

WHISPERING LEAVES



Approximate Playtime
50 - 80 Minutes

TRACKING SHEETS

Each quest book has its own tracking sheet that can be found on the back cover of the book. While reading from this book, time is tracked on the corresponding tracking sheet for this book.

You trek west along the road from Dragonholt, passing through the orchards and rocky plains until you reach the edge of Eventide Forest. You follow the main road on a long loop around the steep cliff face that forms one border of the forest, trading time for a better chance of finding some sign of Phillip—no one on horseback would have taken the direct path.

➔ *Two time passes for each time that has passed today as recorded on the "Dragonholt Village" tracking sheet.*

After perhaps an hour of travel, you come across your first sign that something might be amiss. A normally gentle brook is swollen far beyond its banks. Phillip's path would have crossed the stream at a ford here, but there's no sign of the path under the churning brown waters. Some hundred paces downstream you can see a tangle of roots and boughs, perhaps from where the flooding knocked down a tree.

Attempt to cross the stream here.

➔ *Read entry 8246.*

Look for a safer way across.

➔ *Read entry 2262.*

Examine the area for any sign of Phillip and Talbot.

➔ *Time passes unless you have awareness (skill) or survival (skill) or story point A4 is marked.*

➔ *Read entry 8830.*

Forge a bridge of ice to cross.

Requires frost rune (item).

➔ *Read entry 9827.*

1082

You shift as the dwarf approaches, trying to make sense of his ferocious assault. He overextends on a particularly large downward swing, and you see your opportunity to strike.

If you have dueling (skill) or reasoning (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 2298.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 1232.*

1097

The crossbow bolt flashes through the air where Phillip's heart had been a moment before, smashing through the wood of the cage to break apart on the tower's stone floor.

When you look up, the bandit leader is nowhere to be seen. "Thank you," says Phillip, climbing back to his feet. "Again."

➔ *Read entry 5132.*

1232

You dodge the downward swing, but before you can capitalize on your advantage the dwarf bandit whips the axe's long handle into your gut, causing you to double over. The dwarf hefts his axe again and swings the heavy blade in a flat arc, a killing blow aimed straight at your head.

In desperation you step forward, inside the weapon's arc, and turn a killing blow into a bruising, head-rattling collision with the axe's stout oak haft.

➔ *You lose five stamina.*

Before the dwarf can recover for another swing, you grab his beard and drag his face down into your rising knee. He goes limp, dropping his axe and collapsing in your arms.

Two more bandits, a dwarf woman and a human man, rush forward to flank you. The human jabs at you with what appears to be a dagger tied to the end of a wooden pole, so you throw the bandit in your arms at him. The dwarf woman tries to circle around behind you and lob a handaxe at your back, but you step aside at the last minute and the axe soars past you ineffectually.

If you have brawling (skill) or thievery (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 9848.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 9363.*

1263

You look over the clearing for obvious signs of Phillip or his manservant-cum-bodyguard, Talbot. The clearing is ringed by a handful of paths, each stretching out into the forest. Within moments, your eyes fall upon something large and dark. Your breath catches in your throat as you realize it's a corpse—a human man in Lady Regina's livery—Talbot.

You crouch down to examine the body and realize that you were wrong; the man is still breathing, just barely, and his eyes snap open with a crazed stare.

"The young master," breathes Talbot. Each breath burbles in his throat, as if through water. The arrows protruding from his chest rise and fall as he reaches for you with a fumbling hand. "Bandits. They came," he wheezes, "out of the forest." His free hand motioning in a vaguely western direction. "Their leader wanted Phillip... alive... I drew my sword, but... too slow... Tell... her ladyship..." Talbot lapses into silence, lies back, and breathes no more.

There is nothing you could have done, his wounds too severe and too old to be mended by healing potions. You respectfully close the man's eyes and resolve to notify Lady Regina and the village guard after finding Phillip.

Search the clearing for more clues.

➔ *Time passes unless you have awareness (skill).*

➔ *Read entry 9566.*

Examine the paths for tracks.

➔ *Time passes unless you have survival (skill).*

➔ *Read entry 3489.*

1278

You cross the clearing to the hyrrinx woman's side and pull the knife free. "Thank you for helping me," she says. "My name is Hetharr. I live in a village not far from here. Normally the bandits leave us alone; I suppose these ones didn't like that I'd seen them with the human cub."

With a jangle, the woman lifts a heavy iron ring of keys, dangling from one claw. "The orc had these on him. If you're looking for that human cub the bandits took, you might find these useful."

- *Mark story points U5 and V5.*
- *You gain the iron keys (item K).*
- *Time passes.*

If story point Z4 is marked...

- *Read entry 5427.*

Otherwise...

- *Read entry 9190.*

1321

The archer takes a long draw on her pipe. "Not sure," she says before exhaling two streams of silky, grey smoke through her nose. "I heard him shouting at the kid about rights or something. Threatened to kill 'im. Don't know why he hasn't done it already."

"It is strange. He's not usually so squeamish," mutters the bandit with the axe. "Who knows what that posh bastard is planning." She shrugs. "Come on. We need to patrol and report back," she says to her companion.

- *Time passes.*
- *Read entry 9949.*

1330

Just as you are about to release the rune's magic, you notice the axe-wielding bandit charging you. She is too close to dodge. You release the magic, crystalline frost creeping up the woman's legs and body. Her axe slows to a stop only inches from your skull, the bandit's entire body wrapped in shards of ice.

Unaware of what has become of her companion, the archer continues her flight, passing beneath the waterfall and out of sight.

- *Mark story point Z4.*
- *Time passes.*
- *Read entry 9949.*

1332

You read the bandit's stance and shift to avoid her attack. When it comes, the axe blurs through the air and your careful balance and judgment give way to pure reflex.

If you have agility (skill) or reasoning (skill)...

- *Read entry 2936.*

Otherwise...

- *Read entry 3815.*

1377

You direct your attention to a shifty-looking man hanging near the back of the group of bandits and call out to him as if he were their leader.

"Don't talk to him," grunts Kimball. "You're dealing with me, here."

You apologize and explain that you just assumed that the bandits were deferring to the one amongst their number who is manifestly most qualified to lead—meaning, not Kimball.

If you have empathy (skill) or persuasion (skill)...

- *Read entry 1395.*

Otherwise...

- *Read entry 7344.*

1395

"What do you mean by that?" asks the shifty man in the back, scuttling forward a little. You explain that his obvious noble bearing and (noticing a small leatherbound book tucked into a pouch at his belt) education seemed to suggest that he was the natural leader.

"Enough of that rot," growls Kimball through gritted teeth.

The shifty man pulls out the book, a broad smile spreading across his mostly toothless mouth. "You're right!" he says. "I am educated! I been writing in this here book, you see, all my thoughts and thinks."

"Shut your spirit-blighted yap," says Kimball, turning on the book-writer, his narrow eyes narrowing still further.

"Now just a moment," says a stocky human woman with her hair in two braids. She holds up a single finger. "I, for one, would like to hear what Scriv has to say. Let's hear his thinks and see if he might make a better leader than you, Kimball."

You say nothing and step back. The dark-skinned woman with the patterns shaved into her hair rushes toward the fairer woman with the braids. "Let's not hear his 'thinks,' nor yours, Cille. He's dumber than a one-headed ettin and you're not quite worth the second head."

Another bandit speaks up, complaining about some decision of Kimball's. Yet another says that really the decision belongs to Kyrice and they should ask him to resolve the dispute. Kimball roars and draws his sword, waving it about in an attempt to restore order. You take another step away from the group, then another. Soon you are walking toward the bandit's tower, with the sound of quarreling bandits fading behind you.

- *Read entry 9577.*

1427

You do your best to convince the hyrrinx woman that you mean no harm, but your words get tangled up and you think you might be doing more harm than good. Eventually, you just stop talking.

If you are a catfolk (race) or you have persuasion (skill)...

- *Read entry 7486.*

Otherwise...

- *Read entry 7443.*

1529

You draw what looks like a stick covered in tar from a belt pouch. You break the stick in half and hurl it toward the onrushing bandit, who leaps back as the stick bursts into sputtering flames and begins belching thick black smoke. The bandit hacks and coughs before abandoning his charge and fleeing north.

- ➔ *Mark story point Z4.*
- ➔ *Read entry 3910.*

1614

"Shouldn't have said anything, furball," rumbles the oafish orc. "Kyrice may be content to leave your little village alone, but only while you mangy animals know your place."

"Cut her up!" hisses one of the bandits, a gaunt-looking elf woman with burning eyes. "She saw us take that noble brat. Kill her and leave her as a warning for her village."

The third bandit, a human man whose bare chest and bald head are marred by countless scars, nods vigorously but says nothing.

Before you can decide how to handle the situation, Braxton draws her sword and calls out to the bandits as she approaches, "Let her go!"

"Who's this?" asks the twitchy elf, drawing a dagger from her belt. The scarred human shrugs and lifts a heavy cudgel.

- ➔ *Read entry 2097.*

1615

The woman's gaze falls on your hiding spot. She squints and tilts her head as if analyzing what she is seeing, then turns her attention to her companion. "Don't smoke too long, Grey. Kyrice will throw another tantrum if he thinks we're not patrolling like he asked."

"Ah to hell with Kyrice and his new toy," says the archer. She packs some tobacco into her pipe, lights it, and takes a draw. "What does he want with the kid anyway? Kidnapping a noble brat seems like a sure-fire way to bring the guard down on us."

"The family clearly has money. Maybe he thinks he can ransom the boy," responds the larger woman with the axe.

The archer takes a long draw on her pipe. "Nah," she says before exhaling two streams of silky, grey smoke through her nose. "I heard him shouting at the kid about rights or something. Threatened to kill 'im, Kavi. No ransom for a dead brat."

The larger woman shifts her weight. "Who knows why that posh bastard does anything," she mutters. "Come on. We need to patrol and report back."

You wait until they follow the path downstream and out of sight. Then you leave your hiding spot and make your way cautiously to the waterfall.

- ➔ *Time passes.*
- ➔ *Read entry 9949.*

1680

You quickly nock and draw, hurrying to fire at the bandit before she escapes through the waterfall. You aim as carefully as you can, then let fly. The arrow streaks straight toward the fleeing bandit.

- If story point U7 is marked...*
 - ➔ *Read entry 7527.*

- Otherwise...*
 - ➔ *Read entry 9097.*

1682

For an instant time seems to flow like honey. You step in front of Phillip, watching with a curious sense of detachment as the glimmering point of Kyrice's quarrel comes spiraling toward your chest.

- If you have two or more of the following skills: agility, brawling, or devotion...*
 - ➔ *Read entry 9960.*

- Otherwise...*
 - ➔ *Read entry 3258.*

1732

You have no time to think, only to act! You shout a warning and shove Phillip to the ground. Kyrice is already moving—running for the stairs—before you can take stock of the situation.

- If you have agility (skill) or devotion (skill)...*
 - ➔ *Read entry 1097*

- Otherwise...*
 - ➔ *Read entry 6614*

1789

As the goats come curiously toward you, you pull a small crumb of bread from your pack and offer it to the closest animal. Seeing him munching happily away, the other goats immediately rush closer, their attention now completely fixed on you. Soon, you have a large and attentive goat audience.

You yell and scream and startle the goats into running toward the bandits and their encampment. In moments, the goats are knocking down tents, bleating from atop the wall around the tower, running hither and yon with boots dangling from their mouths, and generally causing mayhem. The bandits scurry after, shouting and flailing ineffectually in an attempt to restore order.

One of the goats, however, a brown-and-white buck with impressive curved horns, seems unimpressed with your gambit. He lowers his head and gives you a proper charge, ramming into you, then spinning away with a kick of his sharp little hooves. In fact, he chases you most of the way to the bandit tower before seeming satisfied that you've learned your lesson. At least the bandits are far too preoccupied to notice you.

- ➔ *You each lose three stamina.*
- ➔ *Read entry 5691.*

1817

A young man—no, a boy—sits on the floor in the cage. His features are delicate, and his green eyes glimmer with unfallen tears. He looks up as you approach and leans against the cage bars.

Seeing who is approaching, Phillip's expression changes, now filled with hope. He pulls himself up to a crouch. "Oh thank goodness! You'll let me out of here, right? Please hurry; my mad uncle could return at any moment." The boy's eyes glimmer with tears. "Oh thank you, thank you! I was certain I was going to die here!"

The cage is made of heavy wooden beams, apparently of more recent construction than the rest of the decaying tower. A heavy iron padlock secures the door, but the cage doesn't seem to be bolted down, secured only by its tremendous weight.

Unlock the cage door.

Requires iron keys (item).

➔ *Read entry 3589.*

Pick the lock.

Requires thievery (skill).

➔ *Read entry 3348.*

Dismantle the cage.

Requires craftsmanship (skill) or reasoning (skill).

➔ *Read entry 4909.*

Work together to lift the cage.

Requires story point A4 is marked or there are three or more heroes.

➔ *Read entry 9389.*

Lift the cage alone with your tremendous strength.

Requires both athletics (skill) and endurance (skill).

➔ *Read entry 6641.*

Grab an axe and break open the cage.

➔ *Read entry 9487.*

1855

For a moment you think your wall of fire is doing the trick, but then the dwarf bursts through the flames in midair, beard on fire, and brings his axe down in a punishing arc that knocks you sprawling.

➔ *You lose four stamina.*

As you roll away from another killing axe-blow, you realize that you've dropped the flame rune. You also see two more bandits loping forward. You produce your blasting rune and thrust outwards, hurling magical energy into the axe-armed dwarf. He goes flying, his beard leaving a trail of smoke, and collides with one of the oncoming bandits.

You scramble for your feet as the remaining bandit closes, jabbing at you with a crude spear.

If you have craftsmanship (skill) or dueling (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 3762.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 3704.*

1869

You sprint into the trees and see a human-like figure fleeing through the leaves away from you. You pursue and are quickly on her heels. With a great leap, you throw yourself upon her, and your momentum sends you both sprawling to the ground.

➔ *You lose one stamina.*

You have caught a yowling and spitting hyrrinx woman. Her brown fur is mottled with grey, and her tufted ears are tucked flat against her head in what you assume is an expression of hostility and fear.

➔ *Mark story point L6.*

"I didn't have anything to do with what happened to those humans!" she growls. "Let me go!" Her posture and demeanor are threatening, but you notice she is now favoring her left leg.

"Sorry, you're free to go."

➔ *Read entry 5311.*

"What happened to the humans?"

➔ *Read entry 9884.*

"Who are you? What are you doing out here?"

➔ *Read entry 7239.*

1874

After a few moments, you see humanoid silhouettes behind the waterfall, and two human women emerge from the curtain of falling water. One carries an axe; the other has a bow slung over her shoulder.

The women stop dead when they see you, their conversation halting immediately. The archer readies her bow and nocks an arrow. The larger woman hefts her axe and calls out to you, "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

You do your best to look and act like the bandits you encountered on your way to Dragonholt. You spin a story about how "the boss" sent you to hide the body left at the clearing.

If you have deception (skill) or performance (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 6123.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 6656.*

1897

You and Shark press forward and back, weapons ringing and feet shuffling on the crushed gravel beneath you. Gradually, you shift the fight in a circle until your back is to the tower door. "Nowhere to run now," leers Shark, so you kick him in the chest, hack at his legs, and run for the door. "Wait!" he shouts, as you slam the door behind you and drop the crossbar. Shark's curses follow you, but none of the bandits do.

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 4387.*

1924

You rush over to where the east wall of the room once stood and look down at the ground between the tower and the valley wall. The outside of the tower wall is lush with vines. A couple paces from the base of the tower, the fieldstone wall rings the area. Beyond the wall, the ground is dense with leafy foliage.

You might be able to climb to safety, but the tower wall does not look greatly sturdy. You hear shouting and the hacking of axes against wood echoing up the stairwell.

Climb down the vines.

➔ *Read entry 2416.*

Secure the climb with rope.

Requires craftsmanship (skill) or reasoning (skill).

➔ *Read entry 9926.*

Leap from the tower.

➔ *Read entry 2180.*

1933

The archer draws and looses, sending an arrow arcing for you, but the tree twitches and the arrow deflects harmlessly from a trembling bough. The second arrow meets the same fate, and as the other bandit attempts to climb up, the lower limbs thrash about, hurling him back to the tower roof, straight into another group of bandits emerging from the stairs. The resulting confusion buys you all the time you need to make it safely across.

You drop from the tree onto solid ground and waste no time before grabbing Phillip by the hand and sprinting through the forest toward the southeast.

➔ *Read entry 9982.*

1980

"Not so fast!" The voice cuts through the room like a chill wind. You turn to see a broad-shouldered man with a scar running across his face standing at the stairs—the same man who led the bandits you encountered at the Tree of Tales just days ago. He holds a black crossbow, the point of its quarrel gleaming in the evening light.

"Uncle!" says Phillip. His eyes go wide as he stares at the crossbow. "So you've finally come to do it, then. Remember, uncle, the spirits hate kinslayers worst of all."

"You've forced my hand, Phillip." The bandit leader shakes his head. "If only you would see reason. Join me. Throw your support behind my claim. Support me over your sister as heir. Your mother was never supposed to be the Countess. That's my title she holds!"

"You're a monster, Uncle Kyric!" shouts Phillip. "You killed Sonia, didn't you? Admit it!"

"Enough," says Kyric. He pulls the trigger on his crossbow.

Push Phillip out of the way.

➔ *Read entry 1732.*

Put yourself between Phillip and his uncle.

➔ *Read entry 1682.*

2048

You draw your weapon and step out of the undergrowth, calling out the orc. "Who's this?" asks the twitchy elf, drawing a dagger from her belt. The scarred human shrugs and lifts a heavy cudgel.

The pot-bellied orc thrusts his knife into the tree, pinning the hyrrinx woman by her tunic. Then he turns his attention toward you. "You think I—the great Brun—am afraid of you? I've seen more terrifying kittens than your sorry display! And killed 'um too. Ain't that right, Twitch, Dez?" He smirks and glances over his shoulder at his companions. The elf woman now wears a fiendish grin. The human's mouth is slightly ajar, and you could imagine him licking his lips if he had a tongue to do so.

The orc's gaze returns to you, and he slowly draws an obscenely large dagger from his belt, more a machete than a knife. The way he brandishes it, its not hard to tell he's used it to kill. Suddenly, he dashes forward, moving more quickly than you would expect from a man as rotund as he is.

Meet his charge with steel.

➔ *Read entry 5018.*

Shoot him before he reaches you.

Requires archery (skill).

➔ *Read entry 4091.*

2050

The scarred human rushes at you, emitting a strange clicking howl. He hefts a heavy cudgel above his head, a length of hard, knotted wood stained red by what you can only assume is the blood of its last victim.

Subdue the man by force.

➔ *Read entry 8826.*

Deter the man with alchemical smoke.

Requires alchemy (skill).

➔ *Read entry 1529.*

Intimidate the man with a burst of flame.

Requires arcana (skill).

➔ *Read entry 3844.*

2079

You grab hold of your growth rune and slam it into the ground, touching the grass and reaching out to the tree roots beneath. You feel the rune's magic spread out into the earth, and the trees respond, groaning and growing and soon ensnaring the fleeing elf woman in a web of roots and vines. Struggling, she is hoisted a dozen feet into the air.

"Alright," she calls. "You made your point. You can cut me down now." You turn your attention to the hyrrinx woman, ignoring the elf's increasingly plaintive cries for help.

If story point L6 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 5660*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 1278.*

2097

The pot-bellied orc thrusts his knife into the tree, pinning the hyrrinx woman by her tunic. Then he turns his attention toward Braxton. "You think I'm afraid of you? I've seen more terrifying kittens than your sorry display! And killed 'um too. Ain't that right, Twitch, Dez?" He smirks and glances over his shoulder at his companions. The elf woman now wears a fiendish grin. The human's mouth is slightly ajar, and you could imagine him licking his lips if he had a tongue to do so.

The orc's gaze returns to Braxton, and he slowly draws an obscenely large dagger from his belt, more a machete than a knife. The way he brandishes it, its not hard to tell he's used it to kill. Suddenly, he dashes forward, moving more quickly than you would expect from a man as rotund as he is.

Braxton meets the man's charge with a flash of steel that leaves him short a leg and slams her shield into his chest and face. He falls backward to the ground, screaming. A second slash sends his foul weapon and three fingers into the undergrowth. She plants her foot on his stump, her sword tip nearly piercing the man's throat. "Stay down. I've felled creatures more terrifying than you sorry lot."

➔ *Read entry 2050.*

2180

After a quick glance down, you figure that you could probably jump to land safely in the brush against the valley wall. You move back a few paces to get a run-up, then sprint for the open hole and hurl yourself out into the open air.

If you have athletics (skill) or willpower (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 6906.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 9228.*

2181

You heave the gnome into the air in a low arc headed straight for the human bandit. He drops his spear and catches her, sending them both toppling to the ground in a tangle of limbs. Fresh blood blooms on your arm—the gnome must have managed a hit with her knife as she went by.

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

Shark lunges forward with his hooked sword, slashing high and then spinning for another cut low. You duck beneath the first, then back away from the second. You lash out with your own attack and he scrambles back.

If you have dueling (skill) or reasoning (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 1897.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 5854.*

2185

You turn away and continue back under the aqueduct, the goats following after. One brown-and-white one leaps up onto a fallen column, bleating. The bandits are almost certain to notice.

If you have devotion (skill) or stealth (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 3945.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 7648.*

2262

You make your way downstream, picking carefully along the uncertain bank. When you reach the looming boughs and branches you spotted from the ford, you see why the river is flooded: a tangle of fallen trees and trapped boughs has formed a dam.

Downstream of the dam, the stream returns to its usual size and you soon find a shallow spot where you can hop from rock to rock.

Take some time to clear the blockage.

➔ *Read entry 6850.*

Continue on without clearing the stream.

➔ *Read entry 2398.*

2298

You dodge the downward swing and grab the man by his braided beard, pulling him forward. Between the force of his attack and your assistance, the dwarf staggers forward a few paces before falling face first into a large mud puddle.

Two more bandits, a dwarf woman and a human man, rush forward to flank you. The human jabs at you with what appears to be a dagger tied to the end of a wooden pole, sending you scrambling back looking for an opening. Distracted by the shouting human, you are easy prey for the dwarf woman's hurled handaxe, which slams into your back and knocks you reeling.

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

If you have brawling (skill) or thievery (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 9848.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 9363.*

2329

You step forward and swing your weapon up to knock hers aside. The weapons clash like a thunderstrike, the impact nearly ripping your weapon from your hand and echoing off the rocks around you.

➔ *You lose two stamina.*

If you have dueling (skill) or military (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 4621.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 3110.*

2354

Arrows fly through the leaves around you, but luckily none find their marks. The bandit below you leaps up to begin climbing, but the small branches give way under his weight just as you had planned. He falls back to the roof in a tangle of branches and vines. You drop from the tree onto solid ground and waste no time before grabbing Phillip by the hand and sprinting through the forest toward the southeast.

➔ *Read entry 9982.*

2360

Creeping past the aqueduct brings you close to the edge of the pool it feeds and its grazing goats. One of the goats—the same one that startled you earlier, you'd guess—comes trotting toward you, bleating and flicking its stubby tail.

As you try to quietly shoo the beast away, it nibbles at your gear with its dexterous lips, murmuring in its goaty way. Soon another goat approaches, then a third. The entire herd is starting to notice your presence, bleating for food. The bandits would have to be very stupid indeed not to find you with all this caprine attention.

Attempt to sneak past the goats.

➔ *Read entry 2185.*

Feed the goats.

➔ *Read entry 4774.*

Startle the goats and cause a panic.

➔ *Read entry 1789.*

2398

You hop carefully from rock to rock and cross the stream without even getting wet. Then you begin the hike back upstream to pick up Phillip's trail once more.

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 9792.*

2416

You carefully pick your way down the face of the tower, relying on the vines for most of your handholds, or finding narrow gaps and imperfections in the mortared stone of the wall. From time to time you slip, your heart threatens to burst from your chest, and you slam into the wall scrabbling for another toehold, something, anything that will hold your weight. You just drop the last six feet, stumbling away from the tower.

➔ *You each lose two stamina unless you have athletics (skill).*

You see movement above you as several bandits approach the opening in the wall and look out over the valley. You grab Phillip and scramble for cover.

If you have stealth (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 3049.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 4699.*

2437

Before you even quiet your breath, you can hear the sound of snoring through the door. You listen a bit longer but hear no signs that anyone else is in the room. Cautiously, you push open the door just enough to take a look.

Peering into the room, you see a pot-bellied orc asleep on a creaking wooden bench. Two rows of rickety wooden cots lie against the walls. The orc is alone. A ring of heavy iron keys hangs from his belt, and an obscenely large dagger rests against the bench a few inches from his twitching, sleeping hand.

Sneak into the room and steal the keys.

➔ *Read entry 7796.*

Close the door and head up the stairs.

➔ *Read entry 6421.*

2446

You flip through Phillip's book. It seems to be a diary in which the youth has also written a great deal of poetry.

Some of it is actually quite good. Near the end of the book, the tone of the poetry shifts radically, becoming much darker and tinged with melancholy. The last page is missing, leaving a ragged torn edge behind.

The last poem, before the missing page, paints a "perfumed fop" who is "limp as a silk handkerchief" in an unflattering light, describing the character as a "snake in human skin." It also has some choice words about someone who "lies with beasts," and is "infested with a madness most foul." Both characters are placed in a position of "cruel ambush" regarding the poem's heroine, who dies "most foully" and "by unseen hand."

Examine the paths for tracks.

➔ *Read entry 3489.*

Climb the tree in search of other clues.

Requires athletics (skill).

➔ *Read entry 8962.*

Commune with the spirits of Eventide Forest.

Requires devotion (skill).

➔ *Read entry 7023.*

2600

Arrows fly through the leaves around you, and one of them catches your leg. You wince from the pain as you make your way toward the ground and behind cover.

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

The bandit below you leaps up to begin climbing, but the small branches give way under his weight just as you had planned. He falls back to the roof in a tangle of branches and vines. You drop from the tree onto solid ground and waste no time before grabbing Phillip by the hand and sprinting through the forest toward the southeast.

➔ *Read entry 9982.*

2662

You scramble up the trail and hide behind some bushes on a rocky outcropping beside the waterfall. The bandits step through the curtain of water, two women—one holding an axe, the other holding a bow. The archer flicks her eyes past you, then glances back, focusing on your hiding place. She pulls an arrow from her quiver and nocks it to her bowstring; she has seen you!

Leap down and attack.

➔ *Read entry 5070.*

Cut her bowstring before she can fire.

Requires thievery (skill).

➔ *Read entry 4423.*

Release a bolt of electricity.

Requires runes (skill).

➔ *Read entry 3173.*

Freeze her in place.

Requires frost rune (item).

➔ *Read entry 8799.*

2693

The gnome woman tumbles to the ground, grimacing and squeezing her watering eyes shut. Still, she launches herself back to her feet and slashes blindly with her knives, dead-on target by luck or intuition. You raise your arms to protect yourself and her blades bite deep, sending your lighting rune tumbling away.

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

Shark and the human man seem dazzled, staggering and blinking furiously, but they lunge at you anyway. Neither bandit is particularly accurate, but with two of them making wild swings and jabs it's only a matter of time before they land a lethal blow. With only your blasting rune at hand, you lift it and unleash a burst of force.

If you have endurance (skill) or willpower (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 5208.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 3563.*

2711

Your growth rune looks like a gnarled piece of wood as strong as stone and pulses warmly in your hand as you coax it to life. The trees and vines hanging over the tower ripple and expand with each pulse, seeming to reach gently for you as you step forward and begin your ascent. The climb is remarkably easy, with the tree bending itself to provide convenient footholds for each stage of your journey.

You hear shouting and heavy footfalls on the stairs. A moment later, two bandits are on the roof. One rushes forward. The other falls back and bends her bow.

If you have devotion (skill) or survival (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 1933.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 5819.*

2716

You draw your own weapon and battle is joined! You dance back, giving Kimball another blast from your frost rune as he delivers a whipcrack-fast backhand slash. He pauses to break the newly formed ice on his wrist, and you take the chance to lunge, scoring a ragged hit along his shoulder when he twists aside.

The bandit's counterblow is faster and more powerful than it has any right to be. You barely get your own weapon up in time, and the shock of the impact makes your arm twinge with pain. While you struggle to recover, the bandit steps back and then attacks again, a vicious overhand hammerblow that even with his rusted sword would split you from crown to groin. You desperately thrust your rune up as you step aside, creating a shield of ice that shatters and rains razor-sharp shards over both of you.

You trade blows, ducking under another vicious swing and blasting Kimball's feet with ice. You slash at his legs as he breaks free and are hurled back by a bare-handed blow that leaves your head ringing.

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

You barely sidestep another vicious overhand, and with your vision still swimming you desperately try to buy time by freezing the sword to the wet grass. Kimball yowls and lets go of the blade, his hands already starting to blacken with frostbite, so you step in and land a solid hit to his midsection that leaves him crumpled on the frosted ground.

Taking a moment to catch your breath, you look at the remaining bandits. The ones still present are slowly breaking free of their icy prisons, but they seem in no hurry to pick a fight with you and your frost rune. You turn and head for the bandit's tower.

➔ *Read entry 9577.*

2722

Several bandits idle in a collection of tents and lean-tos not far from the tower, watching the goats and apparently napping. More bandits lounge by the tower's only door, clearly on guard. They don't seem to be extremely alert to infiltrators.

Fight your way to the tower.

This option does not exhaust your activation token.

➔ *Read entry 5236.*

Sneak along the edge of the valley.

This option does not exhaust your activation token.

➔ *Read entry 9295.*

2829

The woman's gaze falls on your hiding spot. She squints and tilts her head as if analyzing what she is seeing, then she hefts her axe. "Who's hiding over there? Come out!"

The archer pockets her pipe and readies her bow, looking in your direction. She nocks an arrow, draws back, and lets it fly. The shaft pierces your cover and thunks into the tree behind you.

➔ *Read entry 6684.*

2853

You hunker back in your cover, then toss another stone closer to you. The lanky human wanders into your ambush, and you strike from behind, clapping a hand over his mouth and wrapping an arm around his throat. He kicks, struggles, and then goes still as the second bandit approaches. "Peter?" she calls, drawing a knife.

You scramble back to cover, timing your attack for the moment the gnome woman spots her fallen comrade. It's almost too late; she spins and lashes out with her dagger, but you knock it aside and clobber her over the head. She crumples next to her companion.

The third bandit is overconfident and ambles idly into your trap almost before the gnome has hit the dirt. "What is going on, you idiots," he sneers, and then hisses "Oh, shard!" as you step out of your hiding place and fell him with a single swing. He gets his sword halfway out of its scabbard before pitching facefirst atop both of his companions.

You drag all three of the bandits out of sight behind some bushes, then head for the tower door.

- ➔ *Time passes.*
- ➔ *Read entry 4387.*

2881

You drive the spearpoint deep into the elf's shoulder. He hisses, dropping the sword to scrabble at the spear with both hands. With the leverage afforded to you by the length of the spear's shaft, you hurl Shark to the ground.

Turning to the gnome, you see her retreating, spinning her knives on her palms and glancing back and forth between her injured comrades.

You slip through the tower door and slam it shut behind you.

- ➔ *Time passes.*
- ➔ *Read entry 4387.*

2897

You grab hold of the gnome woman to hurl her at her friends, but her knife slashes across your forearm and you drop her instead. Before she can rise you kick her away from you, then cry out in pain as the human stabs you with his spear.

- ➔ *You lose five stamina.*

You grab hold of the spear's haft and wrest it from the bandit's grasp, thrusting back with the blunt end into his gut. He doubles over, gasping for breath. Before you can finish him off, Shark comes lunging forward with his hooked sword. You block with the spear, which splinters and breaks under the blow, then snatch up your own weapon as Shark scrambles back out of reach.

- If you have dueling (skill) or reasoning (skill)...*
- ➔ *Read entry 1897.*

- Otherwise...*
- ➔ *Read entry 5854.*

2936

You duck under the vicious swing and spin around to the bandit's side. A quick strike wounds the bandit's right shoulder, and she staggers away from you, lashing out blindly with the haft of her axe. You dance backward, distancing yourself. She snarls and shifts her grip on her axe, now favoring her other hand.

- ➔ *Mark story point U7.*

If story point K5 is marked...

- ➔ *Read entry 9535.*

Otherwise...

- ➔ *Read entry 8758.*

2998

You call out, asking whoever is there to stop. A furry, cat-like figure in a red tunic pauses at the edge of the trees, her tail bristling behind her. She is a hyrrinx catfolk, a woman, unarmed, and a bit older than Phillip at a guess.

- ➔ *Mark story point L6.*

"Please, wait! I mean you no harm."

- ➔ *Read entry 1427.*

Approach cautiously, in a non-threatening manner.

- ➔ *Read entry 8281.*

3049

The bandits don't immediately notice you, so you race toward the valley entrance as fast as you can. It's not until you break cover to sprint the last few paces for the canyon gap that you hear a shout of "there he is!" distantly from the tower behind you.

You step through the waterfall into the forest glade and waste no time before grabbing Phillip by the hand and sprinting through the forest toward the southeast.

- ➔ *Read entry 9982.*

3110

The impact has left you both staggered, but the bandit recovers first. She swings again, this time catching your arm. Pain flares and then the arm goes numb.

- ➔ *You lose five stamina.*

Her swing drags her off balance, and you seize the opportunity to strike once more, before she can finish you with another blow. You land a palpable hit on her right shoulder. She staggers back, swinging her axe in a flat arc to buy herself some space. She grits her teeth and shifts her grip on her axe, now favoring her other hand.

- ➔ *Mark story point U7.*

If story point K5 is marked...

- ➔ *Read entry 9535.*

Otherwise...

- ➔ *Read entry 8758.*

3173

In the moment the bandit nocks her arrow, you draw a lightning rune from your sleeve. She draws back, arrow point trained on your chest. You grip the runeshard and electricity crackles around your fist. In a flash, a bolt of lightning arcs from your hand to the bandit's wet clothing. She shrieks, and her arrow flies wide, missing you entirely.

The surge of electricity has left your arm numb, and you can feel that your heartbeat is irregular. However, you notice the bandit's bowstring has burned up, her bow now useless.

➤ *Mark story point Y2.*

➤ *You lose two stamina.*

➤ *Read entry 6684.*

3220

The bandits don't hinder you as you leave the valley. Some of them grin or make rude sounds as you pass by. Kyrice watches you from the tower as you leave. Even so, your trip back to Dragonholt is difficult, burdened as you are with Phillip's body. The fact of his death—heavier than any corpse—hangs leaden around you. A difficult, tiring journey becomes detached and dreamlike under that weight as your feet move one after the other and silence reigns in the wood and in your heart.

You halt your retreat to rest at the top of the steep cliff that borders Eventide Forest. You think back to when you barely escaped the bandits with your life mere days ago in this very spot. You set Phillip's body against a gnarled tree leaning out over the drop. You've wrapped it in a blanket, but you notice the blanket has fallen open only after you sit. Phillip's face stares at you, grey in the fading light. You stare back, too exhausted to move.

An enormous raven lands on the tree, croaking in triumph. You struggle to your feet and wrap Phillip's body again in the bloody blanket before lifting him from the ground. The raven watches you—fearless—as you stumble on toward Dragonholt.

You pass through the thinning wood and enter the orchards beyond. The grumbling bird follows after, flapping from tree to tree to glare at you with night-shiny eyes. Eventually, the bird gives up the chase, lurking in a great, old apple tree just within sight of the village.

As you near the dragon statues, you look over your shoulder in the direction of the forest. The old apple tree looms huge and black behind you, the raven a blacker shape in the darkness. For an instant, you think you see a woman standing beneath the tree, her moonlight-white hand resting on the trunk. But only for an instant, then the vision is gone. Phillip's body seems lighter now as you carry him beneath the arching dragons.

Somehow, the statue of black stone seems larger and more fearsome than it did when you passed beneath it earlier. The white stone of the opposing dragon seems tarnished, stained red in the light of the setting sun.

➤ *Mark story point O6.*

➤ *This quest is complete. Read entry 6646 in the "Dragonholt Village" book.*

3243

You follow the trail northwest into the forest. Before very long, you find a silk handkerchief in the center of the trail. It looks like it's been trod into the mud, but when you smooth it out you see it has an elegant "P" embroidered into one corner.

➤ *Time passes.*

The path turns to the north and follows along a winding brook. Upstream, the brook widens into a cliffside pond fed by a small but vigorous waterfall. The path winds around and up to a series of rocky cliffs and scrub-clad slopes. The pond and waterfall are surrounded by a moss-carpeted glade beneath a canopy of trees thick with hanging vines.

As you approach the pond, you hear shouting and crude laughter dimly from the direction of the waterfall. Someone is coming! In just moments they'll be in full view!

Hide nearby.

➤ *Read entry 5999.*

Prepare to ambush the approaching bandits.

➤ *Read entry 2662.*

Pretend to be a bandit.

➤ *Read entry 1874.*

3258

The world turns red. There is not pain so much as blankness as you find yourself lying on the cold stone floor. You struggle to sit up and are suddenly immobile with pain, gasping and curling uselessly around the shaft protruding from your chest.

➤ *You lose ten stamina.*

"Tch!" spits the bandit leader before turning on his heel and disappearing down the tower stairs.

Phillip kneels beside you. "Oh, it looks bad," he says, rummaging in his pockets for something. He produces a small bottle filled with red liquid, breaks the wax seal, and brings the bottle to your lips. "This will help while the wound is still fresh!" He removes the bolt as you drink the bitter liquid, and your chest swells. At least it's no longer bleeding.

Phillip helps you to your feet. "We'd better leave."

➤ *You recover half of your maximum stamina.*

➤ *Read entry 5132.*

3348

You slip your torsion wrench and picks from their hiding places and set to work. The mechanism isn't especially complex, and after a number of attempts you hear a click and the lock pops open. Phillip comes crawling through the door, smiling with relief.

"I never thought I'd be happy to see a thief," he says, climbing to his feet. "Thank you. Now let's get out of here."

➤ *Read entry 1980.*

3489

You examine each path on the edge of the clearing, looking for signs of passage.

You find heavy boot prints and scuff marks in the soft earth of a northwestern path. Discarded in the leaf-litter nearby you see a dagger marked with Phillip's family crest.

As you straighten up from the dagger, you spot movement and a flash of red in the trees! Someone or something is there, moving away from you.

Call out for whoever it is to stop!

➔ *Read entry 2998.*

Leap quickly to intercept!

Requires agility (skill) or athletics (skill).

➔ *Read entry 1869.*

Move cautiously and track whoever or whatever it was.

Requires stealth (skill) or survival (skill).

➔ *Read entry 8300.*

3563

A sound like a thunderclap erupts from your closed fist, causing the air to ripple. You and Shark both go flying through the air. You land on the soft earth a few paces away, rattled and gasping, but as you climb to your feet you realize the bandits all got it worse than you: Shark is lying in a crumpled heap against the tower wall.

Aching and limping, you retrieve your lightning rune and make your way into the tower.

➔ *You lose four stamina.*

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 4387.*

3567

You climb the stairs through a smaller room with no windows, then higher still to the roof. The lip of the valley ridge is an overhang not more than a couple paces away and above you. Several trees grow along the edge of the cliff above you, low-hanging branches and draping vines within your reach.

You might be able to climb to safety, but the tree branches and vines do not look sturdy enough to hold more than one person at a time. You hear shouting and the hacking of axes against wood echoing up the stairwell.

Send Phillip up first.

➔ *Read entry 3667.*

Secure the climb with rope.

Requires craftsmanship (skill) or reasoning (skill).

➔ *Read entry 3983.*

Bolster the trees with runic magic.

Requires runes (skill).

➔ *Read entry 2711.*

3589

You have to try several keys, but eventually you find one that fits and turns in the lock. The mechanism falls open, and Phillip pushes through the door, laughing in deep, dry sobs.

"Thank you," he says, pulling himself to his feet. "Let's get out of here before my uncle comes back."

➔ *Read entry 1980.*

3667

You boost Phillip into the tree, and he starts clambering along the branches. As he moves away from the smaller branches, you leap into the tree and begin climbing as well.

If story point A4 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 9616.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 8896.*

3704

The bandit jabs at you with a spear that, while crude, is more than sufficient to keep you stumbling and wrong-footed. You keep looking for an opening, but nothing presents itself. Finally, in desperation, you aim your blasting rune at the bandit's feet and unleash another torrent of magic. The resulting explosion knocks you both sprawling, but you're the only one who stands back up. You stagger around, find your dropped flame rune, and then realize a new group of bandits is approaching.

➔ *You lose four stamina.*

➔ *Read entry 9596.*

3762

The bandit jabs at you with a spear, and you step aside. As he draws it back, you see the spear is a crooked wooden branch with a dagger lashed to it. As the bandit jabs again you catch the spear in hand and then break it with a grunt. Now holding the spear tip with its knife, you step forward and ram it into the bandit's gut. He gasps and falls over. You retrieve your missing rune and then realize more bandits are approaching.

➔ *Read entry 9596.*

3815

You twist to dodge the attack, but you are either too slow or you miscalculated where the swing was aimed. The bandit's axe impacts your upper back, and your shoulders and chest explode with pain. The bandit's swing carries through, throwing you to the ground and leaving you gasping for breath.

➔ *You lose eight stamina.*

If story point K5 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 9535.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 8758.*

3836

You let the archer pass beneath the waterfall, and she soon disappears from view. You turn your attention to the axe-wielding bandit, who grins savagely and strains her head to one side with a series of audible pops.

- ➔ *Mark story point Z4.*
- ➔ *Read entry 9535.*

3844

You slip a flame rune into the palm of your hand, feeling its warmth flare hotter and hotter as it activates. You thrust it forward and unleash its magic potential, a burst of flame that rushes out to lick the bald bandit as he rushes toward you. The man croaks a wordless scream, staggering back and beating at his skin and clothes with his free hand. He glances at his wooden cudgel, which has now become a torch, hurls it to the ground, and runs off into the forest to the north.

- ➔ *Mark story point Z4.*
- ➔ *Read entry 3910.*

3910

The elf woman blows a lock of hair from her face. She looks at the fallen orc and back to you. "I-I'm not with him," she sneers. She drops a dagger to the ground that she had been twirling around her finger until now. Then she flees, rushing out of the clearing into the trees to the north.

Shoot her down before she can escape.

- Requires archery (skill).*
- ➔ *Read entry 8356.*

Entangle her with roots and vines.

- Requires runes (skill).*
- ➔ *Read entry 2079.*

Let her escape.

- ➔ *Read entry 7614.*

3945

The brown-and-white goat follows close behind you, the vanguard of a column of the creatures. He leaps from rock to rock, scrambling for hoofholds in the unlikeliest places.

"Shut up your yapping," bellows a voice startlingly close by. A large bandit steps around a stone and hurls a rock at the closest goat, which leaps away with a dismayed "maa."

The bandit stoops for another stone as you freeze, clinging to cover and praying that you won't be noticed. By some miracle, you aren't, and that miracle is the brown-and-white goat, who leaps down from his rock with a triumphant bleat and runs horns first into the large bandit's behind.

You continue creeping toward the tower as the goats and the bandit run screaming through the valley, chasing one another and paying you no mind.

- ➔ *Read entry 5487.*

3983

You leap into the tree, climbing swiftly, checking if each branch can hold your weight. When you reach one of the more stable boughs, you retrieve a length of knotted rope from your pack. You secure the rope to the bough and drop the other end down to the roof below.

As Phillip climbs, you hear shouting and heavy footfalls on the stairs. You begin cutting the smaller branches and vines within reach of the roof. Two bandits reach the roof. One rushes forward. The other falls back and bends her bow.

If you have agility (skill) or stealth (skill)...

- ➔ *Read entry 2354*

Otherwise...

- ➔ *Read entry 2600*

4018

A skirmish breaks out on the rooftop behind you. You hear shouting and ringing steel, and an arrow flashes through the leaves near your head. One by one, you clamber across the tree, then turn and give what cover you can to the next companion in line. Eventually, you've all made it across to stand on the thick trunk and solid ground below.

- ➔ *You each lose three stamina unless you have athletics (skill) or military (skill).*

The bandits below you leap up to begin climbing three at a time, but the small branches give way under their weight with a loud crack. They fall back to the roof in a tangle of vines and limbs. You waste no time before grabbing Phillip by the hand and sprinting through the forest toward the southeast.

- ➔ *Read entry 9982.*

4091

You nock an arrow, draw back, and fire in the span of a heartbeat, but the orc slashes the arrow out of the air as if your attack meant nothing to him. His rush continues, and he will be upon you in moments. You nock another arrow for a second shot.

If you have agility (skill) or willpower (skill)...

- ➔ *Read entry 4874.*

Otherwise...

- ➔ *Read entry 6226.*

4167

You creep up to the tower door carefully, using the long grass and a rotting old wagon as cover. For the last few feet, you press yourself against the tower wall itself, then peek your head around the corner to check out the situation.

There are no guards left on the door. You watch as a goat trots by, someone's pants fluttering from her horns, followed by a bandit holding a blanket haphazardly around his bottom. No one is left to stop you, so you just walk through the tower door.

- ➔ *Time passes.*
- ➔ *Read entry 4387.*

4187

You attempt to parry the incoming thrust, but the orc is too strong. He slams into you with his shoulder, and you feel a sharp pain in your side. You slam your elbow into the brute's face, causing him to stagger backward. You clutch at your side. Blood pools against your palm and seeps through your fingers, and your vision swims.

➔ *You lose five stamina.*

The orc wipes the blood from his face with the back of his arm, then grins widely as he sees that you're bleeding. He charges again, spurred by bloodlust, but his foot catches in a tangle of vines, and he falls forward onto his own blade. Blood pours from a gash in his neck, and he moves no more.

➔ *Read entry 2050.*

4226

You creep up to the door. Its wood is old and somewhat warped, knots and flaws in the boards now exaggerated into small holes. You lean forward and place an ear to one hole, listening for any signs of life on the other side.

If story point U5 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 7581.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 2437.*

4243

You hurl yourself at the bandit with the spear, knocking the point of his weapon aside and positioning yourself inside his reach. The spearman shuffles back, and you move with him, reaching out to grab hold of the blackened wooden haft.

If you have military (skill) or reasoning (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 4649.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 7504.*

4287

You smash a flask of liquid smoke on the ground. A thick cloud of haze surrounds you. You can hear the dwarf screaming his battlecry as he charges blindly through the smoke.

Estimating the dwarf's location by the sound of his shriek, you break a tangleweb bladder on the ground in his path. The mixture inside explodes into a rapidly hardening goo, and the dwarf runs right through it, falling over and soon coming to a halt, stuck fast.

Before you have time to gloat, however, two more bandits emerge from your smoke, a dwarf woman armed with hatchets and a human man with a makeshift spear. They're already on top of you!

If you have awareness (skill) or stealth (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 5813.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 7646.*

4337

Braxton steps forward and slams her shield into the dwarf woman, hard, sending her reeling back. The orc pivots and catches the human's spear on her sword, disarming him with a flourish. The human staggers back, then turns his stagger into a scramble as he spins and runs back through the rapidly clearing smoke.

"Are you alright?" asks Braxton as she turns and dispatches the dwarf with a backhanded slash. She drops her shield and offers you a hand up. "You should be more careful. You're nearly as reckless as Mariam."

➔ *Read entry 9596.*

4362

You approach the bandits at the door. Their apparent leader, an elf man with pearly—almost blue—skin, drops his hand to his sword. "What's this, then?" he asks. "I don't believe we've met, stranger. They call me Shark." His grin is wide and full of triangular teeth. The thought of what he did to make them that way makes your jaw ache and your mouth taste like iron.

You put on your best bandit swagger and say you need to meet with the boss.

"No way, no how," says Shark. "Kyric said nobody goes in unless they're with Brun or Kyric himself. What'd you say your name was again?" He rubs the pommel of the blade at his waist with his palm.

If story point U5 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 6003.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 4934.*

4387

The ground floor of the tower is seemingly two semicircular rooms. This room is lit by tall, narrow windows. A stone stairway winds up the external wall to your left. Aside from a few empty baskets, the room is devoid of furnishings.

In the middle of the central wall is a door that must lead into the other half of the ground floor. The door is made of sturdy wood, but you see no immediate signs that it is locked.

Examine the doorway.

➔ *Read entry 4226.*

Climb the stairs.

➔ *Read entry 6421.*

4423

You slip off the outcropping and land beside the bandit, who shifts to aim the now-drawn bow in your direction. With a practiced step and slash, you slice through her taut bowstring. The bowstring cracks like a whip as it breaks, sending the weapon out of the bandit's hand and into the pond.

➔ *Mark story point Y2.*

➔ *Read entry 6684.*

4541

"Too easy," growls the hulking bandit, knocking you back with another blow. He straightens and blows a lock of hair from his face that has escaped its tight queue. "You," he says, leveling his sword toward Braxton. "The orc wench. Step in here. I'll fight you both at once."

"Wench?" says Braxton, drawing her sword. "I'd decline out of a sense of fairness, but if you're going to beg me for a beating..." Braxton steps into the ring, bashes her sword against her shield in challenge, and nods at you. You nod back.

You and Braxton move as one, Braxton taking Kimball's strike on her shield, you shifting to threaten his flank. When he turns to keep you in front of him, Braxton shifts and you change directions, circling the bandit like a pair of wolves. Realization dawns and fear touches his eyes. Braxton smiles. "You're the one who changed the rules," she says, and then lashes out with her shield, knocking him staggering into your attack. You cut across the backs of his legs, and he falls to his knees, holding himself up only by clinging to the hilt of his sword.

"Enough," he says. "You win."

The woman with the dramatically shaved head laughs and steps forward, throwing Kimball's arm over her shoulder. "You asked for that, big guy." She glances at you. "Go on, do your thing. You won't get any trouble out of us." Some of the bandits cluster with their leader, while others break away and flee toward the waterfall, perhaps giving up the bandit life for good. As you and Braxton make your way toward the tower, you see the dark-skinned woman watching you with an unreadable expression.

➔ *Read entry 9577.*

4621

The axe-wielding bandit reels from the impact. You seize the opportunity and strike once more, landing a solid blow on her right shoulder. She staggers back, swinging her axe in a flat arc to buy herself some space. She grits her teeth and shifts her grip on her axe, now favoring her other hand.

➔ *Mark story point U7.*

If story point K5 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 9535.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 8758.*

4649

You knock the bandit's spear from his hands, then drive the butt end into his gut. He doubles over, all the breath going out of him with an "ohhh!" You jab with the spear to keep the gnome at bay, then thrust at Shark.

If you have dueling (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 2881.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 8045.*

4699

One of the bandits sees you and tries to point you out to the others, with only middling success. Eventually, after shouting and pointing and eventually grabbing a compatriot's head and manhandling her until she's looking right at you, the bandit makes his point, and soon a group of miscreants issues forth from the tower's door. Some of them have long, powerful bows, and they fall back and begin lobbing arrows at you from halfway down the valley, their shafts thudding into the mist-shrouded earth around you as you approach the cave leading to the waterfall.

➔ *You each lose three stamina unless you have agility (skill).*

You step through the waterfall into the forest glade and waste no time before grabbing Phillip by the hand and sprinting through the forest toward the southeast.

➔ *Read entry 9982.*

4774

The goats crowd around as you rummage for something, anything edible to give them. One nibbles on your belt. Another seems very interested in your pack. A third is chewing on a bit of rope—how did she get her lips on that? That was packed away! In any case, the goats are only getting louder and more insistent as you try to find something to satisfy them while you creep away.

If you have survival (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 6700.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 7648.*

4797

A young man—no, a boy—lies dead in the center of the cage. A crossbow quarrel protrudes from his chest.

A broad-shouldered man with a scar running across his face leans against the wall, gazing out the window over the valley—the same man who led the bandits you encountered at the Tree of Tales just days ago. You believe him to be unaware of your entrance until you notice the loaded crossbow he holds, aimed at your chest.

"Here to save my nephew?" asks the man. "You're too late."

He glances over at the cage, his eyes sliding off the corpse as if ashamed. "I didn't want to kill him." The man's voice is flat. Only the twitching of the shining point of the crossbow's quarrel betrays any turmoil within him. "It would have been easier if he'd just agreed to support my claim against his sister." His eyes slide back to you, and he seems to see you for the first time.

"Go back to Dragonholt," he says. "Take Phillip's body. Give my bastard sister a chance to mourn. I have time. I'm not the one who's dying." With that, he pushes off the wall and starts toward the stairs, his aim at your chest unerring.

Let the man leave and retrieve Phillip's body.

➔ *Read entry 3220.*

Draw your weapon and rush him!

➔ *Read entry 7801.*

4868

You pull the frost rune out from the roll of sheepskin in which you store it, using the skin to protect your hand. With a thrusting gesture you send out a wave of glimmering blue frost, turning the sparkling dew on the grass and even the mist in the air itself into bitter-cold ice. The bandits howl in despair, some fleeing, others becoming trapped in the rapidly expanding ice.

With a roar, the huge human bandit breaks free of the ice holding him back. "It's just a rune you cowards!" he shouts, drawing his sword. "Let me show you how to deal with that!"

If you have dueling (skill) or military (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 2716.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 5709.*

4874

You draw back and release the arrow at the moment the orc thrusts. Your arrow catches him in the chest, killing him instantly, but his momentum drives the dagger into your shoulder. You grip the foul weapon and yank it from the wound, tossing it to the forest floor beside the dead orc.

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

➔ *Read entry 2050.*

4909

You jam your pocket knife into the door pins and wrench them out, one by one. Once that's done, the door simply falls open, swinging awkwardly where the lock secures it to the frame. Phillip climbs to his feet and shuffles through the door.

"That was clever," he says. "Thank you. Now let's get out of here."

➔ *Read entry 1980.*

4934

Shark leaps backward, slashing ineffectually at you with his sword. "Wait, I recognize you," Shark hisses, and the other two bandits leap to surround you. "You were camping by the Tree of Tales four nights ago!"

Shark, with his hooked sword, stands between you and the door. A lanky human man with a fire-hardened spear approaches from your left, and a gnome woman with curved knives lunges at you from the right.

Catch the gnome and throw her into the human.

➔ *Read entry 7760.*

Launch a tactical assault to break through.

➔ *Read entry 4243.*

Blind the gnome with runic magic.

Requires runes (skill).

➔ *Read entry 9269.*

5018

The large orc is upon you in moments. You block his first slash with your weapon, but he presses forward with a powerful thrust. You dodge backward, but your movement is restricted by the undergrowth. You will need to strike back.

If you have dueling (skill) or military (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 5884.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 4187.*

5070

You leap from the outcropping, but the bandit is incredibly fast. She looses an arrow that slashes across your leg. You slam into her with the force of your fall but stumble on your weakened leg. You both fall to the ground, but you stagger to your feet before she does.

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

➔ *Read entry 6684.*

5132

You rush to the staircase, Phillip in tow. You can hear shouting and the clatter of weapons from below. You toss a few of the nearby chairs down the stairs to slow the bandits before overturning the table into the stairwell.

Phillip glances at the stairs leading higher in the tower and then at you. "What do we do now?" he asks.

Ascend higher into the tower.

This option does not exhaust your activation token.

➔ *Read entry 3567.*

Escape through the collapsed east wall.

This option does not exhaust your activation token.

➔ *Read entry 1924.*

5189

The dwarf hollers, leaping back and slapping at his beard while it smolders. His eyes wide, the dwarf takes another look at you, then glances over his shoulder at the crumbling tower. He clenches his jaw, then runs past you for the passageway out of the valley.

And not a moment too soon, as pain flares on the skin of your hand where the glowing runeshard rests. You flail, and the stone goes flying, the curtain of flame dissipating a moment later.

➔ *You lose two stamina.*

Two more bandits rush forward, a dwarf woman with a hatchet in each hand and a human man with a crude spear. You fumble out another rune and thrust it more or less blindly at the dwarf woman, feeling the power explode outward and hurl her into the rocky wall of the valley, where she lies still—your blasting rune at work. You turn your attention to the spearman, but he is already too close to use the rune safely.

If you have craftsmanship (skill) or dueling (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 3762.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 3704.*

5208

A sound like a thunderclap erupts from your closed fist. The air ripples, and the elf bandit goes flying through the air to land in a crumpled heap against the tower wall.

You stagger backward yourself, your hand and arm going numb from the force of the boom. When you recover, you see that all the bandits are down or fled. You retrieve your lightning rune and make your way into the tower.

- ➔ *You lose two stamina.*
- ➔ *Time passes.*
- ➔ *Read entry 4387.*

5236

You draw your weapon and charge into the valley. Several bandits rush toward you, led by a dwarf with a long beard and a heavy axe. The man screams and charges forward, swinging his axe haphazardly.

Dispatch the dwarf quickly.

- ➔ *Read entry 1082.*

Daunt the man with runic fire.

Requires arcana (skill).

- ➔ *Read entry 8710.*

Put down a smoke screen.

Requires alchemy (skill).

- ➔ *Read entry 4287.*

5297

You continue the fight, settling in for a long brawl as you desperately parry the bandit's brutal, punishing attacks. One comes for your head, you knock it up so that it only grazes your temple. Another thrusts for your stomach, and you deflect it down to slash along your thigh.

But as his attacks keep coming, you realize that Kimball has a pattern: a powerful attack followed by a brief retreat, a moment to reevaluate, and another attack. During the next reprieve you lash out, lunging forward and taking him by surprise. Once you have the initiative, you keep going, battering the man down until he lies broken at the feet of the bandit woman with the dramatically shaved head.

If you have endurance (skill) or military (skill)...

- ➔ *You lose three stamina.*

Otherwise...

- ➔ *You lose six stamina.*

"You win," breathes Kimball, dabbing at the blood on his lip. "Let 'em through," he says to the other bandits. Some of his companions crowd around to help him to his feet. Others break away and flee toward the waterfall, perhaps giving up the bandit life for good. The dark-skinned elf watches you as you make your way toward the tower, a mixture of fear, anger, and respect behind her gaze.

- ➔ *Read entry 9577.*

5311

"Really?" she says, tail lashing. "Is this a trick?" Her ears tilt up and the hyrrinx woman takes a step back. You assure her that it is not, and she backs away, then climbs into the branches of a nearby tree.

She pauses, perched on a low-hanging branch, and looks back over her shoulder at you. "I saw some of those bandits take the human cub away. They shot and killed the older human. The cub looked hurt, but not dead." Her tail twitches again. "Their camp is to the northwest. Look for the ruined castle. They'll be in there."

She glances at you, and you see her ears flick before she leaps to another tree and begins moving east through the forest.

- ➔ *Mark story point V5.*

Return to the trail and head northwest.

- ➔ *Read entry 3243.*

Follow after her.

Requires awareness (skill) or survival (skill).

- ➔ *Read entry 8300.*

5427

The hyrrinx woman bounds off into the trees to return to her people, and you set out on the trail of the bandits.

It isn't hard to follow the trail to the bandits' den, between the footprints in the muddy ground and the freshly broken branches of a bandit's panicked flight. Before long, you come to a waterfall rushing down from a steep rocky cliff to empty into a clear pool feeding a murmuring stream. A small group of bandits is clustered around the waterfall, including two human women you haven't seen before.

The trees provide plenty of cover, so you observe for a moment. The bandits converse in low tones, most of what they say washed away by the running water. "Kyric will want to hear about this," says someone. "We'd better kill the kid to be safe," says someone else.

Then they stow their weapons and step through the waterfall, vanishing from sight. After a minute, it becomes clear that they're not coming back, and also that the bandit lair must be somewhere on the other side of that waterfall.

- ➔ *Time passes.*
- ➔ *Read entry 9949.*

5487

Soon enough, you find yourself lurking beside the tower. No one has seen you. The door is guarded by three bandits; there's no way you'll be able to sneak past them. The tower wall is partially collapsed, and you can see into one of the tower's upper levels. The walls are lush with vines that might be sturdy enough to hold your weight.

Lure the guards into a trap.

- ➔ *Read entry 7564.*

Approach the door and pretend to be a bandit.

- ➔ *Read entry 4362.*

Climb the outside of the tower.

- ➔ *Read entry 9468.*

5491

"It seems peaceful," says Braxton. "You'd never know we were fighting for our lives here not that long ago." You nod and look over the clearing for obvious signs of Phillip or his manservant cum bodyguard, Talbot. The clearing is ringed by a handful of paths, each stretching out into the forest. You hear Braxton gasp and follow her line of sight to something large and dark. Your breath catches in your throat as you realize it's a corpse—a human man in Lady Regina's livery—Talbot.

Braxton watches the clearing vigilantly as you crouch down to examine the body. You were wrong; the man is still breathing, just barely, and his eyes snap open with a crazed stare.

"The young master," breathes Talbot. Each breath burbles in his throat, as if through water. The arrows protruding from his chest rise and fall as he reaches for you with a fumbling hand. "Bandits. They came," he wheezes, "out of the forest." His free hand motions in a vaguely eastern direction. "Their leader wanted Phillip... alive... I drew my sword, but... too slow... Tell... her ladyship..." Talbot lapses into silence, lies back, and breathes no more.

Braxton cups her hand over her mouth in grief. You respectfully close the man's eyes and resolve to notify Lady Regina and the village guard after finding Phillip. "How terrible. Master Phillip is alone with those bandits," says Braxton.

Search the clearing for more clues.

➔ *Read entry 9566.*

Examine the paths for tracks.

➔ *Read entry 3489.*

5550

The archer takes a long draw on her pipe. "Tower," she says before exhaling two streams of silky, grey smoke through her nose. "He dragged the brat up the tower. I heard him shouting at the kid about rights or something. Threatened to kill 'im too."

"Who knows what that posh bastard is planning," mutters the bandit with the axe. "I'd have thought he'd try to ransom the boy." She cranes her neck until you hear a few pops. "Come on. We need to patrol and report back," she says to her companion.

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 9949.*

5637

A wave of frost sweeps forward, covering the surface of the pond in a sheet of ice. When the wave reaches the cascade, the water freezes instantly, creating a shimmering wall of solid ice just as the bandit reaches it.

Unable to stop her momentum, the woman crashes into the barrier and falls backward, disoriented. You knock both bandits unconscious and tie them up, leaving them beside the path.

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 9949.*

5660

You cross the clearing to the hyrrinx woman's side and pull the knife free. "Thank you," she says. "The bandits usually leave us alone. I don't know why they attacked me." With a jangle, the woman lifts a heavy ring of iron keys, dangling it from one claw. "The orc had these on him. If you're looking for that human cub the bandits took, you might find these useful."

➔ *Mark story points U5 and V5.*

➔ *You gain the iron keys (item K).*

➔ *Time passes.*

If story point Z4 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 5427.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 9190.*

5691

Soon enough, you find yourself lurking beside the tower. The three bandits you previously saw loitering in front of the tower door are now attempting to herd the panicked goats. The tower wall is partially collapsed, and you can see into one of the tower's upper levels. The walls are lush with vines that might be sturdy enough to hold your weight.

Walk in through the unguarded door.

➔ *Read entry 4167.*

Climb the outside of the tower.

➔ *Read entry 9468.*

5709

Kimball lashes out like an avalanche, sending you sprawling and nearly knocking your rune from your hand. You barely get to your feet before another swing of his sword plunges into the damp grass where you had been an instant before. You lash out with the frost rune, coating the sword with ice and freezing it to the ground, which buys you a moment to find your feet while Kimball breaks it free again. He swings in a wide arc that strikes your side and forces you backward, stumbling over the frost-hardened ground.

➔ *You lose five stamina.*

You use the rune again, building up a wall of ice between you and the bandit. He roars and you can dimly see his distorted form hammering on the ice, hacking away at it with his sword. You start to gather the mystic energy of the rune above you while Kimball takes a few more swipes, then pauses and simply walks to the side.

Kimball comes around the ice wall, snarling like a wolf. "I've about had it with your tricks," he rumbles, and then you drop a mystically assembled hundred-pound ball of ice on his head. He falls like a puppet with its strings cut.

The remaining bandits, most still trapped in the ice, do their best to pretend they are somewhere else. You gather up your fallen sheepskin, wince at the burning sensation where you touched the rune with your bare skin, and head toward the bandit's tower.

➔ *Read entry 9577.*

5813

You see the bandits before they see you, and you step into the smoke to circle around behind.

"Bregan, are ye well?" asks one voice—the female dwarf, you assume. You hear the dwarf trapped by your tangleweb cursing incoherently.

"Where did they go?" asks another—the human with the spear. You come up behind him, using his voice to guide you, and kick his legs out from behind. He falls, and you snatch up his spear, turning his warning shout into a strangled gurgle.

"What was that?" asks the dwarf with the hatchets. She straightens, and you ghost back into the smoke. "Briar? Sound off. I canna see ye." You circle around again, listening intently, but all you hear is a muted swear, then silence. Meanwhile, the smoke is stinging your eyes and attacking your nose and throat. You cough, and then the dwarf shouts "Aha!" and an axe comes flying through the smoke to slash across your shoulder. Pain lancing through your arm, you rush forward and jab the spear into the dwarf's side. The spearpoint breaks off and the dwarf goes down, leaving you doubled over and coughing while the smoke finally clears.

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

➔ *Read entry 9596.*

5819

The archer draws and looses, sending an arrow arcing for you, but the tree twitches and the arrow buries itself in a thick branch not far from your head instead. Golden sap oozes from the arrow wound and the tree groans, then begins thrashing madly, its vines and branches flailing with no semblance of control. This makes any pursuit by the bandits completely impossible, but it also sends you scrambling for safety, pummeled by lurching limbs and almost hurled to the valley floor below.

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

You drop from the tree onto solid ground and waste no time before grabbing Phillip by the hand and sprinting through the forest toward the southeast.

➔ *Read entry 9982.*

5854

You trade blows with Shark, managing to keep his hooked sword from you as you desperately look for some opening or advantage. You swing high, Shark swats your attack away and ripostes low, sending you jumping backward just in time. Your back collides with the tower, and you realize you've been turned around and trapped against the tower door.

"Nowhere to run now," sneers Shark. You open the door, duck inside, and throw down the crossbar behind you. "Wait. What just happened?" shouts the elf. You turn away and ignore his muffled complaints and curses.

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 4387.*

5884

You parry the incoming thrust and step to the side, allowing the orc's momentum to carry him past you. His leg catches in the undergrowth, and he loses his balance. You use the opportunity to strike his back and send him to the ground. A quick flourish sends his foul weapon into the brush.

➔ *Read entry 2050.*

5966

"Shouldn't have said anything, furball," rumbles the oafish orc. "Kyric may be content to leave your little village alone, but only while you mangy animals know your place."

"Cut her up!" hisses one of the bandits, a gaunt-looking elf woman with burning eyes. "She saw us take that noble brat. Kill her and leave her as a warning for her village."

The third bandit, a human man whose bare chest and bald head are marred by countless scars, nods vigorously but says nothing.

Rescue the hyrrinx woman.

➔ *Read entry 2048.*

Leave the hyrrinx woman to her fate.

➔ *Read entry 7758.*

5999

You move off to the side of the path, hiding in the undergrowth. After a few moments, you see humanoid silhouettes behind the waterfall and two human women emerge through the curtain of falling water. One carries an axe; the other has a bow slung over her shoulder.

The women stop beside the pond, and the archer produces a pipe and begins to dig in a belt pouch. The axe-wielding bandit scans the glade with a discerning eye, watching for any signs of danger.

If you have stealth (skill) or survival (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 1615.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 2829.*

6003

You spin the tragic and very urgent tale of Brun, the bulky orc lieutenant, meeting his untimely end at the hands of a berserk hyrrinx woman. With his dying breath, Brun entrusted his keys to you as well as a critical message for Kyric's ears alone. You pull out the heavy iron keys as proof.

"Poor Brun," breathes the lanky human bandit.

"We all bite it in the end," says Shark, and all three bandits lower their heads for a moment of silence. You follow suit. "Alright," says the elf. "Go on in." As you close the door behind you, you can hear him chatting with his companions. "You know what this means? Number two spot is wide open!"

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 4387.*

6090

Not wanting to waste any more time with this ruffian, you produce a blasting rune from a hidden pocket. The woman watches you cautiously, unsure what to make of the strange stone. You grip the shard in your fist and swing with a mean right hook as if pretending to punch the bandit. At the moment your mock punch would strike the woman, a burst of force erupts from the air beside her, throwing her off her feet and into the pond.

You shake your hand and stretch your fingers as you make your way toward the waterfall. Wielding this blasting rune always leaves you with tremors.

- ➔ *You lose two stamina.*
- ➔ *Time passes.*
- ➔ *Read entry 9949.*

6123

The woman with the axe eyes you warily. Just as you are sure your ruse has failed, she lowers her axe and speaks. "I see. Don't scare us like that."

The archer relaxes and stows her arrow and bow before speaking. "Good work." She produces a pipe and begins to dig in a belt pouch.

"Don't smoke too long, Grey," says the larger woman. "Kyric will throw another tantrum if he thinks we're not patrolling like he asked."

"Ah to hell with Kyric and his new toy," says the archer. She packs some tobacco into her pipe, lights it, and takes a draw. "Kidnapping some noble brat seems like a sure-fire way to bring the guard down on us."

"What does Kyric want with the boy?"

- ➔ *Read entry 9367.*

"Does Kyric plan to kill him?"

- ➔ *Read entry 1321.*

"Where was the boy taken?"

- ➔ *Read entry 5550.*

6224

You rummage around in the baskets, finding several sacks and other containers that look like they've been stolen from merchants on the forest road over the past few weeks. Several of the sacks have valuable supplies, and one contains an ornate mask.

- ➔ *You gain 50 gold.*
- ➔ *You gain one healing potion (item A).*
- ➔ *You gain a dragon mask (item G).*
- ➔ *Time passes.*

After searching for some time, you determine that there is nothing else of interest in this chamber. You return to the other room and make your way up the stairs.

- ➔ *Read entry 6421.*

6226

You draw back, but the bandit is too quick. With an upward slash, he slices your forearm and sends your arrow soaring into the air. A powerful downward slash opens an angry wound on your chest and forces you to the ground.

- ➔ *You lose four stamina.*

The orc stands over you, ready to bring his foul weapon down on your gut. You raise your arms to protect yourself, but no attack comes. By some miracle, your wayward arrow has returned and struck your would-be killer through the heart. The orc falls to the forest floor beside you.

- ➔ *Read entry 2050.*

6235

Kimball slashes at you again, but this time you're ready. You block his strike with one hand and drive your other into his elbow, ruining that arm. Then you follow through with an elbow to the stomach, pivoting inside his reach. Kimball wraps his good arm around you and tries to get a choke-hold around your throat.

- ➔ *You lose two stamina.*

You push off the ground with both feet, causing him to stagger backward a step. Then you bring your full weight down on his left knee with a loud crack. Kimball collapses, groaning on the ground behind you, unable to stand. "You win," he says, clutching his broken arm. "No more, please!"

The woman with the maze-like hair crouches beside Kimball and begins tending to his wounds. "Go now," she mutters to the ground. "You won't have any more trouble from us. Just go!"

The other bandits step back in silence. Some of them help carry Kimball toward the encampment while others break away and flee toward the waterfall, perhaps giving up the bandit life for good. The dark-skinned woman watches you as you make your way toward the tower, a mixture of fear, anger, and respect behind her gaze.

- ➔ *Read entry 9577.*

6421

The tower's upper floor is a single large room. The stairway winds along the west wall, down to the ground floor and up to higher rooms of the tower. The east wall is crumbling and mostly collapsed. A window is set into the south wall of the room, overlooking the valley.

Against the north wall stands a decaying weapon rack. You spot a tarnished axe and a bent spear, but nothing of real value. A large wooden table and a smattering of chairs are laid out near the stairway. A large wooden cage stands in the center of the room, crudely but solidly built, with a heavy iron padlock on it.

If ten or more time has passed...

- ➔ *Read entry 4797.*

Otherwise...

- ➔ *Read entry 1817.*

6614

Off balance from shoving Phillip, you tumble to the ground yourself. You scramble to your feet and look around, but the bandit leader is nowhere to be seen.

Then you look for Phillip and find him lying on his back, a crossbow bolt protruding from his chest. "Thank you," he wheezes. "Please, tell my sister..." Blood flecks his lips and his eyes go blank. His chest rattles and lies still.

You close Phillip's eyes and gather up his corpse before heading back to Dragonholt. The bandits make no attempt to stop you.

➔ *Read entry 3220.*

6641

You step forward, cracking your knuckles. You plant your feet and grab the bottom of the cage with both hands. With a great huff, you lift the side of the cage until you are standing. You feel your muscles straining under the thing's immense weight.

➔ *You lose one stamina.*

Phillip slips under the cage's bars and uses your arm to pull himself straight. "You're very strong," he says as you drop the cage to the ground with a crash. "Thank you. Now let's get out of here."

➔ *Read entry 1980.*

6647

Arrows fly past you as you climb. The bandit below you begins pulling on the hanging vines in an attempt to shake you loose. That on its own would be bad enough, but then an arrow catches your leg, nearly causing you to lose your grip. You struggle and strain until you have pulled yourself up onto a thicker bough.

If you do not have athletics (skill) or endurance (skill)...

➔ *You lose five stamina.*

Otherwise...

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

The bandit below you leaps up to begin climbing, but the small branches give way under his weight with a loud crack. He falls back to the roof in a tangle of branches and vines. You drop from the tree onto solid ground and waste no time before grabbing Phillip by the hand and sprinting through the forest toward the southeast.

➔ *Read entry 9982.*

6656

The woman with the axe eyes you warily. "Hogwash," spits the archer. "Kyrice sent that oaf Brun with Twitch and Dez to clean up the clearing." Before you can spin another lie, she draws back her bow and fires an arrow. It's all you can do to keep the arrow from punching straight through your leg. Instead, the projectile slices through the side of your thigh.

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

➔ *Read entry 6684.*

6684

The larger axe-wielding bandit wheels and charges at you, her weapon trailing behind her, building momentum for a devastating attack.

Meet her assault with your own.

➔ *Read entry 2329.*

Anticipate her swing and dodge it.

➔ *Read entry 1332.*

6700

Goats are infamous for their ability to eat anything, but you know better: goats will nibble on anything but are actually quite picky eaters. Fortunately, you have some seedcake in your pack, along with some wild carrots that you'd collected along the trail, both of which the goats seem quite happy with. As word (or rather, bleating) spreads of what you have, the goats mob you, so you gather up the delicious treats and heave them over the mass of goats back toward the pond. The goats trample away from you, knocking each other away with their horns and generally ignoring you completely, except for one brown-and-white goat who pauses to look back and bleat.

With the goats distracted, you pick your way carefully toward the tower. As you do, you see a number of bandits gathering by the pool, apparently perplexed by the goats' behavior, but none of them look in your direction.

➔ *Read entry 5487.*

6712

The bandit is only moments away from the waterfall, moving at a full sprint. You clutch the frost rune in your outstretched hand, ready to freeze the curtain of water and block the woman's path.

If story point U7 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 5637.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 1330.*

6850

You spend some time removing branches and chopping boughs until the stream of water begins to flow more freely. You work carefully, lest the dam give way all at once and sweep you away with the flood. At length, a loud cracking groan sends you running for the far bank, where you watch the whole dam tear apart and wash away downstream. The stream should return to its natural flow within a few hours.

➔ *Two time passes.*

➔ *Mark story point R8.*

You make your way back to the road and continue to follow Phillip's trail.

➔ *Read entry 9792.*

6875

You rummage in your pack for a moment and pull out an oiled, leather bladder, then heave it at the woman as hard as you can. She scoffs and slashes it out of the air with ease.

Her blade pierces the membrane and from the wound explodes a web of sticky goop. The webbing wraps around the woman's arms, torso, and head. She staggers backward and falls to the ground where she lies stuck, struggling to free herself. As you step over her and move on, you see only part of her nose and one hate-filled eye glaring at you from beneath the hardening sludge.

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 9949.*

6888

You fumble for something, anything to get you out of this mess as the axe-wielding bandit looms above you. "Lie down an' think o' Dunwarr," she leers, flipping one hatchet up into the air and catching it with the dull smack of wooden haft on skin.

You grab something at random and throw it right at her face. She whips her handaxe out like lightning, slashing the tangleweb clean in half and spreading its contents across her arm and face. "Ugh!" she shouts. "Briar! Get that—" and then she cannot talk anymore as the alchemical mixture expands and covers her face.

The spearman shouts and jabs at you once more, slashing across your shoulder as you roll to the side and scramble to your feet. You fumble out a vial of Lorimor fire and hurl it at the man with the spear. The vial spins, ejecting a stream of burning fluid that splashes across the man's face and back at you as well. He runs, screaming, and you scrape off the gelatinous flaming gunk and beat out the flames, only a little singed.

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

➔ *Read entry 9596.*

6906

You manage to land in the brush out beyond the fieldstone wall encircling the tower, which breaks and bends and cushions your fall. Which still leaves you flat on your back gasping for breath, of course.

➔ *You lose two stamina.*

You pull yourself to your feet and give Phillip, peering at you from the tower above, a thumbs-up. He nods, then vanishes from sight for a moment before taking his own flying leap. You manage to catch the young noble in your arms and set him gently down unharmed. "I think you just saved my life twice in two minutes," he says.

By the time the bandits have even reached the hole in the tower wall, you're halfway down the valley, moving at a sprint. By the time they're coming out the tower's door, you're ducking into the cave that leads to the waterfall.

You step through the waterfall into the forest glade and waste no time before grabbing Phillip by the hand and sprinting through the forest toward the southeast.

➔ *Read entry 9982.*

7023

You feel a great presence settle around you, comforting yet powerful like the forest itself. A wind ripples through you, bringing with it a vision of a young man, vanishing into the forest. Dark and sinister figures surround him, dragging him away to the northwest.

At length, you return to yourself, feeling as if you raced through the whispering leaves back to your body. You stand, feeling slightly wobbly and blinking against the bright sunshine. Then you walk, slowly at first but with more confidence as your body wakes up, toward the northwestern path.

➔ *Read entry 3243.*

7239

"My name is Hetharr," says the hyrrinx woman. She straightens up and glares at you, as if daring you to make fun of her name. "I live here in the forest. I was gathering some berries out here when I heard the bandits by the spirit tree."

Her tail lashes behind her and the claws on her hands extend and retract. "And this is my forest! I don't see what gives you the right to come out here and ask me questions." She points to the northwest. "Those bandits attacked and took the human cub. I had nothing to do with it."

With a sudden rush of speed, she climbs high into the branches of a nearby tree. You see her give you a final glare before leaping to another tree and moving east through the forest.

Return to the trail and head northwest.

➔ *Read entry 3243.*

Follow after her.

Requires awareness (skill) or survival (skill).

➔ *Read entry 8300.*

7344

You cause a bit of a ruckus. Kimball yells at them all to shut up. "Why does Kimball get to be leader?" whines one bandit.

"Because he's stronger and smarter than the lot of you," says the dark-skinned woman.

"Big bastard's stronger, I'll grant you," says the whiny bandit, "but smarter? Where's your proof?"

Kimball rolls his eyes. "Enough of this nonsense!" he shouts, then draws his sword and slashes at you with a brutally fast and powerful strike that starts at your shoulder and drags across your chest. The blow knocks the wind from your lungs and forces you staggering backward. If his sword weren't so dull, it might have cleaved you clean in two.

➔ *You lose five stamina.*

If you have dueling (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 6235.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 8122.*

7441

Several bandits encircle you, emerging from the persistent valley mist like phantoms. One of the bandits, a huge human man with straight black hair and death in his hooded, narrow eyes, steps forward.

"You know, we don't have to kill you," he says. "You can just give up. We'll even let you go after we take all your money."

"Probably," amends the woman behind him, a tall, dark-skinned human with dramatic patterns shaved into her tight cap of brown curls. "After all, we do love to watch Kimball work."

Challenge the huge bandit to a duel.

➔ *Read entry 7918.*

Attempt to turn them against one another.

➔ *Read entry 1377.*

Freeze the bandits in place.

Requires frost rune (item).

➔ *Read entry 4868.*

7443

The hyrrinx woman hisses and spits at you, slashing at you before backing away. Red blossoms on your forearm where her claws sliced through your skin.

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

"Keep back!" she yowls. "How do I know you're not with those bandits to the northwest? I saw what you did to that poor human cub and his protector! You won't drag me off to your castle!"

With sudden a rush of speed, she climbs high into the branches of a nearby tree. You see her give you a final glare before leaping to another tree and moving east through the forest.

Return to the trail and head northwest.

➔ *Read entry 3243.*

Follow after her.

Requires awareness (skill) or survival (skill).

➔ *Read entry 8300.*

7486

The hyrrinx woman's ears flick. They have pronounced tufts on the ends, which make the movement even more dramatic. "I think you mean me no harm," she says. "My name is Hetharr."

You ask about Phillip, and her tail twitches. "I saw the human cub at the spirit tree. It was attacked by the bandits from the northwest. They killed the older human and dragged the cub into the forest." She points. "They probably took it to their castle in the valley. I don't know much about that place. The bandits are dangerous, but they leave us alone most of the time."

Hetharr straightens and stalks into the trees. "Good luck finding your cub. I hope they haven't killed it yet."

➔ *Mark story point V5.*

➔ *Read entry 3243.*

7504

You knock the bandit's spear from his hands, then drive the butt end into his gut. He doubles over, all the breath going out of him with an "ohhh!" Pain lances from your leg, and you stumble to see the gnome dancing backward with a manic grin on her face and blood on her daggers.

➔ *You lose four stamina.*

Shark approaches, his sword high and his teeth shining. Using the spear as a walking staff, you push yourself back to your feet and thrust at Shark.

If you have dueling (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 2881.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 8045.*

7527

Your arrow catches the fleeing bandit in the hamstring. She crumples, clutching at her leg and screaming while the waterfall's spray falls upon her.

"Grey!" The axe-wielding bandit spins, her attention focused on her stricken companion. You take advantage of the opening and strike her on the back of the head, causing her to collapse in a boneless heap.

Then you restrain both bandits, prop them against the slimy rocks within the waterfall's mist, and move on.

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 9949.*

7538

You step forward and begin to maneuver with the bandit, searching for an opening to strike, but she keeps you at bay with a few swings and jabs from her axe. You realize she is stalling for time, waiting for her allies to arrive and overwhelm you.

If you have brawling (skill) or military (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 8876.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 7839.*

7564

You stand in a hollow behind the fieldstone wall, out of sight of the rest of the valley, and prepare your ambush. You gather a handful of stones and fling them, one by one, at the tower wall, each stone sounding a sharp "pock" in the still air. After a few moments, a lanky human pokes his head around the tower wall, looking for the source of the noise.

If you have military (skill) or stealth (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 2853.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 9141.*

7581

You listen at the door for a dozen heartbeats but hear nothing on the other side. Cautiously, you push open the door just enough to take a look.

Peering into the room, you see two rows of rickety wooden cots against the walls, none in use now. Various baskets, grey and brittle with age, are stacked in the corners of the room and under cots.

Search the room.

➔ *Read entry 6224.*

Head up the stairs.

➔ *Read entry 6421.*

7614

The elf woman rushes into the trees, careening between tree trunks and knocking small branches aside. Despite her race's reputation for woodcraft, she is leaving a clear and obvious path toward the bandit lair. Confident that following her will be no trouble, you turn your attention to the hyrrinx woman.

➔ *Mark story point Z4.*

If story point L6 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 5660*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 1278.*

7646

The bandits are upon you before you have a chance to react. The tall human jabs at you with a spear fashioned from a dagger lashed to a wooden branch, sending you scrambling desperately away. Too late, you realize he was simply herding you toward his axe-armed companion, and a solid whack on the back of the head leaves you bleeding and your vision swimming. You fall to the ground, thankful that she apparently hit you with the flat of the blade.

➔ *You lose five stamina.*

If story point A4 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 4337.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 6888.*

7648

You creep out from beneath the aqueduct and begin the last leg of the journey to the tower. You step into a small stand of trees, weaving between the trunks, your feet rustling through the fog-soaked leaves.

Suddenly, a bandit emerges from behind one tree. You draw back, but another comes scrambling down the valley wall, pointing your way and hooting. Not wanting to be trapped with no room to maneuver, you move out of the trees and into the open field as more and more bandits surround you.

➔ *Read entry 7441.*

7758

You break off, leaving the hyrrinx woman to her fate. You pick your way northeast, hoping to intersect the path Phillip and the bandits took out of the clearing. After a short diversion scrambling over an enormous fallen tree, you do so.

➔ *Read entry 3243.*

7760

The gnome woman leaps and thrusts a dagger toward your chest. You duck low and grab the gnome woman by the wrist, twisting and using her momentum to throw her.

If you have athletics (skill) or brawling (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 2181.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 2897.*

7796

You creep into the room on soft, cat-like feet until you stand beside the sleeping orc. The key ring is tucked partially under his hip. You give the ring a subtle pull, but this only serves to disrupt the orc's slumber.

If you have stealth (skill) or thievery (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 7893.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 8056.*

7801

You draw your weapon and take two steps forward before you hear the click of the crossbow trigger and the quarrel takes you off your feet. You land hard on your back, and you can feel that the blow has broken more than a couple ribs.

➔ *You lose eight stamina.*

By the time you stagger back to your feet, the man—Phillip's uncle—has already swept past you and down the stairs of the tower.

➔ *Read entry 3220.*

7827

Several bandits are in a flurry of activity, rushing about their encampment near the tower. A small group of them are already jogging toward the passage behind you. Someone must have warned them you were coming.

Fight your way to the tower.

➔ *Read entry 5236.*

Sneak along the edge of the valley.

➔ *Read entry 9295.*

7839

You rush forward, inviting the bandit to slash with her axe. She does, and you attempt to fall back at the last moment, but you lose your footing on the slick rocks. The woman's axe collides with your shoulder, sending you toppling to the ground.

➔ *You lose four stamina.*

The woman steps forward, raising her axe over her head in preparation for a killing blow. You kick the side of her knee as hard as you can and hear it crack. She screams in pain, and you wrap your arms around her good leg, lifting and pushing until her broken knee collapses and you deposit her into the pond.

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 9949.*

7893

The orc shifts in his sleep but does not wake. In his new sleeping position, you are able to work the key ring off his belt loop, careful not to let the keys rattle against one another.

➔ *Gain the iron keys (item K).*

Having successfully robbed the orc, you take another look around the room. Various baskets, grey and brittle with age, are stacked in the corners of the room and under cots.

Search the room.

➔ *Read entry 6224.*

Sneak out of the room and head up the stairs.

➔ *Read entry 6421.*

7918

The massive human strides forward, his hand resting on the pommel of the broadsword at his waist. He chuckles loudly, but it doesn't touch his eyes, which narrow still further. "You think you can take me on? All by yourself? I'd like to see you try."

The other bandits hoot and howl as they form a tight circle around you. "Kill 'um, Kimball," shouts the dark-skinned woman. "Rip 'um to pieces!" hollers another.

Kimball raises a hand, and the circle of bandits falls silent. Then he speaks. "You beat me, you can go wherever you want. I win, you're not going anywhere."

Before you can make any sort of reply, Kimball's sword is leaping from its sheath and slashing across your chest like lightning. The blow knocks the wind from your lungs and forces you staggering backward. If his sword weren't so dull, it might have cleaved you clean in two.

➔ *You lose five stamina.*

If you have dueling (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 6235.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 8122.*

7956

"Too easy," growls the hulking bandit, knocking you back with another blow. He straightens and blows a lock of hair from his face that has escaped its tight queue. "You," he says, leveling his sword toward Braxton. "The orc wench. Step in here. I'll fight you instead."

"Wench?" says Braxton, drawing her sword. "I'd decline out of a sense of fairness, but if you're going to beg me for a beating..." Braxton steps into the ring, bashes her sword against her shield in challenge, and shifts to stand in front of you while you retreat.

The two clash together again and again, the bandit's sword skittering across the orc's shield while her sword bites only empty air. Kimball is as fast on his feet as a striking serpent, falling back and lunging with lethal precision.

Kimball's speed and fury seems at first like it might be too much for her, but Braxton fights with such calm and steady discipline that you gradually realize that Kimball was defeated the moment his first blow failed to drop her. Her attacks seem timid, until suddenly she explodes into motion, knocking the bandit's sword aside with her shield and then rushing him, knocking him off balance and cutting deep into his leg with her own slash.

"You were too predictable," she says, already cleaning her sword. "Do you yield?"

"He yields," says the dark-skinned woman with the shaved head. Kimball nods, his teeth gritted and face pale with pain. "Go about your business. None of us will stop you."

Several of the bandits cluster around Kimball, tending to his wounds. Others break away and flee toward the waterfall, perhaps giving up the bandit life for good. The dark-skinned woman watches Braxton as you make your way toward the tower, a mixture of fear, anger, and respect behind her gaze.

➔ *Read entry 9577.*

8045

The elf knocks the spearpoint aside with his sword, then follows through with a wicked slash, the hook catching your cheek and leaving what is sure to be a ragged tear.

➔ *You lose two stamina.*

As Shark draws back for another swing, you whip the spear around and knock his legs out from under him. While he scrambles to recover, you jab the spear into his leg, then make for the tower.

You've lost track of the gnome bandit, but she makes no attempt to stop you, and Shark is still moaning in pain as you pass through the door and lock it behind you.

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 4387.*

8056

The orc startles awake, fumbling for his dagger with bleary eyes. Without thinking, you grab whatever is close at hand—a clay pot—and smash the object over the orc's head. The bandit flops back onto the bench, not asleep this time but unconscious. No longer in danger of waking him, you free the key ring from his belt loop.

➔ *Gain the iron keys (item K).*

Having successfully robbed the orc, you take another look around the room. Various baskets, grey and brittle with age, are stacked in the corners of the room and under cots.

Search the room.

➔ *Read entry 6224.*

Head up the stairs.

➔ *Read entry 6421.*

8122

You launch a counterattack, but Kimball knocks it aside as if it were a gnat. He slashes again with his battered sword, and you barely get your own weapon up in time. While you're reeling from that strike, Kimball lashes out with his foot and sends you flying backward, into the screaming ring of bandits around you. They catch you, keeping you on your feet, and with cruel laughter shove you back into the circle, toward what seems likely to be your death.

➔ *You lose five stamina.*

If you have military (skill) and story point A4 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 4541.*

If you do not have military (skill) but story point A4 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 7956.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 5297.*

8246

You grit your teeth and step into the churning water. The water is deeper than you thought and the current stronger. You lose your footing and stagger into stones and drowning trees, standing at what should be the edge of the stream.

➔ *You each lose one stamina. You each lose two additional stamina unless you have athletics (skill), endurance (skill), or survival (skill).*

You pull yourself, dripping, onto the far shore and collapse for a brief rest. You squeeze as much water as you can from your clothes and check to make sure none of your gear was damaged. Then you press on toward the Tree of Tales.

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 9792.*

8281

You pause well outside of arm's reach, calmly making no threatening moves and speaking in a soft, measured voice. The hyrrinx woman's ears slowly unflatten, cocking in your direction.

If you are a catfolk (race) or you have empathy (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 7486.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 7443.*

8300

You pursue the mysterious figure, following a series of paw-like prints in the soft earth. The trail isn't too hard to follow, and the figure's red garment is easy to spot through the undergrowth, but even so you almost lose the trail several times as you clamber over fallen trees thick with moss and between rocky outcrops swarming with vines.

➔ *Time passes.*

Before long, you hear noises ahead of you, and a sharp cry of pain and alarm. Through the undergrowth, you can see three bandits and a hyrrinx woman in a red tunic. One of the bandits, a pot-bellied orc man with a ring of heavy iron keys at his belt, has the hyrrinx pinned against a tree while he threatens her with a long knife.

If story point A4 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 1614.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 5966.*

8356

You fire at the fleeing elf, pinning her leg to a tree just before she gets out of sight. She shrieks, staggers, and falls against the tree, grabbing for her wounded leg.

She'll get free and crawl to safety eventually. You turn your focus to the hyrrinx woman.

If story point L6 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 5660*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 1278.*

8710

You drop your flame rune into the palm of your hand, then will it to life. The rune heats up, glowing with power, and you bring it to your mouth and blow, causing a sudden jet of flame to lash out at the onrushing dwarf. You walk the jet back and forth, making a curtain of flame to ward the bandit back.

If you have deception (skill) or persuasion (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 5189.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 1855.*

8758

"Hold 'em off, Kavi!" The bandit archer turns and runs for the waterfall, no doubt planning to return to their hidden camp and alert the other bandits to your presence.

Shoot her down before she escapes.

Requires archery (skill).

➔ *Read entry 1680.*

Freeze the waterfall.

Requires frost rune (item).

➔ *Read entry 6712.*

Let her escape.

➔ *Read entry 3836.*

8799

The bandit draws back the arrow until the fletching brushes her cheek. Her form is impeccable, and you find yourself staring down the length of the arrow. She makes to loose the arrow into your skull, but her fingers do not move. They cannot move.

You clutch the frost rune in your hand. The bandit's soaking clothes and skin have frozen in place, covered in a sheet of bitter frost, a look of pain and panic frozen on the woman's face.

➔ *Mark story point K5.*

➔ *Read entry 6684.*

8826

You knock the club from the bandit's hand, but he hurls himself at you and plants his shoulder into your chest, hard. You gasp for breath as he punches you again and again in the gut while trying to maintain a tight grip with his other hand. You drop your elbow on his exposed back, drive your knee into his stomach, and eventually force him to let go, staggering back and struggling to stay on his feet. You wind up and deliver a punishing blow across his face that leaves him sprawled on the forest floor, unmoving.

➔ *You lose three stamina.*

➔ *Read entry 3910.*

8830

You look around carefully and find clear hoofmarks. Two horses passed this way yesterday morning and then came back later in the evening. The hoofprints moving toward Eventide Forest are deeper than the ones coming back.

The trail plunges directly into the tumultuous stream here. This is where Phillip crossed, but the water looks rather dangerous after the recent rains.

Attempt to ford the stream here.

➔ *Read entry 8246.*

Look for another way across.

➔ *Read entry 2262.*

Forge a bridge of ice to cross.

Requires frost rune (item).

➔ *Read entry 9827.*

8876

You rush forward, inviting the bandit to slash with her axe. She does, and you fall back at the last moment. She overextends herself in an attempt to land the blow anyway but manages only a glancing jab as you roll with her blow.

The bandit strains to regain her balance with her heavy axe. You seize the opportunity to strike, grabbing her elbow and pulling her further off balance. From behind her, you throw an arm around her throat and squeeze it tight against your chest. She flails and pounds at you with ever-weakening limbs until her body goes limp. You leave the unconscious woman beside the path.

➔ *You lose two stamina.*

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 9949.*

8896

You hear shouting and heavy footfalls on the stairs. A moment later, two bandits are on the roof. One rushes forward. The other falls back and bends her bow.

If there are two or more heroes...

➔ *Read entry 4018.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 6647.*

8962

You haul yourself up into the branches, examining the statuettes, talismans, fluttering papers, and other adornments as you go. Before long, you find a fresh-looking scrap of paper tucked into a crack in the tree's bark. You pull it out and smooth it against the trunk, revealing a heartfelt and rather well-written eulogy for Sonia.

On a second sheet of parchment, Phillip blames himself for her death and pleads for Sonia's forgiveness. The paper is stained where drops of water have fallen. You discover that Phillip was meant to be riding with Sonia on the morning she fell, but Tymothi had caught Phillip and was lecturing him about learning the genealogies of the local noble families. Phillip believes if he had been with her, Sonia might have survived.

Tucking the pages back where you found them, you resume your climb into the upper branches.

➔ *You lose one stamina.*

From above, the forest stretches out around you, a sea of shifting and murmuring green. Aside from a smudge of smoke on the horizon to the northwest, you see nothing that would indicate where Phillip has been taken.

You return to the ground and check for signs of passage on the trails leading northwest away from the Tree of Tales. Along one path, a number of branches have been broken and you discover heavy footprints.

➔ *Read entry 3243.*

9097

The axe-wielding bandit hurls herself to the side, blocking your shot. Your arrow flies true but strikes her instead of the fleeing archer. The bandit's axe slips from her fingers as she clutches the feathered shaft now sprouting from her chest. She mouths a soundless "Oh" and then topples into the pond.

"Kavi!" screams the archer, pain ripping through her voice. You nock another arrow, but she slips through the waterfall and out of sight before you can draw back.

- ➔ *Mark story point Z4.*
- ➔ *Time passes.*
- ➔ *Read entry 9949.*

9141

One of the bandits, a gnome woman, notices you and nudges the elf man who is leading them. "Hey Shark, look at this!" She points at you and calls out, "We can see you hiding there."

Their apparent leader, an elf man with pearlescent—almost blue—skin, drops his hand to his sword. "Come on out," he says. His grin is wide and full of teeth. The other two spread out to surround you.

Shark, with his hooked sword, stands in front of you. A lanky human man with a fire-hardened spear approaches from your left, and the gnome woman lunges at you from the right with curved knives.

Catch the gnome and throw her into the human.

- ➔ *Read entry 7760.*

Launch a tactical assault to break through.

- ➔ *Read entry 4243.*

Blind the gnome with runic magic.

Requires runes (skill).

- ➔ *Read entry 9269.*

9190

The hyrrinx woman points north into the woods. "The bandits make their home in the old castle in the valley." She sketches out a rough map with one claw in the dirt of the forest floor. "Follow the stream. You'll find it easily."

You don't find any castles, but you do follow the stream the hyrrinx suggested until you come to a waterfall, rushing down from a rocky cliff and spilling into a clear pool. You arrive just behind a pair of human women—one archer and one with an axe. The women are dressed in rough clothing and scraps of armor—clearly bandits. You duck behind some trees to see what they do next.

They pause before the waterfall long enough for the archer to pack a pipe and have a brief smoke, talking in low voices washed away by the stream. You hear the name "Kyric" and some mention of "the brat." Eventually, the archer taps out her pipe into the pool, packs it and her bowstring carefully away, and then both women step through the waterfall.

- ➔ *Time passes.*
- ➔ *Read entry 9949.*

9228

You land short of the safety of the brush; in fact, you land short of the fieldstone wall. You let your legs bend as you land, absorbing as much of the impact as you can, then tuck into a roll that sprawls you up against the stones. You manage to stand after (but only just), and every movement hurts.

- ➔ *You lose four stamina.*

You pull yourself to your feet and give Phillip, peering at you from the tower above, a thumbs-up. He nods, then vanishes from sight for a moment before taking his own flying leap. You manage to catch the young noble in your arms and set him gently down unharmed. "I think you just saved my life twice in two minutes," he says.

You're already moving for the valley entrance by the time the bandits reach the hole in the tower wall to look for you, but after your rough landing, you are moving only at a stiff limp. They're in pursuit far sooner than you'd like, and their first volley of arrows lands around you as you reach the cave leading to the waterfall.

- ➔ *You each lose three stamina unless you have agility (skill).*

You step through the waterfall into the forest glade and waste no time before grabbing Phillip by the hand and sprinting through the forest toward the southeast.

- ➔ *Read entry 9982.*

9269

You produce two runes from your pockets, a lightning rune and a blasting rune. The gnome woman leaps into the air and thrusts her dagger at your chest. You hold the lightning rune in an outstretched hand, and a brilliant flash of light erupts from your palm.

If you have agility (skill)...

- ➔ *Read entry 9289.*

Otherwise...

- ➔ *Read entry 2693.*

9289

Blinded by the light, the woman's knife merely slashes across your forearm, causing you to drop the lightning rune to the ground. She lands hard and rolls into the human's legs, and they collapse in a tangle of flailing limbs.

- ➔ *You lose three stamina.*

The elf, Shark, clutches at his eyes and then rushes forward, swinging wildly with his hooked sword. You step aside from his first clumsy blow, but before you can find some way to exploit his evident blindness he's swinging again, and again. With only your blasting rune still to hand, you lift it and unleash a burst of force.

If you have endurance (skill) or willpower (skill)...

- ➔ *Read entry 5208.*

Otherwise...

- ➔ *Read entry 3563.*

9295

You duck to the right and take cover behind a weathered grey standing stone. None of the bandits seem to have seen you, so you carefully rush from there to a thicket of what seems to be blackberries, and then to another tall stone.

Moving from cover to cover, you pick your way along the edge of the valley. The sun is somewhere behind the valley's walls, leaving you in chill, mist-shrouded shadows as you move like a ghost.

You pause beneath the crumbling aqueduct, peering out at the valley and taking stock of the situation. Suddenly, you hear movement behind you. You reach for your weapon as something comes through the brush! But it's just a goat.

The goat bleats and bounds past you, down toward the pond at the end of the aqueduct. There it joins several of its fellows.

You spy several bandits moving about the valley, some headed for the waterfall and others standing guard at the tower, but you see no indication that they've spotted you yet.

If story point Z4 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 7648.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 2360.*

9363

The human bandit jabs at you with his makeshift spear while the dwarf ducks in and out of your reach, her twin axes whirling. Try as you might, you just cannot keep them both at bay, and you sprout a number of new cuts and wounds.

➔ *You lose five stamina.*

Finally you stumble, and the spearman rises up to finish you off. You hurl yourself to the side at the last minute and his thrust carries past you and into the dwarf bandit's thigh. She cries out and suddenly hurls her handaxe into the spearman's head, where it settles with a wet "thock."

You double back briefly to kick the axe-wielding dwarf in the chin while he struggles to rise, then turn your attention toward the tower.

➔ *Read entry 9596.*

9367

"Who knows what that posh bastard is planning," mutters the bandit with the axe. "Maybe he thinks he can ransom the boy."

The archer takes a long draw on her pipe. "Nah," she says before exhaling two streams of silky, grey smoke through her nose. "I heard him shouting at the kid about rights or something. Threatened to kill 'im. No ransom for a dead brat."

The larger woman cranes her neck until you hear a few pops. "Come on. We need to patrol and report back," she says to her companion.

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 9949.*

9389

You each take hold of the cage along one side. On three, you all lift with all of your might. The cage slowly tilts, a gap forming beneath. Phillip waits until the gap is large enough to crawl under. Then, after a moment of hesitation, he quickly slips out of the cage.

You drop the cage to the floor with a raucous crash. Panting, you help Phillip to his feet. "Thank you," he says. "Now let's get out of here."

➔ *Read entry 1980.*

9468

Grabbing hold of the vines and bracing your feet against the stone of the tower wall, you begin the arduous climb. It's slow going as the vines tear at your clothing with their small thorns and occasionally tear away from the grey stone under your weight.

As you reach the upper floor, you see that a significant gap opens in the wall nearby, the mortared stone crumbled and tumbled over the tower floor and the valley below. Carefully, you swing yourself over to the hole and clamber inside.

➔ *You each lose one stamina. You each lose one additional stamina unless you have athletics (skill).*

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 6421.*

9487

"Wait, are you sure that's a good idea!?" shouts Phillip as you start hacking away at the wooden cage. The youth twists away, cramming himself into the far corner of the cage. After a few sweaty minutes, you've hacked a sizable hole in the thing.

➔ *You lose one stamina.*

Phillip crawls forward and, with your help, climbs to his feet. "Thank you," he says. "Now let's get out of here."

➔ *Read entry 1980.*

9535

The bandit with the axe plants her feet in a wide stance, half open in your direction. She spins the axe a few times as if testing its reach and weight, keeping herself always between you and the waterfall.

Clearly, she is waiting for you to make the next move.

Engage her in close combat.

➔ *Read entry 7538.*

Blast her out of your way.

Requires arcana (skill) or runes (skill).

➔ *Read entry 6090.*

Entangle her with alchemical oobleck.

Requires alchemy (skill).

➔ *Read entry 6875.*

9566

As you approach the tree, you see a modest leather satchel propped against the trunk. You crouch down to examine it and soon conclude it must belong to Phillip, as it contains a small leatherbound book emblazoned with his house's heraldry. It also holds an uneaten meal of apples, sausage, and cheese, a pen knife, pen and ink, and other odds and ends.

As you straighten from the satchel you find an arrow embedded in the trunk of the great oak. You pull the arrow free and find that the wound in the tree looks fresh, the wood a shining white. The arrow is fletched with grey goose feathers and seems well made.

Examine the paths for tracks.

➔ *Read entry 3489.*

Climb the tree in search of other clues.

Requires athletics (skill).

➔ *Read entry 8962.*

Commune with the spirits of Eventide Forest.

Requires devotion (skill).

➔ *Read entry 7023.*

Read through Phillip's journal.

➔ *Time passes.*

➔ *Read entry 2446.*

9577

You approach the bandits at the door. Their apparent leader, an elf man with pearlescent—almost blue—skin, drops his hand to his sword. "What's this, then?" he asks. "I don't believe we've met, stranger. They call me Shark." His grin is wide and full of triangular teeth. The thought of what he did to make them that way makes your jaw ache and your mouth taste like iron.

You ready your weapons, and Shark leaps backward, slashing ineffectually at you with his sword. "We got trouble," Shark hisses, and the other two bandits leap to surround you.

Shark, with his hooked sword, stands between you and the door. A lanky human man with a fire-hardened spear approaches from your left, and a gnome woman with curved knives lunges at you from the right.

Catch the gnome and throw her into the human.

➔ *Read entry 7760.*

Launch a tactical assault to break through.

➔ *Read entry 4243.*

Blind the gnome with runic magic.

Requires runes (skill).

➔ *Read entry 9269.*

9596

Moving like stalking wolves through the valley's mist-soaked grass, a group of bandits approach you. Some have knives, others have cudgels, and one or two have long yeoman's bows.

➔ *Read entry 7441.*

9616

You hear shouting and heavy footfalls on the stairs. "I'll hold them off. Get Phillip to safety!" calls Braxton as she draws her sword. She bashes her shield into the first bandit to reach the roof, sending him toppling into the bandits behind him. "Go!" she shouts.

You drop from the tree onto solid ground and waste no time before grabbing Phillip by the hand and sprinting through the forest toward the southeast. You glance over your shoulder just once to see that Braxton has climbed the tree and is hacking away the low-hanging branches and vines.

➔ *Read entry 9982.*

9792

You hike for a while deeper into the forest, until the trees part and reveal a sun-drenched clearing.

The Tree of Tales rises up above the clearing, just as it did before. The wind rustles the leaves and the forest whispers, sharing the stories that have been secreted throughout its branches.

The sun blazes high in the sky and crickets drone ceaselessly. The clearing throngs with the noisy silence of Allerfeldt, nature bursting with life beneath the late-summer sun.

If story point A4 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 5491.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 1263.*

9827

You pull the frost rune from a pouch at your hip and carefully open the sheepskin it's wrapped in. The air immediately feels colder. You call upon the well of magic stored within the shard, and it responds more readily than you would expect. It takes only a thought to freeze a bridge of solid ice that stretches across the entire stream.

You carefully test the construction, but it is as solid as any stone bridge you have ever seen. You cross to the other side and, with another thought, shatter the bridge into chunks small enough to easily melt in the flowing water. Then you press on toward the Tree of Tales.

➔ *Read entry 9792.*

9848

The human bandit lunges at you once more with his makeshift spear. You grab the haft and dance aside, twisting the man's stab at you into a warding jab at his dwarven companion. As she scrambles back you fumble at the dagger lashed to the spear's point. With a grunt, you tear the dagger free from its bindings, then spin and slash at the human bandit. He falls down, clutching a ragged cut on his chest and you spin again, hurling the dagger point first into the dwarf bandit's shoulder.

You double back briefly to kick the axe-wielding dwarf in the chin while he struggles to rise, then turn your attention toward the tower.

➔ *Read entry 9596.*

9884

The hyrrinx woman edges away from you cautiously. "Some of the bandits who live in the ruined castle to the northwest came, and they shot the old human. The human cub tried to run, but they beat it and took it toward their castle." She looks away, her ears and tail twitching. "There was an elf with them. He said something about 'the boss' wanting the cub alive."

With a sudden rush of speed, she climbs high into the branches of a nearby tree. You see her give you a final glare before leaping to another tree and moving west through the forest.

Return to the trail and head northwest.

➔ *Read entry 3243.*

Follow after her.

Requires awareness (skill) or survival (skill).

➔ *Read entry 8300.*

9926

You retrieve a length of rope from your pack and secure it to the heavy cage in the center of the room with a trick knot. Then you toss the rope out the hole in the wall and abseil down it, bracing your feet against the tower wall and sliding easily down to the ground.

Once you and Phillip are safely on the ground, you give your rope a proper tug and the trick knot releases, spilling the rope down to coil at your feet. You see movement above you as several bandits approach the opening in the wall and look out over the valley. You grab Phillip and scramble for cover.

If you have stealth (skill)...

➔ *Read entry 3049.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 4699.*

9949

You pass under the waterfall, where a trail runs against a spray-slick rock face and then through a narrow gap in the rock. The sound of the rushing water echoes and twists around you as you descend, then climb again, and soon emerge into a narrow valley.

The valley is a rolling field of tall grass and wildflowers flanked by steep rocky slopes draped with leafy vines. At the far end of the valley stands a crumbling stone tower ringed by a low fieldstone wall. Both the tower and wall are spotted with patchy grey-green lichen. Trees grow along the valley's ridge, branches and vines hanging over the edge above the tower's roof. A low mist still lingers in the valley where the sun hasn't yet burned it away.

Standing stones and thick brush run along the valley's edge on your right. About half way between you and the tower, a vine-choked aqueduct brings a trickle of water into the valley, feeding a still pool where a modest herd of goats is grazing.

If story point Z4 is marked...

➔ *Read entry 7827.*

Otherwise...

➔ *Read entry 2722.*

9960

You reach out and snatch the crossbow bolt from the air as if in a dream. Suddenly everything's caught up again, moving full speed, and the only sound is your blood pounding in your ears. You flip the crossbow bolt around and hurl it at Kyric, who shrieks and rushes down the stairs.

"Wow," says Phillip. "That was amazing." He cranes his neck, as if trying to see where his uncle has gone. "Let's get out of here."

➔ *Read entry 5132.*

9982

You and Phillip race through the forest, the bandits somewhere behind you baying like a pack of hunting hounds. You reach the great tree, where Talbot's body still lies, and Phillip points toward the path back to the village. "This way," he says.

You grab Phillip by the hand and drag him in an entirely different direction, following your route out of the forest the last time the bandits were chasing you. Your way features a difficult climb up a steep cliff, but it's faster than the path Phillip suggested and doesn't require you to cross a rain-swollen stream.

After you run through a narrow gulch and race along a rocky ridge toward Dragonholt, the noise of the bandits dies out behind you. When you reach the bottom of the cliff, Phillip pauses to catch his breath. "I don't hear any bandits," he says. "That was a good idea, taking this route. Of course they chased after me down the road I took to get here."

With no bandits actively shooting you this time, you carefully hike up the cliff face and make your way through the thinning forest toward the rambling orchards outside Dragonholt. Once you make it to the apple trees, you pause, and Phillip helps himself to a few early apples. "This is good," he says. "Those bandits never fed me; I'm starving."

Phillip suddenly chokes out a sob halfway through his apple. "Oh spirits be good," he moans. "I was about to ask Talbot to remind me to pay the farmer for these apples. But Talbot's dead now." Phillip folds in half, his half-eaten apple rolling away. "Sonia, and Talbot, and damn near me. How many more corpses will it take for my snake of an uncle to be satisfied?"

You move to comfort the boy, but before you can, Phillip wipes at his face, blinking away his tears, and straightens up. "Enough," he says, fresh resolve flashing in his eyes. He pushes away from the apple tree he'd been leaning against and tugs at his tattered finery. "I can fall all to pieces later, when I'm safely home."

You continue through the orchard and pass beneath the dragon statues. Somehow, the statue of black stone seems larger and more fearsome than it did when you passed beneath it earlier. Shaking off the thought, you reach the village green. The bandits wouldn't dare chase you into the village; you hope.

➔ *Mark story point J1.*

➔ *This quest is complete. Read entry 9591 in the "Dragonholt Village" book.*