

Knot in the Rope took a glance at the map one last time. He had a long way to go and a lot of places to be, and it was well past time to go. The dead drop had ten destinations on it, 50 gold pieces, and the map, of course. Nine taverns, pubs, and cafes to hit in one night. And each mark had its own set of challenges and a LOT of meatballs to eat. But Knot had to smile as he set out on his quest for The Water City, rolling a shiny gold coin in his claws; he would have done this job for free.

The journey began at high noon, not a time any good rogue would want to be working, but if Knot was going to hit every mark he'd need the extra time. The homestead was just a hop skip and a jump away from Hazel's, a good place to start. Hazel's was in a comely neighborhood, and it didn't take long to reach the place. The menu was extensive, but Knot was there for one thing. The meatballs came out of the kitchen, no problem, and Knot whipped out a two pronged fork from its sheath. His faithful sidearm. No need to break out the rapier for the first place. Four meatballs was a good warm-up, but Knot couldn't help but think this was too easy. He flicked the serving wench a copper and headed out, but before he left he noticed them. A group of half-orc crooks wearing white with long, curling mustaches across their faces. The Ardee Boys, Knot's biggest rivals in the city. He owed them a gambling debt, but today wasn't the day to pay it. Knot quickly cast his gaze downward, hoping their un-keen eyes would miss his stealthy form.

With Hazel's behind him, Knot decided to break south and head for Joey Meatball's. The name was a little on the nose, but then again, his mission was very specific. On his way, an old friend met him at a crossroads, Wallace, a canis whom Knot had always counted on. Wallace warned him that the Ardee Boys caught wind of his mission, but more importantly, they know he's carrying a large sum of gold. Knot nodded in confirmation, taking some pride in already knowing news before it comes to him, even if it's bad news.

The road to Joey Meatball's was short, and before long he was waiting patiently for what promised to be a feast. Joey Meatball's was known for ample portions, and the staff warned him one would be enough. Knot laughed at their warnings and asked for two. One thing was for certain, the fork wouldn't be enough for these beasts. Knot drew the rapier and skewered the balls handily, eating them ferociously off the blade. That much protein would be too much for most, but this wasn't Knot's first feast, and before long he'd finished the second mark.

As Knot left Joey Meatball's, he took care to slink stealthily onto the road, watching carefully for any Ardee Boys. No one fit the bill, but Knot didn't like the preponderance of birds filling the sky overhead. Bird and cat are fateful enemies, and the Ardee Boys weren't above paying the off crow for information. Knot pulled his hood over his pointed ears and tried to look inconspicuous. Caffè Biaggio was the next mark, a family style place with an authentic feel. Just right for Knot. He stumbled into the joint a bit flustered from the mighty meatballs of Joey, but he shook it off when a fresh plate hit the table. Another four balls down, felled by the keen tines of his trusty fork. The ambience was something Knot could have done with more of, but the sun was fast falling, and there were many meatballs left to conquer.

The path to Marino's, his next mark, brought him past Hazel's again. He noticed, with no small amount of glee, that the Ardee Boys were only just leaving. Surely they were either not on his trail, or his stealthy escape had worked. Knot strode a little taller toward Marino's, with a feeling like luck was on his side. He knew Marino's would be quick, too. It was a smaller joint, dishing up meatball subs fast, so that's just what Knot did. He grabbed his next mark to go and headed west for the Stone Arch Bridge across The Great River. This plan met an ill fate when Knot noticed a dark form moving across the sky. It seemed the crows were paid for more than just reconnaissance, and before long, shrill cries sprang from sharp beaks, picking and chomping for Knot's bountiful sandwich. Knot ran north, taking shelter under an ancient structure known as the Bell of Two Friends. The arched structure was just enough cover to shake the avian menace, long enough to finish the fourth mark. Surely the Bell of Two Friends was a friend to Knot.

Knot was shaken for the first time since setting out, but he felt a sense of calm as he approached the aesthetic stone bridge across The Great River. The mighty structure was a full 350 fathoms in length, sprawling with all manner of folk from across the great city. A mist was rising from the waters, giving Knot a further sense of security knowing the birds above would have trouble spotting him in the fog. He wiped his brow of sweat and his muzzle of marinara, thoughts now solely on the next mark; Bar la Grassa. As Knot reached the halfway mark on the bridge, he heard a shrill cackling out of the fog, a sound he knew well and dreaded. A witch was about. Was this a portent of some doom ahead? He knew not, but he had to shake it off and trudge forward across the river.

La Grassa was a fancy place, an upscale tavern serving the best and brightest in The Water City. Knot wasn't dressed for fine dining, but he had always relied on a certain rogue dash to get him by when looks are lacking. He strolled in, twirling his whiskers in his hand as he requested a table. It took a bit of charm, but before long he was seated before a plate of eight stunning meatballs. A second course, they called it, but for Knot there could be no others. Now, eight balls is a lot for any adventurer, and these weren't the only ones knot had supped upon this day. But when the beautiful smell wafted under his nose, a sly smirk appeared, and he drew his rapier, skewering the lot of them with two deft thrusts. He left a generous tip of two gold pieces as he made for the door. But he was greeted with a strange sight upon attempting his escape: a trio of Ardee Boys trying to get into the bar. He laughed as he watched the spectacle of a high elf hostess shooing away three half-orcs with a twist of her wand. The Ardee Boys were furious, shouting profanities at Knot, having caught his feline gaze through the dusky lights of the bar. Knot turned about at their words, stealthily sneaking out the kitchen door, back onto the darkening streets.

Knot's road took him hooking west, then south on the long journey to Rinata. This would be the longest stretch without meatballs since the day began, a perfect time to build up an appetite for the homestretch. His path took him through a glade filled with works of great art, watching with great pride and menace as the rogue walked about. Knot was taken aback by an arcane whisper, beckoning him to a certain sculpture. After a short walk, the whisper led him to a great carving of a spoon, and standing before him was a spectre of a great tabaxi hero, Ulysses. Knot

was no cleric, but he recognized destiny when he saw it. The hero spectre blessed his noble quest and granted knot a gilded spoon of great power. A spoon seemed a strange gift for the eating of meatballs, until Knot remembered the spaghetti. Combined with his fork, this golden spoon would allow Knot to feast at peak efficiency. With this blessed gift in hand, Knot trudged onward, until finally reaching Rinata.

Rinata was an intimate eatery, taking pride in their homemade fare. Knot knew the meatballs would be excellent, especially after his long walk. He sat before the proud pair of meatballs atop the pasta, drawing his legendary utensil for its first encounter. A hush went through the restaurant as the gleaming spoon went to work. It was soon clear that the spoon was more than just a handsome tool, it seemed to impart an extra bout of flavor to every bite, making each meatball all the more succulent. He left Rinata feeling great power course through him, urging him onward to his next mark.

Now, FIKA Cafe was something different. Thus far, every mark had been of distinct style, from a far away land of tomatoes and pasta. At FIKA, Knot would savor meatballs for a land of snow and fair-haired warriors. These meatballs were a delightful aside for Knot, and he heartily enjoyed this northern fare. As he finished his plate, he noticed a flurry of activity outside the cafe. He casually walked to the front window, looking out onto the street for what the kerfuffle was about. The Ardee Boys were outside, banging ladles and wooden spoons against pots and pans, chanting mockingly for Knot to come out and face them. Knot instinctively made moves for the back of the restaurant, but suddenly the lead Ardee Boy appeared from the crowd outside, Chef was his name. Chef spoke as if he knew where Knot was headed "No use going the back way, my feline foil, you'll find just as many of us there as here" Knot scowled as a turned about again, heading out the door to face his foes. Chef laughed as he delivered his villainous exposition "We know you're holding 50 gold pieces, and we'll take that fancy new trinket of yours, too". Knot drew his rapier stoically, not giving any cues as to what his next move might be. Chef's toadies brought him his weapon, a wooden pizza peel wrapped with barbed wire.

Chef made the first move, dashing forward with fury. Knot sidestepped left and smacked the hulking orc in the ribs the the flat of his blade. This made the orc even angrier, and he turned about with a jerk and swung wide for the cat. Knot rolled under the whooshing peel, parrying with another smack to the orcs hamstrings. Chef tumbled forward, balancing his weight on the peel before lurching forward and twisting his form about, swingin one more time for Knot's face. But the rogue was too quick, ducking away from the weapon and delivering a hard kick to the orcs left knee, causing Chef to fall forward. Chef jerked around on his back, trying to stand up, but as his vision focused on the sky above, he felt the cold sting of Knot's rapier poised expectantly on his throat. "Alright! I give!" barked the orc. "Be on your way, Knot. But watch your back! The Ardee Boys... Have a BEEF, with you!!" Knot had to stifle a cringing grimace at such awful punnery, but he maintained stoic composure as he backed away from the scene, eyeing each belligerent before making his escape. He was headed for DeGidio's, his penultimate mark.

DeGidio's was a great balance of classy and casual. Just the right spot after his run-in with those ruffians. He finished his meatballs, his spoon making short work of the spaghetti, and decided a short rest was in order. He didn't know why, but he felt that something was coming on his last mark that would require all his strength. He joined a table of friendly folk, dealing cards and gambling some of his per diem to pass the time. After a successful hand or two, Knot stepped out to breath some fresh, and just as he did he heard the witchy shrieking passing over in the cloudy night. His blood ran cold as he realized it was headed straight for his final Mark, Carmelo's.

With an admitted bit of nerves, Knot trudged on toward Carmelo's, remembering that the Witch's Tower was nearby. But to his delight, he found Carmelo's easy to get to, and a perfect end to the night. The meatballs were absolutely the classic benchmark he'd always loved. Two perfect orbs doused in rich sauce over perfectly al dente spaghetti. He ate with a sense of nostalgia, and even some sadness, knowing his mission was complete. He sighed contently as he left his tip, two gold pieces this time, and he walked happily out of the restaurant. He strolled north, heading back home to end the night, when he felt a feeling of dread. The tower was now in his view, and he could almost feel the cold, witchy gaze piercing his soul. For the first time since he set out, he felt fear, real fear entering his mind. He walked with his eyes fixed on the tower, daring not break his stare lest he be surprised by the hag. His eyes suddenly felt heavy, and myriad meatballs in his stomach made him want badly for sleep. He closed his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them, the grizzly withered hag was before him. It shrieked at him, pointing a gnarled finger at him as Knot felt a terrible lethargy waft over him. He fell to his knees, fighting to stay lucid but crumbling under the witch's spell. At the last moment, before sleep took him, he saw the glint of Ulysses' spoon in his cloak. He drew the artifact and held it aloft, using every last ounce of strength he had left. The clouds above parted and the moon shown off the spoon like radiant sunlight, blinding the hag and causing her to screech like a banshee before mounting her broom and fleeing Knot and his weapon. Knot breathed timidly at first, before sighing relief as the wave of lethargy left him. He was safe.

The road home was uneventful, and Knot was thankful for that break. Adventure was fine, but after a couple dozen meatballs, any adventurer needs a long rest. Home welcomed the tabaxi rogue like an old friend, and Knot slept soundly by the fire, one more mission successful.