to her. The elegant Queen Alice and her stooge. The plain, dimwitted and homely Dorothy."

"Alice is my friend! She doesn't think of me like that!"

The reflection barked back, "That whore hates you! She let you get lost in these woods instead of preventing you from running off when she had the chance!"

"But why?!"

"Because she wanted you to be raped by the Red Knight."

"That's ridiculous! She warned me about him. And she brought me the axe and the amulet," Dorothy stated, with tears in her eyes.

"A false sense of security."

"No. I don't believe you. She wanted to help me escape from this place."

The reflection's tone calmed. "Then why didn't she bring you the slippers? A quick tap of the heels and you'd be out of Looking-Glass Land and safe back at the castle. But they're as absent from your feet as your underwear beneath those pajamas."

Those facts struck a chord with Dorothy. Why had Alice brought the other items but not the slippers? This reflection was starting to make too much sense. Finally, she dared to ask it, melancholically, "Then what do you suggest I do?"

The Evil Dorothy smiled. "Use the Emerald Amulet. Theadora's power far exceeds the magic used to hold this stupid glass world together. You can break us out of here and we can go back to Oz, where we belong."

Dorothy was just about to reach for the amulet when she hesitated. A part of her was still resistant to the mirror's charisma. She wanted to be that version of her so bad. With black eyeshadow, porcelain skin, her head held up high without slouching or avoiding eye contact. But she resigned herself to press on and consider all of the reflection's points later. She put one foot in front of the other and continued past the mirror.

Crash! Alice sliced through yet another mirror. Dozens had fallen victim to her onslaught. With each one that projected an image of the Mad Hatter, she broke through to try and find the real one. His maniacal laughter followed every shattering sound of glass hitting the ground. And every time Alice turned around, she'd either see him in the mirror, or herself with Hatter standing behind her. It was unnerving. Then something peculiar happened. One mirror did not reflect her or the Hatter. The vision stopped her dead in her tracks and she lowered her sword by her side, seemingly in a trance.

Instead of her reflection, she saw a mannequin bust on a stand. No arms or head. But on display was a long forgotten but memorable outfit. A blue, short-sleeved dress with a white pinafore apron. The legs had matching stockings and black shoes. She hadn't worn those clothes since she was about 14 years old. A feeling of both nostalgia and fear washed over her.

Suddenly, she was no longer looking at the mannequin, but her own reflection once more. The red tips of her hair were gone and the length had returned to her shoulders, neatly held back by a black headband. Before she could react, the Mad Hatter appeared behind her once again. He said, "Things were much simpler then, weren't they? You've established so much since and that's commendable. But why not revive an old classic? Can't Queen Alice be who she is and who she was?"

Alice closed her eyes and memories came flooding back to her. Tumbling down the rabbit hole, carrying the pig, being threatened by the Queen for stealing tarts. All of these events happened while wearing that dress. Then she remembered the Hatter's private tea party he'd held for one of her unbirthdays. It felt so wrong but so right as they slipped underneath the table. He caressed her gently while removing her white stockings. That's when the descent into madness really began. Alice opened her eyes.

The Hatter was still behind her in the reflection. Smiling, he whispered, "Go ahead...put it on." And in an instant, Alice was suddenly standing there, fully dressed in her classic attire. The Mad Hatter was no longer just a reflection. He was there, in the flesh, as she turned around and faced him. The tail of her skirt fluttered with the gust from her spinning motion. Alice diverted her eyes downward with a coy and bashful smile as their gazes met. He reciprocated. "Oh, how I've missed you, Alice."

As Dorothy happened across yet another lonely standing mirror in the forest, still showing that tempting image of the woman she could become, she frantically searched about, looking for the current square's designation. "Aha! Here it is!" Behind a large stone, she found an etching that read, "C6."

"Now that you've found it, what do you expect to do with that information?" her reflection said in a taunting manner. "Use the amulet. It's the easiest way for you to win."

"You're right," Dorothy said, quickly touching the gemstone. "I summon the Scarecrow!"

Her wicked counterpart rolled her eyes and scoffed. "Ugh!" A beam of light projected the Scarecrow between them and once he became physical, Dorothy asked, "If we're in C6 and the Red King is in E8, what's the best strategy for getting a checkmate from here?"

The Scarecrow rubbed his chin and thought. "Let's see. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. So you could go diagonal into D7 and be directly parallel to him. That would at least put him in check. I'm not sure what happens in this world though when that happens. Another way would be for you to keep going thatta way on into C7 and try to surprise him in D8. Of course, the Queen might be there but she'd probably come running back even if she wasn't."

“So those are my best options? D7 for a direct attack, C7 to try and sneak up...”

The reflection interrupted, “...or use the amulet to win the game right now.”

“Shut her up!”

The Scarecrow pulled his revolver from his pocket and shot at the mirror, shattering it. “Sorry, Dorothy. Wish there was more I could do to help.”

“That’s alright, you’ve done enough,” she said while pondering. The Scarecrow’s image disappeared and the light returned to the gemstone.

Decide for Dorothy what she should do!

Move to D7 = [Section 1](#)

Move to C7 = [Section 2](#)

Use Amulet = [Section 3](#)

1. Dorothy decided a direct approach was best. Without wasting any more time, she moved in the direction the Scarecrow had pointed that led to D7. What she found there was not at all what she’d expected. The terrain was similar to the field where the battle had been taking place between the pawns, except it was flatter. The sun was shining above and she could see the Red King’s camp in the distance. But there was one obstacle between Dorothy and her goal. It was the Queen. But not just any queen...it was Alice. And for some reason, unbeknownst to Dorothy, she was dressed like she was when she was a kid. Blue dress, white pinafore and her hair in a black headband but with a crown on top.

“So you made it?”

Dorothy gulped. The expression on Alice’s face wasn’t a pleasant one. “Uh huh.”

“Got past the Red Knight?”

Dorothy’s thoughts went back to what her reflection had said about Alice intending for the Red Knight to hurt her. “Yeah.”

“Well...I suppose we knew it would come to this one day.”

Alice held her Vorpall Blade up at the ready and prepared to strike. Dorothy reciprocated by holding up the silver axe. She’d really wished it had not come to this but...

...but then she remembered something. Everything was reversed in this world. If she attacked Alice, she'd really be leaving herself vulnerable. But if she stood and did nothing, she would attack with all of her might. Though she knew she'd really be attacking, it felt right for her to lay down her arms. Because she truly did not want to attack her friend. At least this way, she didn't have to go through the motion of carrying it out. So she made the only logical choice she could. She threw the axe down at her side.

A moment passed, then out of nowhere, Alice was thrown backwards off of her feet. She let out a groan of pain. "Gah!" Dorothy ran to her friend's side and knelt down beside her. "Alice! Are you okay?" Then it hit her...Alice had been standing aggressively with both hands on her sword. That meant that what she'd really chosen to do was stand back and let Dorothy strike!

Alice sat up, clutching her midsection and smiling. Fortunately, the attack had been with the blunt end of the axe. "You did good kid. You made it."

Skip the next two sections and continue the story.

2. Realizing she'd likely be outmatched by whatever it was that was awaiting her, Dorothy opted for a sneak attack. She continued on to the C7 square, hoping there wasn't a queen on D8. As she left the forest, she found a dirt road going through a beautiful meadow. The flowers were alive and singing! But they weren't singing by themselves. Someone was standing off the side of the road, leading them in song next to a horse. It was the White Knight!

Remembering what Alice said, she ran over to the Knight, waving her hands in the air. "Excuse me! Excuse me, sir knight! I don't mean to interrupt your song, but I was wondering if you could help me."

The dashing handsome knight, with curled moustache, replied, "And what does milady need help with? Does she need a song of her own?"

"Umm, no thank you. But I'm a friend of Queen Alice and she told me that if I saw you, then you might be able to help me?"

The White Knight swooned. "Ah, Queen Alice. The loveliest flower in the garden. She's as sweet as a Marigold but as dangerous as a Rose."

Dorothy raised an eyebrow. "Uhh, yeah. So can you help me out?"

"For Queen Alice, of course. What can I do for thee?"

"I'm trying to get to E8. If I can checkmate the king, then I'll be able to go back home."

"Hmm. Well, I can certainly take you to E8. But the Red King is not there."

"He's not?"

"No. In fact, my very presence here in C7 put him in check. You see, I move in L-shaped patterns and E8 is directly in my attack path from here. So the King has moved."

Dorothy frowned and began to sob. "Oh no. Now I don't know where to go!"

"Fear not, young lady. The King has moved to F8. I can reach E6 from here and that will put him in checkmate, as there is nowhere else for him to move."

"Really?!"

"Yes. Come now, upon my steed and we shall ride! Onward to victory!"

So Dorothy climbed up behind the White Knight and held tightly as he rushed off towards E6. She remembered that this square was just above the one where the advancing pawns had come from when she and Alice had gotten separated. She wondered what would be there when they arrived. But the question was soon answered by what blocked them in the middle of the road. It was Alice! And for some reason, she was dressed in her classic blue and white attire. At first, Dorothy was concerned that her reflection had been telling the truth and that Alice was here to stop her from winning the game. But the Knight slowly trotted up to her and asked, "Doth milady object to our passage?"

Alice smiled and waved her hand to pass. "I do not."

So the Knight continued on, carrying Dorothy over the line to square E6. He helped to lower her off of his horse and bid both ladies farewell, receiving a kiss blown through the air from Queen Alice on his way out.

Skip the next section to continue the story.

If you've read Sections 1 or 2, you may continue the story from here.

But how did Alice get here?

The Mad Hatter looked sweetly into Alice's eyes. For him, she was a vision of both what was and what was to be. "Oh, how I've missed you, Alice."

The Queen's head remained bowed for a moment. It seemed as though she was finally accepting her place at the Hatter's side. But suddenly, she began laughing abruptly. The Hatter's expression of joy transformed into one of concern. Alice threw her head back, cackling and holding her stomach. "I had you going, didn't I? You really thought that sticking me in this old dress and whispering sweet nothings would get me to make you the King of Hearts? Ha! I wasn't born yesterday!"

"But Alice...I thought we had an understanding? That no one's madness could match yours but my own?"

"Well...you're half right." She retrieved her Vorpall Sword and slashed straight through the Mad Hatter before her. He shattered into a million pieces like glass. This was just a simulacrum of him, as Alice had expected. The real Mad Hatter was safely observing from elsewhere in Looking-Glass Land.

He leaned back in his chair and said, "Touche," while watching a monitor of Alice leaving the zone she was in and continuing her search for Dorothy.

Back to the Present

As Dorothy walked on towards the space the King was in, she bumped into an invisible wall. She turned back to face Alice and in total surprise a crown magically appeared on her head. She had won the game. The King had been checkmated and Dorothy was now a queen, no different than Alice. Well, at least in this world.

"I'm so proud of you," Alice said with a smile. "All you needed to do was get past a queen and I'm glad I was able to provide you the opportunity."

Dorothy looked confused for a moment, then it made sense. The two were standing in front of a giant mirror that had blended in with the background, reflecting the other side of the square, where the King actually was. “The slippers...you left them on purpose, didn’t you?”

Alice nodded. “Yes. Because I wanted you to win the game. You were already here and the shoes would have been the easy way out. So I grabbed the axe and the amulet and hoped you wouldn’t notice I’d left them.”

“But why? Why did you want me to win so badly, rather than just escape?”

“Isn’t it obvious? Because I wanted you to be a queen...just like me. And more importantly, I wanted you to be happy. If you became a queen with my help or the help of your reflection, it didn’t matter.”

The two girls fell into a long embrace and when they finally broke free, they returned to Wonderland. A fresh stack of tarts delivered by the Ace were awaiting them and their slumber party continued...

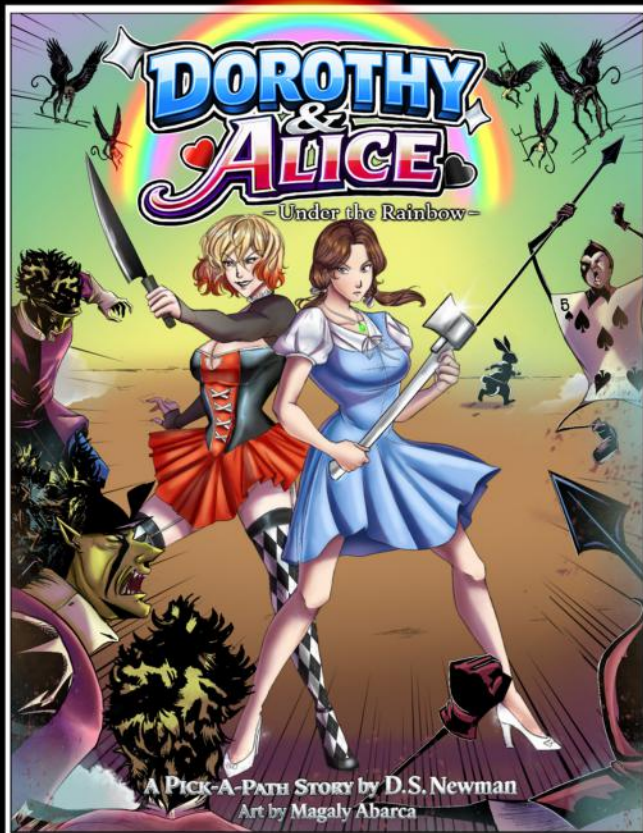
...“Let’s try another game,” Alice said, while digging through the cedar chest at the foot of her bed.

The End

A Note from the Author:

I sincerely hope you’ve enjoyed Looking-Gass Limbo. I wrote it in part to give readers a sample of my take on Dorothy & Alice’s personalities. I truly wanted to portray them as I imagined they would be after their origin stories had taken place. And while I made them my own, I didn’t want to entirely reinvent them.

If it resonates with you and you also enjoyed the decision making element sample I provided, then please check out the first book in my Pick-A-Path Series; Dorothy & Alice: Under the Rainbow. It’s a fully colored, illustrated, premium hardback gamebook with more than 40 outcomes!



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