

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF A HERO

A FIGHTING FANTASY GAMEBOOK

by
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BACKGROUND

Adventure has forever been a distant thought for one like you. You are not a Warrior. You are not a Wizard. You are simply a young lad working at the stables in Port Blacksand, under the care of your guardian, the stableman.

A kind and goodly fellow, the stableman has looked after you for more than a decade, teaching you to ride and take care of horses. You have worked hard, receiving only meagre wages for your exhausting duties. But you have no complaint, for the stableman, himself, is scratching a living. Nonetheless, you are still well fed and allowed to stay in a small living area above the stables, which is ultimately better than the grubby inns Blacksand can offer. Best of all, the stables overlook a training ground.

Some time ago, a sergeant of the despicable City Guard, deemed it necessary to train and discipline Lord Azzur's troops. The idea didn't get very far, of course. Most of the soldiers merely lazed around or sat yawning with boredom till each session was over. The sergeant left the city without ever knowing of his greatest pupil.

From a young age, you have dreamt of an adventurous life in the outside world but felt too unprepared. In the time you had to spare, you would constantly spy on the training ground from your window upstairs when a session was in progress. You watched, learned then practiced the art of swordplay and combat manoeuvres in the confines of your room.

Years passed. Now, growing into adulthood, you find that your arduous work has built up your strength and confidence. What's more, you require less sleep to regain energy, and that means more hours to continue your self-training. Soon you will be ready to join the world's heroes on a path of adventure.

NOW TURN OVER

1

The day goes on like any other and you have already been busy at work. The streets at midday are as packed as early morning. Blacksand is a living nest of beggars, thieves, traders and a whole host of disreputable miscreants. The city is not a safe place. Each and every citizen, down to the smallest child, carries a weapon of some sort. Yours could be better, for you carry only a rusty shortsword. Until you acquire a sturdier blade, you must reduce your SKILL by 2 in combat – make a note of this.

A cry in the street nearby suddenly grabs your attention. Two ruffians, wielding clubs, are harassing a peg legged man. His cries for help go unheeded.

If you leave your duties to aid him, turn to 12.

If you'd rather not get involved, turn to 22.

2

Have you been to the blacksmith's yet? If you haven't, you go there now. Turn to 38. Otherwise, you return to the stables. Turn to 9.

3

Monro despatches the last of her adversaries with a swipe of her magic sword. Silence descends. You rest for several moments to catch your breath when suddenly you feel a cold blade against your neck.

"Why did you remove my helmet?" the knight demands in a stern voice.

Quickly, you explain how the situation was and how you didn't really have a choice in the matter. Plus, you didn't think it would be offensive to remove a person's headgear. She understands but tells you that no one was supposed to know of her real identity.

"In my land, it is seen as a great offence to have a female knight and would result in the loss of morale and strength of my people."

"It sounds like your people need a change of old traditions," you say, "They have to know that a woman can be as strong as any man. *That* is what will raise their morale. They have to believe in what *you* believe."

The blade is pushed further against your throat. "And what is it you think I believe?"

"That anyone with a strong heart and a good soul has the right to defend the people against the world's evils. It is a person's courage and achievements that proclaim the heroic status, not their gender or appearance."

"Indeed. Nevertheless, the few that have known my identity have died by my hand. All of them, scoundrels."

"All of them?" you ask nervously, uncertain whether or not you really want to know the answer.

"All save for those whom I trust: my family, my company of knights, and now, you."

"You trust *me*?"

"If I didn't, you'd be dead already."

"That's good to know. May I say, you do have *really* nice hair; looks better down." Monro's face breaks into a friendly smile as she moves her sword away, allowing you to breathe again.

"Come, my friend. Let us discuss identities later. We have a job to do," she says, patting you on the shoulder.

"Indeed," you reply, bemused.

Monro ties her hair back and dons her helmet, giving you a reassuring wink before flicking down the visor. Weapons at the ready, you enter the experimental chamber. Turn to 32.

4

To your right, a merchant is selling a variety of common and unusual goods. Will you go over to see if anything takes your fancy (turn to 46), or keep walking (turn to 16)?

5

The Man-Orc's axe is no better in your hands than a shortsword, but you may take it anyway. A quick search of the body reveals 5 Gold Pieces, which you put into your pouch before leaving. Turn to 38.

6

Your days go on like any other. With your fine qualities, you could have been made for greater things.

Life is full of opportunities – chances to walk a better path, a better future. Perhaps you missed too many. Perhaps you did not search hard enough.

You look at your life: you live and work in a lowly stable within a city of rogues and thieves. Still, you possess the wit and resilience to survive in it – perhaps you are content with what you have. Your dreams may yet continue, but your adventure will never begin. For you, this is the end of the road.

7

They see you and immediately change the conversation. As you pass, your eyes glance over: one of the two men seems to be a priest, the other, a vaguely familiar

Man-Orc. As soon as you exit the alley, they get back to their dealings. You leave them to it. Turn to 38.

8

The slug-thing dissolves into a pool of its own rancid slime. You confront Venare, who is sniggering evilly at you. You wonder why. Then, a Ghoul grapples you from behind, clawing and biting frenziedly. Lose 3 Stamina points. Owing to the surprise and ferocity of the attack, you are unable to defend yourself and become paralysed as the venom in its claws enters your bloodstream. Your eyes widen in terror as the creature goes for your jugular. In the nick of time, Monro comes to your rescue, decapitating the foul creature with a well-aimed sword swing. The other Ghouls have been despatched.

For the moment, the knight can do nothing to help your condition. As she dashes straight for the Venom Wizard, a pulsing green bolt of energy strikes her. She falters a little, but manages to fight off the spell's effects and engages the wizard in combat.

Conduct this battle like you would a normal combat, with the exception that no Luck points can be used.

SYLAS VLAD VENARE	SKILL	10	STAMINA	15
MONRO	SKILL	12	STAMINA	7 (12)

The bracketed value represents the knight's Stamina if you used a healing potion on her previously. If Monro is killed, you will be the prize for the wizard's latest trial run and your adventure ends here. If Monro reduces Venare's Stamina to 3, turn at once to 19.

9

Night has fallen when you get back to the stables. The stableman has long closed the building and retired to his lodgings but you have a spare key to get inside. If for some reason you did not go to the blacksmith's or tailor's, you must deduct 1 point from your Luck and make it your first priority tomorrow. Then you head upstairs for some much needed rest and sleep right until the warm rays of the sun on your face awaken you. Restore your Stamina to its *Initial* level.

If you have a Silver Brooch, turn to 50.

If not, turn to 6.

10

You leap out of the shadows surprising him. Remember to reduce your Skill by 2 for this battle because you are armed only with a rusty shortsword.

You may Escape at any time by fleeing to the Market Square (turn to 38).

If you reduce his Stamina to 2 or less, you may decide to spare him (turn to 47).

If you win, turn to 5.

11

With your back turned, you can put up no defence. At such a short range, the killer's throw is deadly accurate. You have just enough time to register a sickening thud against your back, and see a bloody knife blade protruding from your stomach, before falling lifeless to the floor.

12

You charge at the two men waving your shortsword. But the thieves are not interested in a street fight; only in their ill-gotten gains and run away as you arrive. The peg leg may be a few gold worse off but is grateful not to have received any bruises as well. He is a fortune-teller by trade and, in payment, offers to read yours free of charge. You feel obliged to let him.

"Mmmm. Your life is immersed in adventure, for adventure is your guide in life," he tells you, "Yet, if you miss opportunities presented to you each day, your adventure, and hence your life, will never truly begin. Look to the future, not the past. Follow what you regard as important in your life."

The man carries on down the street leaving you to ponder on his advice. Turn to 22.

13

Test your Luck twice. If you are Lucky on both occasions, turn at once to 25. If you are Unlucky on either test, Monro is unable to make any useful connection between your information and that of his own findings. You can be of no further assistance and must leave the knight to resume his mission. He thanks you for trying to help and gives you a standard, but sturdy, sword so that you can defend yourself better. (You may now fight at your normal Skill level.) You wish him good luck and say goodbye. Turn to 23.

14

The knight seems quite content in tackling all the Ghouls and screams a battle cry as she hacks into the undead creatures.

Your opponent takes shape in the fog ahead. It is huge, resembling a loathsome, sallow slug embellished with glands from which it secretes a noxious vapour. Its

mere presence is a deadly venom and you move to cut it down in size as it tries to slam you with its great bulk.

CANKER WORM

SKILL 7 STAMINA 10

For the duration of this battle, you must reduce your Skill by 1 point due to the effects of the vapour. Also, unless you are wearing a Druid's Talisman, you must reduce your Stamina by one point at the start of each Attack Round.

If you win, turn to 8.

15

You pass a number of rather sorrowful looking houses and back across Singing Bridge. A group of wretched urchins scurry into your path, almost causing you to trip over and you shout a few unfriendly words at them as they disappear round a corner. The traders at the market have more or less cleared their stalls and are packing up for the day.

A commotion from an alley to your left rouses your curiosity and you investigate. The alley is littered with piles of mud-soaked garbage and broken timbers, but that is hardly the worst thing you see. About ten feet away, a man lies face down in a murky puddle – his clothes slashed and bloody. The murderer stands only a few steps from him and is about to run an old woman through with a long knife...when suddenly, he sees you!

Will you turn and run (turn to 11), or rush to the woman's aid (turn to 49)?

16

A crowd of people have formed a ring around a stage, screaming wildly with excitement. As the event reaches a finale, there is a boisterous round of applause as loud as firecrackers, followed by another cheer. Shoving your way through, you see it is a contest. A large bowl-shaped tank of water, in which a tiny silver fish swims, takes up almost the entire stage. On the rim of the tank, awaiting his next challenger is a surprisingly thin man clad only in a loincloth. Peculiar features make him look somewhat less than human. His partner, or master, is a tall comical character, dressed not far from the likes of a ringmaster. Presently, he is putting on a dramatic display of showmanship to round up his audience and further contestants.

"Can you believe it? Another victory for the amazing Barracuda! Come on! Come on, folks! You have no doubts he can be beaten. Don't overlook this opportunity," he shouts, as if in a theatrical play. "Who out there has the skill and speed to match Barracuda, and snatch the Silverling before him? Only two Gold Pieces to compete, that's two measly Gold Coins, and the prizes today are well worth your effort. And

should you win, you get your gold back as well. Come on forwards, people. You won't get a better offer than that."

If you want to enter the contest, turn to 24.

If you'd rather give it a pass, turn to 29.

17

Saving time by going through a dank alley that leads straight to the Market Square, you stumble across some sort of deal between two shady figures. Obviously too immersed in whatever it is they are whispering about, they don't even notice you approaching.

Will you:

Casually walk by? Turn to 7.

Hide in the shadows? Turn to 35.

18

The Silverling darts everywhere and you swim hard, chasing it all the while and often inadvertently clashing with Barracuda. For an instant the fish zips close by and you seize your opportunity. You snatch the Silverling just as Barracuda makes a grab. But you are quicker and your opponent catches nothing except bubbly water. You swim to the surface, holding the Silverling aloft to the ecstatic audience. You have won. Restore 1 Luck point. The showman shakes your hand, congratulating you, though you sense his disappointment. Barracuda, on the other hand, takes it far less seriously. If anything, it seems he is glad to have finally found a worthy competitor.

You are presented with your choice of prizes as you dry off: a Healing Potion, which restores 5 Stamina points when drunk; a pouch containing 8 Gold Pieces; and a Druid's Talisman. Choose *one* then continue by turning to 29.

19

The knight's final blow cleaves the wizard's staff in two. She follows up with a mighty punch knocking the wizard staggering into his own experimental apparatus. The framework shatters and a container of acid splashes on to his face. Venare collapses, screaming and writhing about in agony. Monro approaches; sword levelled at his chest.

"I believe this experiment has come to an end, Syllas. You have lost. Antidote, if you please."

Venare laughs weakly. "You ruin my research, you scar my face, and now, you're asking for an antidote. Well, here is my last vial. You want it, you pitiful dog? Fetch!"

The wizard flings the vial of liquid high to his right and the knight runs desperately to catch it. With incredible dexterity, she plucks it from the air, less than a foot off the ground. However, she turns to find that Venare has already vanished in a puff of green smoke. Undeterred, she uncorks the vial and pours the contents down your throat. You breathe a sigh of great relief as your limbs gradually return to their working order. You apologise, blaming yourself for the wizard's escape. Monro tells you not to worry about it for she could not have foiled his schemes on her own.

For the next half hour or so, you search the building for your friend, Zuvember the alchemist, to whom this place actually belongs. You find him bound to a chair in a tiny storeroom full of old curios. As you release him from his bonds, he rambles on at how he was mistreated, how Venare forced him to reveal secret chemical formulas, and how people nowadays have no respect for others, whatsoever. Obviously, he has no idea how lucky he is to be alive. You ask him how to dispose of the venomous substances.

"Leave that to me, my friend," he answers in a jovial mood, "I might not be able to enchant items or brew flawless potions, but I sure know how to make things disappear!"

You leave the matter in his hands and walk outside. Monro thanks you for your help and gives you a Silver Brooch as a token of appreciation. Restore your Luck to its *Initial* value. Clasp her hand in friendship, you say your farewells and head back to the stables for some well-deserved rest. Turn to 9.

20

Your assailant's blows and cuts rain down on you and you are hard pressed to defend yourself. This appears to be a fight you cannot win and you pray that death is quick and painless. But the blow that would no doubt seal your doom is never dealt, for the knife connects with the blade of a shining broadsword. Before either of you can even register whom the new combatant is, the blade flashes twice more and it is over. The quiet ringing of the sword can be heard in the cold silence, broken suddenly by a squelching splash and a thud – the tattooed killer's head landing in a mud pool some metres away, and the headless body falls. Turn to 36.

21

"Wait!" you manage to shout before he disappears from view. Catching up to him, you introduce yourself then politely ask his name. "Monro," is all he replies in an accented voice muffled by his helmet.

Will you:

Ask how he wishes to be rewarded for saving you? Turn to 40.

Or, ask what a gallant knight like he is doing walking the squalid streets of Blacksand? Turn to 45.

22

The stableman calls you over to groom the horse that came in last night. The graceful mare has skin white as snow with a holy symbol painted on to its flanks. It takes an immediate liking to you as you give it a good grooming. When you finish, your tutor has another job for you. Horseshoes are in short supply, about an extra two-dozen at least are needed for tomorrow. A batch of saddles also needs collecting from the local tailor's. He throws you a pouch containing 30 Gold Pieces before dealing with a pair of excitable stallions that are being brought in.

Where will you go first?

Will you go to the tailor's (turn to 43), or the blacksmith's on the other side of the city (turn to 17)?

23

Have you been to the tailor's yet? If you haven't, you go there now. Turn to 43. Otherwise, you return to the stables. Turn to 9.

24

There is another round of applause when you announce your challenge and take to the stage. As you prepare for the splash, the showman lays down the rules: On the whistle blow you may dive in. The goal is to catch the Silverling fish with your bare hands before your opponent. No tricks, no fisticuffs.

You move to the edge of the water-filled tank facing the one called Barracuda. Other than being completely bald, he has wide hands and feet that resemble fins or flippers, and his toothy grin is most off putting. Then the whistle sounds and you both dive in to catch the tiny fish, darting here and there. Roll one die four times, totalling the values, then add your *Initial Skill* to get a final score. Do the same for Barracuda, who has a Skill of 8, and compare the two values. If you spend a point of Luck you may add 2 points to your score.

If your score is greater, turn to 18.

If Barracuda's score is equal to or greater than yours, turn to 27.

25

You relate your findings with that of the knight's and manage to uncover the essential clues to the wizard's whereabouts.

"Splendid!" he rejoices. "This means Venare had time to find and set up a laboratory in a suitable area for his experiments. Those crimson flowers around the lab must be the results of his meddling. Sniff enough of their aroma and you won't see the light of the next day, I'll wager. No wonder people are disappearing. If Venare has indeed taken control of the alchemist's laboratory, there is a possibility that your friend, Zuvember, could be among the dead. Let us waste no more time. The wizard has powerful magic at his disposal. If you don't want to get further involved, I suggest you leave now."

Will you back out (turn to 23), or strengthen your resolve and go with the knight (turn to 44)?

26

Hastily, you remove the knight's helmet. For the first time, you look upon the face of your saviour and see something you did not expect. Monro is actually a young woman! She has long dark hair, fair skin and a face showing signs of hard adventuring, even though she could hardly be much older than you are. Pleasantly surprised, you rest her in a more comfortable position to apply the curative.

The footsteps get increasingly louder and more numerous. You draw your sword, hoping for the remedy to work faster all the while. A waft of fetid stench hits you as the door crashes down. Your startled eyes meet with those of ravening GHOULS!

Then suddenly, Monro sits bolt upright, gasping as if woken from a nightmare (but now, more likely into one). She looks at you for an instant as she gathers her thoughts, before noticing the approaching threat. Ever courageous in the face of danger, the knight springs to her feet and leaps into the fray, fighting more ferociously than the frenzied Ghouls.

You charge forwards to her aid, engaging two of the undead in combat.

GHOUL SKILL 8 STAMINA 7

GHOUL SKILL 7 STAMINA 6

The Ghouls you are fighting have yet to reach a lethal stage in their development and do not possess the paralysing ability typical of their kind.

If you win, turn to 3.

27

Just as you are getting use to the Silverling's erratic movements, Barracuda snatches it from your sight. Surfacing, you see your opponent basking in triumph. You have lost.

"Too bad, my friend," the showman commiserates, "You nearly had him, you know. Better luck next time."

You hand him the gold and dry off before leaving. Deduct 2 Gold Pieces and 1 point of Luck. Turn to 29.

28

The bodies have 11 Gold Pieces between them and you take a sturdy sword to replace your old one. (You may now fight at your normal Skill level.) The tattooed killer's long knife you leave well alone. His other possessions consist of a length of rope and an intricately carved snake ring. If you wish to take any of these, note them on your Adventure Sheet. Not wanting to remain in the bloody alley any longer, you move away at a brisk pace. Turn to 23.

29

Your stroll through the Market Square has taken time, and the hour is getting late when you arrive at the blacksmith's. Hammering away noisily by an open fire is a large bare-chested man, whose bulging muscles are stained with soot. The building you are in is a stable much like yours only smaller and serving a different purpose. You cough to get his attention explaining that you require a batch of horseshoes for the stableman. He ignores you until his work is complete and you wait there impatiently.

At last he finishes making a breastplate and sets it aside to cool. He comes round to you. "Horseshoes again, eh?" he says in a nonchalant way. "Av' plenty o' them but a big order came in this mornin so the price is up. Cost ya 10 Gold now."

If you can afford the asking price, turn to 33.

If not, turn to 39.

30

Unfortunately for you, this means you will have to work, tidying and cleaning his store, to make up for the shortage. It seems to take an awful long time before the tailor is satisfied. Lose 2 Luck points. When you are done, you leave briskly. Turn to 2.

31

He bites the two coins, making sure they are real. Then he tells you, "Only met him a week ago. The wizard wanted herbs from my store, all poisons for his research. Don't know much else. He pays good money and I don't bother asking. I can tell he's not local though, that's for sure."

Having acquired all you can from the creature, you let him leave, which he does swiftly in case you change your mind. You head in the opposite direction. Make a note of the word 'SERPENT' on your Adventure Sheet, and then turn to 38.

32

You come into a large room lit by hanging lanterns. The fetid stench is so pungent in here you almost retch. But worst of all, you are horrified to see roughly a dozen rotting corpses suspended on lengths of chain that dangle from the high ceiling. Near the back of the chamber stands the green robed wizard, Venare, engrossed in his sinister experiments. A complex apparatus of transparent tubes, funnels and spheres is set up on a table in front of him, while his surround is a jumble of open barrels and shelves crammed with glass bottles – all containing herbs and chemicals for testing. His head turns slightly at your intrusion.

"Monro. We meet again. Have you changed your mind and come as a volunteer for my research this time?" the wizard mocks.

"Put an end to this, Sylas, you have gone too far," the knight orders, "Your poisons were bad enough and now you're meddling with the dead. If any of your concoctions reach a water system, it would result in the death of hundreds of innocent lives."

"There are no innocents in Blacksand, Monro. You of all people should know that. And water systems; is that really the extent of *your* research? The speed at which the water flows in this miserable city is far too slow for my liking. So I designed a poison that can spread via a more effective traveller: Air. Very soon, it will be ready, and *thousands* will know of my brilliance!"

"You're insane, Sylas," the knight spits.

"It is only a thin line that separates insanity and genius; I'll take the latter," he states, mixing another venomous brew.

"I don't think you heard me earlier, wizard. I said, put an end to this."

"Not a chance," he replies, spinning round with staff in hand.

"Then die!"

"Same answer."

As you and the knight rush forwards, the wizard pulls a lever beside the table that activates an electrical current, shocking the hanging corpses into life! Howling madly, the animated Ghouls break free of their chains, landing on their feet with a disgusting slap. They move menacingly towards you, an insatiable hunger burning

in their eyes. What's more, Venare has just completed a spell and something large is materialising in front of you.

Will you meet the undead in combat (turn to 41), or face the wizard's conjuration (turn to 14)?

33

The blacksmith drops the coins into his grubby apron that, at one stage may have been white. He tells you that he will bring them over tonight to avoid getting mugged in the street. Thanking him you head back south. Turn to 42.

34

The killer falls at last – you must have fought like a demon! For your great victory you may add 2 points to your Luck.

The woman you saved is nowhere to be seen so you search the bodies instead. You find 11 Gold Pieces between them and take a sturdy sword to replace your old one. (You may now fight at your normal Skill level.) The tattooed killer's long knife you leave well alone. His other possessions consist of a length of rope and an intricately carved snake ring. If you wish to take any of these, note them on your Adventure Sheet. Not wanting to remain in the bloody alley any longer, you move away at a brisk pace once you have checked there are no City Guards about that might frame you for murder. Turn to 23.

35

After several minutes, the conversation ends and the taller figure exits the alley. As the sunlight hits him, you see that he has greyish hair and is dressed in the green robes of a sorcerer. You soon lose sight of him in the crowds. The other figure walks past you without knowing of your presence. He is a MAN-ORC armed with a small axe. Will you attack him (turn to 10), or let him be (turn to 38)?

36

You collapse against a grimy wall, utterly spent. You are only aware of your wounds being tended to when a bandage is pulled tight over a nasty cut: the sting jolting you back into the real world. A potion is poured down your throat. It is a restorative and already you feel your strength returning. Restore 8 points of Stamina. Your saviour is an armoured knight dressed in full plate and armed with an enchanted sword – the image of a hero you have always dreamed to be. You thank him for saving your life and commend him on his supreme fighting skills. Never have you witnessed such expertise in swordplay. He merely nods in response and, seeing as you are now in no mortal danger, walks away. Looking around you notice that the woman you saved is nowhere to be seen. All that remains with you in the alley are two dead bodies and a lot of garbage.

Will you:

Try to learn more about your saviour? Turn to 21.

Search the bodies? Turn to 28.

Flee in case the City Guards try to frame you for murder? Turn to 23.

37

You draw your sword, nervously awaiting your foes. What crashes through, however, is not what you expected. Your startled eyes meet with those of ravening GHOULS! Although you fight for all your worth, the undead attack in frenzied states and do not flinch from your blows. Eventually you are beaten down. Instead of eating you, the Ghouls carry both you and the knight to the experimental chamber, where the latest deadly poison is ready to be tested on a 'volunteer'. You appear to be next in line. Your adventure ends here.

38

The noise of the bustling crowds fills your ears as you enter the Market Square. All around you are a colourful range of entertainers and exotic traders. The first stall you pass has a plethora of delicious food on sale at one Gold Piece per meal. If you wish to buy any, mark them down as provisions. You may buy no more than three

meals since you don't have a backpack to contain them in. Continue by turning to 4.

39

If you have an axe or hammer, the blacksmith will give you 3 Gold pieces for it. If you are still short of the asking price, you hand him all your remaining gold and agree to do some backbreaking work. Lose 2 Stamina or 1 Luck point for every piece of gold you owe. Job done, he tells you that he will bring the horseshoes over tonight to avoid getting mugged in the street. You thank him and head back south. Turn to 42.

40

The knight fixes a cold stare at you through his visor then pays no more attention to you, walking off briskly without another word. You have offended him. Turn to 23.

41

Against such a ravaging horde, you stand little chance of victory. You fell two of the creatures before being paralysed by their poisoned claws and killed outright. Alone, Monro continues fighting valiantly, but she too eventually falls under the sheer weight of numbers. You do not die alone in battle, but you die nonetheless.

42

In the Garden quarter of the city, your friend, the eccentric Zuvember, resides not far from where you are. If you think you have time to pay him a visit, turn to 48. If you'd rather carry on south, turn to 15.

43

The stableman is one of the few people left in Blacksand who knows that Dollan Wain the tailor used to be an expert maker of saddles. Ever since he realised that clothing was far more profitable than saddlery, he threw his old career to the gutters. Now he makes saddles only for personal contacts.

A bell hanging above the doorway rings noisily as you enter. The bumbling tailor, dressed in his usual extravagant clothing, walks out from the storeroom and greets you warmly. You tell him that you have come for the saddles the stableman ordered. Wain asks for payment in advance, explaining that he will cart them over at night. The fee comes to 15 Gold Pieces.

If you have this amount, you hand over the gold and bid Wain good day. Turn to 2.

If you don't have enough gold, turn to 30.

44

"You're a brave one aren't you...or foolish," he chuckles. "Here, you will need this." The knight gives you a spare sword. "A strong heart deserves a strong weapon." Add the sword to your possessions. (You may now fight at your normal Skill level.) You lead the way, taking the most direct route.

Evening comes. The streets are emptying and the last of the shops close, leaving only the faint glows of their windows to illuminate the gloomy pathways. Creatures domestic and wild sing incomprehensible songs; glass shatters, bolts creak, screams of another burglary rending the stillness of the air; the sound of

running feet on the aged wooden planks of Singing Bridge, continuing to the alchemical lab – your own footsteps. You have arrived.

The windows of the building are secure, the doors bolted and the edges of the roof lined with rows of vicious looking spikes – Zuvember never wanted visitors getting in the way of his work. It makes perfect sense that Venare selected this place as a safe haven to conduct his own experiments, and there is certainly no shortage of chemicals inside.

Monro fishes a vial from his belt and empties the contents on to the iron bars that obstruct the front window. The liquid is like none that you have ever seen, for it is working corrosively on the bars, dissolving them into nothingness. Monro calls it Metal Rot. Smashing an entry through the glass, he cautions you to be alert before climbing nimbly inside. You quickly follow.

The interior is an absolute clutter of unmarked potion bottles, scrolls, battered materials and various objects you cannot name. The filthy streets outside look relatively tidy in comparison. But you have no time to be concerned about house cleaning; you have a more important task at hand. At the back of the room is a door you know leads to the experimental chamber. Monro goes first, treading lightly over parchments and broken glass. However, Venare found a new use for all the rubbish strewn about. As the knight steps forward, you hear a click and shout a warning. But it is too late; the trap is sprung. A massive iron mace, hidden behind a panel in the ceiling, swings down thunderously like a pendulum. It smashes into the knight, who is thrown forcefully against a shelf like a rag doll. He collapses inert. Fearing the worst, you rush over to see what condition he is in. Even through his visor, you can tell he is still alive, though badly injured and unconscious. Then you hear footsteps, many sets of them coming from beyond the door.

Do you possess either a vial of Sparkweed Pollen or a Healing Potion? If you do and wish to use it on the knight, turn to 26. Otherwise, turn to 37.

45

Monro explains that he has journeyed from afar to fulfil two missions. The first concerns a wizard that he has recently tracked down to this city of thieves.

“Venare was once a lawful wizard, until his brilliance in alchemy turned to insanity. Experimentation with simple herbs and chemicals became an obsession when venom was introduced into the equation. Now he constantly brews poisonous fluids, testing the effects on innocent people in an attempt to reach a higher level of the chemical’s potency. Venare also has a habit of casually throwing aside failed experiments. Should any happen to reach a water system, the results on Blacksand’s inhabitants could be disastrous. I have already heard rumours that

the sewers are crawling with foul mutants and folks are starting to vanish. The City Guard have been informed of this growing danger, but they would not trust the words of a foreigner and I have no evidence. Nonetheless, I must locate and thwart the wizard's plans if it means turning the city inside out. Justice will be served."

It seems the safety of the entire city is at risk. Monro describes the wizard as a man of medium height with silver-grey hair and wearing sorcerous robes of a dark green dye. Then he asks if you have seen such a person or know of his activities. This is a chance for you to repay the knight for saving your life if you can be of assistance. But how much help can a stable lad be?

If you have the words 'SERPENT' and 'SPIDER' on your Adventure Sheet, turn to 25.

If you have just one of the words, turn to 13.

If you have none of the words or would rather not get involved, you can only wish the knight good luck and bid him farewell. Turn to 23.

46

A Dwarf is in charge of the stall. The items he has on display are conveniently price tagged and generally seem useful:

Blacksmith's Hammer	2 Gold Pieces
Climbing Rope	3 Gold Pieces
Vial of Yellow Powder	3 Gold Pieces
Leather Gloves	2 Gold Pieces
Ebony Rod	5 Gold Pieces

The Dwarf tells you that the vial contains a single dose of Sparkweed Pollen, and claims it to be 'strong enough to wake the dead when sniffed'. The rod is adorned with eagle feathers and has 3 runic symbols inscribed at one end.

Buy what you wish, making the necessary adjustments on your Adventure Sheet. You walk north to where some kind of event is taking place. Turn to 16.

47

The ugly Man-Orc is grateful for your mercy, but when you question him about his dealings with the sorcerer, he remains impudent.

"Give me a couple of shinies and I'll tell you," he says, putting on a sly grin.

Gobsmacked that the wretched creature could still make such a request, you may decide his life is better over after all.

If you kill him, turn to 5.

If you stifle your rage and pay up, turn to 31.

48

As you make your way to his home, you notice that several buildings have developed strange crimson flowers, creeping along the walls like ivy. A new species for the Public Gardens, you think to yourself. Zuvember's store-turned laboratory is similarly affected. You knock on his door and wait tentatively, half expecting it to come flying off its hinges after another failed experiment! There is no reply. You shout for him, but he doesn't seem to be at home. Not wanting to waste any more time you walk away, hoping to see him later. Note down the word 'SPIDER' on your Adventure Sheet and turn to 15.

49

You draw your sword and prepare for battle as the man throws the woman to a side, turning his attention to you. His eyes exude an insane bloodlust that makes you tremble, and his tattooed arms bulge with muscles. He moves purposefully towards you, licking his lips in anticipation of another kill! Remember to reduce your Skill by 2 for this battle because you are only armed with a rusty shortsword.

TATTOOED KILLER SKILL 12 STAMINA 15

If your Stamina is reduced to 4 or less, turn to 20.

If you win, turn to 34.

Two days later.

You wave goodbye to the stableman and lead your horse to the main gate. You asked him to come with you but he is satisfied where he is. He had sensed your desire to leave long ago and is happy that you have finally found a better aim in life. His last gift to you: the fine stallion at your side.

With your savings you bought a backpack to hold your ten provisions and any other items you wish to keep; a lantern to light your way; and leather armour to wear over your tunic. Your sword hangs at your belt, as does your pouch of gold in which 20 coins now remain.

As you pass through the main gate, you mount your horse and take one last glance at the city of thieves: the littered streets swamp with vagabonds and merchants; City Guards stand imposingly by the entrance, ever ready to deliver unjust punishment to whom they choose; a gang of robbers busy themselves with looting the contents of a fancy building. You shrug and turn away – there certainly won't be too much to miss from this place.

A smile comes to your face when you see a familiar figure riding towards you on the same graceful mare you groomed just days ago. The armoured knight brings her horse alongside yours, hailing you.

"Greetings, noble knight," you reply, "And you are?"

She removes her helmet, letting her hair unfurl. It glistens in the morning sun like polished ebony. "My name is Valiencis Monrowan. You can call me Valience from now on. I had been thinking on your words before and I think you were right in what you said. My hair *does* look better down."

You laugh together and clasp each other by the arm.

"So, you have decided to take up a life of adventure then?"

"That's right," you reply. "I never did belong in this city. I guess I always wanted to live life as an adventurer. I just needed the inspiration and courage to walk the first step."

Valience puts a reassuring hand on your shoulder. "You are braver than you think, my friend. Be sure to keep that in mind. Now that you are free of Blacksand, to where will you go?" she enquires.

You hadn't thought that far ahead!

Seeing you struggle for an answer, she chuckles quietly and asks, "Why don't you accompany me for a while?"

The prospect has never sounded so good. "To where will we travel, Valience?"

"As I mentioned before, I am on two missions. The first has been accomplished. The second will take us to the eastern lands of Allansia. A malevolent Lightning

Demon is causing havoc there, and a magical axe must be recovered from its grasp. It is a most perilous undertaking and the road will be fraught with danger."

"A quest for justice, I presume?"

"Indeed."

"Then let us face it together!" you say with confidence.

Smiling, the knight nods and you spur your horses into a gallop, riding east.

And so, your adventure begins in the footsteps of a true hero, and perhaps the start of your own heroic tales.