

Chapter 73: A Grim Sword to Live By

Jason was heading down the tunnel from which he had heard the screaming. A bellowing roar came from the same direction, but it definitely wasn't made by a ratling. Jason moved forward, taking care with the wet stone of the walkway and the slimy fungus underfoot. He was still in complete darkness.

At a junction ahead, a ratling sprinted out. Some kind of tentacle snaked after it, wrapping around its ankle. The ratling tripped and was dragged, squealing, back into the tunnel. Jason raced forward to catch a look at the ratling's fate.

What he saw was something like a rat version of Gary, complete with huge, muscular frame and body covered in fur. It was so big it was standing astride the water rushing through the middle of the tunnel, a foot each on the walkways either side. Standing upright, it was so tall it almost scraped the arch of the tunnel with its head. Its body was much more human-shaped than a ratling's, which made its nakedness more obvious.

"You need to put that thing away, mate."

Quest: [Contract: Rat Infestation]

- Hidden objective complete: Find the secret of the final rat nest 1/1.
- 100 [Iron Spirit Coins] have been added to your inventory.
- Hidden objective discovered: Eliminate the [Rat Gorger] 0/1.
- Quest cannot be completed until all hidden objectives are complete.

The rat monster roared at Jason. It had the head of a rat, except the mouth was larger, its face almost unhinging to reveal jagged teeth like a shark's. It had small, darting eyes, which stared straight at Jason in spite of the total darkness.

Dangling in front of the rat monster was the ratling it had dragged away. The rat monster's tail was metres long, thick, ropy and prehensile. It was also strong, easily holding up the ratling for the monster to bite into. There was a slurping noise as the ratling withered away. Like sucking the juices out through a straw, the monster drained the ratling to little more than skin and bones.

Quest: [Contract: Rat Infestation]

- Objective complete: Eliminate [Ratlings] 6/6.
 - 100 [Iron Spirit Coins] have been added to your inventory.
 - Quest cannot be completed until all hidden objectives are complete.
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“Rat Gorger,” Jason said as he watched in disgust. “The name makes sense.”

It dropped the dead ratling into the water, where it floated past Jason. He looked at the withered remains as they drifted down the tunnel.

“This must be what it’s like to fight me.”

The rat gorger licked its lips with a long tongue that sought out any leftover ratling fluids around its huge maw. Its body rippled and bulged. Jason watched its already powerful form grew bigger and stronger in front of his eyes.

“So that’s what you’re up to,” Jason said. “Sacrifice ratling to get +1/+1.”

The creature started lumbering forward. Jason didn’t want to wind up in the creature’s clawed hands, but that wasn’t a large concern. The extra growth had made it almost too big for the tunnel and it was forced to shuffle along with a foot on either side of the waterway. It was slow, awkward and ponderous, exactly Jason’s kind of enemy.

The only element that worried Jason was the tail, which lashed out in his direction. As quick as the rest of the monster was slow, it snaked around Jason’s waist. It pulled him off his feet and started dragging him toward the monster. Jason took his knife and dragged it heavily across the tail. The monster roared, yank it back and freeing Jason.

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- Weapon [Night Fang] has inflicted [Umbral Snake Venom] on [Rat Gorger].
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Jason kicked back up onto his feet, one of the benefits of all his training. He couldn’t use his shadow teleport in total darkness, so he produced tiny motes of light from his cloak, sending them floating up and down the tunnel. He kept the illumination at a minimum, transforming the darkness into a playground of shadows.

The rat gorger continued its slow, hulking approach. The tail snapped forward again, this time lashing out like a whip instead of trying to wrap around him. Jason lacked the reflexes to intercept it, so he vanished and the tail hit nothing but air. Appearing behind the monster, he slashed out with his dagger, cutting into the immobile base of the tail.

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- Weapon [Night Fang] has inflicted [Umbral Snake Venom] on [Rat Gorger].
 - Special attack [Punish] has inflicted [Sin] on [Rat Gorger].
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The monster swung back with a huge arm, but Jason had already teleported back to his previous position.

“Alright, mate,” Jason said. “How dumb are you?”

The tail whipped out again, with the exact same result. Jason jumped behind it and slashed the same spot at the base of the tail, severing the tail entirely.

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- Weapon [Night Fang] has inflicted [Umbral Snake Venom] on [Rat Gorger].
 - Special attack [Leech bite] has inflicted [Bleeding] on [Rat Gorger].
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Jason shadow-jumped out of range as the creature went wild, thrashing about itself impotently, as it roared in rage and pain.

“Pretty dumb, then,” Jason said. “Works for me.”

In its mindless fury, the monster stumbled, tumbling into the water. It was far too big to be pulled along in the current, the channel only submerging it to the waist. Putting a huge hand on walkways beside it, it pulled itself out of the water. While it did do, Jason watched from a safe distance. With the severing of the prehensile tail, the main source of danger for Jason was gone. As he watched the monster push itself upright, he chanted out a spell.

“Your fate is to suffer.”

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- Spell [Inexorable Doom] has inflicted [Inexorable Doom] on [Rat Gorger].
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The monster was tough, but with Jason’s afflictions in place, its death was inevitable. He led it up the tunnel, the bellowing its rage at Jason as it sluggishly, hopelessly pursued. It struggled along as its blood poured from the stump of its tail and its flesh blackened with necrosis. It toughed it out surprisingly well until it crossed paths with the leeches that had finally caught up to Jason. Misery and pain finally overwhelmed its rage as it met a terrible, pitiful end, screams of pain and helplessness marking its passage into death.

Quest: [Contract: Rat Infestation]

- Hidden objective complete: Eliminate the [Rat Gorgor] 1/1.
 - [Rat Essence] has been added to your inventory.

 - Objective complete: Clear out rat nests 6/6.

 - Quest complete.
 - 100 [Iron Spirit Coins] have been added to your inventory.
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“Hey, an essence. Rat essence? Appropriate, but not what I would have picked.”

Animal type essences were common, as much as any essences were common. Some, like bear, wolf and snake were quite prized, while others, less so. He didn't hold high hopes for the rat essence, but he should be able to trade it for several of the more common awakening stones.

Jason walked over to the dead monster.

“Why couldn't it have been the might essence?” Jason asked it. Some essences were common as animal essences, yet were more valuable due to their desirability. The might essence, the shield essence or the magic essence could all have been traded for some quality awakening stones.

“As your life was mine to reap, your death is mine to harvest.”

The red glow of the monster's remnant life force emerged from its body, streaming up into Jason's outstretched hand. The monster's body withered to a dried-out husk. It looked a lot like the ratling the monster itself had drained.

“Live by the sword, die by the sword, isn't it mate. Actually, I hope not. I live by a pretty grim sword.”

He lightly touched the corpse, then backed away before it dissolved into smoke.

- 10 [Iron Spirit Coins] have been added to your inventory.
 - [Awakening Stone of Wrath] has been added to your inventory.
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Jason took in a sharp breath.

“Boss drops. Now we're talking.”

He pulled out the awakening stone immediately. It was the same round, palm-sized crystal as other awakening stones. Inside was a burning, shifting red, wreathed in white-gold light.

Item: [Awakening Stone of Wrath] (unranked, uncommon)

An awakening stone that unlocks the power of wrath (consumable, awakening stone).

- Requirements: Unawakened essence ability.
 - Effect: Awakens an essence ability.
 - You have 8 unawakened essence abilities.
 - You are able to absorb [Awakening Stone of Wrath]. Absorb Y/N?
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As much as he wanted to use it, he put the stone away for the moment. After reabsorbing Colin, he was about to leave when he heard an echoing voice.

"Hello?" it called out. "Anyone down there?"

"Frank?" Jason called back.

"Oh, Mr Asarno," Frank's voice came down from somewhere above. It sounded like he was talking through a pipe or very narrow tunnel.

"Where are you?" Jason called out.

"Up on the street," Frank called down. "There were some pretty loud monster noises coming up through the drains, and the folk up here were getting a bit worried. After it went quiet, I thought I may as well see if anyone was alive down there."

"It was just a rat," Jason called up. "It's dead now."

"That didn't sound like any rat I've seen," Frank said.

"It was a big rat."

"I thought you might not have made it," Frank said. "There some pretty awful sounds of misery and dying at the end there. Thought that might have been you."

"It kind of was, Frank," Jason said. "That's the sound things make when I happen to them. Can you find me the closest way back up to the street?"

"Uh, yes sir, Mr Asano, sir. I'll have you out in no time."