

BLACKSTAR

SCR Adventures, 1986

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Solution by Exemptus - May 2020

Overview and general hints:

Your objective is to find all the treasures in Castle Blackstar and its subterranean passages, purify them, find the Power Orb and return it to the Goddess Artemis, who sends you on your quest. Easier said than done.

There are a few differences between versions. Some of them are:

* The original Spectrum version (published by SCR Adventures) has several bugs, including a map one that prevents finishing it with full points (the checkerboard maze does not allow travel between both M rooms). This version also has a top score of 240 points, where other versions have 250. Input is also very unstable.

* The re-release Spectrum version (published by CDS) uses a different parser and display routines. It also fixes most of the bugs. It has one less object (the leaflet), but it has no real use so this does not affect gameplay. Some room descriptions are also slightly tweaked. This version, or the code base behind it, seems to be the basis for the C64 and Amstrad CPC versions.

* The PCW version (released much later, in 1986, and called just "Blackstar") adds darkness in an additional room, which does not alter gameplay, and has more player facilities such as on-screen score and moves counter, a FREEZE feature to save to memory, and a couple of minor fixes to map connections.

This walkthrough, as well as the map, will be based on the PCW version, but it should be possible to follow it to the letter with all versions but the very first one, possibly with very minor changes. It shows how to finish the game with full points and follows a logical sequence rather than an efficient one.

The game has four different parts:

1. Beginning: entering the castle, exploring the woodland, and finding all objects in lighted rooms.
2. Main treasure hunt: exploring the subterranean parts and collecting all treasures.
3. Getting the Orb: this is significant (and difficult) enough to warrant a separate part.
4. Endgame: Finding Artemis and getting to her.

Exists are not marked in general. All twelve "standard" exits are possible (N, E, S, W, NE, SE, SW, NW, U, D, IN and OUT) and may or not coincide with others. Cartographical consistency is fair, with some allowances. Mazes are of course an exception, but there is only one true maze; others only appear to be. Another difficulty is that not all carryable objects are distinctly noted as such - some can be part of the room's description.

There are no material vocabulary quirks. Things can be EXAMINED, SEARCH is not needed, and ON LAMP and OFF LAMP work as expected. The lamp is the only light source and requires oil. Each oil load lasts for a fixed amount of moves as long as the lamp is on, and of course walking in the dark means death. There is an infinite amount of oil available, so we are not really limited as to number of moves, but finding the oil is another question.

There is also a "Last Lousy Point" puzzle which is *very* easy to miss, although

the game is perfectly fair and gives us a good clue - but when we get it, it is difficult to notice it is a clue, making retrospective playing a bit of a must for the 100% completist. :)

The game is totally deterministic except for a couple of rooms where map directions can fail at random; these will be noted.

Walkthrough:

[We begin in a valley. Proceeding in any direction except W throws us into the Woodland maze. This is mappable by dropping objects, but we don't have any, so best to leave it for now. We begin with a 10 points score.]

W

W [This is the castle front; note the drawbridge is held by a rope]

S

GET BOW

W [Note that there is a weather vane on top of the S tower and a well here]

D [Note the pool of oil, which will be useful later]

GET COIN [Score is now 13]

[Our score goes up when we do something right; the coin is a treasure. But we don't know yet where to store treasures. Artemis said we have to cleanse them, whatever that means.]

N [Oops, this location is dark and we have no lamp - best to go back]

s

U

[The coin has another use: at this location we can THROW COIN down the well and then WISH, which magically transports us to the Temple Clearing. This is neither necessary nor gives us any particular advantage, so it's not part of the walkthrough. Besides, leaving the woods at this point could be tricky.]

N

GET ARROW

E

S

SHOOT ARROW [This cuts the rope holding the drawbridge; score is 17]

W [We are now stopped by the portcullis, which is lowered]

READ MESSAGE [Not very welcoming, is it]

U [Note there is a central courtyard and two towers, N and S]

S

W

W

N [A nest of golden eggs is here, no doubt a treasure]

GET GLOVES

GET EGGS [No chance; they are protected by the eagles]

N

D [A dwarf throws a knife and misses, parodying Crowther & Woods' Adventure]

GET KNIFE [Score is 20, as this is another treasure]

EXAMINE KNIFE [It has runes]

READ RUNES ["Smaug's Bane" - this will be relevant much later]

N

E [The Blacksmith's; note there is an iron bar here]

WEAR GLOVES [Otherwise the red hot bar burns us and we die]

GET BAR [Score is 23]

[The bar is red hot, and it is needed to solve a puzzle, but it will need to

cool down first. This will happen on its own after 200 turns; while it is hot we cannot touch it without the gloves.]

[At this point we have enough objects to map the woodland, so it makes sense to do so. I will assume this has been done. It is possible to make entering and exiting the castle easier by raising the portcullis; otherwise we have to climb the ramparts every time.]

SE

S

SE [The wheel for raising the portcullis is here]

TURN WHEEL

W

NW [This is a good place to leave objects we will use]

DROP BAR

DROP KNIFE [The knife is a treasure, but we will need it later on]

DROP GLOVES [The gloves are not needed for a while]

IN

GET LAMP [Note it is empty and needs oil, which we found in the well]

GET KEYS [Keys are always useful]

MOVE BALE [This reveals a hole in the ground, one of the entrances to tunnels]

OUT

[OK, we have a treasure that can be stored (the coin). Time to explore the woodlands.]

E

E

E

E

E

S

NE [We are in the clearing]

IN

DROP COIN [Score is 27]

OUT

S

N

NW

[This is the Witch's cottage clearing. As its name says, a witch lives here. If we stay too long around, especially after having nicked some objects, she might show up and turn us into worms. The effect eventually passes, but there is a possibility a bird will decide to eat us. That can cramp our style, so it's best not to spend a lot of time monkeying around here.]

N [Note the cottage is made from gingerbread]

READ NOTE ["Cummin's Cottage"]

N

GET BROOMSTICK

GET GINGERBREAD

S

S

SE

SW [On the road again]

W

W

W

W

DROP BROOMSTICK [We won't need these for a while]

DROP GINGERBREAD

[Time to start gathering some treasures. Let's explore the castle a bit more.]

SW

SW

U

[This room is dark in the PCW version, but lighted in the Spectrum one; luckily, it's only a Servant's Quarters room with no interest]

U

GET SCROLL [We cannot read it]

D

D

E [Note there is an upstairs gallery and a chandelier; maybe we can climb it]

U [No, the chandelier is too high]

E

U

TURN WINCH [This lowers the chandelier]

GET ROPE [We will need it to get back from the gallery]

D [Ignore the flour for the time being]

W

U [We are swinging on the chandelier now]

JUMP

GET VIOLIN [Score is 32]

TIE ROPE

D

W

N

U

S

PLAY VIOLIN [This requires the bow, but we never dropped it]

DROP BOW [We don't need it any longer]

GET EGGS [Score is 39]

N

D

N

E

SE

S

E

E

E

E

S

NE

IN

DROP EGGS [Score is 43]

DROP VIOLIN [Score is 47]

OUT

S

N

SW

W

S

W

D

FILL LAMP

[The oil allows us to use the lamp. Regrettably, there is only enough oil for two fills. There is another, inexhaustible source of oil, but it is well hidden and we won't be able to find it until later.]

N

ON LAMP

N [There is a locked door here, but we got the keys]

UNLOCK DOOR [The keys have another use, so we don't part with them yet]

N

N

N

READ WARNING ["Beware, destroying gods is considered a very serious offence"]

W

W

EXAMINE STATUE [Hmm, so it has a diamond]

PUSH STATUE [We automatically move to the other room; score is 51]

[The square on the floor is a trap door which is opened by the button we just saw. After pushing the button we cannot enter these rooms again, and the diamond falls to the lower floor.]

E

PUSH BUTTON [Score is 53]

S

SE

D

GET DIAMOND [Score is 56]

SE

E [Oops, this way does not work; something invisible pushes us]

W

U

E

NW [Note the description of the lake and surrounding features]

READ MESSAGE ["When you see yourself as a friend, speak friend"]

D

E

N

[There are two rooms with locked cells here, but only one we can open with the keys. This appears to lead nowhere, but if you think this is too unlikely not to be some kind of secret passage, you are right: it is.]

UNLOCK DOOR

DROP KEYS [We won't need them any longer]

IN

PULL TORCH [Aha! Score is 58]

N

E

OFF LAMP

[This room is lighted, so we can turn off the lamp to save oil. We are actually at the other side of a grate in the woodland, which we might have found when mapping the forest, but entry is not possible from there. This is one of the four possible entrances to the caverns, the other three being the stables, the ditch in the NE corner of the courtyard, and the well. But this is the only one that will be permanently open, as we will later see.]

TURN WINCH

GET VASE [Score is 61]

E

SE

SW

W

S

NE

IN

DROP DIAMOND [Score is 65]

DROP VASE [Score is 69]

OUT

S

N

SW

W

W

W

W

[The bar is still red hot, but having access to the caverns we can solve other puzzles. A source of light allows us to explore the immediate surroundings a bit further as well.]

SE

SE

D

W [Dark again]

ON LAMP

GET PICTURE [Score is 72]

E

OFF LAMP

EXAMINE PICTURE [Note the interesting description]

GET BOTTLE

EXAMINE BOTTLE [It says the liquid is heat resistant]

U

GET FLOUR

NW

NW

[The bar is not yet cool (the description will change to "a steel bar" when that happens), but it's not long now. This means we can solve another puzzle.]

GET GLOVES

WEAR GLOVES

GET BAR

E

E

E

S

W

D

N

ON LAMP

E

DROP BAR [Score is 76]

[It falls down to the room below, where it will be needed. This is the only way to get the bar there, since it won't go through the door. The door in question is in the middle of the passage we could not enter because of the invisible force, but this is what we have the flour for.]

DROP GLOVES

W

N

N

N

SE

D

SE

THROW FLOUR [Score is 80]

E

E

IN

S

[Here is a goblet, another treasure. However, the moment we take it, the walls in the room just north will start closing in, crushing us. But the bar we snuck in prevents this. Note it has cooled off, provided you have followed this walkthrough: exactly 200 turns have passed since we took it.]

GET BAR

N

DROP BAR

S

GET GOBLET [Score is 85]

N

N

E

E

NW

NW

D

NW

[Note the figure in black robes summoning something. If we go north we will be instantly killed because of this, but we have the necessary to prevent it.]

IN [OK, the wraith cannot harm us inside the pentacle]

READ SCROLL [Score is 90]

DROP SCROLL

OUT

GET CROSS [Score is 93]

S

SE

U

SE

S

N

[The M door. Where did we see an M mentioned before? Remember the picture?]

N

[This is the Checkerboard Maze. It's not really a maze; we are just sent to the room we entered the maze if we take any but one right direction each room. This would be tedious to sort out, but the picture we saw allows us to deduce this is a 4x4 grid and the right path forms an M.]

N

N

N

SW

S

W

GET PIECES [Score is 96]

N

NW

S

S

S

S

[We are at the other M room; this path is long but it will be the only way to connect the castle with the main caverns later on. We are actually under the castle now.]

NW

NW

[NE of here is a dwarf hiding something shiny when he sees us. If we go this way, then later we won't be able to find what was hidden when we have the ring, so we will take a different path.]

E [Note the open trap door]

READ MESSAGE ["This door must remain open"]

D [We can't go down the shaft; fortunately, we are not intended to]

CLOSE TRAPDOOR [Score goes down to 95]

[This point we just lost is the Last Lousy Point. It is absolutely necessary to close the trap door, or else later the wind blowing down the shaft will turn off our lamp when we are there below. The clue the game gives us is that eventually we will need to reopen the trap door in order to get the point back. This is

not trivial to do, because the map will be restricted, and requires planning the route in advance.]

U [There is light again here]

OFF LAMP

U [We exit at the NE corner of the courtyard]

S

E

E

E

E

S

NE

IN

DROP GOBLET [Score is 99]

DROP CROSS [Score is 103]

DROP PIECES [Score is 107]

DROP PICTURE [Score is 111]

OUT

S

N

SW

W

W

W

W

[We haven't dropped the small bottle with the fire resistant liquid yet; we will need it in the manoeuvre that follows. The idea is to cross the underground lake beneath the caverns, which connects all the disjoint areas, including two

separate secret passages from the top of the N and S towers. Using that route is the way to extract the ring we will need from the N tower, since if we just try to take it down the tower we will be killed.]

SW

SW

U

U

U

U [Remember the message at the N ledge? The mirror is where "we see ourselves"]

SAY FRIEND [Score is 115]

IN

ON LAMP [Note the roof is very low, so perhaps we can...]

PUSH ROOF [Score is 117]

U [This is the weather vane we see from the well location]

GET VANE [Score is 120]

D

D

D

[There is a boat here, the only means to cross the lake. The problem is that it has a leak, so we cannot stay in the water for many turns. We need to BAIL BOAT whenever we land again.]

SAIL

N

N

N [Note the flames don't burn us in the boat]

BAIL BOAT

[We are at the island we saw from the N ledge, and there is a stick of dynamite here. The dynamite allows us to take down a wall and allow an exit from a certain area that we could not leave otherwise, but first we have to take it away from the island, and if the flames catch it, it will explode. But we have a certain bottle we picked...]

POUR LIQUID [Score is 125]

GET DYNAMITE

[First a small detour.]

NE

NE

[This is the Oily Cave, where the infinite source of oil is. We can fill the lamp as much as we want here, so best to make a note of it. There is also a magic staff we will need.]

GET STAFF

SW

SW

BAIL BOAT

NW

W

W

BAIL BOAT

N

U

U

OUT

GET RING [Score is 128]

[We could go down from this room to the courtyard, but not with the ring. We have to take the long way back.]

EXAMINE RING [This means invisibility, but only to things beginning with D]

IN

D

D

S

SAIL

E

N

N

N

BAIL BOAT

[Remember the dwarves we mentioned before? That begins with a D.]

WEAR RING [Score is 130]

NE

E

GET NUGGET [Score is 135]

W

N

[Down this room is a precious sword embedded in a stone. As we know, only kings can pull such a sword out, so we will have to become one - or at least resemble one.]

U [We are in the Stables]

OFF LAMP

OUT

E

E

E

E

E

S

NE

IN

DROP VANE [Score is 139]

DROP NUGGET [Score is 143]

DROP RING [Score is 147]

OUT

S

N

SW

W

W

W

W

[Now it is time to get the sword. For this we will have to solve a chain of puzzles, beginning with the dynamite we have collected.]

GET GINGERBREAD

E

E

E

E

E

N

NE

NW

W

W

ON LAMP

S

OUT

E

U

[It looks like this room is the same one we just left, but if you carefully read the description you will notice that instead of "You are in the duel room" it says "You are in the dual room". This is just to confuse unwary adventurers.]

D

D [This area, leading out from the Orb, cannot be left unless we do something]

N

NW

N

N [A crown and sceptre are just what we need to pass for a king.]

GET CROWN [Score is 150]

GET SCEPTRE [Score is 153]

WEAR CROWN

MOVE THRONE [Score is 156]

D

W

EXPLODE DYNAMITE [Score is 159]

D

E

E [We are in the N Chapel again]

[By this time it is likely our lamp would be dimming, or soon will. We refill it at the well.]

S

SE

U

SE

W

W

S

S

S

S

OFF LAMP

FILL LAMP

[At this point, the description of this room changes to mark that there is no more oil here. Later refills will have to be from the Oily Room.]

U

E

N

W

W

N

D

ON LAMP

W

NE

N

D

GET SWORD [Score is 164]

U

U

OFF LAMP

OUT

[We have no further use for sceptre and crown, so we can store them. The sword is still useful.]

E

E

E

E

E

S

NE

IN

DROP SCEPTRE [Score is 168]

DROP CROWN [Score is 172]

OUT

[With the gingerbread and sword we can retrieve the necklace now. No, we hadn't mentioned a necklace before, but there is one. It is very well guarded.]

N

NE

NW

W

W

ON LAMP

S

OUT

[First we will retrieve something in preparation for the Orb quest; it will save some time.]

W

W

N

[The troll can be passed by giving him an object; however, unlike Colossal Cave, it is lost forever, so we cannot finish with full points. The optimal solution is to remove the troll by magic.]

WAVE STAFF [The troll is petrified; score is 175]

DROP STAFF [It has no other use]

E

E

GET GEM [Score is 178]

READ LETTERING [Looks like the button does something irreversible]

[However, the button would not do anything if pressed now. This is because the mechanism behind requires activation.]

W

W

S

S

E

E

U

U [Note the star-shaped indent]

INSERT GEM [Score is 180]

[Although the game says "nothing happens" in the PCW version, this is a blatant lie: the score going up tells us this action is right, and in fact, this has activated the mechanism we mentioned before. In the Spectrum version the message is "nothing appears to happen", which is more accurate.]

D

U

SE

[Down this pit is the Hydra. A terrible foe, never confront her with the full array of heads. However, she has a passion for gingerbread.]

THROW GINGERBREAD [This removes all heads but one]

D

KILL HYDRA [Score is 184]

N

N

GET NECKLACE [Score is 187]

S

S

U

NW

U

D

N

IN

N

E

OFF LAMP

E

SE

SW

W

S

NE

IN

DROP SWORD [Score is 191]

DROP NECKLACE [Score is 195]

OUT

[We no longer need the sword. It is time to get the Orb, and retrieve a final treasure on the way. For this we only need the gem and knife. Once we take the Orb, though, the entrance to the castle and the iron door in the well will be permanently closed by magic, so we will not be able to use these paths. Only the grate will remain open. In order to be able to finish the game afterwards with full points some planning is needed at this point.]

S

N

SW

W

W

W

W

GET KNIFE

E

E

E

E

E

N

NE

NW

W

W

ON LAMP

S

OUT

W

W

N

E

E

PUSH BUTTON [Score is 198]

[A trap door is open and we fall; we appear in a puzzle complex formed of two interlinked triangles and a central room, like a six-point star. The diagram on the room shows that the triangle pointing down is thicker.]

EXAMINE DRAWING

GET CLOCK

EXAMINE CLOCK

[The clock is more like a compass, and it points South. This means we are to walk the rooms on the lower triangle clockwise, beginning with the one S of us.]

S

NW

E

S

NW

E

S

N [The puzzle is solved; score is 209]

[We are transported to another room. There is a vial here, and by the room description its contents might put things to sleep. This is the area with the Orb, and is right below the shaft with the trap door we closed before. It is connected to the area with the throne, but the only pass is guarded by a dragon. But first let's retrieve the Orb.]

GET VIAL

E

D

N

N

D

GET ORB [Score is 214]

[We hear crashing noises; these are the entrances sealing themselves off.]

U

S [This might vary randomly; repeat S until you end up at Shaft Bottom]

S

W

U

[E of this location is the dragon, which will block the opposite exit while alive, and incinerate us after a few turns. It is perfectly possible to kill it by wearing the ring and using the sword, but in that case the body will also block the necessary exit. The only way to avoid this is to kill it with the knife, but we cannot do that unless it is asleep.]

E

THROW VIAL [The dragon is asleep, score is 221]

KILL DRAGON [Score is 227]

[And now we can escape with the last treasures. Note that it would have been impossible to leave this area had it not been for the dynamite blowing up a wall that connects the throne area to the main caverns.]

E

E

NW

N

N

D

W

D

E

E

S

NE

E

IN

N

E

OFF LAMP

E

SE

SW

W

S

NE

IN

DROP GEM [Score is 231]

DROP CLOCK [Score is 235]

DROP KNIFE [Score is 239]

DROP ORB

[But the score remains 239 when we drop the Orb. This is unexpected, as the Orb is the most precious treasure of all. But it is not a treasure in the adventure sense. We must take it to Artemis. But where is Artemis if not in her temple? Maybe we need to seek divine counsel.]

PRAY

[We see a vision of Artemis beckoning us from the stars. So we have to get up there somehow. Then we remember the broomstick, which even if we did not examine we could have suspected it was magic. As a matter of fact, advertisements for

the game challenged the player to find out how to fly, so there are plenty of hints pointing at this.]

[But we left the broomstick in the castle, and if we went there we would find that the entrance is closed and we cannot re-open it no matter what we do. So we need to find another way into the castle, which fortunately is not that hard as we left things ready for this before. This will also allow us to reclaim the Last Lousy Point as well.]

GET ORB

OUT

N

NE

NW

W

W

ON LAMP

S

OUT

E

W

U

SE

S

N

[As you might have guessed, traversing the checkerboard rooms is the only way to get to the castle now.]

N

N

N

N

SW

S

W

N

NW

S

S

S

S

NW

NW

[We are at the Cove, where we strategically left the boat. This would allow us to do a brief detour to refill the lamp at the Oily Cave in case it were running out of oil by now. If you have followed this to the letter there should be no need, but just in case.]

E

OPEN TRAPDOOR [Score is 240 - the Last Lousy Point is back!]

U

OFF LAMP

U

SW

[And we are back to the broomstick now. The problem is how to make it fly.]

DROP LAMP [Necessary, as we won't be able to carry anything but the orb soon]

GET BROOMSTICK

EXAMINE BROOMSTICK

READ PLAQUE

[So presumably there is a magic word that makes it fly. We can try some of the better known ones; there aren't that many. However, what we are not told is that it will only fly from a single location that we can reach from where we are, and that is the highest possible point in the castle.]

SW

SW

U

U

U

U

IN [It is dark here, but the next location is lighted so it does not matter]

SAY ABRACADABRA [At least this is guessable]

[OK, we are flying. We haven't been told either, but the magic in the broom is very limited and will only last a few turns. There are five locations over the landscape we can fly over, but we won't last long in the air, so it's best not to linger.]

U

U

[Since the location is called "Touching the Stars", we will do exactly that.]

TOUCH STARS

IN [The broom is gone now; we carry just the Orb]

N

[This is a "punctuation maze", which is an adventure trope. The locations' descriptions are *almost* identical, but there is something subtle that allows the player to tell them apart, normally the use of spacing or punctuation. Once this is realised, it is easy to sort out.]

N

SE

E

PUSH BUTTON [This is nothing more than a lift button]

W

N

N

SAY FRIEND

IN [The lift moves]

SAY FRIEND

OUT

[And here we are.]

GIVE ORB [Score is now 250]

Y

[End of game.]