

NEVERLAND

Here Be Monsters!

Wendy Darling, Shipwreck Survivor

1

“Iceberg!”

The shout goes up at 11:40pm, on Sunday 14th April 1912, that the RMS *Titanic* has hit an iceberg, somewhere in the North Atlantic, whilst on its maiden voyage from London to New York. The unthinkable has happened; the collision has dented the passenger liner’s hull, causing the seams to buckle and separate, and a ship that was believed to be unsinkable starts to sink, bow-first.

In the early hours of Monday 15th April, the crew start to evacuate the ship, following the ‘women and children first’ protocol as they load the lifeboats, concerning themselves mainly with the first and second class passengers, while the third-class passengers are largely left to fend for themselves, resulting in many of them becoming trapped below decks as the ship fills with water.

Fortunately, for you, however, the Darling family are among the first class passengers. The night is bitterly cold, but at least there is some hope for you. You, along with your mother and father, your brothers John and Michael, and even Nana, your family’s faithful Newfoundland dog, follow the crew’s instructions as they guide you to the lifeboats. But it is as you reach the edge of the deck that things go wrong.

Crowds of people are desperate to board the lifeboats, and it is painfully clear for all to see that there aren’t enough for all the passengers and crew. You and Nana become separated from the rest of your family and despite crying out for them, the press of people continues to push you away from your family and towards one of the lifeboats. It is under duress that

you eventually board it, as the midshipman telling you to do so becomes more and more agitated, but before anyone else can join you in the boat, there is an altercation on deck. A man is arguing with the wretched crewman, demanding to be allowed to board your lifeboat. You hear shouts and then a gunshot.

There is a collective gasp from the crowd and the midshipman falls. As he does so, he hits the release lever for the lifeboat, which suddenly goes into freefall as it drops towards sea, the ropes that had secured it to the ship running freely through the system of pulleys rapidly receding above you.

The lifeboat hits the water hard and you fall backwards, hitting your head hard on a wooden bench-seat. Your head swims and your vision begins to grey, the sound of Nana's furious barking fading into the distance, as you slowly, but surely, lose consciousness...

Turn to **2**.

2

You wake to bright sunlight warming your skin. You stir and slowly open your eyes. Nana is on top of you in an instant, excitedly licking your face – thereby helping to bring you abruptly to full wakefulness – and wagging her tail furiously.

“Alright, Nana. It's alright. That'll do,” you say, pushing the huge Newfoundland off you.

Fully conscious now, you sit up in the lifeboat and look about you. There is no sign of the *Titanic*, or your parents and brothers. In fact, there is no sign of another human being as far as the eye can see, nor any icebergs.

Your lifeboat is adrift on what appears to be a warm tropical sea. A few curls of white cloud spot the vast bowl of the sky while the sun beats down on your face.

You feel warm but weak, and also parched. Your hair is matted and your face crusted with salt from where the sea-spray had dried on your skin. You have no idea how long it is since you last had a drink or how long you have been drifting like this.

You cannot help but shed a few heart-felt tears for your missing family. Where can they be? But more importantly, where are you?

You scan the horizon for any sign of a ship – for any sign of anything! And then you see it – a distant smudge of green on the horizon. Land!

Taking up the oars that are still stowed inside the lifeboat, you fit them into their rowlocks and, mustering what little strength you have, you start to row, hasten the boat's approach towards the distant island.

You have little choice after all; you need food and water, and the island is the only place within goodness knows how many nautical miles that could furnish you with either.

The boat is big and the oars are heavy, but slowly you begin to close the gap between you and the island. As you draw nearer, you rest the oars for a minute to study the island more carefully.

You can see the beginnings of a beach now, and the green smudge has resolved to become a line of thick vegetation that proliferates across the island, which rises to craggy peaks at its heart. You can see a thin trail of smoke rising from the mountainous regions of this lost continent, which makes you suspect that there is a volcano nestled among them somewhere.

You can see what you take to be birds circling over the islands, riding the thermals rising from the volcanic heartlands.

Your attention is suddenly drawn away from the island by Nana's furious barking. The huge dog is standing in the bow of the ship looking back the way you have come.

"What is it, Nana?" you say, joining your pet at the other end of the large lifeboat.

And then you see it too, and what you see makes the hairs at the nape of your neck stand up on end. A dark shape is moving at speed through the water towards you. Your heart racing, you watch as it rapidly approaches the boat, and Nana becomes more and more agitated.

Just when you think the thing is going to hit the lifeboat, it passes right under the hull, and you see the creature in all its terrible glory.

More than twice as long as the lifeboat, the beast truly is a leviathan of the deep. It has a mottled grey hide, a short thick tail, and four huge paddle-like flippers pull it through the sea at speed. But most terrifying of all is the fact that its head appears to be almost a quarter of its entire body length!

If you have the *Beast Lore* special ability, and you want to use it now, turn to **15**. If not, what do you want to do?

Will you start rowing again, as fast as you can, towards the island (turn to **3**), prepare to hit the leviathan with an (turn to **5**), or will you stay where you are and do nothing (turn to **6**)?

3

You haul on the oars, desperate to reach the island before the sea monster decides to attack the boat. The shaft of one oar slips in its rowlock and the blade of another catches the water at the wrong angle, almost dragging it out of your grasp. But then you are pulling powerfully on the oars again and the boat cuts through the waves towards the shore.

Take an Endurance test. If you pass the test, turn to **4**. If you fail the test, turn to **9**.

4

You've found your rhythm now. The lifeboat ploughs through the waves as you haul on the oars and aided by the prevailing current, stroke after stroke you are carried closer and closer to the island, until the boat finally runs aground on the beach.

You leap out of the lifeboat, Nana bounding onto the shore ahead of you, and do your best to pull the boat as far up the beach as you can, clear of the roaring surf and any hungry sea monsters.

Turn to **16**.

5

The monster turns and, with economical strokes of its paddle-like flippers, powers through the water towards the lifeboat once more. As it comes within reach, its huge head breaks the surface and its jaws open wide. But you are ready for it.

Standing up in the boat, holding one of the oars in both hands, you swing it at the leviathan with all your might. The oar breaks across the creature's snout, splinters of wood flying in all directions, and some of them hit you, breaking your skin. (Lose 1 *Endurance* point.)

Clearly not expecting such resistance from its potential prey, the sea monster submerges again.

Turn to 9.

6

Nervously, you stay exactly where you are, hoping that the beast will ignore the boat and be on its way. But then it starts to circle the vessel and you can't help wondering if it's formulating a plan of attack. It certainly doesn't appear to be going away.

What do you want to do now? To pick up the oars and start rowing for the island again, turn to 3. To pick up one of the oars, ready to defend yourself should the monster attack the lifeboat, turn to N5. To use your *Wish Upon a Star* special ability, turn to 7. To remain exactly where you are and continue to do nothing, turn to 8.

7

The leviathan circles the boat once more and then disappears from view.

Where has it gone? You are half expecting the monster to suddenly appear beneath the boat and tip you out into the sea, but it doesn't. Instead the surf carries you and Nana, aboard your lifeboat, safely to the shore.

You jump out of the boat, Nana leaping onto the sandy beach ahead of you, and do your best to drag the lifeboat as far up the beach as you can, clear of the crashing surf.

Cross off one use of the *Wish Upon a Star* special ability and turn to **16**.

8

The monster turns and with efficient strokes of its paddle-like flippers powers through the water towards your position once more.

Turn to **9**.

9

Before you know it, the leviathan is underneath the boat. Driven by all four paddle flippers, the monster surfaces and suddenly you are flying into the air, along with Nana, as the monster upends the lifeboat.

You hit the water with a splash, as the oars crash into the sea either side of you. As your clothes become sodden, the weight of them starts to pull you down.

In a panic, you kick your way towards the surface, whilst also turning your head this way and that, desperately trying to see where the sea monster has gone. Your head breaks the surface just as you think you catch sight of something big moving beneath you. You are sure that you only have minutes left to live, unless you can make it to the shore in time.

If you want to use your *Wish Upon a Star* special ability, turn to **10**. If not, you are going to have to start swimming – turn to **11**.



10

(Cross off one use of the *Wish Upon a Star* special ability.)

The leviathan circles the capsized boat once more and then disappears from view into the blue murk below. But where has it gone? You are half expecting the monster to suddenly appear again beneath you, jaws open wide, but it doesn't – although the longer you stay here, the more likely it is to return...

Adrenaline lending strength to your muscles, you drag yourself through the water, even though your sodden garments continue to weigh you down.

Turn to **14**.

11

You swim as hard and as fast as you can, as though your life depends on it – which it does!

Take an Endurance test. If you pass the test, turn to **12**. If you fail the test, turn to **13**.

12

Adrenaline lends your muscles strength and you plough through the water, even though your sodden garments are weighing you down. But which way are you swimming?

Towards the lifeboat (turn to **13**) or the shore (turn to **14**)?

13

Since you are closer to the lifeboat than you are to the shore, you decide it makes more sense to head towards the boat. Besides, it is exhausting trying to swim whilst wearing a ball gown weighted down with sea water.

But just as you get one hand onto the side of the rocking lifeboat, the leviathan appears suddenly from beneath you. You have no chance against a hungry marine predator twenty-five feet long and millions of years in the making.

The monster opens its terrible jaws and swallows you whole. Your adventure is over before it's barely begun.

THE END

14

Fearing that the monster is going to catch up with you at any moment, stroke after stroke you close the distance between yourself and the shore.

At last you feel your feet touch sand and stop swimming, staggering out of the water, utterly exhausted. Nana bounds through the surf beside you and onto the shore, where she stops to shake the sea water out of her fur.

The lifeboat has been carried to the shore by the tide as well, and you pull it as far up the beach as you can, so that it won't be carried away again, out to sea.

Turn to **16**.

15

With its distinctive body shape, its huge paddle-like flippers and its enormous tooth-filled jaws, it is as if the *Liopleurodon* has swum out of the pages of your book on palaeontology!

The creature was a carnivorous marine reptile belonging to the *pliosauroidea*, a clade of short-necked plesiosaurs, and the apex predator of the Middle to Late Jurassic seas that once covered the landmass of Europe. But what is it doing here? The creature is supposed to have been extinct for the last 160 million years!

Whatever the reason, you think it wise not to antagonise the beast.

Cross off one use of your *Beast Lore* special ability, and then return to 2 and decide what you want to do next.

16

You collapse on the warm sand, exhausted by your exertions. (Lose 2 *Endurance* points.)

And then the tears come again, as exhaustion and your emotions overwhelm you, as your thoughts turn to your family once more. You have no idea whether your parents and your brothers are alive or dead, and you feel pitiful about your own predicament as well, stuck on some lonely tropical island, seemingly many leagues from anywhere.

But lying on the beach crying isn't going to help you. You have always been a practical person and you can think of no other situation where you have ever needed to be more practical. And at least you have the ever dependable Nana with you, so at least you're not entirely alone.

Clearly your ultimate aim must be find a way off this island and return home. However, to do that you're going to need to find out a little about where you've washed up first.

TO BE CONTINUED...

