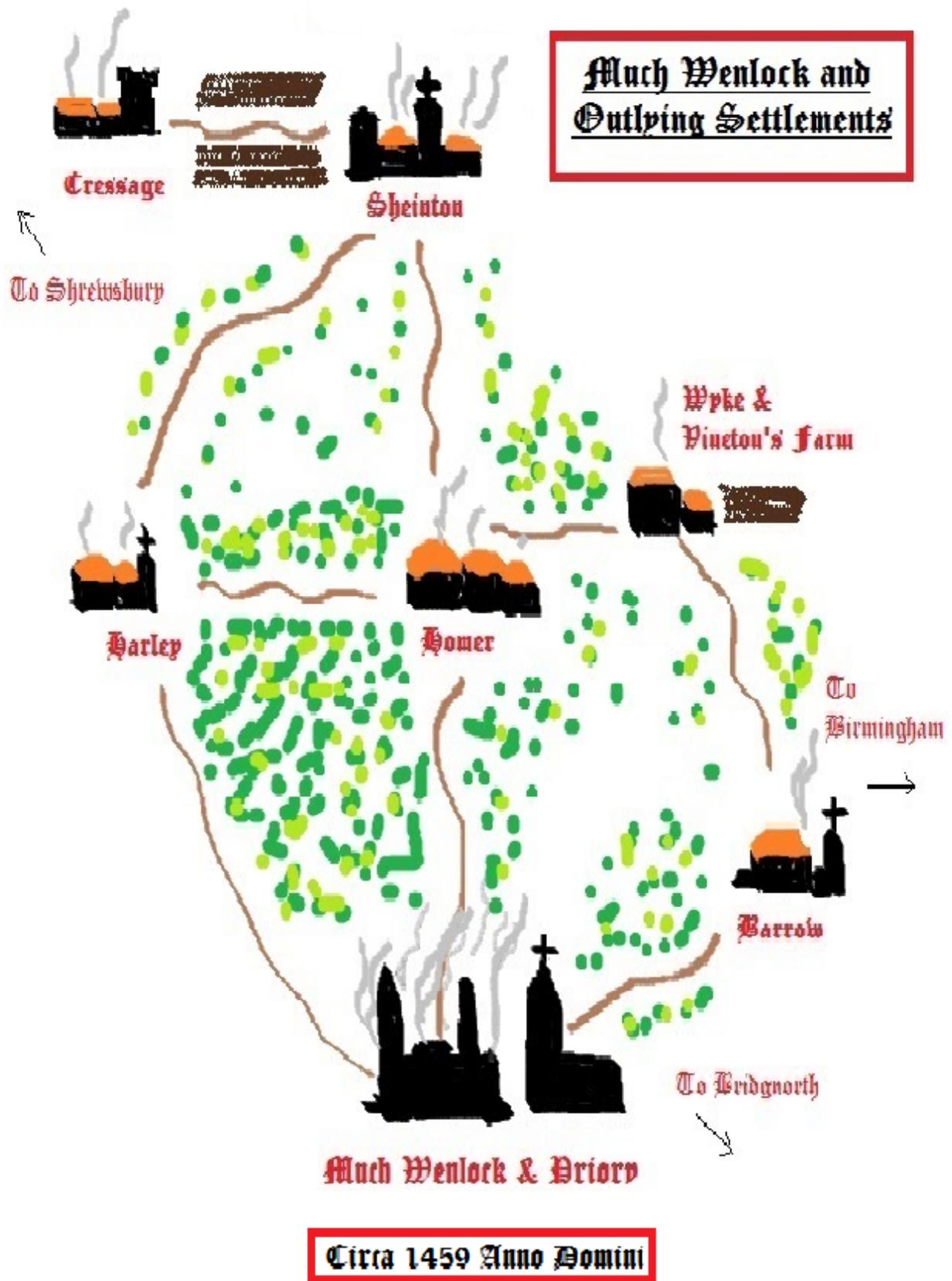


WINDHAMMER PRIZE
FOR SHORT GAMEBOOK FICTION

A Saint Beckons

AN ENTRY IN THE 2015 WINDHAMMER PRIZE FOR
SHORT GAMEBOOK FICTION

WRITTEN BY ROBERT DOUGLAS
COPYRIGHT 2015



A Saint Beckons

Status Sheet

Dexterity: Health: Armour:
Range Dexterity:

Main Combat Weapon:

Money:
Groats:
Silver Pennies:

Items and Notes Discovered:

Companions/Allies:

Enemy Encounters

Dexterity	Dexterity	Dexterity
Health	Health	Health
Armour	Armour	Armour

Dexterity	Dexterity	Dexterity
Health	Health	Health
Armour	Armour	Armour

Character and Weapons

You must first choose which type of soldier you'll be. Each has advantages and disadvantages over the other two. Select and enter your attribute scores alongside choice of weapons upon the Status Sheet:

Man-At-Arms – Always in the thick of close quarter fighting, as such you wear harness of plate, most components of which scavenged from battlefields. Your head is protected by a sturdy barbute helmet. Years of rigorous combat have strengthened your muscles; easily able to wield a variety of one-handed and two-handed weapons, including shields, *but not bows*. **Your status scores are as follows: *Dexterity 9, Health 28, Armour 4***. As this character, you may begin with a choice of the following weaponry:

Hand-axe – The heavy weight of the axe crushes a foe's armour, effectively reducing it by 2 points before combat even begins. However, the axe can prove to be a cumbersome weapon so you must reduce your Dexterity by 1 point after *four* rounds of combat.

Arming Sword – A sword carries no Dexterity penalties, although it's virtually ineffective against plate-armoured opponents.

Halberd – In the right hands, a deadly two-handed weapon designed to mangle, pierce, or rip through all but the finest plate armour. It has a long reach thus effective against cavalry, but very cumbersome against foes on foot reducing your Dexterity by 2 points after *three* rounds of combat.

Warhammer – A truly fearsome two-handed weapon that crushes armour, traumatizes the flesh, shatters bone. Using this, unless otherwise instructed, you may ignore *all* enemy Armour status scores as the blow itself is terrible enough! However, a warhammer demands huge strength to wield, so you must reduce your Dexterity by 1 after *every two* rounds of combat.

Shield – This adds 1 to your Armour score, although you cannot choose a *two-handed* weapon whilst wearing a shield.

Rondel Dagger (Already Equipped) – Ideal for thrusting between chinks in armour, this can be used in place of a shield favouring an additional attack, adding 1 to your Dexterity during combat. However, you can wear this at your belt and resort to using it if you lose your main weapon – in which event you must reduce your Dexterity by 2 points.

Light Infantryman – As opposed to the heavier infantry, you rely more on speed than strength during combat; wearing more lightweight brigandine armour and kettle helm both of which have served to deflect more than one cutting blow. Your status scores are as follows: ***Dexterity 10, Health 22, Armour 2***. However, although preferring to be selective in your opponents, inevitably at times it proves wise to arm yourself with reliable weaponry:

Arming Sword and Shield – This combination isn't quite so cumbersome, although bear in mind a blade proves very ineffectual against plate armour. The Shield adds 1 to your Armour score.

Billhook and Shield – The hook can be used to 'snag and snare' an opponent: if you win two consecutive attack rounds, you inflict an extra 2 points of Health damage on a sprawling opponent (or 1 point if Armour protects them). However, the billhook itself proves cumbersome so you must reduce your Dexterity by 1 during combat. The Shield adds 1 to your own Armour score.

Mace and Shield – A mace is ideal against all forms of armour-clad foes; reduce an opponent's armour score by 2 before combat begins. However, after *four* rounds of combat you begin to tire from swinging such a heavy weight, thus reducing your Dexterity by 2. The Shield adds 1 to your Armour score.

Rondel Dagger (Already Equipped) – Ideal for thrusting between chinks in armour, this can be used in place of a shield favouring an additional attack, adding 1 to your Dexterity during combat. However, you can wear this at your belt and resort to using it if you lose your main weapon – in which event you must reduce your Dexterity by 2 points.

Archer – Being clad in a simple mail gambeson and leather cap will turn only the clumsiest of blows during close combat. And yet, skilled in using the bow, you rely more on deadly ranged

attack and guile when dealing with foes. Your status scores are as follows: **Range Dexterity 8, Combat Dexterity 7, Health 18, Armour 1**. You are already equipped with a fine **Yew Self Bow and Quiver**, but all arrows were used up in the previous battle, so you'll need to find or purchase more during your quest which are to be noted down on your Status Sheet, and deleted every time you use one. When resorting to close quarters, you are afforded the following choice of weaponry:

Kern Axe and Buckler – The Kern axe is crude yet effective against all but plate armour. You suffer no penalties during combat (unless otherwise instructed).

Wooden Mallet and Buckler – The wooden mallet is heavy and you must reduce your Combat Dexterity by 1 point after *five* rounds of combat. But it inflicts 1 extra point of Health damage against opponents *without* Armour in a successful round.

Langes Messer Sword and Buckler – A more lightweight blade that allows speed, increasing your Combat Dexterity by 1 point during combat, but ineffectual against armoured opponents: you inflict only 1 Health point of damage in a successful round, and none at all if their armour successfully protects them!

Rondel Dagger (Already Equipped) – Ideal for thrusting between chinks in armour, this can be used in place of a Buckler favouring an additional attack, adding 1 to your Combat Dexterity. However, you can wear this at your belt and resort to using it if you lose your main weapon – in which event you must reduce your Dexterity by 3 points.

Combat

This adventure takes place during the harsh and brutal medieval age; doubtless you'll cross paths with dangerous enemies. To survive such close quarter encounters, a favourable combat ratio and/or die roll is therefore desirable. You must resolve such fights in the following way:

Calculate the *combat ratio* – for example, if your Dexterity is 8 and your opponent's 6, in this case it would be +2. Once having determined the combat ratio, roll one die and cross-reference this with the relevant combat ratio column. Again, for example, if you rolled a '5', +2 cross-referenced with row '5' = 3EH, so deduct 3 from the Enemy Health (this may be affected by opponents wearing Armour). Consult the table below when conducting combat:

Die Roll	-3 (or less)	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3 (or higher)
1	SD	P3H	P3H	P2H	P2H	P1H	P1H
2	P4H	P3H	P2H	P1H	P1H	0H	E1H
3	P3H	P2H	P1H	0H	0H	E1H	E2H
4	P2H	P1H	0H	0H	E1H	E2H	E3H
5	P1H	0H	E1H	E1H	E2H	E3H	E4H
6	E1H	E1H	E2H	E2H	E3H	E3H	IK

Key: P = Player, E=Enemy, H=Health Points, SD=Sudden Death, IK=Instant Kill

Armour

Wearing armour can often help protect against an opponent's blow: in an unsuccessful round, roll one die, if it is the same or less than your Armour Score, reduce any damage you've received by 1 point. If it is higher, then you must reduce your Health by the amount described in the Combat Ratio Table. However, this rule also applies to foes wearing armour! In a successful round, if the die roll is the same or less than their Armour score, you must reduce damage you have inflicted by 1 point.

Notes, Items, and Money

Throughout your perilous quest, you may discover useful items and valuable information – both of which will prove essential to your success. Write down all that you find, also recording any changes, on the status sheet located at the beginning of this gamebook. It might also be worthwhile mapping the Much Wenlock region, in particular noting down enemy encounters, places of interest, and where aid can be found; it will require more than one attempt to survive this dangerous quest!

Groats and Silver Pennies were the main coinage used during Henry VI's reign. 1 Groat is worth 4 Silver Pennies. Such currency can be used to purchase useful items or information. As you find, receive, or spend money, note down these changes on the Status Sheet as instructed by the text.

Companions and Allies

It will be possible for you to find companions and allies along the way. Make certain to note down their name(s) and a 'special number' associated with them on the Status Sheet. The text will instruct you how and when to make use of such companions. Special Numbers will retain their given value throughout the adventure.

Dear of Our Lord

12th October 1459

You half-collapse against an elm tree. The arrow head is still lodged deep in your thigh, throbs like the devil. Gritting your teeth, you stagger onwards through the dusky gloom, panting with tremendous effort. *Where in God's name am I?* Not that it really matters. The sudden snap of a twig, thrash of a moved bush, and your heart leaps skyward. You stop dead, nervous eyes darting about the forest shadows. Yet no attack comes. The shriek of some wild animal followed by a rustle as it scampers in frightened protest at your approach. *God's teeth!* almost a whimper with relief. Another ambush like the last would certainly finish you.

You reassure yourself there shouldn't be any Yorkists around these parts but, if there were, and if worse comes to worse, you can always conceal or even tear off the red rose badge and feign loyalty to the white. You've kept such a emblem from a time when your commander, Andrew Trollope, fought for the Earl of Warwick before switching sides. Many others – including yourself - followed his example. Not much honour to be had these days, you admit. Nor trust: how can you trust a man who so readily changes allegiance to the enemy standard?

But such matters, even the battle itself, seem as distant memories. A dream...nay, a hellish nightmare, and one best forgotten! Your primary concern is to seek refuge, a shelter, some place warm, with perhaps a vegetable broth and small loaf to stave the autumn chill. At such desires, your mouth waters and an empty belly growls in protest. You'd managed to down a small tankard of mead and some beef tough as boot leather – or perhaps it *was* boot leather! - yet even this sorry feast comprised your breakfast; you haven't eaten for, what...twelve, thirteen hours? Now, all made worse by having lost an alarming amount of blood, in your weakened state you can only hope there's a habitation nearby. *Aye, I would likely die this night, in this dark place.* You lean against the bough of a sturdy oak, as if hoping to absorb its strength. Finally, too exhausted to go on, you give in to thoughts of a peaceful eternal sleep, away from this cold, brutal, hopeless world of woes. You lean back against the oak, slide down the rough bark, sit with your legs stretched out. Grimy, sweat-streaked face cranes up to the starry heavens. "Beautiful," you gasp, "so beautiful, I never truly realised..."

No sooner have you closed your eyes than a beautiful chant relaxes your whole mind. *Blissful...the scriptures were right, after all. Nothing ails my soul's ascent to Heaven.* Your breathing becomes steadier, more rhythmic to your heartbeat...you frown: *heartbeat?* Your eyes open, not to heaven, but the same forest with its creaking branches, wild-flower scents, while a light breeze cools the perspiration on your brow. The hoot of nearby owl stirs you further to wakefulness. Yet the chant remains. *How...?* It takes you a moment to realise: *Monks chanting – a priory nearby!*

This alone prompts your stiff, aching muscles into action. You grimace at the stab of pain in your leg, such sudden movement has renewed the bleeding. Nevertheless, your prayers for salvation have been answered (at least in the mortal sense) which propels you onwards with a fresh heart. The chanting guides your weary steps through the forest, the undergrowth is thick and makes the going hard, you pant with the exertion. Then, suddenly you emerge from the tree-line to find a wall some yards away. You stagger on, following it round, hand clutching at the coarse grey stone for support. After what seems an age you locate the great west door. With whatever strength remains, you hammer on the heavy wood, your frantic blows echo from within. Soon, the world dims and you lose consciousness....

You regain your senses to find the crucified Saviour gazing upon you. The room itself is a simple one, sparse of furnishings, save for the cot upon which you lie and a three-legged wooden stool nearby upon which sits your shirt, trows, and boots. Sounds of sheep and cows in the fields outside, even a cuckoo adds its familiar call - for the moment you're content to just lie there, lose yourself in nature's cacophony. Eventually, you decide to clamber out of your rest-bed and search the priory for some water. Your leg wound has been cleaned and neatly bandaged although you have a raging thirst.

You soon learn that the prior abbot is most intrigued by his mysterious 'guest'. You're also shocked to discover that almost three days have passed since they found you at the door, having been afflicted by a deep fever, your life ebbing towards the cold touch of death. Yet, you vaguely remember something brittle being laid across your brow – after which colour returned to your pale features, the fever passed, and on the third day displayed an almost miraculous recovery.

"And so," smiles Prior Abbot Richmond, "on the fourth day, it seems Saint Milburge's gift has come to fruition once again. Indeed, it seems her blessing smiles upon you."

"Saint Milburge?" you repeat with uncertainty. "Who-?"

"Forgive me, my son, duty calls upon what so little time I possess. But, if you wish, perhaps you'd care to thank her in prayer at the altar watching over her bones?"

"Aye, Prior Abbot, that I would."

Despite it being a secluded place, tidings of the latest 'Milburge Miracle' somehow spread beyond the abbey walls and gathered apace as wildfire. Most townsfolk found some excuse to visit on 'official' business yet in truth only to regard you with awe.

Then, on the seventh day, the soldiers came.

-1-

All fifteen men bear the red rose of Lancaster, supporters of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou. The captain of this patrol is Sir Cecil of Kinlet – nicknamed 'the Raven' owing to his jet black hair and unnerving green eyes. Such a veteran has earned a fearsome reputation in battle. He's also obsessive in his pursuit of 'scum traitorous Yorkists', almost like a predator hunting them to the ends of the earth; clearly there's more to his moniker than meets the eye. Of course, now fully recovered, you reckon it's only prudent to rejoin the cause: "Eard you were 'ere," he growls, clapping your hand in a crushing, vice-like grip, "glad t' 'ave yer back 'mongst the livin', lad!"

"Aye, glad to be back, sir."

You spend a last supper with the the Prior Abbot and the Wenlock monks, saying your fond farewells, before they are summoned by the compline bell. All are saddened by your impending departure, yet one that's inevitable: you are a soldier, after all, and one sworn to defend the Red Rose. Desertion is a route you'd *never* take, no matter how dark the world is. Perhaps their presence is a sign you should return to the outside world. Besides, you don't want to incur the dread Raven's wrath by backing out!

As a mark of comradeship, you spend the night in the nave rather than in the more comfortable infirmary, although the considerate monks have set two braziers here to help keep out the chill night air from your bones. Glowing coals cast an amber light, almost subduing the atmosphere; travel-weary men are soon snoring away despite the discomfort of a hard, cold flagstone floor - save two, however, still conversing in urgent whispers. They cast occasional glances your way. Finally, both soldiers tentatively approach.

"Hail, friend," smiles the first. He is dressed in the typical fashion of an archer: grubby mail gambeson, battered leather cap. Cherished yew self bow and quiver are carefully leant against the wall, although buckler and rondel dagger are still attached to his belt. Sharp blue eyes regard you with apparent curiosity, perhaps a little wariness, but no hostility. "Welcome to the Raven's Roost!"

"Raven's Roost?"

His friend then steps closer, a Gutentag clunks heavily upon the floor as he rests his hands on its pommel. A giant of a man clad in an Almain munitions harness that, from the dents and scuffs, has seen its fair share of battle. Slowly, he removes his barbute helmet, regards you with dark, stern eyes, flaming curly red hair far more dire than the brazier fire. "Raven's Roost," he repeats in a gruff tone, accent unmistakably foreign....German, or Swiss perhaps? "Pray tell you've actually heard of us?"

"Ah, well..."

"Lay off it, Lukas! Your pardon, friend, just his idea of a jest." He leans closer, feigns a whisper:

"After all, you know what the Flemish are like for their humour – or lack of it!"

"One more remark about my glorious *volk*, Hugh Riverton, and I'll stave in your skull. Lukas Tillens swears this!"

"Huh, and if I had a penny every time you said that..."

"...you'd be the wealthier than the king!" he finishes with a booming laugh.

"Keep the noise down, idiots!" snaps a voice from the dozing men.

"Oh, go dunk your head in some cow dung."

"Hmm," Lukas strokes his beard, "I swear he does that every morning. The fashion for him, I'd wager."

Hugh laughs heartily and shakes his head. "Dear oh dear! Trust me, you'll come to regard the Roost as a second home."

You can't help but smile at the banter between these two men. Hardened by battle, yet bonded by such. Barrack humour is all they have to get through each day, every day. To defy the face of death, for as long as they can, is all they can ever do... "I nearly met my end not far from here," you suddenly blurt out.

"Aye," Hugh nods, clasps your shoulder in sympathy, "I heard what happened."

"Still, nothing amiss with a little luck in life, ja?"

"Aye," you nod, "or perhaps it was something more than that."

Hugh frowns: "Faith. You're speaking of faith in a higher power, God's will."

"That chanting was real enough – yet the timing proved surreal."

"And Saint Milburge's hand healed you."

"Her... 'hand'?" you gasp. "B-but she's been dead for—"

Solemnly, Hugh shakes his head. "Lukas is not mistaken, friend. The monks informed us of what occurred. They used her skeletal hand to help cure your ills, banish the fever, heal that wound of yours. A saint's virtuous power never disappears."

"I share your fascination on such miracles," Lukas explains, "Hugh and I would relish a chance to see the blessed hand of Saint Milburge. But, curse our haste, we forget to ask where it rests!"

"Ah, I see."

Only what you *do* see is something wrong: call it instinct, but you sense a certain glint of mischief in their manner. Perhaps it's merely unbridled excitement at the chance to gaze upon the sacred skeletal hand? Pilgrims frequently visit such saintly relics to pray whilst making a donation to the church. However, such homage is made during more sociable hours; why then are these two men asking such a request at this late hour?

You decide to test them with an innocent question: "Can you not wait 'til the morrow? The priory stirs at the sixth hour; you could make your request then. I'm sure the prior abbot..."

"We could be moving out earlier than that," Lukas interrupts, somewhat abruptly. "The Raven is intent on hunting down more Yorkists so they don't regroup and cause us further trouble. Who knows when we might return here?"

Something is definitely amiss – or, more precisely, *two* things: that there's no purpose for the Raven to rise early for he will catch any stray foe, whatever time or place, as it's all left to chance with no specific objective, besides which it would be too dark to track them down. Secondly, both previously affable men are growing impatient and agitated. You don't like the way this is going. What's more, Hugh and Lukas are still armed...*oh Lord God, why didn't prior abbot Richmond impose a condition to leave their weapons outside this holy place?* However, to challenge them here, with their fellows just a stone's throw away, would be most foolhardy; you must lure them away and deal with them quietly as possible before summoning the prior abbot. There are only two possible options here: to feign agreement in leading them to the lady chapel and incapacitate them (turn to **88**), or claim you're not sure where the saint's hand is safeguarded but keep a close vigil over their movements (turn to **59**).

-2-

With unwavering loyalty, Wraith pounces, knocking the footpad from your back. Ghost meanwhile keeps the threat ahead in check. "Get 'em!" you order, drawing a dagger to vengefully gut the winded footpad. You normally prefer giving quarter – but you're in no mood for mercy with such vermin.

Footpad Raiders:
Dexterity 8 Health (see below) Armour: 0

After four rounds of combat, your foe breaks off the fight, fleeing into a nearby wood. Both Ghost and Wraith can help track them down if you wish (turn to **17**), otherwise continue on your way to Harley (turn to **61**).

-3-

Jeremiah lands a hefty punch in your right eye. You stagger back, half-dazed, half blinded. Your opponent seizes the initiative and charges your stomach with his head as would a bull. Jeremiah certainly possesses the strength of one too! You are lifted off your feet, winded, and hit the ground. The pain is intense, you black out. Regaining consciousness, your stomach and left arm feel as if they're on fire (lose 1 Dexterity point). With cold realization, your coin purse is missing (delete all money from your Status Sheet). The beggar has long since fled – although it's likely that bully Jeremiah and his cronies took it for their trouble. Now, roll 1 die: it's a 1 or 2, delete also your Main Weapon from the Status Sheet. Without money, you can't buy a drink, especially not information. This doesn't bode well for your quest. Will you now limp east to Barrow (turn to **42**) or north towards Homer (turn to **27**)?

-4-

You give four piercing whistles. Oculus shrieks acknowledgement and swoops down to your outstretched arm. Showing him the footpad corpses, you whisper: "Seek." Without delay, he flaps away, circling high above – until drawn to a particular area. Hurriedly, you head in that direction. Oculus meanwhile is content to roost among the branches while you investigate (turn to **17**).

-5-

While scrutinizing the tree-line for signs of life, a sudden shout comes from behind: three horsemen are bearing down on your position, brandishing weapons! Their hostile intent is obvious, but how will you counter such a deadly threat? If you are an Archer and possess at least one arrow turn to **29**, otherwise you must take flight for cover of the forest by turning to **52**.

-6-

You fall in step with this amiable Cornish pilgrim. "Aye, it's back to dear ol' Tavistock fer me. One last cup o' the Lady's tears, then I'll be away."

"And as for me, I'm bound to follow the Lady's beckoning – wherever that might lead."

"Hmm, grim business that, to be sure. Fer it to happen on holy ground, sacrilegious!"

"Aye, that it is."

You walk in silence for a moment, contemplating the daunting task ahead as you both turn into Callaughton Lane. "Not far along o' here," Seb assures. "Yer know, I recall that the..." he frowns, old-age clouding his memory, "...Rook was in a feared desire to leave."

Co-incidental, how Prior Abbot Richmond observed the same thing. "Understandable, the Raven had reason enough: he wanted to hunt down those responsible, make amends with God, and avenge the betrayal against him."

"Ah, 'Raven' is what he's called? Ah well, all alike to my mind!" he chuckles, and so do you. "Well, all Ravenkin took flight, not sure where – yet two are resting nearby."

"Oh?"

"Aye, now where...? The Golden Goose! Aye, aye, that's it. With clear orders to keep vigil."

"For information? About Milburge's relic? Or the whereabouts of those two thieves? Perhaps both?"

"No, no, a *person*. 'Keep yer eyes peeled fer that rogue!'" Seb imitates the Raven. "Send word t' me moment 'e sets foot in town! Hmm, wrathful fella."

You frown: this is another odd occurrence. "He" you ask, "not 'them'?"

"Aye, they're after one man, to be certain."

One man? It just doesn't make sense! The Prior Abbot's words return to haunt your restless thoughts: the Raven is definitely playing some game. But what?

"Here we are," sighs Seb.

Spring water spills over the wooden cross that is cracked with age and engraved,

THE BLESSING OF SAINT MILBURGE

"Legend has it the sacred water cures blindness," explains Seb, "the Good Lord knows I have need o' it; too many a year spent in the tin mines has aged my eyes prematurely, yer see."

You wonder if drinking the water from the blessed spring will grant you more visions - and answers – surrounding the relic's location. Well, it can't hurt! Both Seb and yourself drink deep, it is refreshingly pure. Regain all lost Health Points. He then proceeds to fill a water flask in readiness for the long journey home. "Here," Seb proffers you his seashell token that is the mark of a pilgrim, "I want yer t' have this, young 'un, with my blessin'. And may Saint Milburge guide yer steps to her presence."

"Seb, I...my thanks." Add the Pilgrim's Badge to your Status Sheet. "Take care on the journey home."

"Aye," he grins, "I will. Fare thee well!"

You watch him slowly pace the lane, then must decide upon your own route onwards. With regard to those two 'Ravenkin', will you now head for the Golden Goose (turn to **81**), or make for the bustling town market (turn to **48**)?

-7-

You get within twenty yards and can now determine five combatants - four versus one - in a deadly struggle. Judging by his attire, the outnumbered man is clearly a soldier, while his foe are garbed in a variation of leather and rusted armour...vagabonds? Mercenaries, perhaps? To your relief, Lukas isn't amongst their number. However, from this distance, it's difficult to discern whether the fellow is either Lancastrian or a Yorkist straggler - and if he proves the latter then his attackers could be Lancastrian. Or vice versa.

"He's tirin'," gloats the bearded leader brandishing a hand-axe and knife. "Flank 'im!"

This last order is given to a crossbowman. It is loaded then pointed at the lone defender's unprotected back! If you consider the odds too heavy, or don't wish to risk aiding a possible enemy, turn to **60** to continue towards Barrow. Otherwise, if you're an Archer and possess at least one arrow (turn to **99**) or not (turn to **32**).

-8-

"Well," Peter leans closer, "the Raven is in Sheinton for now, sending men into the hunt for those two renegades."

"So I might cross paths with his men?"

"Aye, it's possible. You could join forces, even find out if they've learned something."

"So, where were Hugh and Lukas last seen?" you ask, pausing to take a sup of ale...if you have the name 'Godfrey' written down turn to **56**. If not turn to **86**.

-9-

One of the men suddenly stares at the ring on a chain around your neck. "Where did you get *that?*" he growls accusingly.

"I gave it to him," answers a familiar voice.

"Mary!"

"Aye," she returns your smile, "'tis I, safe and sound."

"You-you *know* this man?" splutters the dark-haired brother.

"Aye, ye fool – *he's* the brave one who saved me from that lynch mob!"

All three men gape for one long moment, then crowd round you, clasping your hand and bear-hugging in deepest gratitude.

"Allow me to introduce Basil, Michael, and Ralph: my brothers."

"Aye," beams young Ralph, "for your noble deed, we're in your debt, soldier."

"*All* three of us," affirms Basil.

"Well," you frown, "I'm on a holy quest searching for the hand of Saint Milburge."

Michael, the eldest, rubs his chin. "Aye, the sin committed at Much Wenlock Priory? We'd all heard about that. Grim business!"

"Nevertheless," says Basil, "a quest we can surely assist?"

"Wait, lads..."

Michael checks your protest. "Your sacred duty is almost a hopeless one to fulfil alone, soldier. But we *know* these parts and, with many friends between us, somebody *might* know something!"

"Aye," grins Ralph, "let us help. It's the least we can do!"

Note down 'Mary's Brothers' as Allies and their Special Number '3'.

Turn to **74**.

-10-

Your canine companions seem to be edging towards the western forest sprawl. "There's no road there, you daft pair!"

However, both guides ignore such mock admonishment, yet intent on you to follow them. Sighing, you do so reluctantly. But it seems that Annabel came this way for there's an obscure trail through the trees. "Aha!" you grin. "I see now. Well done, you two!"

Tails wagging, they lead you westwards (turn to **85**).

-11-

"Hail there, lad!"

"Wh-what?" he pants, frowning impatience - yet you can tell he's also agitated.

"Something ails thee?"

"Aye," he nods, "ye could well say that!"

"Someone is chasing you?"

The young lad glances back along the track, gaze fearful. "Nay, no longer so. But, God's teeth, a giant of a man!"

You raise an eyebrow. "Giant?"

"Aye, he nods firmly, "I tell thee the truth, stranger!"

"I never said you were lying. Now, how about you tell me where this happened?"

A gleam appears in his eyes. "Aye...fer a price: one groat!"

The lad is only about ten years old: you might be paying merely for a fanciful tale. Mindful of such, and if you can afford it, will you agree (turn to **92**), or wave him on and make for the tavern (turn to **62**)?

-12-

"Aye," you relent, "very well. Tell me all that occurred since last night."

Lukas nods, then begins: "After you had been knocked unconscious, Hugh and I ran back to the Lady Chapel, made to unlock the casket - but the lid had been forced open, the relic was gone."

"Gone?"

"Ja," he nods impatiently, "*someone* had been there before us."

"The Raven," you attempt to guess, "perhaps he used you as a distraction?"

"That makes little sense."

"Why?"

"Because when we met with him at Sheinton earlier this morning, as instructed, he seemed none the wiser as to its whereabouts. He was in a wrathful rage at our failure! Raven ordered our weapons confiscated and imprisoned us in a storehouse. Hugh picked the lock, we knocked out the guards, reclaimed our weapons, before sneaking away. But then luck deserted us: we were spotted. I managed to evade our pursuers, Hugh didn't."

"Wait...you said the Raven was in a rage about your 'failure', rather than 'crime'."

"Ja, that's right, *he's* the one who planned the theft. We were following the Raven's orders but..."

"...Matters went downhill and he betrayed your loyalty so he wouldn't be implicated," you realize.

"None of us bargained on your seeing through the deception, which in turn caused complications."

"Most schemes have a weak link in their chain."

"Ja," he nods, "and we would have succeeded were it not for that mysterious thief with the same idea."

"I wonder who actually stole it?"

"God only knows," he growls, "and I doubt we ever shall - they must be leagues away by now."

"Here then," you pass him back the gutentag, "you'll be needing this."

He frowns puzzlement. "You trust me?"

"I *believe* you, at least. And your desire to rescue Hugh is plain to see."

"Ja, and I've vowed revenge upon the Raven - he's my mortal foe now!"

You'd pay good money to witness such a titanic duel between Lukas and his former paymaster.

"Can you defeat him?"

"That remains to be seen," he allows, "but know this: I once defeated *ten* men single-handed at the Battle of St Albans!"

"Aye, that I can believe."

Lukas Tillens is now your Companion. Whenever prompted by the text, subtract 10 from the entry you're on and turn to that reference in order to solicit his help. Furthermore, if you've since picked up two canine Companions, add their special number to that of Lukas so instead you will subtract that total when hinted by the text. If you haven't got 'Raven Hooded' already noted down, do so now.

"Is the Raven still at Sheinton?"

"He's encamped there," confirms Lukas, "resourceful, ruthless, a score of loyal men at his back,

with spies everywhere. I've seen him at work. If anybody can hunt down the relic, it's him. They don't call him the 'Raven' for nothing!"

"Then let's hope we can do better." So saying, you must continue onwards. Lukas is eager to take the north road to Sheinton in a bid to rescue Hugh. However, if you possess a Flint and Tinder Box, you can restore 4 Health points from a rabbit meal he was previously unable to cook. Turn to **15**.

-13-

His smile broadens as he pockets the 3 Silver Pennies (delete these from your Status Sheet). "Aye," he nods, "I've heard a thing or two of interest. A couple of red roses were pokin' around here, searching for one of their own."

"Who?" you frown.

"Didn't say. But their errand to find him seemed an urgent one. They've taken root in the Golden Goose, up yonder."

"That all?"

He looks up from setting feathers, strokes his bearded chin, thoughtfully. "Well, rumour has it Tobias Perch's daughter has gone missin'."

"Kidnapped, you mean?"

"Heh, or eloped of her own free will. She's a rare jewel, so I hear."

"And what of her father?"

"Old and grey-haired – although perhaps more your type!"

"Not quite," you raise an eyebrow at his crude jest, "I meant..."

"Aye, aye," he laughs, "I get your meanin'. Tobias Perch," he repeats the name, "he's a merchant dealin' in gloves. Has a place on Spittle Street." *Hmm, interesting.* "Oh, and if you travel north, watch yourself: there's a madman loose."

"Madman?"

"Aye, one of the traders here, his horse took fright when a giant of a man ran across the road, as if the very fires of hell licked his heels. Turned out the sheriff's men were after him. Outlaw, it seems. Tell ye, if you head northerly, pray such a giant is soon dancin' a gallows jig!"

Giant...? It can't be! "Wait, was he carrying a huge mace?"

"Hmm, well..." he regards you with a quizzical look that becomes one of amazement. "Aye. Old Roger did mention that also. How...?"

"Aye, master fletcher, I've had my threepence worth. Fare thee well!"

God's teeth! So Lukas Tillens has been sighted and on the run! And without his friend Hugh Riverton, it seems. But, even alone, a fierce, formidable mercenary-turned-vagabond as him won't give up without a murderous fight. That fletcher certainly gave some good advice. Will you: locate Tobias Perch on Spittle Street (turn to **53**), head for the Golden Goose (turn to **81**), take the road north to join in the pursuit of Lukas (turn to **27**), or, if you wish to browse the market further, make a note of this reference and turn to **68**.

-14-

Death comes out of nowhere. You'll never know it was a crossbow bolt that penetrated your helmet, as if it were mere tin, and into your brain. You are killed instantly.

-15-

You emerge outside to find the rain has thankfully abated, giving way to a sunlit afternoon, although the air remains chilled by autumn. Splashing through the rain puddles and mud, *unless* there's another route you can determine, the only way onwards is north to Sheinton. Turn to **46**.

-16-

Harry sneers defiance, spurs his horse, galloping towards you. Deftly, you dodge out the way and calmly notch an arrow. The bowstring is pulled taut. A brief moment, breath held, then release. The arrow takes your quarry in the back, penetrating his right lung. Both his hands fly up in shock and he tumbles from the saddle, hitting the dust like a heavy piece of meat. Turn to **39**.

-17-

Cautiously, you sneak between the trees, eventually sighting a house within a clearing. It's a ramshackle affair, no signs of life...If you're an Archer and possess at least one arrow turn to **41**. Otherwise, turn to **87**.

-18-

You regain awareness in the infirmary for the second time, and with a blistering headache (lose 2 Health points). Groggily, you sit up.

"Take a moment," the novice sat beside you says, "and drink this."

Gratefully, you sip from a flagon of honey mead, then gasp, "The-the relic, Saint Milburge..."

Slowly, the novice lowers his head in deep sorrow. "It has been taken from us."

You close your eyes, groan, lie back on the cot in abject failure. Then the door opens. Brother Jacob is stood in the doorway, narrow features twisted with disgust. From him, there is no concern, no sympathy for your plight, only: "Come with me."

The young novice helps you to your feet. "My gratitude. I can manage from here."

"Aye, very well."

Mercifully, despite enduring Brother Jacob's stony silence, at least it's a short walk to the chapter house. This is where the monks meet to discuss priory affairs and issue new decrees. You can only hope you won't be involved in any form of punishment. Elaborate arcading adorns the surrounding plaster walls, a flamboyant blend of green, red, and purple, complemented by gilt. A large stained window allows the autumn sun to kiss the grey flagstone floor with a rainbow of colour. All of Wenlock Priory's monks have gathered to attend these proceedings, sat upon wooden benches that line the walls. A wooden chair has been placed at the epicentre of this chamber where you are instructed to sit. Prior Abbot Richmond takes his place at the lectern, clasps his hands on its flat surface supported by a golden angel's wings. After a long moment he raises his arms; the assembly complies with his order for silence.

"Fellow brethren," he begins, "the previous night our priory suffered a most grievous blow. It is true: the blessed hand of Saint Milburge has been taken from us."

Troubled murmurings and sighs of despair begin to fill the chill air. Prior Abbot Richmond raises a hand to check such a natural reaction.

"Yes, it is a terrible crime that has befallen our most holy order. However, we must bear such burden with fortitude worthy of our monastery, and not allow the sin of anger to cloud our hearts nor our judgement..."

"Forgive me, Prior Abbott," blusters Brother Jacob, "but we cannot simply sit here while this *sinner*," he points accusingly at you, "sits amongst us!"

In response, some of the clergy utter protest, others nod vehemently, a few scrutinize you carefully as if weighing your very soul.

Prior Richmond calms the proceedings once again. "Pray, Brother Jacob, explain yourself."

"This man was seen to be conversing with two of Sir Cecil of Kinlet's men. They convinced him to lead them to the blessed Saint Milburge's resting place. Or it could be they bribed him?"

"Hmm, then perhaps you can explain why they struggled?"

"Well, obviously an agreement between them turned sour, they argued amongst themselves,

frustrated at not finding the key..."

An elderly monk leans forward. "We don't know that, Brother Jacob."

"This man was in league with!"

"I agree with Brother Thomas," interjects the Prior, "we lack the truth behind this matter. There's too much conjecture to your argument, Brother Jacob."

"Oh," he stares at you, "then perhaps our esteemed 'guest' would care to enlighten us?"

Prior Richmond raises an eyebrow. "Hmm, I agree, we should at least permit him a hearing..."

And so you relate all that had happened since your meeting with Hugh and Lukas, your own suspicions and motives, describing the struggle that ensued. By the end, Brother Jacob sputters, "Wha-? You dare to weave a web of lies, laying false blame upon the noble Earl of Kinlet, a man renowned throughout England...!"

"That's *enough*, Brother Jacob!"

He is cowed by the Prior Abbot's rebuke, yet still glares at you with distrust burning clearly in his dark eyes.

"I sense you speak the truth," Prior Richmond turns to you, "and, of course, the true perpetrators long since fled the scene. Therefore, we cannot question them. But Cecil of Kinlet felt betrayed by and somewhat responsible for the sinful actions of men he'd brought within these walls. Earlier this morning he vowed to me that he would hunt both men down and return the blessed relic of Saint Milburge to its resting place. In the meantime, I've informed the town sheriff of the theft. Hopefully, Hugh and Lukas will be apprehended and brought to account, although we should all pray for both their souls. And for now, there is nothing more to discuss on this matter."

"But-!"

"And that includes you, Brother Jacob," he offers the spiteful monk a stern look. "But we do have other important affairs to resolve; we must not waver in our duties here, priory life continues as normal."

Turn to **73**.

-19-

During your travels, you've learned without doubt that the Raven is playing some treacherous game and must be avoided at all costs. However, it soon becomes clear that his spies infest this village; a call-to-arms goes out, Ravenkin are soon hard on your heels. Arrows and crossbow bolts whip past your head. Heavily outnumbered, thinking quickly you claim sanctuary in the church of St Peter and St Paul. But you're also trapped. And the sanctity of a church may not be enough to keep a ruthless foe at bay for long...

Consult your Status Sheet for all Companions and Allies made throughout the adventure. Add up *all* their Special Numbers and turn to that resulting reference.

If the reference you turn to makes no sense, the Raven's men eventually smash open the locked doors. You fight valiantly with whatever Companions you have but, against such overwhelming odds, succumb to death's dark, cold embrace.

-20-

The road twists and turns its way to Harley. Just as you round the next bend, however, something heavy lands on your back. You almost lose your footing – more to surprise than the weight – stagger about, trying to shift your assailant.

"Agh! God's teeth!" he snarls. "Oy, 'urry up, you lot! 'E's a lively 'un!"

If you have two canine Companions, subtract 3 from their Special Number and turn to that reference. If not, then do you possess a Shield (turn to **78**)? Otherwise, you must try to throw him off before his associates close in. Roll three dice – if you're wearing heavy armour (Man-At-Arms) add 3. If the result is the same or less than your current Health turn to **93**. If it is higher turn to **38**.

-21-

What remains of the footpads gather round the body of their fallen leader. One of their number stoops to examine him. "E-e's dead," he gasps. "You bested 'im!"

"...Never thought it possible..."

"...E's gone!..."

"...What now?..."

You raise a hand to check their chattering. "I'm looking for the sacred hand of Saint Milburge." One of the footpads steps closer. "Stay back, I warn thee!"

But he simply smiles - then lets his knife and cudgel drop to the floor. He signals the others do the same; all weapons are surrendered to the wooden boards. The footpads are at your mercy.

"Lead us," insists the footpad.

"Honoured as I am," you sigh, irritably rubbing your tired face, "I'm on a holy quest for the relic of Saint Milburge."

"We 'eard about that," says another, "but Eli never 'ad it. 'E stole many pretty things - but never the 'and of Millburge."

"What?"

"It's true," nods the first footpad, "t' our knowledge, anyway."

God's teeth! you slump in exhaustion. So all this, the attack on these footpads, the demise of Eli Silvers (albeit long overdue), a vain wild goose chase! You search through Eli's jerkin, finding - not the elusive relic - but 2 groats, 5 silver pennies, and a brass key.

"That unlocks the strongbox," he explains of the latter.

"Which is where?"

"Hidden," he shakes his head in dismay, "Eli never trusted us, yet paid us once in a while from the takin's."

Makes sense. "What's this?"

"Ah," grins the footpad, "now that 'orn is...*was* used t' summon us. Just in case 'e got into 'ot water." The horn is outlandish, like something from Nordic legend, intricate patterns inlaid with gold with three wolf heads around the rim. Curious, yet beautiful. "Eli often jested about bein' the next Robin 'ood!"

"Oh aye," you laugh sarcastically, "in all but name!"

"As the slayer o' Eli Silvers, our loyalty now falls under yer command. It's one o' our...tenets, yer see. Blow this 'orn an' we'll endeavour to reach yer current position."

Matters have indeed taken a strange turn! Still, you take them up on the offer. "In the meantime," you wag the brass key, "search around for Eli's treasure chest. We'll divide the spoils - after which you'll leave, disappear, and we never meet again. Understand?"

All footpads nod eagerly. For now, note down these 'Not-so Merry Men' as Allies and their Special Number '3'. The text will prompt when you're to make use of the Nordic Horn. Now, turn to **61** to continue to Harley.

-22-

"Cursed guttersnipe!" snarls the tall, bald fellow. He aims another kick at the hapless beggar's backside. "You're not welcome 'ere. I told ye before: no beggin'!"

"P-please, sire," he whimpers, "a...a couple o' pennies is all I needs-"

"Then go and *earn* it!" he snaps back, holding up blistered hands to emphasize his point. "These ain't *ever* held a beggin' bowl, yet bear the plough, proudly!" Another savage kick, another plaintive yelp. "Same fer the lads behind me," he jerks a thumb, "an' that's why they won't help yer....'ere, what do you want?"

His piercing blue eyes regard you menacingly, daring you to interfere. How will you handle this situation: "Everybody's allowed a sense of pride, and you've hurt his," (turn to **37**), or "Come on lads, look at what you're doing to this poor wretch! How about another round of drinks - I'm buying!" (turn to **77**)? Note that the latter option requires 6 silver pennies.

-23-

So it's decided: to travel with Master Yaxley, enter his employ, earn some money. Perhaps you will learn something along the way, perhaps not. Several times the caravan is attacked, each time you survive. Your income increases substantially with the pickings from outlaw corpses.

You finally reach Birmingham with a bulging coin-purse. "Watch that in the city," laughs Thomas, "pickpockets thrive 'ere!"

You hope rumour also thrives within such a bustling hive of folk. You spend time in the taverns and gambling dens, asking about the ever-elusive hand of Saint Milburge. Days turn into weeks. Still no sign. You make numerous friends who promise to keep an ear out for even the slightest whisper regarding the relic.

"I'm leaving soon," announces Reginald. "There's a place for a veteran such as you."

However, your heart hangs heavy as a millstone - it has been so ever since leaving Shropshire. You shake your head. "Sorry, Reg, but I must return, see if there's been any word. Anything!"

"Aye," he puts a reassuring hand on your shoulder, "I understand. Business requires my presence in Lincoln awhile. Meet me there if nothing awaits you in the west."

Days later, you have returned to Much Wenlock to find no word concerning the relic. Yet Prior Abbot Richmond receives you warmly. Over a meal, he explains that Cecil of Kinlet had indeed apprehended both Hugh and Lukas. "Although their wretched souls had long departed," he sighs, "the Earl presented their corpses - yet no blessed hand of Saint Milburge. I fear it is lost forever to us."

"Prior Abbot, I...forgive me."

He smiles, gently shakes his head. "Strangely, Cecil of Kinlet uttered much the same thing. But your words are sincere. He returned with nothing to offer but death and revenge, yet you returned with a troubled conscience. It is not forgiveness you should seek, my son, but something else."

"And that is?"

"Destiny. Now, go and find it, with our blessing."

"Aye," you nod with stout resolve, "I'm bound for the Lincoln then. Hopefully, one day, Saint Milburge's relic will return to Much Wenlock."

Prior Abbot Richmond spreads his hands, smiles, "Godwilling."

And so begins your new life as a caravan guard. But the quest for Saint Milburge ends here.

-24-

Your arrow thuds into the crossbowman's pavise shield. Before you can even think to shout a desperate warning, his bolt penetrates the poor man's skull, killing him instantly. The bearded leader howls in triumph - before joining two of his men to attack you. After five rounds of combat, there is an opportunity to escape by turning to **60** and continue to Barrow. Should you decide to stay and fight, whenever you lose a round roll two dice: if you roll a *double*, turn to **66**. Defend yourself against these three vagabonds!

Vagabonds:
Dexterity 9 Health 18 Armour 3

If you win, the crossbowman has long since fled. A quick search reveals 2 goats and 3 silver pennies, a large Iron Key, and a rabbit worth 1 Meal (you can only cook and eat this if you possess a Flint and Tinder Box or when you reach a tavern). Despite your victory, however, you can do nothing for the slain man and head on eastwards (turn to **60**).

-25-

"What in God's name are you doing?" growls Lukas.

Hurriedly, you scribble down a message for Percy to be carried by Occulus, then thrice blow the ornate Nordic Horn. "Sending for help," you explain, grinning in anticipation.

"Ghost and Wraith are getting restless," observes Ralph.

Michael laughs. "Itching for a fight!"

"There's still too many out there," Basil peers through a window, "I don't like our chances."

"How many?"

"About thirty men, I'd say, Lukas."

"Good odds!" he growls.

"But with the Raven at their head," you sigh, "the fight would be much harder."

"*Come out, little church mice!*" crows the Raven. "*Come out...*" your eyes widen with shock upon sight of a familiar face, "*...or 'e dances a gallow's jig!*"

The archer is bound, sat astride a horse, with a noose around his neck.

"HUGH!" roars Lukas.

"Steady, steady!"

He barges past you. "That black-hearted villain is about to hang him...!"

"We go out there," Basil warns, "and they'll cut us down with arrows."

"And what's left they'll chop to pieces," adds Michael.

"But we can't just sit here-!"

"I've friends on the way, Lukas. Once the Ravenkin are distracted, only then can we attack them from this side."

"We're like rats in a trap!" sneers young Ralph.

Lukas relents – a little – but doesn't like it. He paces back and forth, occasionally peering out at Hugh Riverton who, despite his predicament, sits proud, bravely defiant to the end. He spots Lukas at the window, smiles and winks.

Then, "*Time's up! Venture forth – or 'e dies a criminal's death!*"

"Right, that's it!" snarls Lukas. "Your damned friends are too late! *Now is the time to strike!*"

"God's teeth...! Help me, lads!" But trying to restrain Lukas is like taming an enraged wild bear with a thorn in its side. It takes all your combined strength simply to slow his progress!

"HUGH!" he bellows. "I'M COMING!"

"Lukas," gasps Michael, "for Heaven's Sake-!"

"DEATH TO THE RAVEN!"

Unable to hold him, together, you stumble outside.

You flinch, expecting a hail of arrows.

Yet nothing comes. Instead, the scene before you is one of a bitter battle being waged. Your Allies have arrived! Of course, Lukas needs no invitation, his mighty gutentag sweeps in devastating arcs, hellish fury unleashed. Ghost and Wraith then lurch ahead, tooth and claw rending, spilling blood, breaking bone, the blood of ancient killer war-dogs coursing through their veins.

"Oh well," shrugs Basil

"All for one...!" declares Michael.

"...And one for all!" concludes Ralph.

Grimly, you draw your weapon, then step into the fray...

**Ravenkin Horseman:
Dexterity 8 Health 10 Armour 3**

If you win, turn to **84**.

-26-

The arrow creases Lukas's head. He staggers back, clutching the wound. You take the opportunity to get inside his defence and trip him. A mighty shove topples this giant oak of a man. He crashes to the floor. Turn to **49**.

-27-

This road takes you through dew-shrouded meadows leading to a looming tree-line ahead. Shropshire is perhaps one of the most forested counties of England - a useful haven for all manner of outlaws. If you have 'Raven Hooded' noted down turn to **85**. Otherwise, turn to **5**.

-28-

Patron heads begin to turn in mild curiosity: a cloaked man is pushing his way through the crowd towards you. Surely an assassin wouldn't try anything here? Yet, you tense, ready for imminent danger.

"It *is* you!" he gasps. "The one of which Seb spoke – the soldier!"

"Plenty of soldiers around here," you frown, "what of it...priest?"

His intensely green eyes brighten, "Oui, of a fashion, mon ami. A...how do you say? Warrior monk, of the Cluniac Order."

"In France, I'd wager, from your accent."

"Oui, oui," he nods eagerly. "Very perceptive of you. I have travelled far in search of you."

"Why me?"

"Saint Milburge's voice guided me, a vision you might say. Please, you must accompany me to the church of Saint Mary's, here in Harley. We've no time to waste! Er, but you must come alone."

This sounds ominous! "Oh, and why 'alone'?"

"What I have to impart is of the utmost secrecy to my Order. Even in such desperate times – lest evil ambitious souls gain a truly divine weapon intended to smite sinners!"

All this could be some elaborate ruse to lure you out. But, on the other hand, what if he's telling the truth? Will you agree to accompany him (turn to **83**) or barge past him and depart, with due haste, for Sheinton (turn to **46**)?

-29-

You must try to kill all three horsemen before they reach your position. Roll two dice. If it is the same or less than your Range Dexterity score, the first foe is slain. If it is higher, then you have missed. Now repeat the procedure twice for his comrades. If you succeed in *killing all* three at a distance turn to **82**. But if all three assailants *survive* turn to **52**. Otherwise, defend yourself:

Brigand:

Dexterity 8 Health 10 Armour 2

OR, Two Brigands:

Dexterity 9 Health 16 Armour 3

If you dispatch the foe, turn to **82**.

-30-

“Here,” Prior Abbot Richmond presses into your hand a coin purse, “this should make the road ahead less burdening. Our blessings, my son, and may God watch over your most holy quest.” Note down you have a total of 20 Silver Pennies. Remember that 1 Groat (if you find any) equals 4 Silver Pennies, in case you need change from a transaction.

“Thank you, Prior Abbot.”

You've only taken several paces when an elderly man with white hair shambles into view. “So, ye're goin' young 'un?”

“Seb,” you grin fondly, “you've stayed late into this morning. Something ails thee?”

“No, no, only that I wish t' sample the Lady's tears one last time before the long journey home. Would yer wish t' accompany me?”

It's only a short walk to the Weeping Cross. However, time is pressing and any delay would make your quest much more difficult. Will you walk with Seb (turn to **6**) or not (turn to **48**)?

-31-

At the last moment, you spy the skulking archer at a ragged hole in the thatch. You duck, running headlong for the ruined house – just as a lethal crossbow bolt whistles close past your head. *Another inch it and would have killed me!* you realize with cold dread. However, in your haste, you have blundered straight into the lion's mouth: this ruin is a footpad den! Turn to **50**.

-32-

The bolt slams into the unfortunate man's shoulder. However, you manage to reach him in time and fend off a savage attack by the bearded man. However, whenever you lose a round, roll two dice – if you roll a double, turn to **66**. As they close in, together you prepare for a tough battle!

Vagabonds:
Dexterity 8 Health 16 Armour 3

If you manage to defeat the three Vagabonds, the crossbowman has long since fled (turn to **72**).

-33-

As if with a mind of its own, the mace sweeps down hard upon your opponent's shield, once, twice, thrice. Even the Raven staggers beneath such powerful force of this supernatural weapon. He swiftly recovers, charges, readying a mighty blow from his axe aimed at your head. You let him come - then suddenly dodge aside, twist round, bringing the mace round in a circular arc. He checks, raises his shield once more, yet so breathtaking is the speed that his shield arm is brutally yanked aside, exposing his midriff. He shouts defiantly, hand-axe sweeping round with the motion. But you're already inside his defence. The mace bludgeons forwards, connects sharply with his helmet, denting the plate. The Raven snarls pain, staggers back, while another mighty swing tears the shield from his grasp. This time, he twists round with a side-swipe aimed at your midriff. You simply step back, letting it pass. Now he's off-balance, you step forwards, bring the mace down hard on his head. Both you and the virtuous spirit of Conrado Montero are as one. Moves are lightning fast and powerful. The Raven hits the flagstones hard. Panting against such terrible pain, groggily he attempts to regain his feet. An uppercut blow catches him full in the visored face, sending him flat on his back, helmet goes flying. This formidable fighter somehow finds the strength to move, hand scrabbling for his axe. He finds it. But you stamp down hard on the

weapon. He gasps, gazes up, his face a mask of hatred and blood. "Yer..." he pants, "...meddlin'...knave!"

"All this suffering and death," you shake your head in futility, "for your own greed."

"N-no," he rasps, "I-I'm the...King's man. F-forever...!"

Kicking the axe away, you haul him up, shove him hard against the battlements. His one hand finds a dagger at his belt. He tries to gut you, yet you grab his wrist, mace jabs into his unprotected face. Blood streams from his nose. Another jab. His mouth wells blood. He drops the dagger, sags against cold stone. By now, the fight has left him.

"Oh no," you whisper in his ear, "I want you conscious for what happens next."

He doubles at a brutal blow to his stomach. Then, finally, you swing the mace round in a powerful uppercut. Force of impact sends him flying over the battlements, to the ground far below. You lean upon the parapet, peer down. He isn't moving. Even the feared Raven couldn't survive such a fall. *It seems an age ago, you wonder, when he welcomed me into the Raven's Roost.* But now it's all finished with, a distant memory. Turn to **65**.

-34-

It takes a while to get served, but finally you catch his attention. "What'll it be, sir?" he asks.

"What do you recommend?"

"Hmm...the Runnymede is a fine brew.

Spend 1sp for a flagon of ale that restores 2 Health points. "Also, I was wondering if you could help me...?"

"No offence, sir, but as you can see..." he gestures around, "my place is heavin'! Oh, very well, but pray don't dally."

"I'm wondering if you've heard anything about a stolen relic?"

"Saint Milburge's relic," he realizes. "No, 'eard nothing. But, if anybody, I'd wager it was that thief, Eli Silvers. Been a blight on Much Wenlock's countryside fer years!"

"Any idea where he is?"

He laughs. "That's a good one! Now, if I knew that, I'd be rich with the bounty law's put on his head. Well, rumour has it he haunts somewhere around Harley. He an' his footpads, they've been spotted a couple of times, out on the prowl. Right, good sir, if you'll excuse me..."

This might prove a valuable lead. Will you ask around the tavern patrons who clearly have more time to talk (turn to **69**), or, if you feel you have delayed enough, head north for Homer (turn to **27**), or east towards Barrow (turn to **42**)?

-35-

"Care to lay a wager on that, Eli?"

He offers you a quizzical look. "Wha-?"

"*Look out!*"

Both faithful hounds come leaping to your aid, temporarily causing confusion, pain, and suffering. Suddenly, one of the windows implodes. Several footpads cower in shock and stagger back from splinters of glass (lose 1 Health point). Then, the slaughter begins as Lukas Tillens is let loose with his deadly gutentag and insatiable lust for battle.

"What kept you?"

"Save the jesting for later," he growls with relish, "there's work to be done!"

You can now contend with these scum on more equal terms:

Eli's Footpad Horde:
Dexterity 8 Health 14 Armour 2

If you win, turn to **21**.

-36-

Fleeing from the cold, relentless rain, you gain shelter of the dilapidated barn. However, somebody else seems to have the same idea....

"YOU!" growls an all-too familiar voice.

"Lukas Tillens," you gasp in shock.

The fearsome mercenary leaps to his feet, gutentag tightly grasped, ready to crush your skull. If you're an Archer and possess at least one arrow turn to **97**. If not, but have only a dagger turn to **64**. Otherwise, prepare to defend yourself from this gigantic mercenary!

Lukas Tillens:
Dexterity 8 Health 16 Armour 4

Fight until you have reduced his Health to 4 or less, then turn to **76**.

-37-

The man's eyes narrow. "You'd do well to mind yer business 'ere, stranger."

"And you'd do well to mind your manners."

"Oho!" he glowers. "My fists'r much faster than yer tongue, knave!"

His friends shout encouragement: "Come on, Jeremiah, show this stranger a thing or two!"

You must not use any weapons and therefore lose any such bonuses for this combat. However, Jeremiah is an experienced brawler, his fists are like iron! If you are struck, deduct 1 from your Health (regardless of any Armour you wear).

Jeremiah:
Dexterity 8 Health (see below)

This is a non-lethal brawl lasting a total of *nine* rounds. If you win more rounds turn to **98**. If he wins more rounds turn to **3**. Note that tied scores do not count, in which case you must roll again

-38-

Whilst staggering and struggling to heave the weight, two throwing knives find their mark in your throat. "About time!" bellows the footpad. You collapse to your knees, unable to fend off a multitude of clubs and blades butchering you.

-39-

You gaze upon the mortally wounded Harry and simply ask: "Why?"

"Heh," he coughs up blood, "th-that's....for th-the....Raven t-to....answer! B-but you'll...be...d-dead before....th-then!"

He spits out his final word, slumps back, staring eyes vacant, lifeless. Your blood runs cold with the realization that the Raven wants you dead. But why? Everybody knows that Lukas and Hugh were responsible for the relic's theft. So why were these men instructed to assassinate you? Certainly, it confirms Prior Abbot Richmond's suspicions - yet what are Cecil of Kinlet's motives?

"Two Ravenkin fer the pluckin'," chuckles Godfrey. His sudden presence startles you.

Suddenly, Jeremiah emerges, red-faced with rage. "God's teeth! You annoyin' piece o' dung-!" he soon shuts up, shocked at finding you. He then glares down to the lifeless body sprawled at your

feet.

“Godfrey's with me, Jeremiah. Understand?”

“Aye,” he swallows hard, “that I do.”

He backs away, frowning hard at the beggar, then turns and strides back towards the Golden Goose, grumbling: “Huh, that pile o' rags'll be the death o' me!”

“Thank thee again, sire, ye saved me from another beatin' there.”

“And you saved my *life*, Godfrey! You knew my drink was poisoned?”

“Aye,” he offers a crooked grin, tapping his keen ears by way of explanation.

“A novel method to upset their plans.”

“An' fun, sire!”

“I'm in your debt, my friend.”

“As I'm in yers.”

You nudge the corpse with your boot. “Wonder what he's carrying?”

“Allow me, sire!” Godfrey's nimble fingers go to work with practised ease, finding Harry's coin purse easily enough. He peers inside. “One, two, three....what comes next? Er, sire...?”

“Allow me: hmm, four groats and....seven silver pennies. Not a bad sum, eh? Here you go.”

Godfrey's mouth falls open. “Ye....ye're givin' it t' me, sire?”

“Why not? You earned it, after all.”

Godfrey simply stares at the purse, weighing it in his palm, hardly believing.

“Oh, and his sword...”

“Aye, sire?”

“You're certain to get a good price for that, it's a fine blade. Take care, Godfrey!”

“God's blessin's be on ye, sire! Friend o' Godfrey!” he whoops at your receding back. Note down the words 'Raven Hooded'. Now, if you haven't already, will you explore the town (turn to **48**), or depart Much Wenlock and head north to Homer (turn to **27**), or east to Barrow (turn to **42**)?

-40-

Suddenly, one of the windows implode. Several footpads cower in shock and stagger back from splinters of glass (lose 1 Heath point). Then, the slaughter begins as Lukas Tillens is let loose with his deadly gutentag and insatiable lust for battle.

“What kept you?”

“Save the jesting for later,” he growls with relish, “there's work to be done!”

Eli's Footpad Horde:
Dexterity 8 Health 20 Armour 2

If you defeat the foe, turn to **21**.

-41-

But wait! Your keen eyes discern a figure lurking within the shadows at one of the ragged holes in the thatch. Moments later, pale sunlight glints from the polished steel of a crossbow. Should this sentry spot your approach, it will make your task more difficult. However, you're a veteran archer with years of practice: the arrow sails cleanly through the opening, skewering the footpad's throat, killing him instantly.

Deftly, you clamber up the wall – such weathered stone and daub provides plentiful hand- and toe-holds. Using the now vacant hole as a makeshift entrance, you slither inside like a serpent. You're in a landing with three bedroom doors leading off. From below, you can hear raised voices, urgent shouts, the unmistakable sound of swords being drawn; the footpads you had defeated earlier are alerting their comrades.

"Eli!" shouts one of them from below. "*Eli, there's been trouble!*"

In response, a door opens. Seizing the initiative, you barge into their leader. Such a powerful surprise attack throws him back inside with a crash.

"Hey, 'ere that...? E's upstairs!"

While Eli is busy recovering, you slam the iron bar, bolts, and heave a desk across the doorway for good measure. It might keep them at bay for a short while.

"Yer foolish dog!" snarls Eli, his one good eye baleful. "Yer trapped!"

"Strangely enough, so are you."

"Hah! My men will tear you apart!"

"Not before I kill you."

Panicked bangs and shouts from behind causes him to leer. Slowly, he draws a sharp knife and billhook. "Oh, we'll see about that," he cackles.

Eli Silvers:
Dexterity 9 Health 13 Armour 2

If you manage to defeat him in 8 rounds or less turn to **21**, otherwise turn to **50**.

-42-

The road to Barrow is soon shrouded by trees - although, at this time of year, their branches aren't so dense with leaves; most of which have fallen to create an amber carpet that rustles loudly beneath your feet. You only hope any nearby vagrants don't hear you. Most birds have fled south to warmer climes, their song now dwindled to only a few trills and ugly croak of crows. Chimney smoke mingles with a chill air. The land is being cloaked in autumn's sombre embrace, a vanguard to winter's white thrall.

A short while later, you hear the distinct clamour of battle: the clanging of swords, shouts of frustrated effort and pain. Will you investigate what's happening (turn to **7**) or, eager to avoid unnecessary risks, continue onwards to Barrow (turn to **60**)?

-43-

The danger passed, hurriedly you bar the church door then rush to Gilles side. He's barely breathing, but manages to gasp: "Th-the...key, Liv.!" Then, he goes limp in your arms. Although too late to help him now, you can at least attempt to fulfil his dying wish by opening the tomb. How old was Sir Conrado when he died? If you think you know, turn to the reference that is the same as your answer. Otherwise, if your attempt is wrong, the seal snaps back into its initial position, frozen in place. A search of the brigands turns up 1 goat, 2 silver pennies, and 2 Arrows. Sighing at Gilles wasteful sacrifice, you've little choice but to continue towards Sheinton (turn to **46**).

-44-

In one fluid move, you have drawn the blade clean across his throat. His eyes widen, gurgles surprise - then is still. You feel no sense of satisfaction in his death, only sadness, with the added frustration of having got nowhere closer to regaining Saint Milburge's hand. All that remains now is the journey onwards. Turn to **15**.

-45-

Both faithful hounds come leaping to your aid, temporarily causing confusion, pain, and suffering. Yet, even with such ferocious allies, this battle will be a hard, bloody one:

**Eli's Footpad Horde:
Dexterity 8 Health 30 Armour 2**

If, somehow, you prevail over the odds, turn to **21**.

-46-

You finally sight the church of St Peter and St Paul on a hill within Sheinton's boundaries. Sat at the foot of this hill you find three men, exhausted, bloody, and bruised. They are being tended by the parish priest who apparently knows a little about wounds and medicine.

"What ails thee?"

"This," sighs the priest, "is the work of Cecil of Kinlet."

One of the men, a muscular dark-haired fellow with a beard irritably swats away the hand bathing his brow. "Aye, damn right it was! That...*Raven's* responsible for condemning our beloved sister to the flames!"

"A witch?"

"No, she was *innocent*," snarls the second man, "he-!"

The third gets to his feet, a reassuring hand goes to his brother's shoulder. "Aye, he couldn't have his way with her, so he condemned her to a burning."

"That man," the priest shakes his head in futility, "has a dark soul the shadow of Satan himself."

Do you have a Wedding Band? If so, multiply the number of pearls by the number of emeralds and turn to that reference. If not, turn to **74**.

-47-

The Raven falls to his knees, mortally wounded. "All this," you shake your head in futility, "for your own greed?"

"N-no," he rasps, "I-I'm the...*King's* man. F-forever...!"

He then pitches forward upon the flagstones, dead. Sir Cecil of Kinlet, the feared, ruthless Raven, is no more.

It seems an age ago, you wonder, when he welcomed me into the Raven's Roost. But now it's all finished with, a distant memory.

Turn to **65**.

-48-

For a small town, Much Wenlock's Bull Ring market is thronged with people. "Is this some kind of festival?" you ask a nearby fletcher.

He regards your puzzlement with a bemused expression. "It is now," he shrugs, "all in honour of the latest miracle."

"You're a believer in such, then?"

"No, I simply go where the money is. Have to earn a livin', soldier."

"Where do you hail from?"

"Bristol."

"A fair distance."

"Aye, that is it, but both my brothers are back home, mindin' the trade there. Meanwhile, I'm travellin', found myself here, takin' advantage of the....dispute."

You hesitate, then: "Which House do you support?"

"Red rose, white..." he shrugs again, "makes little difference to a trader as myself. An' most appreciate my wares. Takin' sides is bad for business, halves the profit, see?"

"I see. How much are your arrows?"

"For you, two pennies apiece."

If you're an Archer, you may purchase 1 Arrow per 2sp - however, you decide it wise to retain a minimum of 4sp for future expenses.

"By the way, any interesting rumours around the town?"

"Might have," he smiles thinly. "What's it worth to thee? Threepence, I'm reckonin'..."

Will you reply: "Aye, agreed!" (turn to **13**) or "Too steep for me! Good day, Master Fletcher." (turn to **68**)?

-49-

You pounce on his sprawled body before he has a chance to recover. A dagger blade touches his throat. Lukas pants heavily, hard eyes stare into your own, defiant to the end.

"Go on," he spits, "time to complete your treachery, schwein!"

"Where is Saint Milburge's relic? Tell me, and I'll spare your life."

He sneers a laugh. "Spare me? For what? Only to face the gallows!"

"It's the hand I'm after," you shake your head, "not your miserable, thieving life. Return the relic and you can go. I give you my word, Lukas."

"An interesting proposition," he frowns, "unfortunately....I've no idea where it is."

"What?"

"It's the truth, I swear."

"Somehow, I find that hard to believe."

"It's true!" he growls. "That....Raven," he spits, "betrayed us to the law."

This is a most difficult situation to judge: Lukas might likely say anything to get out of his predicament - although, given the Raven's ruthless reputation, his words also make an eerie sense. However, you can't risk leaving such a dangerous soldier alive if he's lying. Will you slit his throat, quickly (turn to **44**) or allow him a chance to explain (turn to **12**)?

-50-

You are now surrounded by footpads eager to finish you off. "Just say the word, Eli," gloats one footpad, "we'll take 'im!"

Eli cackles in triumph: "Seems like yer out o' luck, soldier..."

If you have any Companions, then now would be a good time to use them! Otherwise, turn to **96**.

-51-

"Curse that meddlin' archer - you two, keep 'im busy!"

You must switch to a close combat weapon and deal with these two vagabonds.

Vagabonds:

Dexterity 8 Health 14 Armour 2

If you defeat both your opponents, turn to **72**.

-52-

Desperately, you duck, dodge, and try to fend off these ferocious attackers with cowled faces. However, you're heavily outmatched and they've bought precious time for their comrades to emerge from the forest. Against such overwhelming odds, you stand no chance of survival.

-53-

One of the larger houses on Spittle Street devotes its entire ground floor to a glover's owned by Tobias Perch. Two Great Danes – one black, one white – are relaxed just before the door but stir at your approach. They stand, muscles tense, teeth bared to a warning growl. You hesitate. "Down!" barks an equally fierce voice. "Ghost! Wraith! Down, boys, down!"

Startled, you turn to see a man somewhat short in stature that belies his confident manner. Dark eyes regard you carefully and his grey-white moustache twitches as he speaks. "This man poses no threat, I *hope*," he emphasizes the last word; its warning tone isn't lost on your perceptiveness, but then becomes hopeful, "even better that he be a customer, perhaps?"

"Your wares certainly match those of the greatest craftsman, Master Perch," you reply diplomatically.

"Good of ye to say, friend, but eventually they serve new owners and that's enough for me. I've gloves for all kind of folk and occasions. Indeed, one of the King's men came by only yesterday afternoon, requiring a new pair of leather gauntlets reinforced with steel strips. Aye, a knight, but one desiring *more* than hand-wear into the bargain."

"Oh?"

"He was making eyes at my Annabel!"

"It's about her I've come to see you."

"I see," he replies whilst spotting the red rose emblem on your chest. "Are you one of his men?"

"No, fear not! I've had the....er, honour to meet him only yesterday morn."

"Huh, 'honour!'" he grumbles.

"In fact, I fought two of his men last night, they tried..."

His eyes then widen in shock. "Why...you're that soldier from the monastery. The one healed by Saint Milburge! The whole town heard about what happened there: a Godless travesty! The law is hunting those two sacrilegious outlaws as we speak. Praise God," he crosses himself, "they'll soon be caught. But, for now, come inside, we'll discuss this further over some honey mead."

Once inside, he locks the door, then invites you to sit in the back room comprising an office and study. "Oh aye," he growls sarcastically over poured mead, "the *noble* Sir Cecil of Kinlet in whom I've had the utmost displeasure to meet, let me tell you!"

"He made advances towards your daughter?"

"Aye, and she didn't return them. Proves that my girl has good sense besides a kind heart. But his...*leering* tested even her patience, believe me!"

"Hmm," you lean back, sipping the sweet honey mead, deep in thought. "Forgive me for asking, Master Perch, but do you suspect that she's been...?"

"Kidnapped?" he finishes. "It's possible. But, I don't know," he shakes his head, frustrated, "I mean, something ailed her last night. She was ponderous, distracted, troubled."

"You think something was said to her, by the Raven or his men?"

"I'm uncertain. However, during mid-afternoon, after Kinlet departed for the Priory, she felt dizzy and faint. At my insistence she rested for a couple of hours. Upon waking she seemed, as I said, deeply troubled. Yet also with a sense of urgency, as if she had an important task to complete."

"Curious," you frown.

"Very. I first realized she'd gone missing some hours before the...theft at the Priory."

You can only hope that she didn't stumble upon the treacherous schemes of Lukas and Hugh – yet keep such disturbing thoughts from a distraught Tobias. "I've alerted the town, sent messengers to neighbouring settlements for any sign of her. Even offered a hefty reward for

hopeful tidings of her whereabouts.”

“I’ll keep vigil for any tidings, Master Perch.”

“Aye,” he nods, offering a wan smile, “that is all I can ask and pray for. Yet, perhaps there is one way we can aid each other: Ghost! Wraith! Come here, you idle rascals!”

The loyal guard-dogs come bounding in, panting, tails wagging. “Look at ‘em,” chuckles Tobias as he fusses them, “adorable as puppy dogs now. But, give the word, and they’ll transform into demons possessed! And that’s why they’re going with you.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“They’d be able to pick up Annabel’s scent,” he explains, “and your path ahead will be a dangerous one; they’re good in a fight.”

“I can believe that.” You distinctly recall Brother Roubert describing from ancient writings how the Romans, Celts, and Germanic tribesmen used to breed fierce war-hounds.

He then embraces you like a brother so that both dogs understand what’s happening. Then, with a hand on your shoulder, he says to them: “Go with him. Ghost, Wraith. *Go with him!* Find *Annabel!* Now,” he turns to you, “command them to come.”

You do as Tobias instructs, hesitantly.

“Be firm!” he tuts reprovingly.

“Come,” you command in a sterner tone, “Ghost, Wraith, *come!*”

Uncertainly, they look to their master Tobias, cock their heads. He ushers them toward you with a gesture. “Don’t fret,” he assures them, “*go with him!*”

Slowly, they slink over to sit by your feet. You fondle their ears as both peer up at you. “Ah, they’ve taken to you,” grins Tobias.

“We’ll find Annabel,” you reassure him, “or rather, Ghost and Wraith will.”

“Aye, at least it gives us a fighting chance. Good fortune on the road ahead, soldier.”

Each dog has a collar with five spikes attached. Both Ghost and Wraith will aid you during difficult situations: at times throughout the adventure, the text will ask if you have Companions or some way to determine which is the best way onwards - in which case, deduct 5 from the entry you’re on at the time.

Tobias also gifts to you a Spiked Gauntlet. If you win two consecutive rounds, you inflict an extra 2 points of Health damage on a foe. Taking leave of Tobias Perch - his loyal Great Danes following at your heels - you wonder where to head next. However, it seems both your canine companions are lurching towards the east road to Barrow. If you wish to head this way turn to **42**. Or, if you prefer to visit the market for any useful supplies, note down this entry number and turn to **68**.

-54-

With a satisfying ‘clunk’, the seal then rotates full circle, a device retracts pins beneath the lid of Conrado Montero’s tomb. Tentatively, with a brief prayer of apology to both the Knight’s spirit and to God, you prise off the heavy marble lid. There, clutched in one bony hand, is a mace. It actually seems quite ordinary in appearance – yet, upon grasping its hilt, a sudden warmth travels the length of your arm, imbues your mind with a calm, confident resolve. Restore 4 Health Points. “*Sir Conrado’s honour bless you, paladin,*” whispers a lady’s voice. You glance around at the shadows within this cold church – yet realize it’s the virtuous spirit of Saint Milburge in communication once more.

“Aye,” you nod, “I shall not fail your worth in me.”

Note the Divine Mace of Conrado Montero on your Status Sheet. With a final prayer of gratitude, you re-close the lid upon the knight’s tomb. A quick search of the brigands turns up 1 goat, 2 silver pennies, and 2 Arrows. Loathing to leave the noble Brother Gilles unburied, at least his final duty was fulfilled. Turn to **46**.

-55-

Both Ghost and Wraith lead you towards a track-way which you know leads north to Wyke. Annabel must have come this way. However, will you first visit the Shroud and Sceptre in search for more information (turn to **62**), or set off for Wyke without delay (turn to **95**)?

-56-

“WAHEY!”

Next instant, the flagon is sent spinning from your hand. “What on earth-!”

Godfrey hops upon the table, performs a mad jig, cackling insanely. “Honest 'earts,” he sings tunelessly, “easily fooled! WOOO-HOOO!” He gives you the tiniest of winks, but one that you spot nonetheless.

“Why, you-!” snarls Peter.

“Can't catch me, Ravenkin. Ye've a sting of sin! Wahey!”

Godfrey has leapt off the table, narrowly avoiding a savage stab from Peter's dagger. Then, he turns on you – but you're ready for him. Just as he lunges for your stomach, you bring up a stool. The blade sinks into the wood from such force. Without effort, you pull the hilt from his grasp, claim the dagger, then leap over the table and plunge it into his neck. He gurgles surprise, then goes limp as a fish.

“Call the watch!” shouts a voice over the panicked screams, jeers, and cheering.

“Ravenkin's friend 'as fled!” sings Godfrey, “he goes to kin who want you dead!”

God bless you Godfrey!

Barging through the throng, you race outside - just in time to catch Harry untie the reins and leap into the saddle. If you're an Archer and possess at least one arrow turn to **16**. Otherwise, turn to **79**.

-57-

Whilst wrestling with your decision, Ghost and Wraith seem restless by your feet. They paw the tavern door, whining, look at you then paw the door again.

“Aye,” you sigh, “calm yourselves. We're leaving.”

However, they're very eager to travel the northerly track to Wyke. You frown: *so Annabel definitely came by this way?* You hesitate, peering at St Giles, then realize that your promise to a distraught father is far more important than financial gain. Besides, even if you fail to find the relic, at least some good may come of your journey...*if you can survive its perils.*

“Slow down, you two!” you call whilst following the canine guides.

Turn to **95**.

-58-

You decide to meet up with the Raven and see if he's learned the whereabouts of the relic. With any luck, he might have already recovered it. His men seem somewhat startled by your sudden arrival.

“Hail Cecil of Kinlet!” you announce. “What tidings?”

He peers at you, chuckles, then mounts his destrier that walks steadily in your direction. “Yer a 'ard man t' kill,” he says.

Strange words of welcome, you frown. “Aye, well...it's true I've had an arduous journey.”

“One that end's 'ere. Kill 'im where 'e stands!”

Already, you're running back towards the church, a holy sanctuary – yet hear the horse's hooves behind, getting closer, closer, lance point bearing down. Desperately, you feint, dodge, and duck strokes from all sides – but they're merely boxing you in. At such speed, with that heavy, deadly lance in the hands of a seasoned veteran, you are impaled.

-59-

Flickering flames perform a hypnotic dance on the ceiling, lulling you to sleep...

"Roubert..."

You wake with a start. Whose voice was that? A woman – yet there are none to be seen here. Then, you remember: Hugh and Lukas! Your heart sinks when you can't identify them amongst the snoring men.

Instinctively, you head for where Brother Roubert, the library custodian, should be. He often stays up late perusing old documents and manuscripts. You know he's also keeper of the key that opens the casket containing Saint Milburge's hand. Closer to the library itself, you hear angry voices (mostly Roubert, God bless him!) then the sounds of a struggle. Roubert is a redoubtable fellow yet the oldest monk in Wenlock Priory; against two veteran soldiers he stands no chance. Nevertheless, he defies both men as best he can. Witnessing such brutal behaviour towards an elderly man – and a priestly one at that – boils your blood.

"HOLD!" you challenge. "Lay down your weapons, now! Or face me!"

Lukas hefts his gutentag, strides towards you, snarling, "So be it."

Lukas Tillens:
Dexterity 8 Health (see below) Armour 4

Conduct *three* rounds of combat, after which you notice Brother Roubert has been knocked unconscious by Hugh. Anger distracts you from the fight – and Lukas seizes this opportunity to strike. The pommel of his gutentag clunks you hard across the head. The whole world goes black....(turn to **18**).

-60-

St. Giles forms the centre of Barrow. With its squat, square tower, the church hardly proves an inspiring place of worship. What does divert your attention is a sizeable congregation assembled outside its doors: three carts guarded by half a dozen hired mercenaries.

"What happens here?"

"Death."

You are somewhat startled by this short, grim reply.

"We're buryin' one of our own," another more helpfully explains. "Forgive Thomas here, he an' Basil served together awhile, best friends, yer see."

"Oh, my pardon."

"Footpads," spits Thomas, "vagabonds....the devil take 'em!"

"Killed three of us. The priest is prayin' for their souls as we speak."

"I see. Where's your paymaster?"

"He drinks in the Shroud and Sceptre," replies Thomas, "workin' up 'is nerve to journey this accursed road to Birmingham, I'd wager."

Perhaps this merchant has learned something useful in his travels? Unless there's another route open to you, there's nothing to lose by going to meet with him in the tavern. On the way, a young lad comes running from a track-way leading north. Will you stop him to ask what the haste is all about (turn to **11**) or continue to the Shroud and Sceptre (turn to **62**)?

-61-

Upon reaching Harley, you decide to stop by The Rook and Bishop. As with many taverns, it's fairly crowded with locals and travellers. Although you may spend 1sp for a flagon of ale (restore 2 Health points), 3sp for a Meal of beef broth and bread (restore 4 Health points), or 1 goat for both (restore 6 Health points), you're really here for rumour and gossip relating to the relic's whereabouts. However, you begin to despair of ever learning anything useful...if you're wearing a Pilgrim's Badge turn to **28**. Otherwise, turn to **46** to head on to Sheinton.

-62-

The Shroud and Sceptre is a roadside tavern, a welcome respite for travellers and traders alike. There aren't many patrons, only a rotund, balding fellow with trimmed moustache and beard, regaling a small crowd with his tales of foreign cities.

"My pardon," you nod, "you must be the merchant whose wagons are by yonder church?"

He blinks surprise. "Aye, Reginald Yaxley, spice merchant, at your service, er...?"

You introduce yourself, then observe: "You're a learned fellow, it seems! Pray you heard tell of any thieving recently?"

"Doubtless you speak of what happened in Wenlock Priory? Aye, 'tis by now common knowledge."

"I thought perhaps you might have learned of it whereabouts..."

"Soldier, let me tell you, that it's likely such a precious relic has gone to ground with its outlawed bearers. Now, it was two men who stole it? Regrettably, I've heard nor seen naught fitting their descriptions. Forgive my...blasphemy, but it seems your holy quest is a most difficult and desperate one. Perhaps they're in the pay of another who desires it? Who can say?"

You nod sincere agreement. "Questions I've often asked myself - yet I have no answers."

"Listen," he leans closer, "I sympathise with your plight, friend. Yet, perhaps we can help each other? I'm short on men, while you require funds to further your cause. I'm bound for Birmingham and, who knows, perhaps the goal to your quest lies along that same road?"

"You're a very shrewd tradesman, Master Yaxley."

"Aye, that I am." He drains the flagon, then gets to his feet. "At least think on my offer. I pay 1 goat per man, per day. Loot from slain footpads, vagabonds, and such is split between the caravan guards. Meet me at St. Giles in one hour when we depart."

It's a tempting offer indeed. And you concede to his argument that the relic could be fifty miles from here by now, in any direction. Who knows which way you should go now? Unless there is some other indication, you decide that entering Reginald Yaxley's employ is perhaps a better option by turning to **23**.

-63-

"What's your name, my fellow?"

"Godfrey, sire. An' yours?"

You reply, yet soon find yourself explaining more than your name, sensing that you can trust this beggar's gratitude to ensure discretion. Besides, you need to find some clues surrounding the relic's whereabouts.

"Hmm," Godfrey strokes his beard, "folk'd sooner spit on me than speak t' me. They speak t' each other, see, but oh, do I *listen* sire!"

"Heard anything interesting?"

"T' start with, two o' yer own bloody roses....er, Lancastrians," he corrects hastily, "are suppin' ale yonder."

"They've stayed to keep tabs on Much Wenlock, I'd wager, keeping their eyes and ears open for

any word of Hugh and Lukas.”

“Godfrey shakes his head. “Makes little sense t’ me, sire. They spoke o’ only one man, comin’ from direction o’ the Priory.”

“Perhaps they’ve discovered something and wish to divulge?”

“Perhaps,” he echoes, giving you a shrewd look, “ware, sire: an honest ‘eart is most oft easiest t’ fool.”

“Well....I’ll be bear that in mind, Godfrey. Anything else?”

“Hmm, Wenlock guard is on the watch fer signs o’ plague. Rumour’s Cressage ‘as caught a bout o’ it, but,” he shrugs, “in this day an’ age, who can say? An’ then there’s a most...” he struggles over the next word: “...*bizarre* soul indeed! Frenchie, I’d say, from ‘is accent.”

“What’s bizarre about that?”

“E passed through ‘ere, dressed in the ‘abit of a monk, cowl an’ all, but...‘e was carryin’ a battleaxe – *huge*, it was, taller than a man, I’d wager!”

A fighting monk? “Curious. For where was he bound?”

“Well, ‘e asked aroun’, lookin’ fer a man on a ‘oly quest, then ‘eaded north to ‘arley, not far from ‘ere.”

“Aye, if he’s still there....”

“Oh, ‘e will be sire.”

“You sound certain.”

“Drove folk mad wi’ ‘is questions. Endless, sire, *endless*! Moved on, finally, but ain’t given up. That one was on a mission.”

“What other tidings?”

“Naught else, o’ interest, sire,” he sighs, “least fer now.”

“Take care, Godfrey. I’ll buy you another Summer’s Haze upon my return – with Saint Milburge’s hand.”

“Aye, Godspeed wi’ such, sire. Godfrey’ll be ‘ere, waitin’ t’ drink t’ that!”

Make a note of the name ‘Godfrey’. Will you now head inside the Golden Goose (turn to **91**) head north to Homer (turn to **27**), or east to Barrow (turn to **42**)?

-64-

Alas, armed only with a dagger, you cannot hope to match such a formidable, plate-armoured opponent. He beats down your pitiful defence and delivers the killing blow.

-65-

“Are you hurt?”

“N-no,” she replies, taking your hand. “Just shaken.”

“Come, let us leave this place...”

“No, *no!*” she pulls away. “I came here to heal the sick and suffering. Saint Milburge called upon me, in a vision.”

You sigh, too weary even to argue. “Aye, very well...wha-? What are *you* two doing here?”

“Ghost!” she squeals happily. “Wraith!”

“You...you know them?”

“Well of *course* I do! They’re my father’s guard-dogs.”

You almost collapse with uncontrollable laughter. It all makes sense now - yet surely the Lord works in mysterious ways. “*You’re Annabel!*”

“Aye,” she frowns, “so..?”

“Your father tasked me to find you, aye!”

While tending the plague victims in Cressage, the Raven’s final words return to haunt you: ‘a *King’s man, forever*’. It’s not until your arrival in Sheinton when matters clarify.

"Bloody your white roses," you advise Percy and his men, "with all haste! And let's pray our next guest won't recognise most of the dead as Ravenkin. Or he'll know something is wrong."

"Guest?"

Sure enough, as evening falls, thirty armed horsemen arrive on the scene – displaying the royal banner. "Here he comes. Everybody," you instruct, "kneel."

King Henry kicks his horse forward, surveying the dreadful carnage for a long moment, aristocratic face calm yet pale. It's common knowledge he has a delicate disposition and recoils easily in the face of such butchery. "Where—" he coughs, "where's Sir Cecil of Kinlet?"

"With your permission, sire," you reply, "he's departed for Cressage."

"Cressage? What in God's name is he doing there? He sent message to me, requesting my presence in Sheinton. He has a certain...object of interest." Just as you'd suspected! "Are you in charge here?" he asks of you. "Rise, man!"

"Aye, sire, there was a...complication at the priory. The Raven pursued the relic to Cressage – yet has not returned. That was over a day ago."

"Lord save us, what happened here?"

"Yorkist dogs, sire!" answers Lukas. "They tried to take over the village, but we stopped them, hard."

"Ah!" he smiles in recognition. "Lukas Tillens, is it? I remember! How are you, my Flemish giant?"

"Alive, sire!" he grins, hefting his gutentag in salute.

Thank God! you sigh with relief: word of the mercenary's implication hasn't yet reached such royal ears.

"Good, good. Now, Cressage lies due west..."

"Plague is rife there, sire."

He looks at you, face whitens as ice. "Plague?"

"Afraid so, sire," confirms Basil.

Lukas nods. "And the Raven, ignoring our pleas, pursued the relic there."

King Henry gazes westwards across the fields, as if contemplating to follow and meet his faithful captain there.

"With respect, sire," leans in one of his sergeant-at-arms, "your royal person dare not venture where plague..."

"Yes, yes," he sighs impatiently, then points at..."You! Upon his return, have the Raven meet me at my encampment in Ludford. Without delay!"

"Aye, sire! I'll convey your orders moment I lay eyes on him."

He coughs again, clutches his chest, gasps for breath - the King has maladies, including occasional bouts of madness. Perhaps that is the cause behind all this scheming to steal the blessed hand of Saint Milburge? He wouldn't have dared resort to more...*direct* methods in seizing it from the Priory: the folk in these parts would have rebelled against such open tyranny! Even a king must think twice before crossing the line – especially against God. And, in such turbulent times, his rule remains tenuous. Hence, the elaborate plan to steal such a relic with healing powers proved a most tempting and personally beneficial one. Doubtless false blame would have been conveniently placed on some unfortunate present at the time, one of the pilgrims, even yourself. Had the king's scheme succeeded, he would have eventually returned it, perhaps with the Raven himself claiming such glory as the 'noble and heroic' captain who recovered the sacred relic of Saint Milburge, further strengthening Henry VI's hold on the throne in more ways than one.... You can picture the possibilities. Or, more accurately, what *might have been*. But, as it was, Lukas and Hugh were condemned right from the beginning – Annabel overheard the scheme, guided by Saint Milburge herself set out to protect the relic by actually taking it. And you embarked upon a path that inexorably led to both her and the relic's protection from Raven's wrath. Perhaps that is why Saint Milburge chose you, as her champion, to intervene? Maybe there's a higher purpose in store for you in this corporeal world?

Once the King has departed, you bid farewell to all your companions and allies. Only Lukas remains to bury Hugh.

You make one last request of Mary's brother: "Let Tobias Perch know his daughter's safe."

"What...? Where are you going now?!"

“Annabel and I, we're still bound to Saint Milburge on a holy mission. Aye?”
 She returns your smile.
 Turn to **100**.

-66-

During combat, the crossbowman has reloaded and is waiting for his chance to strike. An opportunity opens up, at such close range he does not miss. The bolt slams into your shoulder. You clutch at the agonizing wound - thus distracted, the vagabonds close in for the kill...

-67-

“Cowardly knave!” he snarls, crouching lower behind the shield, but advances slowly. Your best chance will be to aim for the eye-slit in his visor. Yet, even at such close range, it will prove a most difficult shot! Roll one die and add 5. If it is the same or less than your Range Dexterity turn to **47**. If it is higher, the arrow whistles past his helmet. If you have a second arrow, repeat the above procedure, but now he begins to move faster in an attempt to panic and throw your aim, so this time you must add 6 to the die roll. If you succeed on this occasion, turn to **47**. If you run out of arrows, or fail on *both* attempts, return to **89** and fight him at close quarters.

-68-

Some stalls are selling meat pies, salted fish, vegetables, cider, ale, mead... 1 Silver Penny will purchase 2 Meals, and each Meal will restore 3 lost Health Points. Other stalls and shops sell fine hats, gloves, boots, elaborate jewellery, and many other finely crafted, everyday items – yet all worthless to a soldier. You do however turn up a thick Woollen Blanket (priced 4sp or 1 goat), and a Flint and Tinder Box (worth 3sp) which may prove useful on the road ahead. Decide whether to purchase these or not. Now, if you noted a reference number turn back to that entry and choose another option. Otherwise, you must decide which route to take in your search for Saint Milburge's relic. Will you head northerly through Wenlock Meadows (turn to **27**), or east along the road to Barrow (turn to **42**)?

-69-

These folk are content to idly chat and speculate on recent matters concerning the priory. However, it seems nobody has seen nor heard anything as regards the stolen relic. As you begin to despair, two men seated nearby call you over. “Hail, friend!” grins the first. “Thought it was you. We met briefly at the priory,” he explains, then laughs, “Raven's Roost.”

“Ah, right, now I recall. Why are you both still here?”

“Pretty much the same as yourself: trying to learn anything about Saint Milburge's hand. Although, no offence, we're being a little more discreet about it: using ears rather than mouth.”

“Aye, mine was a clumsy approach, granted. Yet...”

“Yet, no sign nor word,” sighs the second Ravenkin, nodding. “We're being punished by God. He's taken the blessing of Saint Milburge from us for our sins.”

“It was stolen, Harry,” counters his friend patiently, “nothing more. Rest assured, Lukas and Hugh will be *punished*. Still, this could be God's way to root out those whose hearts are treacherous.”

“Perhaps you're right, Peter.”

"Well, it didn't disappear by foul magic, but human hands tainted by greed. And to prove our worth we must search and regain that which is sacred."

"Speaking of which," you interject, "we aren't going to fulfil such by sitting here."

"Aye," he nods dourly, "I admit, the Goose is a dead end – at least, for now..."

"I'd better be away, lads," you get to your feet, "I fear a difficult duty lies ahead of me."

Peter nods. "Aye, you're right. It would be best to head north – footpads have been prowling the road to Barrow of late. But, if you have time, I could give you some more advice over another ale, my round!" (turn to **8**), or, "Good luck on the road ahead!" (turn to **27** to head north).

-70-

Both the combined sight of mighty Lukas and your growling canine companions intimidates the crowd and what little courage they possess is dwarfed. All ideas of burning the young woman quickly loses appeal; they disappear into their homes.

"And now," you say to the lone axeman, "it seems *you're* outnumbered."

His face is twisted by anger and frustration: "So be it, stranger! Have yer witch! But," he jabs a finger at you, "the law is on our side, an' the reeve himself will be told o' this....breach o' justice. Mark my words!"

"Ah, be on your way, dumkopf!" dismisses a nonchalant Lukas.

Turn to **71**.

-71-

"Here, take my arm," you help the young woman to her feet. "Can you walk?"

"A-aye," she gasps, "I'll need to rest a moment."

"They thought you a witch?"

"Aye, although I am not! It was that accursed knight."

"Knight?"

"Aye," she nods vehemently, "*Sir Cecil* of Kinlet."

So, you realize, it seems the Raven indeed passed this way. "Your persecution was all his fault?"

"That it was. I work at The Three Bells nearby, around lunchtime he and his kin piled in for food and beer. All of us hereabouts, we've heard of his dark reputation, a powerful man to be feared. But today he was in an even darker mood. When he caught sight of me, he stopped at nothing to have me!"

"Yet you resisted him."

"That I did! However, my three brothers then turned up, they intervened, fought his men in trying to protect me..."

"They were killed?"

"No," she almost whimpers with relief, "thank God! But they were chased away and out of Homer. Then, Sir Cecil flew into a black rage at such open defiance. He condemned me to pay for my family's 'treasonous crimes', dragged me outside, and spread false rumour around the village of my being a witch. He urged the folk of their duty to God, to purge all manner of heretical practice."

She then asks your name, you introduce yourself and she smiles, "I'm Mary. And my thanks for saving me from that....rabble!"

"Simple folk are often easily misled," you explain. "Try to find it in your heart to forgive them."

"Perhaps I will," she allows, "but for now I'm leaving Homer. I can't stay in a place where folk tried to burn me alive!"

"Do you have any family nearby where you could stay?"

"My brothers actually reside in Sheinton, the next village north. It's possible they escaped there."

A bay horse is tethered nearby, belonging to one of the lynch crowd. "Here," you hand her the

reins, "can you ride?"

"Aye, well enough."

"Then head for Sheinton with due haste. Before the mob regains their courage - and you must prevent your brothers from another hot-headed rescue!"

"Aye!" she leaps into the saddle. "Oh, wait..." she removes a ring encrusted with small stones: three pearls and three emeralds. "My mother's wedding ring," she explains, "was passed to me. Now, please, accept it as a token of my eternal gratitude, soldier." With that, Mary rides off north. Note down the Wedding Band (and the number of its jewels) on your Status Sheet. Now, which way to go? If you have two canine companions, multiply their Special Number by 4 and turn to that reference. Otherwise, you decide to follow Mary's progress and make for Sheinton by turning to **46**.

-72-

"Many thanks!" gasps the young soldier between pants. "Glad you came by when..." his voice then trails off, stares at the red rose, then deep concern fills his eyes. The next moment, he has drawn his sword, snarling, "Stay back, Lancastrian!"

You calmly regard his blade for a brief moment. Then merely sigh and stoop to loot the dead vagabonds.

"Wha-what are you doing?"

"I'm weary," you explain, "besides, I didn't come to your aid simply to kill you thereafter."

The Yorkist frowns, falters, then slowly lowers his blade. "Peace between us?" he asks uncertainly.

"Aye, now that makes sense. There's little point in pursuing this war - least, far as we're concerned." You find 2 groats and 3 silver pennies. "Here," you toss him 1 groat, "you'll need it."

"My gratitude," he nods, "so, what brings thee to this part of Shropshire?"

You also find an Iron Key, and a rabbit that you share with the Yorkist (regain 2 Health points) who introduces himself as Percy Werrington. Over a roast fire you answer his question. By the end of your story, Percy is completely amazed.

"A riveting tale," he nods, "I wish you luck in your holy quest, Lancastrian. I confess there isn't much I can do to repay your noble deed - at least, for now. But...." he whistles sharply four times, "I will make a gift to you of my loyal companion."

So saying, a splendid hawk descends and gracefully lands on his outstretched arm. "Meet Oculus," he introduces proudly, "he's my eye in the sky, so to speak, and trained to carry messages. I was going to rejoin my brothers-in-arms until being ambushed by those rogues. My fellows are camped nearby. If you run into trouble, scrawl upon a scrap of parchment your location; we'll come to your aid."

Oculus is passed to you. Note him down as a Companion and the Special Number of 4 calling whistles. The text will hint when the time comes to make use of him.

"Percy, I..."

"No, it is the least I can do. Fare thee well, paladin."

So saying, you return to the road and continue east (turn to **60**).

-73-

No longer relevant to priory proceedings, you are dismissed. However, the prior abbot wishes to speak further with you, so you pace the cloister grounds, allowing the fresh autumn air to clear your aching head. Yet your troubled thoughts persist. To help distract from such dark matters, you idly wonder at the circular lavabo and its elaborately carved panels depicting Christ and the Apostles. A voice from behind startles your reverie.

"Quite a rarity in these parts, although commonplace within French monasteries of our Cluniac brethren."

“Beautiful,” you remark.

“Fashioned from finest Wenlock marble,” continues Prior Abbot Richmond proudly, “it polishes to perfection, even in this pale autumn light.”

“Aye, that it does. You wanted to speak with me on other matters?”

“Yes,” he sighs, “I fear so. Brother Jacob was quite right about one thing: Cecil of Kinlet's status, he's a powerful man with a fearsome reputation, answerable only to the King himself. Yet he's also ambitious...”

“A potent brew,” you agree.

“Certainly. But there's....something else,” Prior Richmond hesitates, expression troubled, he glances at the image of Peter and Andrew as if seeking guidance. Then, “God forgive me, but I cannot trust the man.”

“How do you mean?”

“It was his manner, his urgent desire to depart.”

“Embarrassment?” you shrug. “As a leader he's responsible for the actions of his men. Eager to find, capture, and mete out a fitting punishment, doubtless he's in a hurry to absolve himself in your – and the Lord's – eyes.”

“Hmm, perhaps he *is* a God-fearing man,” he allows, “but, even so....”

“But you fear there's more this theft than meets the eye?”

“I do. You see, it makes no sense that two men, loyal veterans in Kinlet's service for years, would suddenly risk being outlawed – and God's wrath! - on a daring plan to steal the blessed relic of Saint Milburge.”

“Desperate men take desperate measures,” you point out, “and yet, you're right in that it was a somewhat reckless move on their part. Yet I sense there's something more to this discussion than my opinion on the matter.”

He nods, smiling at your astuteness, then sighs heavily. “Yes, you're a soldier. A man of resource and endurance...”

“Both such virtues were lacking only a week ago, Prior.”

“Understandably so. But, surely you also comprehend how the blessed hand must be recovered? Not for our humble monastery, no, but for the innocents fated to fall ill – as yourself.”

You regard his raised eyebrow, at first annoyed by any attempt of manipulation by this Prior Abbot – yet he does speak a plain truth: “Aye,” you realize, “if it were not for Saint Milburge's grace I would likely have succumbed to death's cold embrace. But there's also another reason I'll help find her...”

And so you describe in detail the vivid dream from the last night.

“Intriguing,” he whispers in astonishment, “it is known our Lord, and His Saints, have in the past deigned to 'speak' to those they deem worthy thus influencing the grand design of our corporeal world. You have indeed been blessed, my son,” he smiles encouragement, “and such signs must not go ignored.”

If Brother Roubert escaped the struggle turn to **94**, but if he was knocked unconscious turn to **30**.

-74-

You can pay the priest 2sp for healing; restore 8 Health points. Before committing to a search of the village for any clues, he says: “Speaking of Cecil of Kinlet, he's camped on the outskirts of Sheinton. Beware, my son!” If you have the words 'Raven Hooded' noted down, turn to **19**. Otherwise, turn to **58**.

-75-

Lukas hefts his gutentag and strides forward. "Ja, a troublesome crowd, it seems."

"Aye," you grin with confidence, "but no match for *both* of us."

"Hoy, come back here!" snarls the axeman to those of little stomach, already edging back from an imminent and bloody fight. "We can take 'em!"

"Seems some of your friends have more sense," you nod, hoping to encourage the rest in doing the same thing....Roll one die. If it's a 5 or a 6, you succeed in scaring them all away without a fight (turn to **71**). Otherwise, you must defend yourself:

Lynch Mob:
Dexterity 7 Health 13 Armour 0

If you win, the villagers have been rendered unconscious or fled (turn to **71**).

-76-

Lukas is strong, yet so are you. The gutentag proves a fearsome weapon but also a heavy one. He begins to tire and, eventually, you find and exploit an opening in his defence. Your shoulder strikes hard into his chest-plate - it's almost like trying to move granite! - yet succeed in winding him. Lukas staggers back, you trip his legs. Akin to a great oak, he topples over with a mighty crash. Turn to **49**.

-77-

He frowns in puzzlement, taken aback by your unexpected response. Yet, he relents somewhat.

"Aye," grins one of his friends, "seems too good an offer to pass up, eh Jeremiah?"

"Aye," he nods. "Very kind of you, stranger."

"One kindness deserves another, wouldn't you say?"

He smiles thinly at such shrewdness. "But," he holds up a finger which then points at the beggar, "*he* is not to go inside the Goose. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

You then turn to the beggar. "And what would you recommend?"

"W-well..." he flusters, "er...Summer's Haze be the best, sire."

You head inside with Jeremiah and his friends, buy them a round (don't forget to deduct 6sp from your money), and carry a sixth flagon to an amazed beggar – well, nothing was said about him drinking *outside*!

"I..." he almost weeps, "...I'm at a loss, sire. First, yer save me from a beatin', then serve me the finest ale. Surely, 'tis a time o' miracles!"

Turn to **63**.

-78-

During the struggle, you spy movement from ahead – then two throwing knives come twirling through the air! Instinctively, you crouch down behind your shield. Both blades thud into the wood. Anger and impatience govern your next move: the footpad howls when you haul him off with almost supernatural strength. A red mist descend across your vision. You stab down at the sprawled body, he gurgles blood. Then, you launch into attack.

Footpads:
Dexterity 8 Health 18 Armour 0

If you win, the surviving footpads scurry like frightened rabbits into cover of a nearby wood. Pausing to catch your breath, only then do you realize they might have been the ones who stole the relic. A cursory search of the slain turns up nothing. You can only locate those who survived if you have a feathered friend and by turning to his Special Number. Otherwise, you'll have to continue (turn to **61**).

-79-

Drawing your weapon, you boldly stand your ground. Harry gloats at such headstrong bravado. You'll be trodden into the mud! However, at the last moment, you leap aside and at the same time swing your weapon across the horse's vision. The poor beast rears in sheer fright. Harry loses grip, tumbles from the saddle. He staggers to his feet, draws his sword, and defends himself from your onslaught.

Harry (Ravenkin):
Dexterity 6 Health 10 Armour 3

If you win, turn to **39**.

-80-

Both Ghost and Wraith growl menacingly at the small crowd. The man with the axe edges back, concern clear upon his grizzled face. "Call yer hounds off," he warns, "an' take yer leave."

"No," you calmly reply, "but *you* leave."

"Can't do that, stranger. Your last cha-"

"Ghost! Wraith! Get him!"

As you'd predicted, some of the folk have little stomach to face two ferocious guard dogs; they yell in fear and flee for their lives. The remainder you'll have to fight alongside your loyal companions:

Lynch Mob:
Dexterity 7 Health 16 Armour 0

If you win this struggle, all have been knocked unconscious or chased away. Turn to **71**.

-81-

As Much Wenlock sits on the edge of a main London to Shrewsbury route, the Golden Goose boasts a roaring trade. Perhaps travellers along that road have seen or heard something relating to the whereabouts of Saint Milburge's relic? Always worth a try. It's now lunch hour; most people have converged here for food and drink. Several men are stood or sat outside on the low stone wall, occasionally supping flagons of ale, casually watching a ragged figure being shoved to dirty cobblestones. Nobody lifts a finger to stop this! Your heart hangs heavy at such unwarranted brutality...will you intervene and help the beggar (turn to **22**), or consider it none of your business and press through the jeering men (turn to **91**)?

-82-

You have barely dealt the killing blow when a crossbow quarrel whips close past your head: several more brigands suddenly appear from the forest! You can't fight all these enemy reinforcements - now is the time to retreat with due haste. More crossbows are being pointed in your direction; hurriedly, you mount one of the riderless horses and gallop back towards the safety of Much Wenlock. One quarrel thuds into a gatepost, the second strikes your mount in the rump. It neighs pain, skitters, and a third quarrel creases your arm (lose 2 Health points), that causes you to lose grip on the reins. Roll two dice, if the result is *higher* than your Dexterity you lose grip on your Main Weapon (delete this from your Status Sheet). You tumble to the soft wet grass but are soon sprinting back into Much Wenlock. From there, you take the east road. Turn to **42**.

-83-

You depart the tavern with this mysterious priest, all the while on guard against a surprise attack. "So," you ask, "what's your name?"

"Brother Gilles," he smiles.

You observe the great battleaxe on his back. "A warrior priest indeed!"

"Well, only a fool would venture thus far unarmed."

"Very true," you allow.

"Here we are!" he points enthusiastically. "Saint Milburge be praised, my part in this shall soon be fulfilled!"

There nobody around on this bleak autumn afternoon. Gilles leads you to the nave's centre where one giant flagstone has a metallic symbol set within.

"Curious," you remark.

"This, my friend, is a lock, the seal to Conrado Montero's tomb!"

The seal itself bears similar resemblance to a sundial but with numerals around its circumference, **I** to **IC**.

"Now then," he muses, "his age, his age...Let's see, he was born in 1331..."

"Er, Gilles?" you interrupt. "Am I right in assuming that you intend to open this knight's tomb?"

"Hmm? Oh! God forgive me! Oui, oui, I must perform the necessary prayers to Montero's soul beforehand..."

Gilles falls to his knees, clasps his hands in earnest prayer, closes his eyes. What happens next you're helpless to prevent. He gurgles strangled surprise when two arrows slam into his back.

"Divine weapon' eh?" laughs the brigand. "Oh, aye, it's sure t' be valuable. We were right t' follow yer both from the Rook."

"Murdering scum!" you snarl. If you're an Archer and still possess arrow(s), you quickly let fly, reducing their Dexterity by 1 and Health by 4. But you've only time for one arrow before tackling the three brigands at close quarters:

Brigands:
Dexterity 7 Health 18 Armour 3

If you defeat them, turn to **43**.

-84-

By now, what's left of the foe are falling back in disarray. "Into them!" roars Lukas.

"Hold!" you check the advance. "They're yielding – let them."

A variety of weapons clunk and clatter to the ground as the surviving Ravenkin stand, heads

bowed, acknowledging your superiority. If you are using only a dagger, or wish to change your current weapon, you can salvage another, more reliable weapon in accordance with your Character; consult the list of weapons in the Rules section. You greet Percy and his Yorkist fellows, hands clasp in kinship; for now at least, differences between white and red roses have little meaning in Sheinton. "Well met, friends. You've done me a proud service this day. My gratitude!"

"And my life debt is repaid," nods Percy.

"Aye, that it is....wait, where's the Raven?"

"He numbers not amongst the prisoners," growls Lukas, "nor the slain, I regret to say."

"There!" points Michael.

You follow his pointing finger to a horse galloping west.

"CURSE YOU!" roars Lukas.

If you're an Archer, and wish to shoot, he's within arrow range if you have any arrows remaining. Roll one die and add 3, if it's the same or less than your Range Dexterity it thuds into his shoulder – note that his Dexterity is reduced by 1 and his Health by 4. Nevertheless, he maintains grip and makes good his escape.

"What lies in that direction?"

"Cressage," the three brothers answer without hesitation.

You laugh. "That's for certain, then. But what could he want there?"

"More troops?" guesses Percy.

"Forgive me, sire," one of the captive Ravenkin ventures, "but that place is riddled with plague."

Michael flinches. "Aye, he's right. Best not venture there!"

"On the bright side, however," grins Ralph, "perhaps the plague will finish the task for us."

"Still, he's bound there for a reason - one important enough to risk plague."

The Ravenkin nods. "He realized, sire, that where there's pestilence, the healing power of Milburge would also likely be."

"So...whoever is in possession of the relic..?" Ralph realizes.

You nod understanding: "...they might be using it to help cure the common folk."

It all makes an eerie sense. And doubtless the Raven has gone to claim it for himself. Within a plague-infested village. To where you must follow.

"Lukas," you pull at his arm, "we must pursue the Raven, he's after..."

But your friend is stood rock-still as a statue. His eyes brimming with tears, staring....

...At the lifeless body of his friend, Hugh Riverton, swinging in the autumn breeze. The horse supporting him must have bolted when the attack began.

"Go," he replies tonelessly, "find him, kill him. I must stay with my friend."

"Aye," you nod. Then, to the others: "This is for me to finish. Alone. None of you come! My quest takes me to Cressage."

To catch a Raven.

And recover a blessed relic.

Turn to **89**.

-85-

It proves to be an uneventful walk through the forest to Homer. However, the village proves far from idyllic: folk here are in uproar. Brandishing scythes, pitchforks and woodcutting axes, they drag a tearful young woman to the village square. She is beautiful yet her dress is ripped, her angelic face spoiled by bloody scratches, long dark hair dishevelled. Her bare feet are bruised by unforgiving cobblestones as she is lurched and pushed ahead by the vengeful crowd.

"What's happening here?" you demand.

A middle-aged man gripping an axe pauses to confront you. "A witch!" he spits. "If it's any business o' yers, stranger."

"How do you know she is such? Has there been a trial?"

"Aye, she chose the dagger, not the holy cross."

"Oh," you scoff sarcastically, "then it's beyond all doubt! "

"Yer opinion is a moot point, soldier," he growls threateningly, "it may have escaped yer notice but we number far greater than yerself. Hey!" he shouts over his shoulder: "Seems we have a troublemaker here!" Several more villagers stand loyally by their fellow, snarling threats. "Now, I'm givin' yer the chance to leave, peacefully."

There's nothing you can do here - *unless* you have some Companions to call upon? If so, you'll know what to do. Otherwise, you decide Homer isn't quite the hospitable place to linger so you must head either west to Harley (turn to **20**) or north to Sheinton (turn to **46**).

-86-

You take a gulp of ale that tastes sharper than usual. "It's possible Lukas is still in possession of the relic," says Peter, "although I'd recommend you don't fight him alone."

"Not very chivalrous," you nod agreement, "but sensible."

"Aye..."

Peter continues to talk, yet your vision begins to blur, his words echo in your mind. You try to stand but a nauseating dizziness grips you. Your stomach aches terribly. *Poison!* However, by now, it's too late – you crash to the floor, black out, never to waken.

-87-

Taking a deep breath, you venture from cover of the trees towards the ruined building...if you possess a Shield turn to **31**. Otherwise, roll one die: if it's a 1 or a 2 turn to **14**, if it's 3 or higher turn to **31**.

-88-

"Aye, very well, I'll take you there right now."

You lead them through the cold, grey stone passageways to the Lady's Chapel located at the eastern-most part of the priory. Here stands a chest-high statuette of Saint Milburge clad in simple cloth robes and barefoot, beautiful face raised devotedly to Heaven. Lodged within her upraised palms is a casket containing the holy relic itself.

Hugh attempts to open it: "Locked," he frowns.

"Of course! Forgive me, lads, Brother Roubert has the key."

"What good is that to us?" grunts Lukas. "By now all the monks will have retired..."

"Ah," you grin knowingly, "but not Brother Roubert – he often sits late into the dark hours, perusing old manuscripts and such."

Hugh nods, both men eager to accompany you. "However," you raise a hand to check them, "he can prove somewhat...harsh at being disturbed. Best only Hugh and I go while you remain here, Lukas, to lessen the blow."

The giant of a man hesitates, finally nods acquiescence. "Ja, very well. Just don't take all night!"

Brother Roubert is an old monk. And yet, when it comes to being custodian of the priory library, his unbridled passion for manuscripts befits that more of a young novice. Indeed, such exuberance often causes some disapproval amongst his brethren – but Prior Abbot Richmond values such expertise and so tolerates any minor 'misdeeds'.

At first he seems surprised to see you at this late hour, but then scowls: "Oh, the End of Days must surely be upon us," he despairs. "There was a time when this priory stood as a sanctified haven from the outside world. And now look! Crowds of the common folk strolling our halls, at their leisure, clamouring for *miracles*, no less! Like it was market day! Do you ever sleep? Pray tell, for

what paltry reason do you disturb my studies at this infernal hour? Ah," he waves a dismissive hand, "judging by the ridiculous grin on your face, something equally nonsensical. Well," he sighs, "out with it!"

Hugh's horrified expression turns to you. You give a simple wink.

"Brother Roubert, as charming as ever."

"You want charm? Then find yourself a female companion. These tomes don't read nor write themselves, you know! Lord preserve us," his piercing gaze regards Hugh for the first time, "another one! Must be breeding from somewhere..."

In the face of such wrath from a priest, Hugh stammers, then simply stands there, wide-eyed with shock.

"You've brought a mute. How wonderful! Excellent choice for a most interesting conversation, eh? Not that I have time for such things..."

"Aye, forgive our disturbing you, Brother Roubert. But we've come to make a request."

"Oh, this should be good."

"The key to Saint Milburge's casket. Do you have it?"

His quill ceases scratching parchment, slowly he looks up, a troubled frown furrows his wrinkled brow. "The key? Whatever for?"

"My friends wish to look upon it."

"At this hour?"

Hugh steps forward, eagerness fuelling his confidence. "I apologise, Brother Roubert, yet..."

"Er, we'll fetch it. Didn't you keep it hidden within one of the books?"

"Eh?" he continues to frown. "What are you talking...?"

"You know," while Hugh's back is turned, you gesture and emphasise: "you kept it in that scripture about the *thirty one pieces of silver*."

Still, Brother Roubert is totally bewildered.

You roll your eyes in exasperation, nod towards an unsuspecting Hugh. "Thirty one pieces of silver," you repeat, now through gritted teeth.

Such coded speech suddenly dawns on the elderly monk. "Ah, I see...you're right! I'll go and-!"

"Er, look," you catch his arm, "you'd better rouse the abbot, ask his permission. Hugh and I will await your return."

"He won't like being disturbed..."

"Aye, but this is *exceptional*. Right?"

He glances at Hugh, stern face now betrays apprehension. "Aye," he whispers comprehension before scuttling off - for an old man, he can move at fair speed when necessary.

"Look at this place," gasps Hugh. "Think of all those fascinating stories and secrets within those dusty books!"

"Hmm, you're right. There's one down there, see? Brother Roubert told me it dates from the civil war between Stephen and Matilda..."

As he stoops to examine it, you snatch up a nearby stool, ready to strike...

"**HUGH! BEHIND YOU!**"

The thunderous voice catches you off-guard, arms and stool frozen in place – only then to be wrenched from your grasp by the deadly weight of a gutentag.

"Tracherous dog!" roars Lukas.

Hugh draws his knife, backs away. "Keep him busy while I snatch the hand!"

Alarmed, you try to grab Hugh – but Lukas is ready. He trips then pushes you into the nearest bookcase. You catch your head on something hard, and the whole world goes black.... Turn to **18**.

A ruined Norman keep dominates the northern edge of Cressage. It is here you find the Raven's abandoned horse. A plague sufferer shambles into view, with great effort he points upwards: "E-'e took...er, soldier. Yonder...tower!" he gasps.

"Aye, my gratitude."

If you've contracted the plague – well, it won't matter once you recover the blessed hand to cure you (a second time). And if you fail? You'll be dead anyway. You pound up the worn steps to the summit with its jagged, broken battlements. There, you behold the most beautiful, spirited woman you've ever seen. And, without doubt, the lowest man in all of Christendom holding her hostage...

"Cease yer strugglin', wench!" snarls the Raven. "An' give me the 'and!"

"No!" she shouts. "You must never touch it, devil-spawn!"

"*Let her go!*"

Both pause to witness your sudden arrival. "Curse yer eyes!" he spits. "Meddlin' knave! Yer more persistent 'an 'is stinkin' plague!"

"Let her go, Kinlet!"

"No!" he growls, placing a dagger blade at her throat. "One fool's move," he chuckles, "ear t' ear!"

"Ah, so *that's* how the mighty Raven fights? Behind a woman's skirts."

"Hah!" he roughly shoves her aside. "So be it! I'd show yer how t' use a wench, worm – but yer'll be dead soon, anyway! Come then," he snatches up a wicked hand-axe, snaps down the visor, hefts his shield emblazoned with the fiery-eyed raven clutching a bloodied white rose. "T' battle!"

If you possess the Divine Mace of Conrado Montero turn to **33**. If not, but you're an Archer *and* possess at least one arrow turn to **67**. Otherwise, your arch-enemy wears the finest Italian plate armour; if you're wielding either a mace or hand-axe, you may only reduce his Armour score by 1 rather than the usual 2 before combat begins. But a warhammer reduces his Armour score by 2 *and* inflicts 1 extra point of damage added to the table result. A sword blade or kern axe merely decreases any Health damage he sustains by 1 point – and *no* damage at all if his Armour protects him! Also, if you're wielding a dagger instead of a shield, its bonus is nullified against plate armour. If you'd previously wounded the Raven, don't forget to alter his scores accordingly before combat begins. Now, may God go with you in this deadly duel!

**Sir Cecil of Kinlet 'The Raven':
Dexterity 10 Health 18 Armour 5**

If, somehow, you defeat this formidable master-at-arms, turn to **47**.

-90-

Your canine companions seem to be edging towards the western forest sprawl. "There's no road there, you daft pair!"

However, both guides ignore your mock admonishment, intent on you to follow them. Sighing, you do so reluctantly. But it seems that Annabel came this way for there's an obscure trail through the trees. "Aha!" you grin. "I see now. Well done, you two!"

Tails wagging, they lead you westwards (turn to **85**).

-91-

You push your way through the throng, eventually reaching the bar. The whole place is crowded with locals and travelling traders; you're spoilt for choice in obtaining information - however, bear in mind much of which could be mere rumour and fanciful tales. But the landlord might be able to point you in the right direction (turn to **34**). Otherwise, you could simply start with the nearest group (turn to **69**).

-92-

Greedily, the lad snatches the coin from your palm. He stares at it with wide eyes. "Now, this 'giant': where did you encounter him?"

"Wyke," he replies, eyes still regarding his easy gain, "Vineton Farm, the ol' ruined barn."

"And can you describe him?"

"Aye...a soldier, like you, red rose on his breastplate. Flamin' mane - like the very fires of 'ell steamed out 'is skull! Oh, he carried a two-'anded mace. Heavy! Wager 'e could slay a dozen men with one swipe!"

Such exaggeration is not far beyond the truth, you shudder with realization: *Lukas Tillens!* "Yes, doubtless you're right about that. My gratitude, lad, for a helpful service. Now run along!"

He scurries off, goat clutched tight in one small hand, leaving you to deliberate. Finding Lukas is one thing, but persuading him to part with the sacred relic is entirely another...*if* he's still in possession of it. But what of Hugh? Has the law - even the Raven - captured him? Has he fled elsewhere? There's little point in meeting with the merchant now, so you determine to head north in search of answers by turning to **95**.

-93-

You manage to haul the howling footpad over your shoulder...into the path of two throwing knives! As he gurgles his last, you regain your feet and charge, hoping to catch them off-guard.

Footpad Raiders:
Dexterity 8 Health 18 Armour 0

If you win, the surviving footpads scurry like frightened rabbits into cover of a nearby wood. Pausing to catch your breath, only then do you realize they might have been the ones who stole the relic. A cursory search of the slain turns up nothing. You can only locate those who survived if you have a feathered friend and by turning to his Special Number. Otherwise, you'll have to continue (turn to **61**).

-94-

"Oh Lord preserve us!" despairs Brother Roubert. "Haven't you had enough fun and games, you rascal?"

"Greetings, Brother Roubert, on this fine morning!"

"And why are you so infuriatingly cheerful?"

"Well," you laugh, "we're both alive."

"Hmm," he relents, "I concede the point. Still," he sweeps an arm at the collapsed bookcase where novice monks are busily tidying the mess, "just look at my....the *priory* library! These works are old, you understand? Older than myself! They are as children to me."

You feign wonder. "Your 'children'? Well, then they must surely date back centuries!"

"Cheeky knave!" he snaps. "Back to the dung-heap with ye."

"Truly, how fare thee?"

"Hah!" he waves a dismissive hand. "Life goes on. I'll probably write an account of last night's skulduggery. It'll be on yonder shelf for your rascal descendants to read - *if* they learn to read!"

"No doubt. Speaking of such, I need your advice."

Brother Roubert gapes in shock.

"Something ails thee?"

"Wha-what?" he splutters. "Oh, nothing, nothing at all! Yet I swear a miracle just occurred: *you*

need *my* help!”

“Aye, that I do, you proud old monk. It's about my dream last night....”

“Fascinating, fascinating!” he gasps once you've finished. “The Prior Abbot was right, 'tis surely a vision. Hmm, now where....” he grumbles, pulling open drawers, searching for parchment, a quill and ink. “Now,” he offers you stern look, “no fooling about! Let's go over the symbolic images again....right, you mentioned she held out her hands and a 'golden' goose appeared? Hmm, the goose is the sign of Saint Milburge,” he closes his eyes, concentrating, “goose, goose...ah! There's a 'Golden Goose' tavern in Much Wenlock – I wonder if that's what it meant? Well, continuing, two ravens then burst forth from this goose, you tried in vain to seize a scroll clutched in the talons of the first while the second swooped to attack. Hmm, Corvus Corax indeed! Perhaps Saint Milburge is trying to warn you of a possible threat? But, if so, why did they originate from the holy goose? Strange! And then four jackdaws were sat upon a signpost, er...”

“To Barrow.”

“Yes, I see. The jackdaw is....known for stealing shiny, precious objects, trinkets and such. And, you say together they attacked a hawk, no less, with a white rose around its neck? Again, most peculiar...”

“What of the wounded raven?”

“Yes, yes,” he says waspishly, “you impatient rogue, I was just coming to that! A large raven, hmm...and it flew into a barn made from....grapes? Bacchus....no, no...Wine....Vine, Vineton! Harold Vineton. He's a farmer at Wyke's Wood. But he was flying *from* a dozen other ravens? And a goose circled above the barn, calling wildly. Dear Lord above, it all makes little sense to me. And then you describe the apparition of a riderless destrier entering a church, only to emerge with a knight mounted in its saddle, wielding a mace radiating a supernatural light. Wait a moment,” he frowns, “Bertrand! Fetch me that book...no, you imbecile, *that* one....yes, yes, bring it here!” Brother Roubert leafs through musty pages discoloured with age, until his finger stabs down: “Ah, here! I thought as much! Conrado Montero is buried nearby.”

“Who was he?”

“Who?” he repeats in sheer surprise. “*Who* was he? Ignoramus! He accompanied a Prior from our Cluniac Order in Saone-et-Loire, France. A long time ago. Yes, he met a young maid and they married, then he later fought under the Black Prince, you see.”

“A Spanish knight,” you muse.

“Quite so. He was buried in the church at Harley in...let's see....1385. Not sure what the glowing mace indicates – although some claim Montero's mace was blessed by God.”

“Aye, that was the final image.”

He nods, then hands you the parchment. “Keep this handy – and *don't* lose it, young fool that you are! It may guide your steps on the rough road ahead. Now, leave an old man in peace!”

Note down this entry number to which you may refer back; Brother Roubert's dissertation may provide clues on which way to go during your quest to recover the relic.

“My thanks, Brother Roubert.”

“Oh, and...God be with you.” A brief, rare glimpse of a smile is nonetheless sincerely meant.

You raise the given parchment in a final gesture of farewell.

Turn to **30**.

-95-

You've barely started walking along the track when a cold drizzle cascades down. Gradually, it becomes heavier. By the time you've reached Wyke - a small farming hamlet - you are thoroughly drenched. Unless you possess a Woollen Blanket, lose 2 Health points. You notice an abandoned barn nearby; it would be a good idea to shelter from such terrible weather. If you wish to do this turn to **36**, or continue north on to Sheinton by turning to **46** - unless there's another route open to you.

-96-

Valiantly, you battle the odds, for all your worth. But the footpads outnumber you twenty-to-one. Inevitably, they close in and strip your corpse of anything valuable, before throwing out what's left for the wolves to devour.

-97-

Hurriedly, you nock an arrow to the bowstring, pull taut, release. You barely had time to aim at the charging brute! Roll two die, if the result is the same or less than your Range Dexterity turn to **26**, but if it is higher, are you armed only with a dagger (turn to **64**)? Otherwise, return to **36** and defend yourself.

-98-

Jeremiah staggers back from a blow to the stomach. He coughs, then spews ale upon the cobbled street. Wearily, he raises one hand as a sign of submission. "Aye," he gasps, "you-you win, stranger." A couple of his friends – all silenced by your unexpected victory – help Jeremiah back into the tavern. Turn to **63**.

-99-

Without hesitation, you nock an arrow to the bowstring and let fly. Roll one die and add 4. If the result is the same or less than your Range Dexterity, you succeed in killing the crossbowman before he can shoot his target (turn to **51**). If it is higher, then you must roll one die: if the result is a 1 or a 6 turn to **24**. Otherwise, turn to **32**.

-100-

Prior Abbot Richmond is completely amazed by your sudden appearance. "You-you've returned!" he gasps. "Why, when last I laid eyes upon you, it must have been..."

"Almost a year," you nod with certainty. "Forgive me, Prior Abbot, but the blessed hand of Saint Milburge," which you place upon his desk, "embarked on a somewhat longer journey than first expected. But, I assure you, a most beneficial one to many of God's flock."

He peers down upon the bundle, places his own hand reverentially upon the sacred relic within. He nods, then smiles knowingly, "I understand, my son. We've all heard stories of plague miraculously disappearing from around Wales and England. And so, what are your plans after such an accomplished journey?"

"I'm thinking of settling down. Perhaps in Much Wenlock?"

"If that is so, then you're always welcome at the Priory."

"Farewell, Prior Abbot."

"God go with you, my son."

Outside, the brooding skies of another autumn hang overhead. You breathe in the chill air, at peace. *Aye, now is a good time to rest...*

"What kept you?" growls Lukas. "We're getting cold out here, dumkopf!"

"Sorry," you put a protective arm around Annabel's shoulders, your other hand goes to her swollen belly. "And how are my wife and son?"

“Son?” she frowns in mock admonishment. “*Our* child might be a girl!”

“Aye, perhaps....”

“Well,” grunts Lukas, “that money proved a Godsend!”

You nod agreement. “Good thing I’d found that Iron Key on those vagabonds, the ones who attacked Percy.”

“Ah, those footpads – confounded by a double lock!”

“What will you do with your share, Lukas?”

“Well Annabel, it seems sensible to start my own mercenary company....”

“The Lukas Louts, maybe?” you rib, laughing.

“Behave!” she playfully slaps your arm.

“No, no, perhaps... ‘The Riverton Blades’?”

“Aye,” you nod solemnly, “that would do him proud.”

“And we shall settle here, in Much Wenlock! Father can teach his first grandchild the trade.”

“And I’ll train him....*or* her,” you add hurriedly, “in mastering arms.”

“Oh, you *men*,” she sighs, “always fighting!”

“*And* there’ll be time in our child learning letters. Hmm, we’ve busy days ahead of us. Perhaps Brother Roubert would help us out there...?”

THE END

Author's Note

The Battle of Ludford Bridge was perhaps one of the most bloodless military actions in history. It proved more an opportunity for the Lancastrians to flex their muscles and, as described in the Background, assert their control over the region. However, within six months, this easy success had been squandered, the Yorkist cause took advantage, gained momentum and eventually the upper hand. King Henry's fate would be one of imprisonment, release, then imprisonment again until his death in 1471 – likely a quiet assassination due to the precarious political balance often associated with the Wars of the Roses.

Henry VI in fact proved more an efficient administrator than a warrior king. It is true he suffered from a delicate disposition; the glory of leading armies in bloody battles never appealed to him. Indeed, it's well documented his state of mind experienced periods of insanity thus, without a strong and able leader, the Lancastrian cause plummeted until a decisive reversal at Bosworth in 1485. Perhaps his only achievement was to stabilize the monetary system: Shillings, Groats, and Silver Pennies (the second and third of which feature in this gamebook) were widespread by 1459, although foreign coinage such as florins, ducats, amongst others, had previously been thrown into the mix and prevalent during this period. For the sake of simplicity, however, I decided to include only Groats and Pennies along with their abbreviations. Yet it proved difficult from not delving into humour: fans of the first Blackadder series may well remember 'pebbles', 'half-an-egg' and even 'worms' as acceptable currency!

Apart from Henry VI, all characters in this gamebook are of my own creation: Prior Abbot Richmond, Tobias Perch, Brother Roubert...even the villainous Raven (Sir Cecil of Kinlet), along with his dreaded coat of arms, are entirely fictitious. Yet certainly, similar folk with varied personalities and backgrounds existed at the time. Much Wenlock, along with its surrounding hamlets and villages, survives to this day (although back then perhaps such place-names were pronounced with slight variations). But all the taverns and Vineton's Farm are my own invention. And, to my knowledge at least, there was no ruined Norman keep at Cressage. But both the Bull Ring and Spittle Street were and still are part of Much Wenlock's colourful history. I made no mention of Telford – because it never even existed in the 1400's! This very 'new' town was granted such status in the 1960's.

It has been recorded that Saint Milburge was indeed a real person: the eldest daughter of King Merewalh of Mercia, a monarch holding sway over lands which centuries later became Shropshire. She rose to become the abbess of an early monastery in Wenlock (then known as Wimnicas or Wininicas) governing both nuns and monks, and ruled over the community. Allegedly, she was capable of performing a variety of miracles during her lifetime – living well into her sixties was perhaps a minor miracle in itself, in a Dark Age period when life expectancy merely measured into the forties. The Cluniac Order is dedicated to both St Milburge and St Michael; there was indeed a splendid monastery located in Saone-et-Loire, France. Although sadly now nothing more than a ruin, due in large part to the French Revolution of the late eighteenth century. I felt the Cluniac connection provided an additional side to the story...

Wenlock Priory itself fell foul of Tudor power in full swing: in January of 1540, commissioners from Henry VIII brought with them a deed forcing the closure - just one of many victims during the Dissolution of the Monasteries. While most of the beautiful buildings were systematically demolished, both infirmary and prior abbot's lodging were sold off, thus converted into a dwelling house. In time, a farmyard held sway over the ruins with cows being milked in the former south transept. Today, thankfully, this historical site is under protection of English Heritage, to whom I express my sincere thanks for providing helpful explanations on the Priory itself (via a fantastic guide book purchased during my visit there!). Also, the online game Wars of the Roses detailed some ideas for weapons and armour. And finally, to invaluable Wikipedia for further historical insights as and when needed.

But what fate awaits the blessed hand of Saint Milburge? Would it fall into the hands of Henry VI's descendants? Perhaps a loyal Catholic servant absconds with the relic to a secret sanctuary? And then what? However, should it ever again become lost, I'm sure a particular saint would beckon once more...