

A Closet Chronicle
Closet Music for Solo Reader
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Introduction

This document is a piece of *closet music*, i.e. a piece of music designed to be performed in the “mind’s ear”, by analogy with the *closet drama* which is designed to be read rather than performed by actors. It is based on two sources of inspiration—a well known children’s book, and the gamebooks that were popular when I was a teenager (e.g. the *Fighting Fantasy* and *Choose your own Adventure* book series), where you had to work your way through a puzzle by navigating a story that was broken up across a large number of interconnected paragraphs. The piece is designed to be “performed” by being read and imagined.

Practicalities

Start reading at section **1** on the following page. Each numbered section represents one or more sound events, which you should imagine as you read. Some sections direct you to one other section at the end; others give you a choice of which event to choose next.

A Closet Chronicle

1.

The sound of a creaky wooden door slamming behind you. Complete darkness.

Do you:

turn around: go to **27**.

go forward: go to **11**.

2.

The sound of a large piece of stone moving across a stone floor. A few seconds of scratching, then silence.

Do you:

Go towards the sound: go to **5**.

Go back: go to **39**.

3.

The sound of a wet piece of cloth being torn just behind your ears, a gentle whooshing sound, the sound of water-drops on marble, sudden silence.

Go to **10**.

4.

A whippy, whistling sound all around. The ongoing sound of giggling from below. The giggling getting quieter, the echo of a tunnel, a sudden but gentle thud.

Go to **14**.

5.

A high-pitched ringing sound from directly above your head, for just a second. A swirling noise like you have never heard before. A distant cackle.

Do you:

Turn back: go to **2**.

Turn left: go to **20**.

Turn right: go to **34**.

6.

The muffled ticking of a clock. Seven distinct thuds, like the sound of shoes being taken off on a wooden floor above. A hard-to-pin-down high-pitched sound.

Do you:

Carry on forwards: go to **36**.

Go towards the ticking sound: go to **21**.

7.

Silence. Then, the sound of a very-clear voice saying the word “plugh” at a fairly loud volume. Silence, for a long time.

Go to **41**.

8.

The sound of hard-soled boots on wet slate steps. The rushing of a busy river. A distant sound of chanting. From a different direction, the sound of a crowd cheering. The sound of oars in the water, getting louder and fading.

Go to **15**.

9.

The sound of a single pair of footsteps for a very long time.

Go to **37**.

10.

The busy sounds of a working kitchen. The sound of water flowing almost between your ears. A belch. The kitchen sounds fading. The sound of water flowing in the distance.

Go to **15**.

11.

The sound of clothes brushing together, then a sudden whistling, then a soft thud.

Do you:

Turn right: go to **30**.

Turn left: go to **18**.

Go straight on: go to **24**.

12.

An ear-splitting roar, a cynical cheer, then silence.

Go to **9**.

13.

The sound of two feet hitting the floor unevenly.

Go to **20**.

14.

The sound of a river running below you. The chiming of a clock in the distance, rather more muffled than the clocks that you are used to. Scurrying footsteps, very quiet, a few squeaks.

Do you:

Go downwards: go to **8**.

Go off to the left: go to **16**.

15.

The sound of water rushing intensively between you. Creaks of wood and rope. A sigh. The water sound fading to the background.

Do you:

Go left: go to **32**.

Go down: go to **23**.

16.

Several loud thuds behind you. A pair of footsteps getting quicker and quicker. Hoofbeats in the distance, getting closer. A heart beating quicker and quicker.

Go to **31**.

17.

The sound of boots on snow. Then, silence. Then, the sound of wind crisply blowing.

Do you:

Turn right: go to **30**.

Turn left: go to **18**.

Go straight on: go to **24**.

18.

In the distance, the sound of high-pitched giggling. The very quiet sound of crunching gravel. The wind blowing through the trees; but, it doesn't really sound like the sort of trees that you are familiar with.

Do you:

Carry on towards the giggling: go to **33**.

Move away from it: go to **17**.

19.

The letters “X”, “Y”, “Z”, “Z”, “Y” said in a clear voice.

Go to **41**.

20.

A rotating sound like some piece of machinery working at high speed. A muffled voice in the distance, which sounds like counting, but not in any language that you recognise.

Do you:

Go left: go to **39**.

Go right: go to **22**.

Jump up: go to **13**.

21.

The clear ticking of a clock, with the muffled sound of cogs and gears in the background. Eleven clear strikes of a high-pitched, incredibly loud, bell. A distant sigh, at a lower-pitch than is natural to you.

Do you:

Go left: go to **29**.

Go right: go to **36**.

Go down: go to **28**.

22.

The distant ticking of a clock, slightly unevenly. A sudden whistling sound behind your head.

Do you:

Go left: go to **24**.

Go right: go to **20**.

23.

The sound of hard-soled shoes on wet wooden steps.

Go to **12**.

24.

The sound of a clock ticking in the distance.

Do you:

Go forwards: go to **40**.

Turn right: go to **22**.

25.

The sound of your pulse behind your ears. A door slamming, then another, then another. Footsteps for a long time, getting slower and slower. The distant high-pitched chiming of a clock. The sounds of pots and pans being used, getting louder and louder.

Go to **10**.

26.

The sound of giggling surrounding you in every direction apart from a small gap towards the centre-right of your field of hearing.

Do you:

Move through the gap: go to **38**.

Jump up in the air: go to **4**.

27.

The sound of your fists banging on a solid wooden door for a long time.

You turn around: go to **1**.

28.

The sound of hard-soled boots on creaky wooden steps. The cracking of wood, a couple of harder, out-of-time footsteps. The sound of hard-soled boots on creaky wooden steps.

Go to **7**.

29.

The almost inaudible sound of water moving slowly down a stone wall. The muffled sound of cogs and gears intermeshing.

Do you:

Move towards the sound of cogs and gears: go to **21**.

Move away: go to **40**.

30.

The sound of stones and scree rolling.

Go to **39**.

31.

An intense ringing in your ear. The sound of feet running on across stone slabs, some of which are loose and resonate. The echo of rapidly repeating breaths, the beating of a heart.

Do you:

Veer left: go to **35**.

Veer right: go to **25**.

32.

The sound of small metal objects falling onto the floor, slightly muffled, as if behind a screen. A high-pitched cackle. In the distance, the whimpering of an animal in distress.

Go to **12**.

33.

The increasingly loud sound of giggling in the near distance. A sound that is like someone imitating an arrow flying through the air, though at a much higher volume than someone could make out loud.

Go to **26**.

34.

A sudden, loud scream. A loud bang just behind your head. Silence.

Go to **38**.

35.

Silence, then the sound of a river running increasing in volume, a sudden splash, the sound of sodden clothed limbs hitting the water, the sound of a waterfall in the distance.

Go to **3**.

36.

The distant sound of water rushing which almost sounds like there is a crowd of people giggling inside it. The sound of your stomach gurgling.

Go to **10**.

37.

A sigh, the sound of leather hitting wood, a shuffle, a cough in the distance. The sound of a pancake hitting a greasy frying pan, muffled as if from behind a door. A sigh in the distance.

Do you:

Turn right: go to **7**.

Turn left: go to **19**.

38.

It is almost like someone is giggling inside your own ear canal.

Go to **31**.

39.

Very loud winds, so that you can hardly hear anything else. Then, suddenly, a high-pitched metallic ringing sound, for just a second. The sound of the wind getting quieter and quieter. Silence, almost.

Do you:

Turn left: go to **20**.

Turn right: go to **2**.

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40.

The creak of a door opening. The sound of hard-soled boots on a stone staircase. The slam of a door. The sound of several more pairs of hard-soled boots in the distance.

Do you:

Go forwards: go to **6**.

Go right: go to **21**.

41.

Sound of tired footsteps on stone for a long time. A subtle brushing sound. Sound of tired footsteps on wood.

Go to **42**.

42.

The sound of a door creaking open. Light so bright and bitter that you squint and cannot see a thing.

The End

Afterword

The children's book mentioned in the intro is *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*—an appropriately “closet” book. Obviously, to say this to the reader beforehand would set up too many preconceptions. There is no attempt to follow the plot of the book, there are just occasional references: the opening and closing sequences, the lion's roar, the snow, etc. There are occasional references to specific pieces of interactive fiction (books and computer games), particularly Zork and Colossal Cave. However, the priority was always to convey a sense of sonic atmosphere rather than making references.

The idea is that the character can see nothing from the beginning to the end. This is conveyed by the “complete darkness” and “eyes stinging from the bright lights” at the beginning and end. I hope that this comes across clearly. An alternative explanation is that this is someone moving around in the light, but it is just a report of their sonic experience. Some of the sounds are those generated by the character, some by characters and phenomena in the environment; this is deliberately ambiguous, inspired to some extent by the stories of Alain Robbe-Grillet where the point-of-view is constantly shifting and sometimes ambiguous.