

# Livin' In OBLIVION™

## Just a Face In The Crowd

Simply put, this is an attempt to see if I can survive inside the PC game **The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion** if I run my character like any old random NPC (Non-Player Character). You know, those nondescript, friendly-enough but not terribly important characters you brush by on your way to sell the hundreds of pounds of loot from your latest fortress raid? That'll be me.

Along the way, I hope to answer some questions:

Does the economic system in Oblivion really work? Can I find a job, and earn enough money to live comfortably? Can I can scrape together enough to move to the big city, maybe even own a small hovel of my own?

Do the other NPCs really lead interesting, multi-faceted lives, or are they just mindless robots following a predetermined path? Will I fit in with them either way?

Is it even possible for a player to live as an NPC? How hard is it to avoid getting sucked into the enormous, sprawling adventure the game has planned for me? Will trouble find me even if I'm not looking for it?

With the help of the idiot pictured above, I'll find out. No quest to light the Dragonfires, no mansions crammed full of treasure, no heroic deeds of legendary proportions. Just an ordinary guy trying to scratch out a living and blend in with the crowd.

## One Rule To Rule Them All

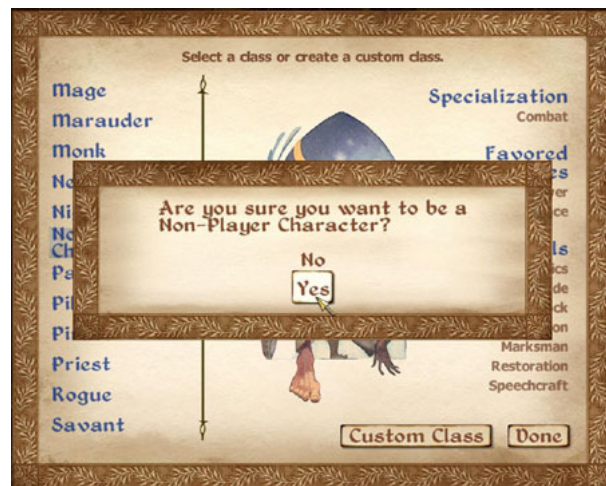
To get the full NPC experience out of Oblivion, I need to set some rules for my character. First and foremost, my character will have to **eat** and **sleep**.

Sounds pretty basic, but Oblivion ain't exactly The Sims. Your character isn't *required* to do either of those things. You *can* do them, there's nothing stopping you, but there's nothing making you, either. However, there are some mods that penalize you if you don't, for instance, by lowering your stats (like Strength and Fatigue) if you skip meals or don't get enough sleep. I think this sort of management would be incredibly annoying if you were playing the game for real, as many dungeon crawls and fort invasions can take days of game-time, and who wants to look around for a place to nap when you're plundering Sancre Tor? However, as a mild-mannered NPC, I think I'll have enough free time to manage my eating and sleeping. After all, I'm not going to be spearheading any assaults on Oblivion gates.

Luckily, unlike The Sims, at least I don't have to worry about finding a place to take a dump.

There are some mods that make drinking water a requirement, too. You can buy a waterskin and fill it at a well, and then you have to drink water to survive. It's a neat idea, but I'm aiming for NPC realism, not real realism. The game's NPCs do drink, mostly in taverns, but don't have to fill up skins at the well. So, neither will I.

I'll obviously need some sort of job to make money. I can't just walk into the Copious Coinpurse and ask for an application, and even if I could, no one would ever show up to buy anything, as the shops are only there for the player's use. Still, there's money to be found by collecting alchemy ingredients from flora and fungi, or hunting animals for meat, and selling the goods to merchants and innkeepers. If you have alchemical equipment you can also use those ingredients to make potions, and sell them. You can dive for pearls, too, and sometimes you come across forgotten treasures in the wilderness. If things get really rough, there's always flat-out theft, though that's dangerous, and stolen goods are hard to move without a fence.



Anyone who plays Oblivion knows that joining a guild is a great way to make money, because, in the case of the Mage's Guild and Fighter's Guild, as soon as you join you can run around snatching everything off the tables and bookcases, and sell the loot back to the guilds or any other merchants (it's not considered stealing if you're a member).

I won't be doing that, though. **No legally looting the Guilds.** I'm not saying I'll never join a guild (though I'm not planning to), but it doesn't make *realistic* sense that they'd stand there watching me stuff my pockets with books and armor and silverware, and then pay me to have it back.

Granted, it doesn't make realistic sense that I could fit books, armor, and silverware into my pants to begin with, but let someone else do a website for that sort of realism.

I'll have to live somewhere, naturally. If I can make a decent living I can stay at an inn, though that'll be pricey for a guy who collects fungus and crab meat for a living. You can't just sleep anywhere — you need a bed or a bedroll, and you can't carry either of those around (there are mods for portable bedrolls, however). I think finding an easily accessible, inexpensive place to sleep could be a challenge. Again, a guild would provide me with a bed, but then I'd feel obligated to perform a few dangerous and exciting guild assignments — and who the hell would want to read about *that*?

**No Fast Traveling.** If I want to get somewhere, I have to do it the old-fashioned way, by holding down W (or toggling Q) and letting my legs do the walking.

So, I have to eat, sleep, work, and live somewhere, and walk everywhere. Escapism? What the hell is that?

One last rule, and this is the biggie... this is the *real* biggie... there will be no reloading.

**No reloads.** No going back to saved games if something I did didn't work out the way I'd hoped. No second chances, no revisionist history. If I pick a pocket and get caught, then I get caught. If I try jumping a ledge and miss, then I miss. If I die... I'm dead.

It's tough. It's potentially *tragic*. I've died many a time in my other games. But I've gotta really commit to this NPC thing, and (aside from the Adoring Fan's remarkable powers of resurrection) when NPCs die, they stay dead. And so shall I.

...to a degree. I'll overrule this rule if some real-life mistake affects the game. For example, if I'm attempting to talk to a merchant and my cat puts his big fat ass on my mouse, which makes me accidentally click one of the merchant's items, thus stealing it, thus summoning the guards, well, that's a do-over (this has happened). That's not my NPCs fault. In life, you don't go into Crate & Barrel and try to ask a question but accidentally pocket a silver vase. Generally.

Also, if a glitch occurs in the game or a mod causes some problem, I'll reload. But that's really it. Otherwise, my NPC will live his boring, pathetic life as if it were the only one he has. Because it is.

## [The Dragonfires Look Okay To Me](#)

A quick word about the mods I'll be using — no real need to read this unless you're actually interested in Oblivion mods, or if you notice some things in my Oblivion that aren't in yours.

I already use a number of mods for Oblivion — one to make the natural environments a little prettier, one to make the weather a little more realistic, one that supplies you with a keychain (you pick up a lot of keys in Oblivion, and they tend to clog your inventory page), some UI mods, and a couple others. To give my NPC the best chance for a mild-mannered existence, however, I'm gonna have to make some core changes to the way Oblivion plays.

First stop — the immense mod called [Oblivion Modular Enhanced](#). It has so many facets that I won't even try to list them all, but I'm mainly using it for one big one: *The Main Quest Delayer Plug-In*.

See, Oblivion starts you off in a jail cell in Imperial City, and thrusts you right into the main quest of the game. It's true that once you've escaped the prison you never have to revisit or continue the main quest, but still, it's hardly the start my run-of-the-mill NPC is looking for. He's no son of prophecy, he's just a Random Joe Tunic.

The Main Quest Delayer plug-in takes care of that problem. You start the game in the coastal city of Anvil, fresh off the boat, with just a handful of coins, a dagger, and an apple. The Dragonfires are still lit, the Emperor is safe in the Palace (I understand you can even go see him).

The main quest just doesn't start at all — unless you want it to. Get arrested by an upper echelon officer in Imperial City, and you'll wind up in that fateful jail cell, thus kick-starting the true beginning of the game. But, I won't be doing that.

The Mod also has some other neat-sounding features I'm not enabling, but that some of you might want to check out — increased fines for serious crimes (and executions for severe ones), you can play as new races like werewolf, Lich, or even as a Dremora, they have a new pricing and weight system for items in the game (I'm going to stick with Oblivion's original economics), and there's a ton of new character classes (I'll be using a custom one).



I've got a mod called Primary Needs, which affects my health unless I eat and sleep, something just about all NPCs do in Oblivion.

I've installed another Mod, called Crowded Roads, that adds some adventurers on the roads between the cities. I just think this is a nice touch — the roads are generally empty except for monsters, the occasional soldier, and you. Since I'm not playing the hero in this game, it makes sense that there'd be more explorers and adventurers around to fill the void. Plus, if I do need to travel between cities, it might be a good idea to tag along behind a real brawler, in case I run into trouble.

There's a mod that lets you experience the effect of drunkenness when you drink to much — not essential but another nice touch, I think.

Finally, there's a mod that adds cats. I think having some cats running around in the game would be good. Cats are nice.

## Hey Nonny Nonny

A few notes on the character I created for this, Nondrick P. Cairk'tir.

Right off the bat, I tried to discourage adventure from finding him. I mean, just look at him. Can you imagine a statue being made of this guy? He sure as hell doesn't look like the Champion of Cyrodiil, so maybe the game will leave him alone.

Since I'm playing without reloading, though, I need him to be, if not heroic, at least durable. Nords are pretty sturdy, are good fighters, and are good with armor (which I hope to one day afford). They come with +10 Strength and Endurance, and -10 Intelligence, Willpower, and Personality. Sounds a lot like me, except for the strength and endurance parts.

They also have a Frost Damage spell, a nice constant resistance to frost, and a Shield spell. For his Birthsign I chose The Ritual, which gives him a tasty once-a-day major Restore Health spell called *Mara's Gift*, for those moments when he's in a real life-or-death jam.

As for the custom NPC class, it's nothing complicated. I chose a Combat specialization, and for my two chosen attributes I picked Willpower (to offset the Nord penalty) and Endurance (ie: hit points). For my Major Skills, I went with Athletics, Blade, Block, Destruction, Marksman, Restoration, and Speechcraft. It's a decent blend of skills I'll use a lot and ones I can practice if I really want to level.

That's the starting pot — we'll see it if pays off.

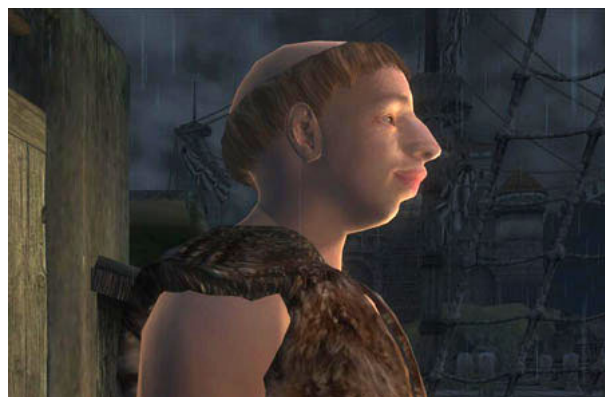
## Day One: Fresh Off The Boat

Huzzah! I arrive in Anvil at around 1:30 in the morning, ready to begin my ordinary life of non-adventure and menial toil!



Anvil is a small harbor city. Docks, a lighthouse, a few homes, presumably shops and inns, and a castle. It's dark, foggy, rainy, and mostly silent when I walk off the boat to have a look around. The first thing I need to do is scout out a place to live — maybe find a cheap room at an inn — not for right now, but so I don't have to search later tonight. I'm clothed only in a vest, pants, and moccasins, and my only possessions are a dagger, an apple, and 17 gold pieces. It's gonna be a rough start.

I spot a small cluster of my fellow NPCs on the dock. An Argonian and Wood Elf are punching each other, an Orc and a human woman are chatting about someone named Velwyn Benirus, who is apparently [trying to sell his mansion](#). See, I'm in town for all



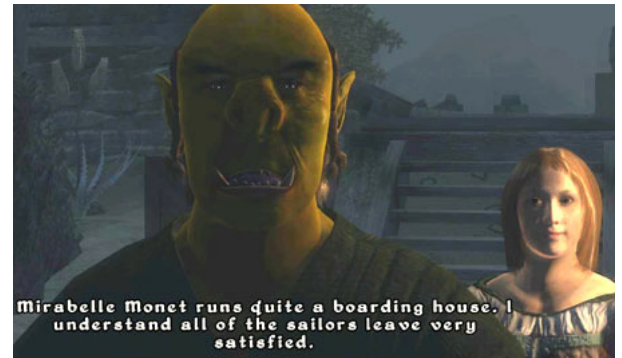
Strength	50
Intelligence	30
Willpower	35
Agility	40
Speed	40
Endurance	55
Personality	30
Luck	50

Below the attribute table, there are icons for various skills and a compass at the bottom.



of five minutes and the game is already hurling quests at me. *Screw you, game that's packed with literally hundreds of hours of adventure! I ain't havin' any!*

I talk to the Orc, Krognak gro-Brok, who informs me bluntly that Mirabelle Monet, owner of a local boarding house, is a something of a slutbag. Seems a bit rude of him, since she's the woman standing *right there, listening*, but when I talk to her she cheerily confirms it: she loves them sailors, all right. She won't even rent a room to you if you're not a sailor. I chat briefly with the two guys punching each other, too. The Argonian is a sailor named Hauls-Ropes-Faster, and the Wood Elf is batshit insane, babbling some nonsense about how he has slugs on his back and how his clothing scares the fish. Too many punches to the head, I guess.



I poke around in Miss Monet's boarding house, The Fo'c's'le, for a few minutes, then head for an establishment she recommended, The Flowing Bowl. I'm greeted at the bar by Maenlorn, a short, pleasant, clearly homosexual Wood Elf, who informs me he runs the place with his twin brother. I look over his prices and buy myself some beef (two gold pieces) in case I get hungry later. Oddly, despite lots of booze around the place, he won't sell me any, nor will he rent me a room. Great. I've already found two inns, but neither with a room for rent, unless you're a seaman crawling with venereal disease.

Maenlorn, and the others I talk to, all tell me about a supposed [gang of female thieves who prey on the married men in town](#). Luckily, I'm single, so hopefully they'll leave me alone! A few NPCs also mention that joining the Fighter's Guild is a good way to make money, but that sounds a little too dangerous for my tastes.

So, I've got beef but still no bed. I head into Anvil proper, and find my way to a place called The Count's Arms, which has rooms available... for 25 gold a night! What a rip! There's gotta be a cheaper place to rest in this city, I can't afford that.

Near the north gate, I spy a bedroll and some other personal belongings, next to the person they belong to: a beggar named Penniless Olvus. We chat about the female gang, as one does with beggars, and then I decide to give him a coin. Not because I can spare it (I'm down to 14 gp now) but because, frankly, I need the karma. I note that even though Olvus is no longer penniless, he doesn't change his name to One-Penny Olvus — I guess then he'd have to change all his business cards and stationary.

A few city guards I talk to suggest I join the Fighter's Guild as well — and I'm starting to sense an agenda here. The Guild wants fresh arrow fodder, so they force the local inns to charge outlandish prices for rooms, which drives the poor, sleepy masses to the Guild to find employment. Nice racket. I spot a supposedly abandoned house, but my hopes are dashed when I find someone named "[The Stranger](#)" is already living there — plus, the place doesn't have a bed anyway.

He's a stranger, all right. I'd try to get to know him, but hey, dawn is nearly here. Finding a cheap bed will have to wait until tonight— today, I've got to make a living.



## [Day One, Cont'd: Greedy for Ingredients](#)

As Nondrick, I don't have a whole lot of job options. I can't start a shop — no one would ever buy anything. However, I can find things to sell to existing shops. There are some that'll buy clothing, weapons, armor, jewels, and all sorts of other items, magic or otherwise. And, some will buy food and alchemical ingredients.

Ingredients are my best bet for making a living. I don't have to steal or kill to get them — they grow in the wild, on farms, and even in cities. It can be dangerous wandering around in the wilderness, but hey, I've got a dagger. Today, I'll explore the area northwest of Anvil and see what I can find.

The sun comes out briefly as I stroll off into the waist-high grass, snagging a couple usable portions of arrowroot and aloe vera leaves from beside the road. I say "stroll" and I mean it — caps lock is off. I won't be running everywhere like your fearless adventurers tend to, I'll be walking like your average NPC does. It's uh... it's a change of pace. It's... really incredibly slow. But hey, I figure moving slowly might give me a new appreciation for the game and I'll see some things I'd have missed if I were sprinting through the landscape full speed.

So, I stroll. My spirits are high but are quickly dampened by 1) the rain that immediately starts falling again, and 2) the first thing I find on my





expedition: the skeleton of a dead NPC.

I'm no pessimist, but I'm definitely not taking that as a good sign. The bones are within a stones throw of the city and the unlucky wanderer is carrying one gold piece. I also manage to scrape up some bonemeal from his dead sorry ass (hey, it's an ingredient).

After some more milling around in the rain, finding jack shit, I spot a shrine in the distance and wander over (turns out to be the Wayshrine of Mara), pray (ie: click on the altar), and get a blessing from Mara (a poof of light) that reinforces my willpower. (I guess if I wanted to diet or something, Mara would help me stick to it. Also a help: I'm broke.)



I also spot some unusual [rune-covered rocks](#)

with a cluster of ingredients around the base, and start gathering — some fennel seeds, white seed pods, lady's mantle leaves, and a few others — a nice haul compared to what I've got so far. I have to admit, I thought there'd be more to find out here. For all the rain Anvil seems to get, the grass is all dead and yellow and barren of herbs. I decide to head back and try the other side of the road.

On the road again, I spot a wolf!. My first creature encounter! (Unless you count the skeleton.) I quickly duck into a crouch (or crouch into a duck). By slightly bending my knees I am instantly much sneakier and harder to see, despite still being smack dab in the center of the road. It

doesn't matter anyway, the wolf is dead. I can't tell why — a city guard may have killed it, or a passing adventurer, or perhaps it choked on a bone from the dead guy I found earlier. Either way, I skin it and take the pelt — I can sell that too. Rummaging around in corpses is paying off today!

As I cross the road I spot a farm house, and I psychically deduce that it is called Whitmond Farm. There I run into an angry woman named Maeva the Buxom, who bitches to me about her husband, Bjalfi the Contemprable, who has [run off to a fort with an heirloom of hers](#), a mace called Rockshatter. I sympathize, really, but I'm not going to chase down a guy with a nickname like "The Contemprable" who has a mace with a knack for shattering rocks.

Come on. Look at my face. It's a face that screams "Please hit me as hard as you can with a magical mace."



Instead, I wander along the outer wall of Anvil. No ingredients or plants of any kind out here. I don't feel right robbing Whitmond Farm of its produce, but I'm genuinely starting to worry. Anvil seems like a rotten place to live already. Only one expensive inn and barely any ingredients. I can't just hope to find stacks of dead wolves every day. What am I going to do?

I spot a weird plant I've never seen before... I can tell immediately it has no general resale value and that it's called a [Nirnroot](#). I certainly am insightful. I also

spot a guard patrolling the shallow water outside Castle Anvil. Maybe a mudcrab gang has been causing trouble.

I poke around inside the castle for a few minutes, then head back into town. I briefly wonder if I can sleep inside the Chapel, but it sure doesn't look like a good place to rest.

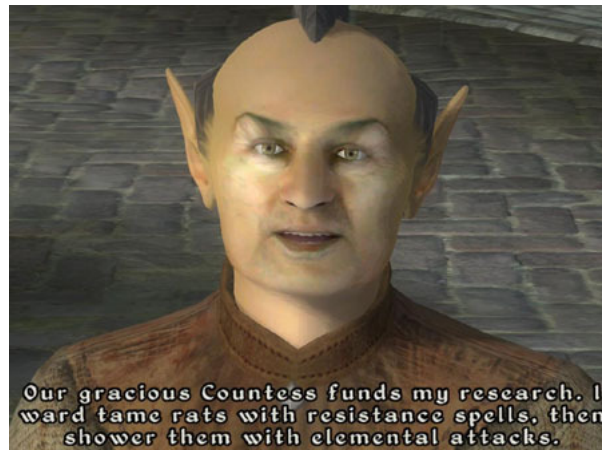






[I wouldn't sleep there, would you?](#)

Outside, I see some weird preacher guy ranting about something or other, but he's clearly nuts so I don't bother listening. I also meet a guy with an interesting hobby.



S'cool. S'cool. Everyone gots ta make a livin'. Hey, man, I ain't judgin'. Now if you'll excuse me I'm going to run away very fast.

Out of curiosity, I go see if I can sleep in the beggar's bedroll, but I can't because it's "owned." Same with a bedroll I spotted out behind the stables. I guess if I really want to sleep, I've only got one choice in Anvil. First, though, I cash out — I sell all my collected ingredients (and wolf pelt) to the friendly gay elf in The Flowing Bowl, then head to the Count's Arms.

After sales, I've got 63 gold. Minus 25 for the room at the Arms, I've got 38, so my day's profit stands at 21 gp. Not terrible, but not great either. At least I have enough for an overpriced room tomorrow night.



And, at least the overpriced room is sorta nice. I quickly snatch up the food on the table — a potato, a leek, and apple, some grapes, strawberries, and a bottle of cheap wine. I eat my earlier beef purchase, one of my apples, and drink the entire bottle of wine in a gulp.



Dang, that was a long day. I scoured a pretty large area for ingredients today, and those few I found won't grow back for a while. I might have to try something different tomorrow, because I can already tell the ingredient plan just isn't going to work in Anvil.

## [Day Two: Taking a Dive](#)

Time to start Day Two, and I start it by stealing stuff. I don't loot the entire hotel room, but I do help myself to the folded cloth on the dresser.

Look, it's a *hotel*. They *expect* you to take the folded cloth. I also snag a sweet roll off a table in the hallway before heading downstairs to the somewhat crowded lobby. I'm still a little peeved at the cost of the room and I'm determined to make up for it.

It's cloudy and partly drizzly when I leave the hotel and head for the docks to begin what will hopefully be a more lucrative line of work: diving for pearls.







Now, I'm no [Argonian](#), but I should be able to swim well enough to collect my weight in pearls, and Cyrodiil is known for its high percentage of pearl-bearing clams. I head out past the lighthouse, carefully navigate down the cliffs to the ocean, and stroll into the surf.

And, after paddling around in the water for a couple hours, it becomes apparent that there are no clams in the waters of Anvil. I don't find Clam One. There's nothin' but rocks and sand and water. There aren't even any slaughterfish!

I hate this freakin' town.  
As I glumly

crawl out of the water, while it's *still* freakin' raining, no less, I run into some of Anvil's surlier natives.

A mudcrab! And two more close by. Well, luckily, I'm feeling good and stabby. This rusty old dagger isn't ornamental! I dodge in and out of range, slashing and slicing away with my trusted dagger that I've never used before. Moments later, it's over.

Who's ya daddy? That's right, Ugly Clown-Face Trout-Lipped Guy's ya daddy!



Ingredients			
Crab Meat	1	1	
Misc			
Lockpick	3	0	

Well, that's weird. I plunder the crab for their presumably delicious meat, and one crab has a little surprise in it. Which raises the question: exactly who was trying to pick a crab? And why?

I soon find another Nirnroot, but no clams or other ingredients. I even find another of those weird stone formations, but no pickable herbs

around it. It's already lunchtime and all I've collected is 3 gold pieces worth of crab meat. And it's *still* raining! Is this Anvil or Seattle? I grouchy eat my stolen sweet roll and an apple for lunch, and decide I could use a pick-me-up. I head over to the lighthouse to see if I can reach the top and maybe — despite the lousy weather — see the distant spire of Imperial City's White Gold Tower. Maybe that'll inspire me.

I have a chat with [Ulfgar Fog-Eye](#), the lighthouse keeper, who seems to be making a damn comfortable living by lighting a fire once a day. Nice digs, and he doesn't seem to mind that I just walked into his house and started nosing around in his stuff. Too bad he doesn't need an assistant; it'd be nice to earn enough money to buy a sword or maybe some sleeves. I climb the steps to the top of the lighthouse and, while I have a nice view of Anvil, I can't see the Tower in the distance. It's just too darn overcast.

Astoundingly, the day is about over. I head into The Flowing Bowl, and buy a loaf of bread and a wheel of cheese (4gp total) from Maenlorn, who I notice is selling my wolf pelt for 18 gp. I sold it to him for 5. Nice mark-up, *jerk*.

Out of curiosity, I wander into the local Magic-Mart, or as they prefer to call it, the Mage's Guild. I'm curious to see how much a mortar and pestle costs — I could use one to combine ingredients and make potions, which often fetch a higher price than their raw components. They're going for 43 gp here... and I only have 38 gold anyway. Plus, I don't have any ingredients besides crab. So, a pointless exercise.

Glum, I head back to the Count's Arms hotel, and rent a room for the night. Minus that 25 gold, I'm now down to 9. Nine friggin' gold pieces. I got here with 17, so I'm now officially operating at a loss.

When I get to the room it hasn't even been restocked with food! The plates are empty! And no fresh folded cloth! That tears it. I'm *done* with Anvil. Screw this lousy burg! Tomorrow, I'm getting up early and hitting the road.





## Day Three: On The Road

I'm up at 4am on Day Three, ready to leave Anvil behind. Look, there are plenty of nice NPCs in town. I've gotten to know some of them. I've joked with them. I've admired them. I've boasted to them. Heck, I've even [coerced](#) them. I don't even dislike the actual, physical town. It has a nice statue, a lovely lighthouse, some charming buildings, some lunatics, a chapel filled with slaughtered clergy... everything a town should have.

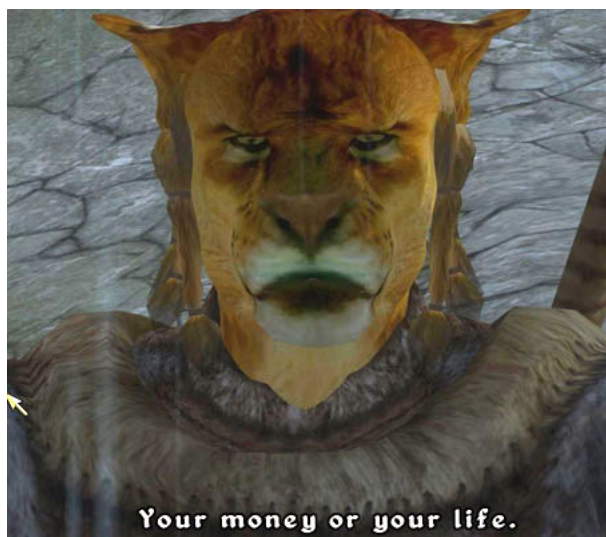


But I can't live here. A single, over-priced inn, and not enough employment opportunities... it's not the place for an NPC just starting out. I've got to move on before I wind up blowing Penniless Olvus to get my gold piece back.

Thus, the road I shall hit! Hopefully, there's somewhere nearby I can live on the cheap, and just commute to Anvil when I need to sell my loot or go shopping. I buy some ham (2gp) from the guy in the lobby, then head out of Anvil, north, along the darkened road.

I pass a heavily armored Legion soldier on horseback, which is sort of reassuring. I don't know what dangers these roads hold, so even a slow-moving cop on horseback is comforting.

A little further up the road, and around a bend, I see a small stone wall and what looks like a diverging path to the northwest. Suddenly, out of the rain dashes a [Khajiit](#) armed with an enormous battle axe. He has an interesting proposition for me:



Hmmm. I mull it over. If I choose to give him my life, he'll probably take my money anyway. On the other hand, I have no money. I decide to tell him that. To my surprise, he mutters something about how times are so bad even an honest highwayman can't make a living, and wanders away.

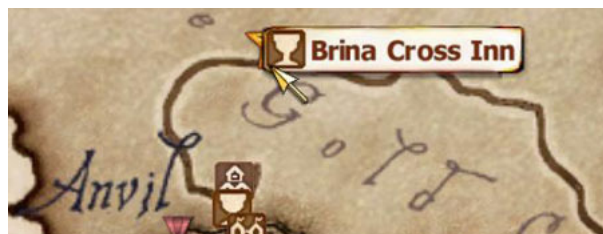
Huh. I'm sort of shocked. I thought for sure he'd gut me like a crab and pull a lockpick from my corpse, but he just turns his back and stalks off into the rain. Weird. If I were, say, an adventurer, I'd probably never have tried that approach.



I try to engage him in conversation, but he just tells me, more or less, to piss off. Around then, an actual adventurer, clad in armor and hauling his own

giant axe, strolls down the road heading for Anvil. The highwayman doesn't try to rob him; instead, they just start chit-chatting. Maybe because that Legion soldier is approaching at the same time.

This is about as close as it gets to rush hour in Cyrodiil. I leave the bustling crowd and stay on the main road until I come to a small, fenced in farmhouse with a stable and small garden. My spidey-sense tells me it's the Brina Cross Inn, which is confirmed by a sign.





I'll be happy to get out of the rain (I'm starting to think the Gods hate me or my weather mod is broken), but if they don't have an affordable room, I really won't be able to stay. But, as it happens, they only charge 10 gold a night for a room! I'm saved! The owner of the inn, Christophe Marane, is even nice enough to buy the few odds and ends I've collected on my long, slow walk up the road. I'm back up to 17 gold, my exact starting amount. Hopefully, the ingredient gathering will be a bit more fruitful up here, and with any luck, in a few days I'll be able to head back into Anvil for some gear.

I head right back out in the pissy weather with a new lease on life. I can make this work! I'm sure of it.

I scour the countryside to the south of the inn, not finding an overwhelming amount of fine pickables, but doing a little better than I have lately. I also find a spot with a nice view of Anvil from up on high. Again, too bad the weather is so gloomy or it'd make a nice picture. Er. A nice *memory*. I circle back around and hit up the fields to the north of the inn. I spot a deer, but it spots me as well, and dashes off into the undergrowth. Someday I'll own a bow and at least one arrow. This I so swear!

As I turn my head to watch the deer flee I realize I can see, in the distance, the city of Kvatch. Ah, Kvatch! Long may she stand. I'm sure nothing terrible will ever happen there.

I head back to the inn. On the road, I see the Legion soldier again, dismounted this time. He's killed a wolf, it seems, and so I hurry over like the pathetic bottom-feeder I am, and skin the carcass. Then it's back to the inn, where I sell my haul to Christophe. Deduct the price of the room, and I'm still up 32 gp at the end of the day. Not a bad rebound. I eat some bread, cheese, and grapes, then have a chat with an inn resident, the lovely and alluring Arielle Jurard.

Frankly, I can't remember what we talked about. I'm sure I joked as much as I boasted, and admired as many times as I coerced. But she coerced my *heart*.

### Day Four: Go Northwest Young Man

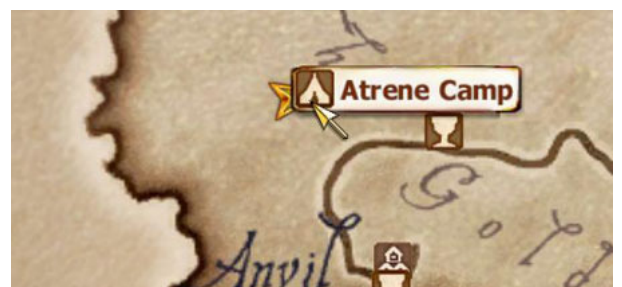
Since I scoured the area south of the Brina Cross Inn yesterday, today I'm going to head north and west. I figure if the ingredient gathering doesn't go well, at least I can come back down the coastline and maybe liberate some crab of their meat to make up for it.

After a breakfast of ham and strawberries (breakfast of Champions of Cyrodiil), I take the main road west and then take the path forking to the north, where the Khajiit highwayman is still skulking around. He still doesn't want to talk to me. A few minutes later I stumble upon a camp. There are a few bedrolls and a tent, but no one around — maybe this is where the Khajiit hangs out when he's not holding people up. Inside the tent is a locked chest. I brush the crab-flecks off my lockpick, and pick the lock. Inside, there are 10 gold pieces, a silver urn, and a repair hammer.

I hesitate to steal the contents. First off, it probably belongs to that highwayman who was nice enough to not kill me. Second, they probably used to belong to whoever he robbed. It just doesn't feel right. I do try to borrow the repair hammer to fix my rusty dagger, which took some abuse during my crab fight. I fix my dagger but break the repair hammer — oops. I had intended to put it back. Maybe I can buy one later and stick it back in the chest. Or, maybe I can just run away before anyone spots me here.

I head west again, spotting a few more deer, but none close enough to sling a fireball at or chase down with my knife. Ahead of me, up an incline, squats the crumbling remains of a fort. I creep up to investigate — I haven't been finding a ton of ingredients, but they do seem to grow more around large rocks or walls. I catch a glimpse of something walking around just inside the wall of the fortress. I creep a bit closer as it walks by in the other direction. It's a skeleton!

Wow, an actual member of the undead! Maybe Crowhaven is a hideout



for necromancers or vampires or something. It doesn't see me as it shambles back and forth, and I wonder if it's a skeleton archer. If so, and if I could defeat it somehow, I'd have a bow without having to buy one in a shop. As I peer at it, though, I see that it seems to be carrying an axe and not a bow.

That's when another axe hits me right in the face.

It catches me completely off guard, as axes to the face often do. I was so intent on watching the one skeleton I didn't notice the other one charging me. They're using velociraptor tactics! Clever girl... I run backwards down the hill, causing the original skeleton to spot me as well, so now I've got two angry piles of bones after me. Run away!

Wait! I'm an NPC, not a... not a... running away... thing. I've seen plenty of NPCs fight foolishly to their own deaths! I should be no different. So, after running away for a while, I turn and stand my ground.



The skeletons are pretty slow, and have a big wind up before they swing their axes, so I manage to get some slashes in without taking any big hits. I use a combination of my Flare spell (a wimpy fireball) and dagger attacks to take one down, and cast *Blessed Word* (my birthsign's Turn Undead spell) to repulse the other. As it flees I repeatedly stab it in the backbone until it flops into pieces. My health slid down to about half, so I cast a heal spell on myself a couple times, and then pick up the two axes. One is iron, the other steel, and together they're worth maybe 20 or so gold resale.



I've survived my first real fight but I don't want to push my luck by checking out Crowhaven. Instead, I continue west until I reach the ocean. There, I find something else: an ancient Ayleid ruin called Garlas Malatar.

The Ayleids were an ancient race who inhabited Tamriel long, long ago. Also known as Heartland High Elves, they were tribal, and their downfall is often attributed to OH HOLY CRAP! JACKPOT! THERE'S ALL SORTS OF INGREDIENTS TO PICK AROUND HERE!

I paddle excitedly into the water and start stuffing sacred lotus seeds and water hyacinth nectar into my pants as fast as I can. A couple mudcrabs clack over when I climb back onto land, and are dispatched from a safe distance with my Flare spell. Suckas! I head south along the coastline, finding new clusters of herbs and crabs every couple hundred feet. I think this will prove to be a pretty lucrative day. And hey! At long, long last, the sun makes an appearance.



Just in time for it to set. I've wandered pretty far south, actually, and I'm almost back in Anvil again. I don't want to shell out for a room, so I decide to down some crab meat for energy and double-time it back to Atrene camp. It's closer than the Brina Cross and I'll be able to save ten gold. Provided, of course, no other bandits are using the camp when I get there.

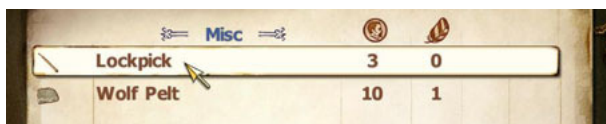
It's full dark when I make it back to the road, zip past the highwayman again (guess he's working the night shift). As I get close to the camp, though, something springs out of the bushes right at me. A wolf! The first live one I've seen. I backpedal madly. I've been running the whole way from the coast, so my fatigue is very low (thanks to a mod for that) and I won't be doing much damage with my dagger (or axe) if I connect.

As it turns out, I don't have to connect at all, because another growling bundle of fur meets the wolf head-on. The Khajiit highwayman, swinging his mighty, two-handed axe, makes short work of the wolf! My hero!

See, he's all gruff on the exterior, but I knew he liked me! He spared my life once and just saved it again. Even if he won't talk to me, he sure

seems to care.

To show my appreciation, I skin the wolf and take the pelt so I can sell it in his honor. It's the least I can do.





Hey, this wolf is carrying a lockpick, just like that crab was. What the hell? Who the heck is going around trying to pick these animals?!?

## Day Five: Reversal of Fortune

A lovely night of free sleep at Atrene Camp, and I'm ready to start Day Five. I've got lots of ingredients and two axes to sell, so I think I'll head into Anvil. Maybe I'll have enough cash afterwards to pick up more than lunch.

As I head toward the main road, I see my Khajiit buddy loping up the road toward me! Maybe he finally wants to talk to me?

Yeah, he does. "Your money or your life," he says. Wait, haven't we been through this once already?

Well, it worked last time: I tell him I have no money. Now, he'll wander off and our strange relationship will continue, right? Ha ha! Good times.

Ruh-roh. What the hell, man? I thought we had an agreement! You were the gruff criminal with the heart of gold, and I was the fish-faced putz in the vest! We were a great team!



I guess he doesn't feel that way. He attacks with his ginormous axe, and I backpedal, trying to ready one of the axes I got from the skeletons. I attempt to yeild, hoping for a truce, but he's not having any. Mere feet from the corpse of the wolf he saved me from, he slams his great axe into me, drawing blood and blurring my vision.

Okay. If it's gonna be a fight,

then it's gonna be a fight. No one to save me this time except me. That's life in Cyrodiil, baby. Quite often you wind up going toe-to-toe with the people you know best.

Suddenly, something huge and iron fills my field of vision — and it's not the highwayman's axe. It's the Imperial Legion soldier I've seen patrolling the main road from time to time! He's come sprinting out of the undergrowth, rushing right past me and swinging his huge honkin' sword at the Khajiit! Unbelievable. He circles around and slams his weapon into the highwayman's back.



The Khajiit, foolishly, continues to target *me*, instead of defending himself against the much larger, pointier threat. And in a just a few moments, it's over. The highwayman is dead, and the soldier sheaths his sword, gives me a look, then marches back off into the trees to find his horse.

Well, that's that. Too bad. I'd sort of gotten used to

seeing the gruff Khajiit skulking around every time I passed. He was merciful to me, once, and even saved me from a wolf. It's a shame, and it's sad, how things ended up for him.

On the other hand...







One man's misunderstood life and violent, tragic death is another man's free fur armor and giant honkin' battle-axe! Awww yeah! That's life in Cyrodiil, baby! One minute you're mugging travelers, the next, a bald twerp is leaving your naked body next to the road and heading into town to sell your belongings.

Turns out, the soldier who saved me is headed back to Anvil, so I walk along with him. Funny. The Khajiit saved me from the wolf, and the soldier saved me from the Khajiit. Who knows? Someday I might need saving from the soldier.

That's life in Cyrodiil, baby.

## Day Five, Cont'd: Mixing It Up

I reach Anvil without incident, and head to Morvayn's Peacekeepers, a weapon and armor shop near the north gate. I chat with Varel Morvayn for a bit, hoping to get a discount by boosting his disposition towards me. It turns out, he loves being coerced. This guy owns a store full of deadly weapons and it just makes him all kinds of happy to get threatened by a fish-faced weakling! Ah, well, it takes all kinds. I sell him my three axes and buy myself a short sword. I give him 3 gold to repair my rusty dagger and my new fur boots and cuirass. I also buy a fur sheild to complete the rugged, furry adventurer look.

Look out, wolves and crabs! Nondrick is armed and dangerous! Don't mess with me or... or... or someone else will probably show up and kill you!



I swing by the Count's Arms to sell my ingredients, of which I have a great many after yesterday. After buying some cheese and an orange to go with my supply of crab meat, I'm at 101 gold pieces! Triple digits! A far cry from just a couple days ago.

Now, watch *this* clever shit. I head to the Mage's Guild and buy a novice Mortar & Pestle (42 gp). I also buy an apple and a



Ingredients			
5	Apple	2	0.2
	Bog Beacon Asco Cap	2	0.1
	Bonemeal	9	0.2
2	Bread Loaf	2	0.5
	Cairn Bolete Cap	2	0.1
5	Cheese Wedge	2	0.2

loaf of bread (2 gold each), knowing they both have fatigue restoring properties. I grind the apple and bread with my mortar and pestle, creating — no, no, not mushy apple-bread porridge — but a potion of Restore Fatigue! That's right. I'm an *alchemist* now. *Hehheheh* yeah. And with those 4 gp worth of ingredients, I have created a magical potion that is worth... wait for it...

Uh. 3 gp? Hm. That... that definitely didn't work like I thought it would. I guess I need to be a better alchemist to make expensive potions. Crap, I really thought that would pay off. In fact, I have to sell it for only 2 gp because these guys are cheapskates.

Ah, well! I needed a mortar and pestle anyway, and I've still got 57 gold left. Lesson learned. I briefly consider buying a bow and some arrows, but I decide to hold off for now.

I head back to the Brina Cross Inn, exploring a bit on my way back. I find a cave without even seeing it — I mean, I suddenly know it's there but actually have to search around to find the entrance. I'm very insightful. I psychically deduce its name (Hrota Cave) and poke around in it, hoping to find some mushrooms. I don't find much except signs that someone lives in this cave: a barrel with torches in it (I take one), a chest with a few pieces of gold (I leave them), and a bedroll near a campfire. Yep,

Potions			
	Restore Fatigue	3	0.4





definitely someone's pad — I'd better bail. Only an adventurer would poke around in a cave knowing there are bandits or marauders living in it.

I get back to the Inn around sundown — have some food, stare at Arielle, even though we have nothing new to talk about, and have a bottle of ale. Whoah! The inebriation mod kicks in, big time:

Man, a single bottle of ale hits me harder than a two-handed axe. Either Arielle slipped me a mickey, or that mod might need some tweaking. Perhaps taking pity on the poor, drunken, amazingly ugly traveler, Christophe doesn't even seem interested in charging me for the room. I do buy some beef, bread, and cheese from him for the next day's travels, then watch drunkenly as the ladies discuss mudcrabs and how much they don't like them. Par-tay.

## Day Six: Hungry Like the Wolf

A new day! To the south, adventure beckons! So, Nondrick heads north. You know how he is about adventure.

A quick stop at the Wayshrine of Arkay buffs my health, and, tiring of the usual breakfast of beef and berries, I attempt to take down a deer, at range, with a fireball. I score a hit but it flees into the woods before I can do any more damage.

Ah, well! I'm optimistic that the day will yield an impressive crop of ingredients to sell. Just look at this fertile land!

Unfortunately, dead grass doesn't fetch a high price on the market.

A long stroll more or less directly north leads me to a small farm on a large estate, and the eerily accurate voice in my head tells me it's Lord Drad's Estate, near the enticingly named Bleak Mine. I don't see anyone around, not even in the worker's quarters, and it's tempting to start plucking vegetables out of the ground all willy-nilly since I haven't found much of anything to sell yet today.

But I'm not playing Grand Theft Onion. Nay, this is *Oblivion*, and I want to make my way by harvesting the unclaimed wilderness and occasionally stealing the clothing off fresh corpses. It's an honest, simple living, and I'm an honest, simple NPC. No stealing!

From Drad's pad, I head east for a bit, still finding little to sell. It's already past noon, and my stomach is growling. Or maybe the growling is coming from the wolf that charges out of the dead grass directly ahead of me.

This time, it looks like no one is going to leap to my rescue. Luckily, I've got a shield and sword for just such an eventuality! I block as the wolf lunges a few times, then swing at it wildly when it leans back on its haunches. My blows don't do a whole lot of damage, and it manages to take a couples bites out of me, but the outcome is never in doubt. Triumphant, I skin the beast of it's valuable pelt. Finally, something I can bank on.

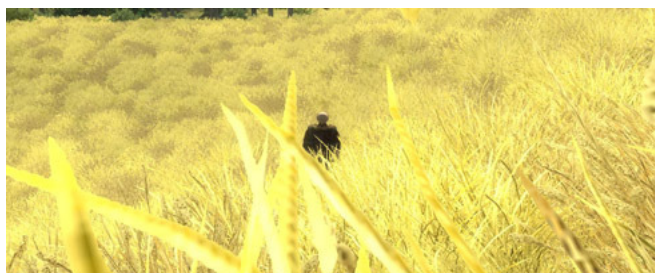
Another long stroll leads me to Brittlrock Cave, and, thinking I might find some 'shrooms within, I hesitantly step into the darkness.

Inside the door I find a small stool and a sack, which contains some clothing and a torch. I light the torch and move slowly down into the cave.

Further down, I find a chest. Inside: twenty gold pieces. And there's still no one around. Twenty gold, to me, is a small fortune, especially with the day I'm having. It's two nights of lodging at the Brina Cross Inn. It's a new cuirass or an iron bow. It's an *obscene* amount of ham.

No! I will resist. Damn this world, always throwing opportunities for thievery at me.

I creep a bit deeper into the cave, finally spotting one of its occupants



skulking around in the gloom. A small, bent figure paces about just beyond the light of my torch. A *daedra*.

Okay, the picture sucks, but I'm not getting any closer just to get a clear shot. Trust me, it's a scary oogy monster that I don't want to mess with.

As I head back out the way I came, I stop again near the chest. Stealing is wrong, but what about... stealing from evil enchanted monsters? What the hell is a Scamp gonna do with twenty bucks, anyway? Stroll into First Edition and buy a copy of *The Lusty Argonian Maid*?

What the hell. I pocket the loot, ensuring the day hasn't been an entire waste while simultaneously striking a blow against the evils of the realm by seizing their ill-gotten assets. Who says one NPC can't make a difference?

I also try on the clothing I found in the sack. It's a shirt with suspenders.

Mm, yeah. I don't think the exposed midriff is Nondrick's look.

I've wandered pretty far north and east today, and it's nearly nighttime, so I make my way back to the Inn. Another wolf leaps out of the bushes and I manage to kill it without much difficulty. This one, in addition to its pelt, is carrying two gold pieces. Crabs with lockpicks and now wolves with pocket change. The mysteries of nature.

Most of my spoils for the day are wolf pelts and stolen coins, though I mix up some ingredients, including some mushrooms I picked in the cave, and manage to sell the resulting restorative potions to Christophe for a profit of 10 gold. All together, I've got 72 gold at the end of the day.

That's not bad, it really isn't, but I'm troubled. So little of my earnings today came from gathering ingredients and selling potions. I can't count on robbing evil imps and slaying weathy wolves every day. My luck just won't hold out very long if I have to explore caves and get into brawls.

As much as I like the Brina Cross, my career is going nowhere here. I'm gonna have to move on.

I decide. Come morning, I'm leaving. I'm going to Skingrad.

## Day Seven: Girl Trouble

Off to Skingrad! A large town in the West Weald, divided in two by a rolling valley, Skingrad is home to the finest vineyards in all of Cyrodiil. It's also really, really far away for an NPC who doesn't fast-travel or own a horse.

Still, I'm determined to reach it. It's definitely more than a single day's walk, possibly as many as two or three, especially if I'm stopping to pick flowers, which I probably will. I won't have time to fully explore the area around the road, but Cyrodiil tends to pull you off your intended path pretty regularly. I'm guessing there will be some inns or camps along the way so I've got somewhere to sleep when night falls.

[Why not stop at Kvatch, which is a fine midpoint between the Brina Cross Inn (on the far left) and Skingrad? Well, I'm running the Main Quest Delayer plugin of the [Oblivion Modular Enhanced](#) mod, which means Kvatch has not been sacked yet, as it is in the un-modded Oblivion. However, you still can't *visit* Kvatch because, well, it only exists in-game as the sacked version. Look, let's just pretend there's no such place and it'll be easier for everyone.]

I sell everything non-essential to Christophe before leaving the Brina Cross Inn. Ingredients I was saving for potions, spare clothing, and food I don't plan to eat. With all my assets turned to cash, I'm starting the journey with 127 gp. I wolf down some bread and cheese, and step out onto the long winding road east. I'm more than a little sad to leave the lovely Arielle Jurard behind, but frankly, we've run out of things to talk about. Besides, Nondrick isn't a one woman guy, especially when that one woman seems more interested in discussing mudcrabs with the locals than getting busy with his fine self.

I have the good fortune to run into a traveler headed in the same direction [thanks to the "[Crowded Roads](#)" mod I installed, which gives the world a little more foot traffic].





Okay, she's not as armor-plated as I'd like, but just having someone else out on the road with me makes me feel a little safer. If I trail her by a few dozen years, any wolves or bandits are sure to go after her before they go after me.

And so, bravely using an unarmed woman as wolf-bait, I set off into the cool dawn. Shortly after departing, we run into an Imperial Legion Soldier, those iron-clad swordsmen on horseback who make ideal bodyguards, but he's heading in the other direction. I think it might even be the same one who saved me from the Khajiit bandit, but he doesn't mention it if he is. He's so modest.

Other than flinging a fireball at a far-off deer and missing (I'm determined to bag me a deer one of these days), it's an uneventful morning. I discover I was right about finding places to stay along the road to Skingrad, as I come upon Gottshaw Inn, a homey little cottage just north of the road. Good news: rooms are only 10 gold a night. The bad news: well, it's not night. It's not even *noon* yet. I'm not really ready to stop. I'm maybe halfway to the road that leads up to where Kvatch would be if Kvatch were there.

I've barely made any progress, so the Gottshaw, as charming as it looks, is more or less useless to me. I decide to press on.

By now I've lost the other traveler, so I'm alone. Not for long, though, as I come across a quiet young man. He's dead, which explains the lack of conversation. Face-down in the road, his mace and shield lying nearby, I can't even tell what killed him, or why, or even who he is. A random traveler? A bandit who robbed the wrong person?

All I know is, he deserves a decent burial, which is a bit of a shame because all I'm gonna do is take his stuff and leave him naked in the road.

For the next few hours I walk alone. I wander off the road now and then to pick some ingredients. I reach the road that leads toward Kvatch, accidentally wander up it a while, get a little lost, then find the main road again. It's getting late, and I haven't found anything like an Inn. It doesn't seem at all worth it to backtrack to the Gottshaw, so I keep heading east. I suppose I can walk through the night if I really have to.

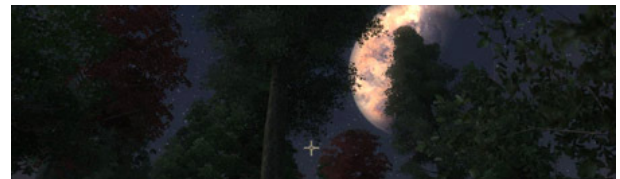
I seem to be missing all the action today. I come across another corpse, this time a wolf. I skin it, as is my way. It's now nighttime, and the moon (or whatever planet that is) has come up.

I'm a little nervous. Nighttime is no time to be out wandering alone. The roads are dangerous, and you never know who might leap out of the bushes and attack you. Adding to my anxiety is that I still don't know where I'm going to sleep, plus, someone I don't know leaps out of the bushes and attacks me.

A bandit! I swear, Cyrodiil has a bandit-to-citizen ratio of about three-to-one. This bandit also happens to be quite an attractive young woman. Hello, sweetie!

Oh, right, you're trying to kill me. Fine. Have at thee, sweetie!

She slams her axe into me a couple times as I backpedal. I don't know if she's got a magic axe or if she's coated the blade with poison, but my endurance starts to drain. Bandit's sappin' mah endurance! I take a few swings with my sword, hurting her but not badly. With my health down three quarters and my endurance draining, I'm going to have to fall back on my spellcasting if I'm going to survive this.





Blammo! A point-blank fireball lights her up like a Christmas tree that's on fire. I fire a few more into her, keeping my distance at the same time. Finally, she goes down with a cry, and the battle is over.

Man. My health almost dropped to half, making this my most dangerous encounter to date. Normally, a bandit fight isn't going to be much of a big deal, but with Nondrick, I'm playing with [no reloads](#). If he dies, that's it. Game over. It adds a bit more excitement to these little skirmishes, I gotta say.

Well, I don't know what drove this pleasant looking young woman to a life of crime — frankly, I blame mudcrabs — but she messed with the wrong mushroom-picker. Again, as my religion dictates, the dead are to be honored by yanking off their clothing and leaving them nude in the road. [So I do](#).

Nearby I find Mortal Camp, the bandit's base of operations. Being the scavenger I am, I go through the sacks and crates, finding a silver pitcher worth 4 gold, some food, a few bottles of beer, and some other odds and ends. Plus, it's a camp, which means I finally found a place to sleep. And for free!

Or, is it? Is it free? Was not a price paid, a dear price, that of a mortal life? Nondrick has killed crabs and wolves, but this was a person, and frankly, he's contemplative about the whole thing. See, [look at him being all contemplative](#). Or maybe he's just staring into space with his stupid fish face. Whatever.

It's just after midnight, and there's still a long way to go tomorrow. Bedding down, I set my internal alarm clock for five hours, crawl into a dead woman's sleeping bag, and get some shut-eye.

## [Day Eight: Treading Water](#)

[Dawn arrives at Mortal Camp](#), finding a very sluggish and sleepy Nondrick P. Cairk'tir. Still, there's a long way to walk today, and those flowers aren't going to pick themselves.

I should be able to reach Skingrad today, provided I don't have to wander too far from the road or have to set any women on fire. Time to get moving!

Not far up the road, I spot a wolf sniffing around. Eager to avoid a confrontation, I hunch myself over, thus becoming harder to see or at least convincing anyone watching that I have painful bowel cramps. The wolf wanders about but never leaves the road, so I decide to engage it at range with a fireball. I miss, but hit it a couple times as it races over. Weakened, it's not difficult to finish off with my sword.

Along with the usual 10 gp pelt, this wolf was also carrying a fork. It's not worth anything in gold, though it does provide a nice mental puzzle, namely, why the heck is a wolf carrying a fork around?

My plan to stay on the road derails shortly thereafter, but with damn good reason. INGREDIENTS.

Holy handpicked hordes of herbs! Lookit all this primo shit! The woods positively come alive with things I can gather and sell! Flax seeds, Columbine Root Pulp, Lady's Smock leaves, Motherwort Sprig, Elf Cup Cap, Nightshade... the list goes on and on! It seems like every few feet there's a new cluster of flowers. It's like wandering into a field of cold hard cash. I wasted my time paddling around Anvil harbor and wandering in the dead grasslands to the north — this is the place to be.

Forgetting about my schedule, I wander off the road, first to the south, then to the north, grabbing double-handfuls of everything within reach. Eventually, I stumble upon a small dwelling named Shetcombe Farm. Well, I could stand a break for lunch, or maybe some company, so I head inside the farmhouse. I walk in and a sudden thought pops into my mind.

Hm. Yeah, I guess I could— Oh, no no no no *no*. No, no. Nice *try*, game brimming with adventure, but you're not roping me in *that* easily. I'm not searching around for *nobody*. I'm not doing *nothing*. I'm *leaving*.

I exit the farmhouse, annoyed. Active *quest*? Clue to *whereabouts*? That's not *my* idea of excitement.



Misc			
Pewter Fork		0	0.1
Wolf Pelt		10	1





In fact, I stumble upon my idea of excitement a few moments later, in the form of [a small swimmin' hole](#) near the farmhouse. You know, it's a beautiful day, I've gathered a ton of valuable ingredients, and I haven't had to murder any attractive women... maybe I'll have a little dip in the pond!

I strip down to my skivvies and slip into the water. Yes, *that's right*, I removed my armor and clothing before entering the water, just like one would do in real life. Lookit me, maw, I'm roleplaying! Man. You're not gonna find shit like this on other blogs.

I paddle around a bit, enjoying the warm sunlight, the cool water, and the gentle wind blowing through the trees that brings to mind the sound of ungodly leathery wings flapping.

Wait a second... ungodly leathery wings?

### **Day Eight, Cont'd: Hard Out There For An Imp**

An imp! Interrupting my relaxing swim! He's got some gall. Ha ha. That will be funny in a minute.

There's nothing worse than being confronted by a winged hellspawn while wearing sopping wet underpants. Luckily, when I stripped down I neglected to remove my short sword (somehow it's clipped to my enormous manties). There's no time to get my armor back on (okay, actually, there's all the time in the world, since bringing up the inventory screen pauses the game, but I'm roleplaying here, dammit), so there's nothing to do but draw my weapon and fight for my life.



It flaps over and swipes at me with its talons, drawing blood

on the back of my leg, uh, somehow. I swing at it spastically, like a child too uncoordinated to even get a hit in tee-ball. I finally manage to connect a few times, and despite having no shield, I keep most of my health and soon the disgusting creature flops into the pond.

I gotta say, the little guy is positively ripped. Look at those abs! He must do a lot of crunches. It doesn't make me gay to admire his dead cut little body, right?

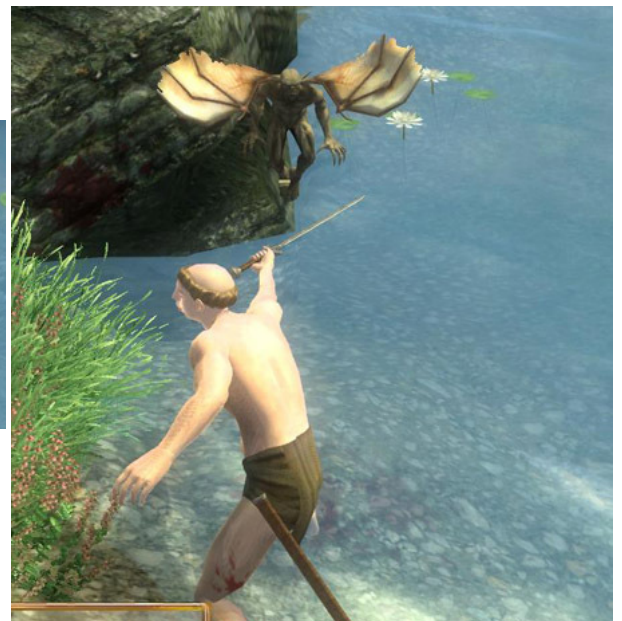
I search him for loot and find that he's loaded with Imp Gall, which is like bile or barf or something gross like that. Imp gall can be used in alchemy

— plus it's worth about 15 gp on its own. I also spot an oyster in the water under the corpse, and open it to find a pearl worth 2 gp. Finally, I found an oyster! Screw you, Anvil.

I quickly get my armor back on, and just in time, because another imp comes flapping over looking to start some static. He's dealt with, and his body plops into the pond like the first.

Well, gross. Now there's a bunch of bile-coated strangely muscular dead gross imps floating around in my lovely little swimming hole. Kinda spoils the enjoyment. Ah well, I don't have a pool skimmer, so I'd best be moving on.

Rather than heading back to the road, I cut straight east toward Skingrad through the wilderness, quickly stumbling across some extensive Ayleid





ruins called Miscarcand. With all this imp-slaying and ruins-finding, it's hard *not* to feel a bit like an adventurer. Just look how brave and badass [I'm looking in this shot](#). Except for, you know, the horrible face and all.

I poke around a bit, finding some ingredients (including a sack with some fish scales in it), and fling a fireball at another far-off deer. I springs away unharmed. Something tells me I shouldn't tarry here too long, however, though I can't put my finger on what it is.

I sure don't want to see *my* huge misshapen skull on a pole. Besides, I've spotted something by the far end of the ruins:

I'm pretty sure it's a goblin. Imps are one thing, but goblins have berserker rage, armor, weaponry... and a lot of friends. I'm out of here.



The problem, of course, with wandering through

the wilderness is all the wild things, and it's not long before I'm attacked by yet another wolf. This one goes down easily enough, but sadly isn't carrying any gold or kitchen utensils.

It's getting dark. I finally reconnect with the road around 8:30, and while I've still got a bit of ways to go, I'm getting close to Skingrad at last.

As I plod down the road, I hear a voice call out ahead. "Who's there?"

I drop into a crouch. Through the fading light I spot a woman with a shield, her weapon drawn. I can barely make her out, but Ye Olde Photoshop's image adjustment sheds a little light.

Another bandit. It looks like I'm not out of the woods yet.

## [Day Eight, Concluded: Off to Beat the Wizard](#)

[I apologize, in advance, for the lack of and quality of the images in this entry. This all took place in the dead of night where I could barely see my health meter in front of my own face. In order to see anything in the screenshots, I have to really tweak the levels up which leaves them looking real pooppy. Plus, some things happened so fast I didn't even have time to snap a shot.]

Here I am, a stone's throw from Skingrad, and once again I'm being hunted by a female bandit. This time, I'm not going toe-to-toe if I can help it. I'm determined to reach the city without shedding any blood or risking my life.

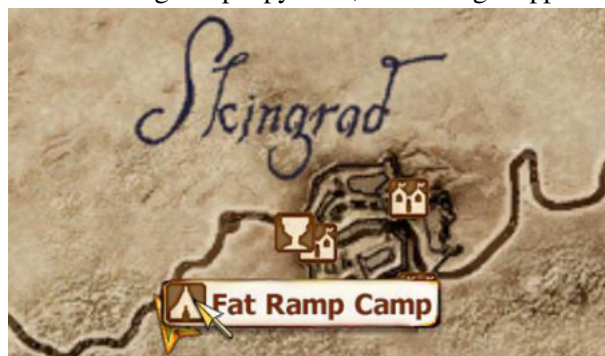
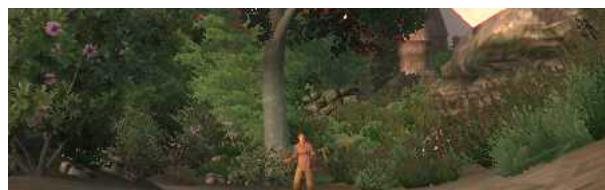
Dropping into a crouch, I hope she'll just give up on me, but this time, bending over, even in near-total darkness, doesn't hide me from her keen bandit senses. She knows I'm there and calls for me to come out. I don't, instead slinking into the bushes to the south of the road, hoping to slowly circle around her. It works — she loses me in the night and I spot her moving further down the road, away from the city. I take off my fur boots, hoping it will make me move even more quietly. I climb a small rise and peer down at her camp.



That's when I hear *another* voice calling for me to show myself. A *male* voice. Dammit, there are two of them now.

He knows I'm there, but he isn't climbing the rise to get me, possibly because it's much steeper on the other side. Still, he's not going to just let me go. I'm not sure where the woman went, but I don't hear her anymore. This could be good or bad. Fighting multiple enemies in Oblivion is never really a picnic, no matter what level you are, especially in the dark, and especially if most of your skills can only be applied to picking onions. It's time for plan B.

Ruuuunnnnnnnnnnn! I tear through the camp and back out onto the road.





The male bandit gives chase, but there's still no sign of the female. I can see Skingrad ahead of me in the gloom. I'm very close but he's not letting me go. I know if I can just reach the city gates, he won't follow me inside. Plus, there's a chance an armed guard might help me.

Behind me, I hear some yelling, and the sound of a spell being cast and the sound of blows landing. I turn around in time to see two figures engaged in combat. One is the bandit, the other is someone I've never seen before. He appears to be unarmed, and he strikes the bandit with, I think, only his *fists*. The bandit, amazingly, falls faster than a fleeing NPC can take a screenshot.

My savior this time is a fellow named Toutius Maximus. I'm a bit stunned. I have no idea where he came from or how he took out a bandit, who, on closer examination, was a Bandit Hedge Wizard. Being a wizard who hides in the bushes and robs people, I guess. That's how Dumbledore got his start.



Toutius seems pretty nonplussed about killing a man with his bare hands. I ask him for some rumors, as one naturally does after witnessing someone pummel someone else to death, and he encourages me to join the local Fighter's Guild. That's not a bad ad campaign, really — punching a wizard to death is a pretty convincing demonstration of the benefits of signing up with the Fighter's Guild. Do you want to brutally club a wizard to death with your fists? Sure, we all do!

Well, once again I've been saved by an extremely violent stranger. I thank him by stripping the dead wizard of all his stuff, which includes a Poison of Frailty. I'm plenty frail already, thanks.

I made it, though. Skingrad! I even get an escort to the gate. [By a bunch of sheep](#). I quickly find my way to the Two Sisters Lodge, but before I can enter some whackjob Bosmer named Glarthir stops me in the street with some odd babbling:

Um, yeah, how about not? How about you go behind the chapel, wait until midnight, and then pound some Imp Gall up your ass?

Inside, I talk to one of the two sisters who run the lodge. She's an orc (presumably, the other is as well). She's got a room and it'll only set me back 10 gold. Honestly, right now, I'd have paid a hundred. It's been a long day.

The room is very sparse and there's no food or towels to help myself to, but I don't care. It's almost two in the morning after a long trip that's introduced me to imps, bandits, goblins, wolves, and wizards... it's been a real adventure, and that's precisely the sort of thing I'd like to avoid.

As I prepare to stand next to my bed all night and get some rest, I find myself hoping that Skingrad will be more accommodating than Anvil was. Traveling is too damn dangerous for a level one NPC, and I don't plan to do it again anytime soon.

## [Day Nine: Man About Town](#)

It's a lovely yet somewhat hazy morning in a new town.

I [stride purposefully through the streets of Skingrad](#), looking for a place to empty my bulging pockets. It's been a long, troublesome trip, but it's about to pay off.

I find Colovian Traders, a shop toward the north end of Skingrad. There I meet Gunder, a plump, leathery merchant, and through a careful combination of joking ("What's the deal with all the wolves carrying forks, anyway?") boasting ("Seriously, I'm the guy who found a fork inside a wolf") threatening ("I will stab you with my wolf-fork!") and admiring ("With hands like that, I bet you could put a lot of forks inside a lot of wolves") I manage to make him like me more than he really should. Then, I sell him a bunch of crap.

I've got weapons and armor stripped from dead people, I've got tons of collected ingredients, a pearl I pried from an oyster, a silver pitcher, wolf pelts, imp-vomit... and he buys up every last bit of it. When we're done, I've got a record 478 septims.

Almost 500 gold! Holy cow. Nondrick's ship has come in. It hasn't even been ten days since I stepped of the boat in Anvil with a dagger, a vest, and a couple of coins, and now I'm virtually rolling in dough.

Even better, I don't have to immediately rush right back out into the wild, braving wolves and wizards, to collect new wages. I can take a few days off. Get to know the city. Make friends with the locals. See what it's *really* like to be an NPC.



If I'm going to play the part, though, I think I'd better look the part. I'm a merchant now, a businessman, not some armored brute who makes his living with a blood-stained sword. Luckily, Gunder has a few outfits for the well-to-do merchant out for a casual stroll.

I buy this elegant blue number.

Hmmm... maybe a little *too* fancy? I don't want to come off like a snob. So, I purchase this red outfit as well. Damn, I cut a dashing figure!



*How Do I Look?* Of course, I *will* have to venture outside the walls again someday, so I also buy an iron bow and arrows, which I've wanted since day one, and a fur helmet to match the rest of my stinky fur armor. It's also pretty damn stylish on its own.

Hello, ladies!

With my purchases, I've still got 325 gold, enough for Nondrick to not have to sweat the small stuff for a long, long time. So, let's strut his stuff on the streets of Skingrad for a bit.

The streets are pretty much empty with the exception of a beggar, so I decide to be proactive and simply start walking into people's houses. The first home I find with an unlocked door belongs to a fellow named Lazare Milvan, who seems less than thrilled to find a velvet-clad ugly dude in his foyer.

He doesn't actually throw down, but I decide to leave anyway. In the street I run into a city guardsman.

Glarthir, the oddball elf who stopped me in the street last night, comes up as a topic of conversation, as the guard feels that he's acting a bit strange.







That anachronism aside, I'm a little torn by this whole thing. The Glarthir issue, as you may already know or by now have guessed, is a bit of an... adventure. It's part of an elaborate "quest" called [Paranoia](#), which can have a number of different outcomes depending on how you handle it. When I played through it with my other character, I seem to recall it ending with, shall we say, the streets running red with the blood of a number of innocent townspeople.

While my other character reveled in the bloodshed (he was not a nice fellow at all), this is something I'm pretty sure Nondrick would like to avoid. Still, I'm trying to be an NPC here, and one things NPCs do a lot of is gossip. About news, about mudcrabs, and especially about other NPCs. It doesn't *really* seem like I'm breaking my own rules by engaging in conversation with another NPC about Glarthir. Does it?

I decide to proceed cautiously. If he comes up in conversation, I may talk about him, I may not. But I won't take any chances. I won't get involved in anything exciting. This is my promise to you.

I stroll into *Hammer and Tongs*, have my shortsword and armor repaired for four bucks (a bargain!), and talk to the proprietor, Agnate the Pickled. As she is a drunk woman, I figure I'll chat her up a bit, which pushes my speechcraft skill up a notch and thus, amazingly, prepares little old Nondrick P. Cairk'tir to gain a level. Level 2! Now I'm wealthy *and* experienced. Things are definitely going my way today.

I'm so happy I give a coin to the regrettably named Foul Fagus, a beggar, just before meeting a regrettably orange guardsman named Dion.

Uh-huh. Sure. Start out by suggesting I check out the wine and cheese, and then try to slip in some intrigue as to why the Count won't be seen. Nice try, Dion, but you'll have to do better than that to get me wrapped up in some adventure.

Then I run into the man who saved me last night, Toutious Sextus.

Well, I dunno. We could probably chat about that wizard you pimp-slapped to death last night in the course of saving my life? Guess not.

At any rate, since I've already met the guardsman and the beggar, I take the rest of his advice and visit the cathedral, to see if the priest will be my friend. The priest doesn't seem to like me much either, and passes me off to a healer named Marie Palielle, who I find asleep in her bedchamber on the lower level.



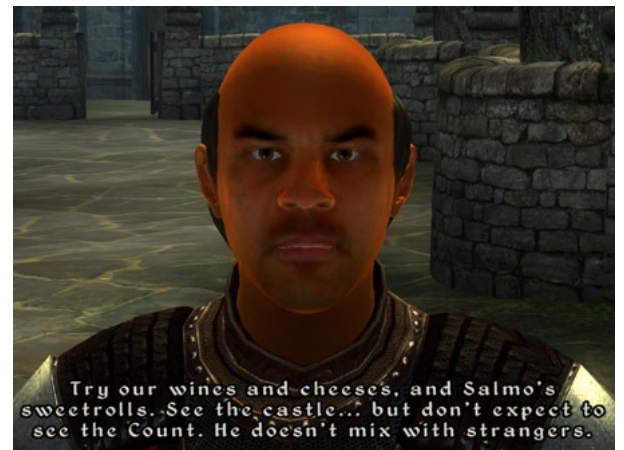
This isn't creepy or anything, is it? After staring at her for a while, I wake her up so we can have a chat.

She's very pleasant to talk to and not as unattractive as most people in the game. She kindly suggests some activities I might partake in that don't involve me standing over her leering at her while she's sleeping.

But she's nice about it, and I

think she's perhaps the friendliest person I've met so far in Skingrad. Things *do* get a little ugly when I end the conversation, wherein she threatens to call the guards if I don't get out of her room, but as an ugly guy who barges into people's homes, I've got to expect that kind of reaction from time to time.

I continue my wandering, chatting with a few more NPCs I run into, then head back to the Two Sisters Lodge for the evening. It's a little lonesome for a bit.







Things pick up, though, and how could they not, with a handsome devil like me around? I simply sit motionless in bar for five hours and then the chicks come flocking in. Agnate, the drunk from the weapons store, and a woman from the Colovian Traders, Enja. Plus, the lady orc behind the bar. I'm swimming in girlies.

Drinks are imbibed, conversations are repeated, dispositions are boosted, and



midnight finally rolls around, so I retire for the evening. First, though, it's time to ascend to the second level. This is how it shakes out:

With my face, I'm gonna need as much personality as I can get, and with my fighting skills, I'm gonna need speed. To run away with. I'm not sure why my intelligence is given a boost, but it could be because of all the eating I do. Testing (eating) alchemy ingredients can help you become a better alchemist, and though I've only mixed a few potions, I am eating a few times a day, so that may be why it has such a high modifier. I am now more skilled at eating. I am a level two eater! Watch out, cheese!

Choose 3 Attributes to Increase			
	Strength	50	+2
	Intelligence	33	+3
	Willpower	35	+2
	Agility	40	+2
	Speed	40	+5
	Endurance	55	+2
	Personality	35	+5
	Luck	50	

And with that, I set my internal alarm clock for 8am and drift into satisfied slumber. It was a good day. I made money, I made friends, I gained a level, and I did it all without any excitement or adventure.

Or did I? Because I am awakened much earlier than 8am. In fact, it's just past four in the morning when my eyes snap open unexpectedly.

There is someone in my room.

### Day Ten and Eleven: Grapes of Wrath

A bright orange sphere signals that it is morning, but it's not the sun. It's Sir Dion of Beta-Carotene, the guardsman, standing in my room.

I'm kind of annoyed. What kind of scumbag walks into someone's room while they're sleeping, wakes them up, and has a little chat?

Oh, right. Right.

Anyway, Dion is kind of a dick. He warns me that Glarthir is crazy, and tells me to report any strange



behavior to him or another guardsman. Then, he leaves.

It is at that moment I realize something truly awful. Before I went to bed last night I was rifling through my inventory and outfits and stuff, I guess I accidentally put on my stupid fur helmet and never took it off. So I was wearing it the whole time Dion was having his dramatic and pressing conversation with me.

That's just great. He must think I'm an idiot.

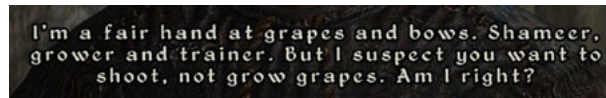
At any rate, it's somewhat satisfying to have this game, this *world*, so completely desperate to provide me with adventure that it's actually breaking into my room while I'm sleeping in a stupid furry hat to offer it



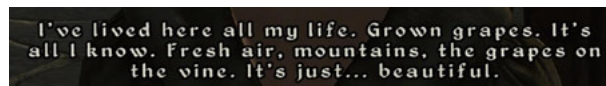


to me. And yet, I resist, as I plan to spend today strolling around doing nothing.

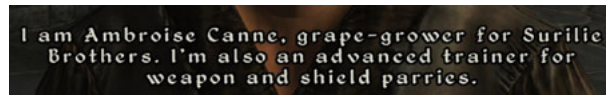
Which turns out to be pretty easy, because after the Dion incident, *Oblivion* seems to have given up on me. Instead of adventure, it feeds me a steady diet of grape-related anecdotes. Everyone I stop and talk to just can't shut their goddamn yaps about grapes.



I'm a fair hand at grapes and bows. Shameer, grower and trainer. But I suspect you want to shoot, not grow grapes. Am I right?



I've lived here all my life. Grown grapes. It's all I know. Fresh air, mountains, the grapes on the vine. It's just... beautiful.



I am Ambroise Canne, grape-grower for Surilie Brothers. I'm also an advanced trainer for weapon and shield parries.

Okay, there's a little adventure in there, but it's mostly grapes. The exceptions are Dion, who I run into again, and who tries to pressure me into suggesting that Glarthir be arrested, and Glarthir himself, who is angry with me for not meeting him behind the chapel.

While I'm finding these Skingradians alternately extremely dull or fairly annoying, I'm still interested in seeing what sort of house might be for sale in town. After all, I don't want to live in inns forever. I want a place for myself, to display my treasures, such as... well, I've got that wolf-fork, anyway. It's a conversation piece!

I pick up a tip that I should visit the castle and speak to an Orc named Shum gro-Yarug if I'm interested in a house. I track him down and engage in the usual mode of chit-chat, in which I watch his face carefully to determine if he prefers being threatened, joked with, admired, or bragged to, and then engage in some combination of the four. Which is odd. I mean, if I know the guy hates jokes, why would every fourth thing out of my mouth be a joke?

It takes a lot of talk, and one cash bribe, to even get him to trust me enough to even mention the house for sale.

Well, okay, fair enough. I can accept that, but I think I should get my 12 septim bribe back, at least. Plus, walking slowly everywhere really eats up time and the day is almost over.

I head up to the bridge to see if I can catch a glimpse of Imperial City's famed tower, which is said to be visible from every city in Cyrodiil. Just as it did in Anvil, the weather conspires against me. Fogged in, I can't see far at all, in any direction. Especially the wrong direction.



to show off my new duds, which appear to be flats and a dress. There I meet a woman named Else God-Hater. As advertised, she hates the Gods.



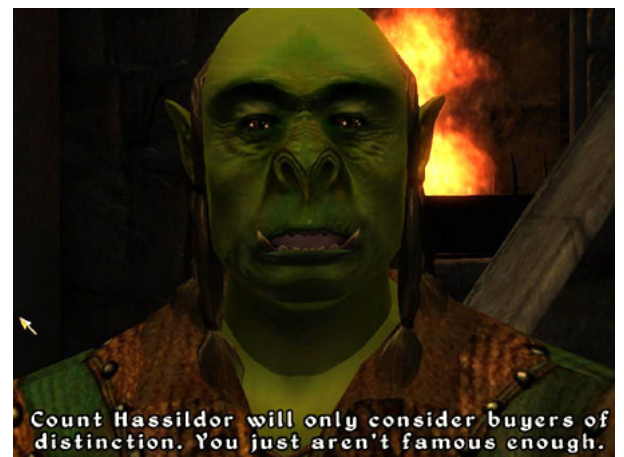
Suckage. Depressed, I go buy myself another outfit. For clubbing.

I head to the West Weald Inn

So noted. I also overhear a conversation between Else and a heavily armored elf regarding the hottest topic in of all of Cyrodiil. [It's on YouTube here.](#)

Fearing Dion may burst into my room at the Two Sisters Lodge again tonight, I shell out a bit extra for a room at the West Weald. It's a small room but it's on the corner, which would mean something if I could see out the windows.

The next morning I'm up and sporting my fancy blue duds. I grab some breakfast (an entire watermelon, just for a change) and I decide, what with all the chatter about grapes, I'd better check out the vineyards before someone kicks down my door and demands I visit them. The vineyards, as it turns out, are not only full of grapes, they're full of people who want to talk about grapes. It's a real grape town, this Skingrad.







I notice a bit of a traffic jam as well. Looks like a bunch of travelers from the Crowded Roads mod I installed have gotten stuck behind a fence. I also spot the dead naked pummeled wizard lying in the road — dead and pummeled courtesy of Toutious Sextus, naked thanks to yours truly.

I do a little ingredient gathering, though I don't pick any grapes. I could, easily, as there are tons of them and it wouldn't technically be stealing, but as an NPC I am bound by a different code. Anyway, I don't want grapes. I'm tired of seeing them and tired of talking about them. I head back into the city, kind of grouchy.

Oh, for fuck's sake. This doesn't help my mood *at all*. This douche is



not only wearing the same outfit as me, he's wearing the same hair.

I stomp away, back up to the bridge, to take one more stab at seeing the distant spire of Imperial City. Despite the weather being fairly clear, I still can't see if from the bridge. Night is approaching, so I start back, but decide to climb a nearby hilltop not far from the bridge.

And there, in the fading light, through a gap in the lush trees, I finally spot it.

The White Gold Tower. The center of Imperial City, the meeting place for the Council of Elders.

You know, I don't think I want to live in Skingrad, or even stay here much longer. I want to be *there*. In Skingrad, I'm a big dork in a little city. I want to be a little dork in a big city.

At the same time, I'm not sure I've got what it takes to make it there. Not yet, anyway. One thing's for sure, I'm a little bored with walking around hearing about grapes. And I got an idea this morning, while I was preparing to stuff an entire watermelon down my craw.

The woman I bought the watermelon from also sold boar meat, and for a pretty penny, too. While I haven't seen any boar, and probably won't until I've gained a few more levels, maybe I should try my hand at harvesting something other than weeds.

Yes. Tomorrow, a hunting I shall go. A *hunter*... I shall *be*.

## Day 12: Shafted

I awaken at 5am. It's dark, quiet. The wealthy merchants who strut smugly around the city dressed in red or blue velvet are still fast asleep. This... is the time of the *hunter*.

And I... am a *hunter*.

Dressing in my armor, I ready my bow and a quiver of arrows, and depart, slipping through the silent streets. Stealthily. Like an oiled snake. Like a *hunter*. Because I *am* one. Then, well, I have to hang around the aforementioned silent streets for a few hours because it's so early, the armor shop isn't open yet, and I really need to buy armored gloves and leggings.

While I'm loitering around the streets — loitering the way only a *hunter* can — I notice a female ~~high~~ dark elf named Falanu peeping over a low stone wall around the corner. I go talk to her, like, in a real *hunter*y way.



Ingredients			
	Blackberry	2	0.1
	Boar Meat	35	2
	Carrot	2	0.2
	Cheese Wedge	2	0.2



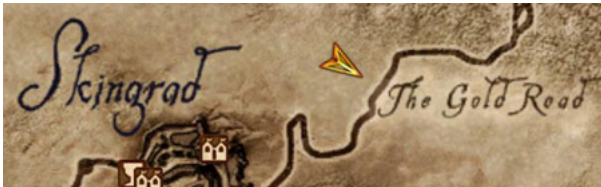




I don't, but I *do* know where she could find an attractive single dead bandit hedge wizard.

The armor shop finally opens, and while they don't have fur gloves they have fur *greaves*, which are like armored leggings. I fork over sixteen bucks, but in a way that is very much like a hunter. Finally, at half-past eight, which is a *little* late for being the time of the hunter but still, and I stress this, *the tail end of the time of the hunter*, I stroll out the front gate. To, uh, hunt.

I walk east, finding a graveyard or, as Falanu would call it, [a singles club](#). I collect a few ingredients as I'm poking around in the woods, but it's a few hours later before I spot my first prey, a deer.



Dropping into a crouch, or as I call it, a hunter's crouch, I nock an arrow, take aim, and send my missile directly into the deer's face. Even with my surprise attack doing twice the normal amount of damage, the deer springs away. I give chase, peppering the woods with arrows, but never score a second hit.

By noon I've traveled pretty far north and east, and haven't killed *anything*. I've collected some mushrooms, but that's not very hunter-ish because they're pretty easy to sneak up on. I slip into a mild depression — call it a hunter's depression — as I consider just giving up and heading back along the road to Skingrad. This hunter thing doesn't seem like it's gonna pan out. Rats.

No, seriously, *rats*. One leaps out of the grass and attacks me. This must be a rat cranked up on skooma because it's throwing itself against my shield at a rapid enough rate to increase my block skill. Still, it's just a rat, and one good swipe of my sword brings it down with a squeak, and I harvest the nearly worthless meat from its corpse. A few minutes later I come across a small pond, where I sneakily dispatch a second rat at range with an arrow. There, that at least made me feel more like a hunter.



I come across a wolf, wound it with a stealth arrow at range and finish it with my sword, then kill another rat, then come across some more deer, which I injure but fail to kill. They are really wily, those deer. And that's pretty much the day's hunting. A couple rats and a wolf, and there's a deer with an arrow in its face somewhere. [The ingredients I've gathered along the way](#) are worth more than the animals I've butchered, and the hunting leaves me a few arrows short and my weapon and armor quality down a few pegs. I suck as a hunter.

Still, the day isn't a total bust. On my sullen clomp back to the city, I meet another female ~~high~~ dark elf named Undena Orethi. I chat her up and she reveals a little something odd. (And she *does* have eyes, she's just in mid-blink in this picture.)

I like stuff like this. There are tons of NPCs in the game and, like the necrophiliac and this tomato hunter, many of them have little personality quirks that keep them from just being another automated drone, walking their predetermined paths and saying their scripted lines. I mean, they *are*, but at least they have their *own* lines, and someone took the time to make this NPC stand out a little. It gets me thinking about what makes Nondrick stand out, apart from his giant stupid head. Not much, when you get right down to it.

I check the [Oblivion Wiki](#), which has this to say about Undena: *She is not involved in any quests and does not offer any services.*

But I say *nay* to thee, wiki, for she has indeed provided me a service. She has inspired me. She is in search of something, she is on a quest, not one that involves clearing ancient ruins of monsters or finding lost artifacts or slaying vampires, but a *personal* quest.



While I'm keeping Nondrick away from the game's formal quests, I think I'd like him to have a personal quest, something outside the boundaries of him just making a living and trying to find a home. Sure, he'd like to get freaky with one of these female NPCs but this isn't going to happen due to the limits of the game, just as Undena will never find her perfect tomato because all of the tomatoes in the game are the same.

So, I want to come up with a personal quest for Nondrick, one he can accomplish or at least spend his free time pursuing. He needs his own grail. Nothing dramatic or adventurous — something more like a hobby. But, he needs *something* to go along with his non-adventure. He needs a side-non-adventure.

For now, he heads back to the West Weald, his hunting days over. Even if I do manage to bring down a deer or two, it's time consuming, their meat doesn't go for much, and I'll probably lose several arrows in the process. Rats are easy to kill but their meat isn't worth a lot, either. Wolf pelts go a decent price, but wolves attack me when I'm out collecting ingredients anyway, so there's not much point in specifically trying to track them down.

So, a new plan is formed, or rather, a variation on an old plan I gave up on too quickly. The ingredients will be the key to my success, but not merely picking them and selling them. I shall combine them, mushing them up together in a little something the ancients called Iron Chef.

Wait, they called it Alchemy. And it's time for Nondrick to become an alchemist. A proper one. It's time to put down the bow and pick up the beaker. And that's the most exciting hook I can think of for the end of this post.

## Day 13-14: Mortar and Pesting

Before I can become an alchemist, I have something to attend to.

I head back to Colovian Traders, and sell my fancy duds back to Gunder. I let my brief success picking flowers go to my head. I'm not some wealthy fancy-pants merchant. I'm a simple dork with a bag of rapidly dwindling gold. I buy a simple brown shirt, some pants, and cowhide shoes to wear around town.

There. Simple, humble, and ready to start my career. I wander around the Mage's Guild, hoping to buy a few things for my new start-up, but no one is selling anything other than spells. I eventually find my way to a shop called All Things Alchemical, run by the necrophiliac elf I met the other morning. I spend most of the rest of my money on a Novice Albemic and a Novice Calcinator, giving me two more tools with which to practice my new craft. It also leaves me with a mere 29 gold to my name. But, you've gotta spend septims to make septims.

I check out the rest of her merchandise, buying an apple, some beef, and a blackberry, all of which share the "Restore Fatigue" property. They each also cost 2 gold, so I'm down to 23. I already have an ear of corn, which I think I bought at the inn for lunch. I mix them all together and voila! I have a potion! That probably tastes horrible! And it's worth 3gp. Okay, that was a loss.



I try again, with a couple of items I picked yesterday and one purchase from the shop, and mix up two



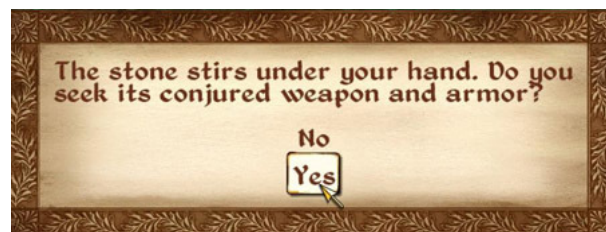
"Restore Intelligence" potions. These are worth 6 gold each. I also decide to start haggling over the prices, and manage to sell each potion for 4 gold. I'm up to 30 again. I buy some Spiddal Stick to match some Nightshade I picked yesterday, which gives me a Damage Health potion, which I sell back at just a slight loss. Down to 29 again.

Well, buying, mixing, and selling doesn't seem to pay off just yet, and gathering, buying ingredients to match the properties of my gathering, *then* mixing only works sometimes. I have an idea, though, of how this all might come together, but to put it into action I'm gonna need some cash. Time to hit the fields again.

I armor up and head northwest, finding flax, water hyacinth, peony, sacred lotus, alkanet, and even a couple pearls in some clams in a pond. Plus, I come across a [weird stone](#) that wants to give me something.

Sure. Why not.

Magicka bursts forward from the stone, enveloping me. I feel tendrils of unnatural energy claw at my flesh, snake into my veins, and clutch at my heart. I open my mouth to scream and the ancient eldritch power pours into my lungs like blood-red smoke and clouds my eyes with visions of a barren, blasted land ruled by a scowling Daedra Lord perched on a massive throne of charred, splintered bone. When the darkness passes, I find myself clad in brutal black and crimson armor, holding a massive spike of a sword in my two shaking hands.







I continue picking flowers. Yeah, I *know* I've got magical Daedric armor on and am carrying a deadly four-foot double-edged Oblivion-forged blade, but that's no reason to change my plans for the day.

Not a bad day of collecting, either. It's dark and raining as I head back into the city gates. (The magical armor and sword have since poofed back out of existence.) I mix up some potions from my collection, get a cheap room at the Two Sisters, and get some sleep.

In the morning, I'm back to the alchemist's. I sell the potions I've made, *and* all my spare ingredients, and use the profits to buy her out of apples, grapes, onions, blackberries — everything cheap that shares the very common Restore Fatigue property. I mix up a ton of two-ingredient potions, and sell them to her. My alchemy skill goes up several times as a result, and I buy a Novice Retort, the fourth and final instrument of the alchemist.

I think I'm on the right track now. It's not about *profit* so much at this point, it's about becoming a more skilled alchemist. The more skill I

have, the better my potions will be, and the more I'll be able to sell them for. It's not time to make money, it's time to grind. Quantity, not quality — only two ingredients per potion instead of three or four.

Plus, all the buying of cheap ingredients and selling of mass amounts of potions will increase my mercantile skills, and boosting merchants' disposition through conversation will increase my speechcraft skills. I'll become a better alchemist and salesman, and more likable guy, all at once.

I head over to Colovian Traders, and do the same with Gunder, buying everything cheap he has, mixing up as many weak potions as I can, and selling them back to him.

I dash over to the West Weald Inn, buying them out of carrots, cheese, ham, pears, rice, and everything else they've got that I can afford. I slap together a huge amount what must be some truly awful tasting potions, and finally, for real this time, voila!

I'm still pretty broke at this point (54 gp) but I'm an apprentice alchemist! Now each ingredient has two properties I can use, which will make it easier to mix and match ingredients, and it'll unlock more potent drinks, which will in turn sell for more money.

There are still a lot of questions in Nondrick's life, but finally one has been answered. I've got a real, workable plan. Major in Alchemy, minor in Sales. This is how I shall make my fortune.

## [Day 15-16: The Grind](#)

It's ironic that the day after I decide to become an alchemist, I finally bring down my first deer. To be fair, though, the alchemy helped.

I'm out gathering far north of Skingrad, and I spot a deer nearby. I'd just picked up some nightshade, a deadly little flower, and I'd gathered some peony seeds earlier as well. Both share an alchemical attribute: damage health. I cook up the poison brew, dip an arrowhead into it, and creep as close to the deer as I dare.

My shot flies true. The deer is dealt double damage by the surprise hit and springs away, as they always do, but the poison works quickly. I see it drop a moment later.

Finally! I even get my arrow back. The venison isn't worth any more than rat meat, which seems strange, but it's more about the accomplishment and actually progressing in skill. Plus, I do need to eat. Look at me, living off the land. I'm all grows'd up.

I continue north, far north of Skingrad now, finding some new ingredients, mostly mushrooms. I slay a few lone wolves, pass some Ayleid ruins, and realize that I'm so far north that even by turning back, I won't reach Skingrad until morning. I decide to press on. There's got to be a camp or town or inn somewhere out here.



	Weapons				
Iron Arrow		1	0.1	2	
	Ingredients				
Venison		1	2		



It's nearly midnight by the time I stumble across a small settlement called Hackdirt. [I find Moslin's Inn, but it's empty.](#) Odd. Innkeepers usually don't stray far from the front desk. In fact, most of them sleep right next to the bar in case they get late visits from adventurers or dorks in furry hats. The houses are all locked, so I wander over to the chapel. There I find a crowd of people. Midnight mass?

They are... less than polite.

I head back to the inn as instructed and wait around. Eventually, the innkeeper arrives and I rent a room for what's left of the night, which is nothing, because it's about seven in the morning by now. It's pretty big, a suite, in fact, and I sleep until noon.

I visit the shop, which sells nothing but arrows and bear pelts, a little odd since the room is filled with crates and chests and should be teeming with merchandise. This Hackdirt is a strange town. Someone more adventurous should really [investigate](#).

If they're not selling, at least they're buying, so I mix up what potions I can, sell the rest of my gatherings, and depart with about 100 gold to my name. Another settlement shows up on my radar shortly, someplace called Weatherleah. It's a large farmhouse and it's been trashed. The furniture is destroyed and there are human bones strewn throughout the place. This is kinda oogy, but as an alchemist I can gather bonemeal to use in my potions.

Even though there's a bed in the place I can use, which makes Weatherleah an attractive free alternative to paid lodgings, the bones and skulls and [dead roasted human body in a fireplace](#) make this a non-option for the cowardly alchemist. I decide to leave. I take a skull, though. If I ever have a mantle, it might be cool to have a skull on it.

[It's quite foggy as I stumble upon some ruins named Wendir](#), though at least one thing is clear: I'm not going back to Skingrad. At least not for a while. There's no house to be bought, I'm tired of the grape-centric conversations, and, for a boring alchemist Nondrick still has a bit of wanderlust. I'm close to the city of Chorrol now, it's not far north of here, so I'm making that my destination.

I fight two wolves in Wendir, and win. And look, one even had a bone. Aw. Now I feel bad. I wonder if there's a mod where I could have a pet wolf.



Misc			
Bone	0	2	
Wolf Pelt	10	1	

The fog turns to rain, followed by strong winds and thunder. Miserable weather. [This YouTube link fails adequately to capture just how gross it is out.](#) But you get the idea. Trudging along in the darkness, I come across Odiil Farm, but it's locked up for the night. Luckily, there's a Priory just up the road.

**You found Weynon Priory.**

or ever will happen at this totally boring and inconsequential monastery, huh? Poor dopes. Anyway, there are some beds I can crash in for the night for free.

Tomorrow, a whole new city beckons. Chorrol. Here's hoping I'll like it enough to stay.

## [Day 17: A Quested Development](#)

Before I leave Weynon Priory, I poke my head into [Jauffre](#)'s office, where he's reading a book.

Sup, Jauff? To simpler times, my friend. To simpler times.

Actually, these *are* simpler times, and will remain so. With my lunkhead NPC wandering about refusing to get into adventures, there will be no adventure. Jauffre will be able to live out the remainder of his days in peaceful meditation or reading or whatever the hell he does when he's not helping adventurers save the world.

In fact, by not beginning the main quest I actually *have* saved the world. Uriel Septim sits unmolested in Imperial City, and will remain there. The Oblivion Gates will never open. The world will remain in a state of static peace. I've saved the world from ending by avoiding the beginning of the end altogether. Nondrick is a hero simply by trying not to be one.

Well, whatevs! It's time to check out Chorrol!

[Chorrol is an brownish town](#) west of Imperial City, its main export being fighters and main import being, apparently, bald dudes.







I should fit right in here.

I'm in the Oak and Crosier, a local inn, with affordable rooms (10 gp). I buy every cheap ingredient the Khajiit barkeep has, and continue my alchemy grind, making crummy potions just for the experience. Just up the road I find a shop called Northern Good and Trade, run by an Argonian, and sell my collected loot, which isn't really very much except some wolf pelts and a couple pearls. It's while I'm chatting up the shopkeep that something magical happens — my speechcraft odometer turns over and I'm prepared to gain another level with the coming night's rest. Gosh! Level three, here I come!

First, though, gotta scope out the local scenery.

Oh, I see what I want, all right. Heh heh heh. Heh. Heh heh.

With that bit of creepery out of the way, I visit the chapel, and eavesdrop on a couple of conversations — one [predictably about mudcrabs](#), and one about [goblins, for a change](#) [both YouTube links]. I enjoy how the dude shoots me a look as he shoulders past me in that second clip.

I meet the local beggar, named Lazy, and give him a coin for good karma, then run into an orc on the street named, well, let's just say *Something gro-Somethingelse*. Something starts talking about someone named Reynald. Something ran into Reynald in another town, Cheydinhal, but Reynald acted as if he'd never met Something before, apparently, and this is *so* interesting to Something that, rather than just asking Reynald about it, he's decided to tell me, a complete stranger, all the details.

And just like that, the game gives me a quest just for listening to Something's boring blather. Great. Looks like Chorrol is just like every other town, just packed to the rafters with intrigue.

Maybe I'm taking the wrong approach. Maybe instead of starting off with Nondrick and having him avoid all the quests, I should have one character go through the entire game and complete every single quest possible, and *then* somehow load up Nondrick in that world, a world where all the adventure has been exhausted. Though that in itself sounds exhausting.

For now, I keep wandering around. I get my armor and weapons repaired, chat with some more locals, and wind up at The Grey Mare, a dive bar and inn. I walk around, talking to the various patrons.

And then. Something terrible happens. Something truly awful. Something that every NPC knows about but never thinks will happen to them.

There's a man sitting in the corner, drinking, and I walk over to him before I realize who he is. He's Reynald, the guy *Something gro-Somethingelse* was talking about. I talk to him.

I just talk. Nothing else. I don't lead him on or tease him or anything. I don't act like I'm looking for adventure. This is *not* my fault. Do you understand me? I did *nothing* wrong. I did nothing no other NPC wouldn't have done in my place.

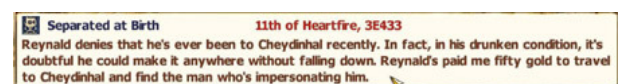
Still, unknowingly, just by *speaking* to this man, I've... I've **updated the quest I didn't even want to accept in the first place**, the quest the orc gave me.

I can do nothing as this drunkard spills his story and then forces — *forces* — fifty gold into my inventory.

I feel so violated. I've been quest-molested. I've been *quolest*ed.

Now, I *really* don't know what to do. I don't want to go on this quest, I want to pick herbs and mix them with bread and cheese. But I've been forcibly paid already — am I now obligated to at least see it through? I can't give the money back. I can't reload a previous save, because it's against my rules and plus I honestly can't remember the last time I saved the game. I'm screwed.

Here are my options, as I see them.





1) Forget it. I didn't want the quest, it was just rammed all up in me. I'll just keep the gold and ignore this jerk and his stupid jerky crap.

2) Continue it. Look, I'm probably going to visit Cheydinhal at some point anyway. He's not asking me to storm some vampire lair or slaughter a bunch of party guests one-by-one in a deadly game of cat and mouse. He just wants me to look for a dude who looks like him in another town.

3) Return the money. Very tricky, as I can't just give it back to him. The best I could do is buy something worth 50 gold and reverse pickpocket (ie: plant) it into his inventory. This would satisfy me as refunding his quest advance, but it's risky. Nondrick's stealth isn't much to speak of and if I get caught fiddling around in Reynald's pockets I'll get arrested.

Ach. Damn it. If I find myself in Cheydinhal, I'll ask around. But I consider the day ruined.

To make myself feel better I visit the castle. [There I find Countess Arriana](#), who seems a bit self-centered.

I hate people who refer to themselves in the third-person. Sadly, even after some chatting and a bribe, she won't discuss the idea of selling me a house. Again, Nondrick is simply not famous enough. Guess Chorrol will never be home.

She leaves a moment after dissing me, so I take advantage of the opportunity and plant my butt on the throne... [I even put on my furry crown](#).

That little bit of frivolity marks the end of the day, and I head to bed at the Oak and Crossier. Of course, bedtime means it's time to level up! Here's a look at how our lad has grown:

Choose 3 Attributes to Increase			
	Strength	52	+2
	Intelligence	38	+5
	Willpower	35	+2
	Agility	40	
	Speed	45	+3
	Endurance	55	+2
	Personality	39	+4
	Luck	50	

Looks pretty good. The mixing, chatting, and selling have given me some nice modifiers for personality and intelligence, both of which I need to be a good alchemist and salesman. I gotta remember, though, that the rest of the outside world is leveling right along with Nondrick. If I'm gaining levels, so are all the beasts roaming around guarding those ingredients I'm going to be picking. And I'm pretty sure the monsters aren't putting their points into personality.

I might be getting smarter and more charming, but they're getting deadlier. The world just got a little more dangerous.

### Day 18: Close Calls and Waterfalls

I awake, feeling stronger, smarter, and even more charismatic than ever. It's my first day as a Level Three Administrative Alchemist! Time to facilitate the strategic acquisition of salable assets!

As if in recognition of my sudden gain in power, the world outside the gate of

Chorrol greets me with a mouthful of wolf teeth. I don't know what the deal is with the wolves in Cyrodiil. They don't seem hungry, just angry. They'll run right past a soft, tasty deer to bite into a legion soldier dressed in spiked plate armor, or, in this case, a botanist dressed in hair.

But hey, I'm not sweating it. I'm level *three*. I use my newly enhanced intelligence to determine the wolf's every move (it has one move – to bite me) and every weak point (its weak point is its body) and my increased personality skills to sprinkle the battle with witty comments (such as “Yahhh!” and “Whulhuh!”), and in a moment, thanks to my newly increased strength, the wolf is dead. Yeah. I'm pretty much a badass.

Then it's back to my main chore, pickin' flowers, which is not so badass. Still, there's some good pickin' in these thar woods. I figure I'll make a big loop, heading north, then west, then south, and end up by the gate on the other side of the city at the end of the day.

Other than a rat attack, nothing really happens for a while, other than the always exciting and volatile act of pulling plants out of the ground and stuffing them into my... well, whatever it is I carry all my stuff around in. Then I come upon this scene:







Look, I'm not the adventurous type, really, I'm not, but it's a door under a waterfall. It's a freakin' *door* under a *waterfall*. I'm pretty sure anyone, anywhere, upon discovering a door under a waterfall is obligated by natural law to have a peek inside it.

I have a peek. It's a [bandit hideout](#). Time to exit, cave left. I know I was just crowing about being leveling up my strength, but I leveled up my cowardice as well.

I step back outside and am suddenly set on fire. Ouch.

An imp is flapping toward me, flinging

fireballs every few seconds. I somehow hadn't noticed that the soothing music that always plays in my head had turned dark and ominous, a sure sign I'm in danger. I dodge the next blast but am hit again. Fur armor and fireballs probably don't mix very well.

I keep a large tree between us, periodically popping out to hurl arrows at it. Eventually, it tires of the ranged combat and closes the distance, at which point I hack it out of the air.



Hey, I had a pretty nice shot there. Right in the imp noggin.

To celebrate, I strike a heroic pose on top of the waterfall, just in case someone is taking pictures. [Luckily, someone is.](#)



At the foot of the waterfall I find one of Oblivion's little treats: [a forgotten treasure chest](#). It's always fun stumbling across something like this. I kind of wish every time you did, an e-mail got sent to the person at Bethesda who stashed it here, just so they know you found it.

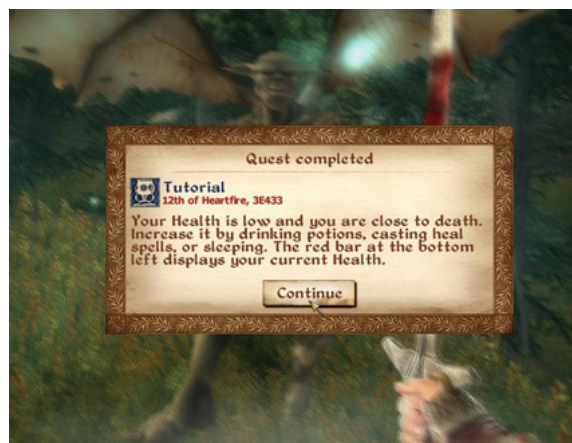
This chest has 8 gold pieces and a crystal ball worth 5 bucks. When you're playing Oblivion, really playing, I mean, this sort of treasure is a huge letdown. When you're playing as a humble root merchant, as I am, this is awesome. It's free money and a trinket to hold onto until I have a mantle to place it on. I'm happy as an imp slathered in gall.

After I waded out of the water, probably smelling like wet, burned hair, a wolf greets me, a wolf with a very nice pelt and a little hidden treasure of its own: two gold pieces.

Hm. Maybe he was saving up for a place of his own, too.

A little further north I come across Nonwyll Cavern, and, hoping to find some mushrooms I carefully venture inside. Crabwalking, my sneak skill goes up about 700 times in the space of four seconds. Something is in the cave. Something very, very close by. I scuttle back out.

MISC			
2	Gold	1	0
	Wolf Pelt	10	1



Once outside, I am immediately struck by lightning. Ouch.

Not from the sky, from some angry god, but from another leathery winged imp. He blasts me again, and again, as I desperately switch to my bow to try to take him down. I miss a few times and he flaps over to melee range. I switch to my sword and shield but as I swing to hit him he gets me with another shot.



An alarming message appears, one I haven't seen yet. Looks like, 18 days after starting it, I've finally finished the tutorial.



That ain't good. [No reloads](#) with our boy Nondrick here. It's kill or die.

Cleverly, I choose kill. But still, a close call, the closest I've had. These beasts are getting stronger – I've really got to start being more careful, and I've got to put some thought into becoming a better, stronger fighter. My chosen trade takes me into danger often enough that I've got to be prepared to deal with it.

I use my Mara's Gift spell to heal all my wounds – I was down to about 1/4<sup>th</sup> my health.

A few minutes later I kill a rat that owns a knife. Man, soon I'll have an entire flatware set from items I've found inside parasite-ridden animals. And won't my dinner guests be pleased to hear where I found the utensils they're eating with?



Nightfall. I'm on my way back to Chorrol. I'm attacked by a female bandit – and then another. The first is a pleasant looking Redguard woman, the second, a female Khajiit. I suppose she's pleasant looking. I'm not really into cats. In that way.

Both fights go about the same – I backpedal while flinging fireballs at them, they lunge with axe or warhammer, I take a few lumps, they eventually fall before my blade. One the one hand, it's nice to see a lot of ladies in the bandit trade, a traditionally male-driven occupation. Girl power!

On the other hand, neither of the lovely ladies seem to have been very good at being bandits. Apart from their armor and weapons, they've got diddly to show for their efforts. The wolf I killed earlier had more gold than they did.

I head into the city, a bit troubled. In my first couple weeks of being an alchemist I've had to kill three or four women. It just seems wrong. Here I am trying to live a mild-mannered life and I'm droppin' bitches like Nico Bellic.



GTA: Grand Theft Alchemy.

## [Day 19 & 20: Fortitude](#)

It's Turdas morning, Heartfire 13 — man, is it Heartfire 13 already? I'm still writing Heartfire 12 on all my chequetims.

Anyway, I'm up around nine and headed to Fire & Steel to sell the armor and weapons I took off of two dead she-bandits the night before. My own fur armor is in extremely bad shape after being set on fire and electrocuted, so I wind up selling some of the armor I'm wearing and keeping the some of the less battered bandit bits for myself. I also have my weapons repaired and then step back outside into the fresh morning air.

Hm. Is the fresh morning air a little chillier than it was a few minutes ago?  
Oh. Oh, right.

I forgot than when selling the armor off your back, it's a good idea to then equip the armor you're replacing it with. My bad! Sorry, citizens of Chorrol.

It's a little weird for Nondrick to be so buff, considering what a dork he is. Clearly, all those women he's been killing have done wonders for his abs. I quickly put on my humble alchemist clothes and head over to the Mage's Guild. Time to do some grinding. There I meet this intriguing mage. (Notice yet another baldie in the background.)



Woman Gone Wild! I'm actually a big fan of the book. These shady oil painters travel around the coasts of Cyrodiil, getting young, mead-filled maidens to spend a few hours undoing the complicated ties and straps of their undergarments, and then painting portraits of them in the buff. The paintings are meticulously duplicated into smaller versions and then



distributed to young males for a reasonable price. My favorite series is *Woman Gone Wild*, Volume Six: Blotto in Bravil.

Did I beat that joke into the ground enough? Good. Good.

I do my alchemy grind with the counter jockey at the Mage's Guild, selling my collected haul, buying cheap ingredients, mixing weak, flimsy potions, and selling them back. When I'm done, I'm sitting pretty at 578 septims. Not bad, but it's no time to rest on my laurels: it's time to go gather some.

I head east, pickin' as I go. It's an extremely uneventful morning, uninterrupted by even a single wolf or rat attack, though I spy a winged imp far off in the trees and give him a wide birth. Eventually, I come upon this welcome sight.



I'll be honest — walking everywhere and never fast-traveling isn't... easy. The click of my mouse could instantly transport me to any city in the game. Sprinting would decimate my lengthy travel time. There are long stretches, like today, where I'm not attacked, there are few ingredients to pick, and not much of anything interesting to look at, and I think, *man, why the hell am I playing like this?*

But at moments like this it somehow feels worth it. In other playings of this game I've spent days, weeks even, in Imperial City. I know it inside and out. I barely even look at the city, I just zip there, run to the merchants, unload my junk, and dematerialize to my next location. But playing as Nondrick has restored a good deal of majesty and mystery on Imperial City, and catching a glimpse of it through the trees, seeing it grow closer and larger each time, is a bit of a thrill.

I continue to wander. An imp makes his intentions known, and is hacked out of the air with none of the drama of the last two. Night begins to settle in for the evening, and I realize I've wandered pretty far east. Luckily, the road isn't far north, and luckily again, I find an Imperial soldier on horseback is headed in my direction. I walk with him, scurrying off the road here and there to pick ingredients, then hustling back to stomp along in the safety of his torchlight. It's a long, slow trip but I gather a nice collection along the way.



A wolf springs out of the darkness and I don't even ready a weapon, as the soldier slides off his mount and cuts it down — the wolf, not his horse — leaving me to cut the steaming pelt off its hide. A little further up the road I find a dead Khajiit bandit, perhaps slain by my soldier on his trip down the road earlier. That means free armor for me, though I can't find his weapon anywhere.

It's quite late by the time I make it back to Chorrol. I hit up the Mages Guild and the clerks at both inns, selling my haul and grinding out some potions, before stumbling into bed.

My total cash is now up to 926. It seemed an uneventful day, but I almost doubled my money.

I don't sleep more than a few hours — I'm tired of running out of sunlight and trudging home in the dark — and I bust out early. Heading straight along the road before dawn, past Odiil Farm, pushing east. I reach Fort Ash, which actually straddles the road. I'm met by its apparent keeper, a Khajiit highwayman.

As it turns out, I'm really not in the mood to do either. Have at thee, foul cur!



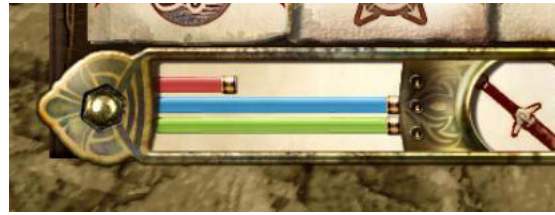
It's a pitched battle. He's hampered by the fact that his weapon is two-handed, meaning he telegraphs his attacks and can't block my blows effectively, and I'm slowed down by the fact that I have to fight in third-person perspective to take these pictures.







Hoping to build up my fighting skills a bit, I refrain from casting spells and just hack at him, blocking when he lunges, swinging when he pauses, and eventually he goes down.



Owie. He really did a number on me. I heal up with Mara's Gift, then decide to check out the bandit's crib. Hopefully, he's got a bedroll I can use — I'm always on the lookout for somewhere I can sleep for free between cities.

Fort Ash has an underground interior, but I'm staying away from that in case it's full of bandits. I'm all for exploring the crumbling exterior levels, though.

As I climb to the second floor, my spidey-sense goes off: Imp. He's dispatched with a few arrows and a couple slashes of my sword.

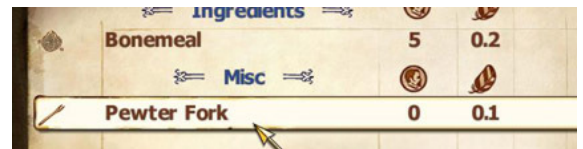
There are some barrels scattered around the second floor of the fort, and I grab an apple from one and a stone cup (to go along with my Adventurer's Dishware set) from another. Lying on the stone surface I find a Potion of Detect Life, worth 45 gp. Nice! I also find a dead goblin and swipe his rusty iron mace. Looks like there were some tenants here before the Khajiit moved in.



In an unlocked chest I find some iron arrows, and next to it, on a step, a small pile of gems. Oh, I'll be taking those as well. A topaz, a ruby, and an emerald, the last worth 20 bucks. This is turning into a small, poorly funded gold mine.

On the next level up, another dead goblin is relieved of his sword. I find some more ingredients in a couple barrels and a few bottles of mead, plus four GP in small sack. A skeleton lying next to a chest gives up some bonemeal and — yes! Another pewter fork!

I can't wait to eat with it. The chest itself holds a silver pitcher, which will also someday find a place of honor on my dinner table. Now if I could just find a dinner table.



A surprising amount of loot. I'm glad it was all outside — I never would have poked around indoors to find it — and I stroll away from Fort Ash with my pockets jingling. I feel a little guilty, because it sort of seems like adventuring, this killing and then plundering, not the sort of thing a soft-headed alchemy major should be engaging in.

Luckily, those thoughts are quickly erased when I come upon this sight.

Now that's what I'm talkin' about.

Hmm. I think, um... I think I ain't going back to Chorrol. Yeah, I ain't. I can't. There's no way I can turn my back on this view. No way.

It's getting dark as I press on. I slay an enraged rat who owns a lockpick, and fight off an Imp who flings frost spells at me. It's pitch black when I reach the doors of the Wawnet Inn, just across the bridge from Imperial City.



The innkeeper has a room for 10 gold, quite affordable for the suburbs. As I head up to my room I encounter a man sitting on the staircase. He's a salesman, as it turns out, or, more specifically a buysman, as don't purchase anything but instead unload upon him all the crap I've got clogging up my pockets. And, when our transactions have been completed:

Not bad at all. For the first time, I'm in four figures. And I'm on the doorstep of Imperial City. Everything's comin' up Nondrick.



## Day 21 – 23: A Dubious Detour

It's a very pensive and moody Nondrick P. Cairk'tir who awakens next to his bed in the Wawnet Inn this morning. I'm feeling a bit conflicted about a few things.

First, Chorrol. I have to admit, I didn't really spend much time there. Part of my goal is to find a home, which, granted, I wouldn't be able to do in Chorrol, but regardless, I didn't really give the town its due. I didn't explore it much or really make an effort to get to know the residents, which is part of the purpose of playing the game like this in the first place. I've been a bit too driven toward making money and visiting Imperial City, and so I think I left Chorrol behind a little too early.

Which is why, on my mind this morning, is another city not far from here: Bruma.

Bruma, crouching in the mountains to the north, is a cold, snowy city, and one I'm frankly not overly fond of. Still, Nondrick is a Nord and thus Bruma is his homeland. I know when I enter Imperial City, with all its distractions, it's going to be hard to leave. I think perhaps I should visit Bruma first.

It's a tough decision. Extremely tough. Imperial City is a two-minute walk from here and Bruma is a two-day hike, at least, through a barren, frosty landscape. I hate to put Imperial City in my rearview, but I feel obligated to. Besides, I wanted to stroll into Imperial City a success, and while I'm doing pretty well for myself as of late, I'm still not much of an alchemist. I'm not much of anything.

I sullenly sell my hedge clippings to the innkeeper, buy up all of her cheap groceries, mash them into mush in a bowl, and sell them back. I'm up to almost 1200 septims.



Then, reluctantly, I walk north, leaving Imperial City behind.

Sigh. Well, what's another week, really.

Just up the road I spot a traveler headed in the other direction.



I stop for a moment. Something seems a bit odd about this fellow. I thought

at first that he was an Imperial Woodsman, what with the uniform and bow, but that's not a Legion uniform. Who is this guy? I catch him up and have a chat.

Turns out he's the Countess' Bodyguard. The Countess of *Leyawiin*. Which is *hella* far south of here. What the heck is he doing way up near Imperial City? As a bodyguard, what the heck is he doing more than two feet from the Countess? Strange. Must be a bug.

The north road turns east, the weather turns gray, and a wolf turns into a dead wolf. A strange wolf at that: he's not carrying any gold or silverware. Strange. Must be a bug. Nice view up here, though.

I happen upon a small town called Aleswell where neither ale, nor all, is well. The entire populace appears to be... well, quite frankly, they don't appear at all. They're invisible.



They relate to me a tale of a wizard who lives nearby, who turned the entire population see-through, and beg for my assistance in releasing them from the curse. Yeah, see, I'm not really into that scene.

As I leave Aleswell, hunger suddenly strikes me. Oops. I forgot to eat today. Not only that, I used all my existing food to make junky potions to sell to the innkeeper. Well, I'll just push on.

It's already dark by the time I reach the north fork that will eventually lead me to Bruma. I spot a wolf in the road, which I eventually determine to be a dog, not a wolf, and dogs have owners. This isn't always a problem, but out in the wild, a dog owner is usually a bandit. On the plus side, a bandit in the wild usually has a bedroll, so I might have a night's sleep for the low low price of killing a man. And his dog.

Just then, my hunger pains increase. My health begins to drain. Then my agility. Followed by my speed, endurance, fatigue, willpower, and strength. This isn't good. These are the hunger effects from the mod I installed. If I head to the bandit camp, I'll have to fight the dog and the bandit with my attributes reduced. The bandit may have food, he may not. He may also have buddies. I shouldn't be looking for a fight in any case, really, but especially not when I'm in such poor shape.

Backtracking to the Wawnet Inn will take the rest of the night, and I can't stay in Aleswell because the invisible jerks won't rent me a room unless I cure their invisibility. Shit. I'm stuck.

My hemming and hawing pay off, however, as I see some distant torchlight approaching from the west. Imperial Guard, on horseback. Saved again!





The dog, showing no more smarts than your average wolf, charges, and the soldier makes short work of him while I watch. The dog's owner appears, a marauder archer, and begins loosing arrows at the guard. Undeterred, the soldier corners him and makes short work of the lawbreaker, while I pitch in with one or two very carefully placed arrowshots. The last thing I want to do is hit the soldier.

I strip the dead marauder, and the soldier, not satisfied with my post mortem,

conducts his own examination of the dead man's junk. Nothing's moving.

The bandit was camped at some ruins named Sercen, and poking around in some sacks and barrels, I find enough food to return my attributes to normal. [There are also a couple bedrolls](#), and hoping more bad guys don't show up during the night, I settle down for a few hours' sleep.



In the morning, I'm headed north. I kill a few poverty-stricken wolves and a rat as Imperial City slowly recedes behind me. I wander off the road left and right to pick ingredients, but I don't find a whole lot, and with the steepness of the landscape, I tend to find a lot of unclimbable hills and dangerous looking cliff edges, and wind up having to double back to the road. I do that whole thing where you think you can climb the hill, then you're walking in place, then you jump around a lot trying to move forward, then you slide backwards, then you come very close to jumping right off a ledge and dying, thus ending your blog in a very stupid way.



I think this trip to Bruma might wind up taking longer than I already thought it would.

It's mid-afternoon when I find myself peering down at a small settlement. My keen senses deduce it's Bleaker's Way. Nice town, as it turns out. Nothing horrible happening here. At least, [not at the moment](#). I even find a free bed in the attic of one of the houses.



Another boring day of trudging uphill awaits me the next morning. You know what? This trip sucks. Nothing is happening, and while I'm generally a big fan of nothing happening, *nothing is happening*. I regret not just going to Imperial City when I had the chance. And just think, I get to walk all the way back down this stupid trail in a couple of days. I slay a wolf with two gold pieces, and another carrying nothing around but a few bucketfuls of its own blood. Man. Even wantonly murdering animals doesn't cheer me up.

The landscape turns snowy and I find a strange rock that I decide to touch. It

gives me a demonic glove and an eensy evil dagger that I am unable to put to any real use. I'd feel like a tool killing anything with this anyway. It looks like something you'd find sticking out of a club sandwich. Everything sucks up north. Even the interdimensional enchanted weapons.



Amazingly, [it's nighttime again when I finally reach Bruma](#). Jeez, three entire days to get up here. I got some gathering done, and I've got a pocketful of pelts to sell, but what a terrible trip. I head straight for Olav's Tap and Tack, a dingy inn near the main gate, sell my wares to Olav, and start chatting up the locals.

Ongar the World Weary informs me without prompting that no way is he some sort of shady merchant! Definitely not! Then he proceeds to demonstrate just how unconnected to the Thieves Guild he is by dropping into a crouch and pickpocketing everyone in the room. He's terrible at it, gets caught, the alarm is raised, a city guard runs in then immediately exits. This happens about five times. Bruma, City of Glitches!





Well, there better be more of interest here than incompetent Thieves Guild fences and snow. It took me three days to get here, and, quite honestly, I'm already ready to leave.

## Day 24: Made for Bruma

So, I developed a bit of a bad attitude on the hike to Bruma, but I'm determined to be a bit more positive today. After all, despite the dreary, uneventful trip through the mountains, I'm in a new city, with new people to meet, new places to explore, and, potentially, new women to ogle.

After a quick breakfast of corn and oranges purchased from Olav, I strike out into the city. Bruma is a frosty place: even the buildings seem huddled together for warmth. I find my way to the Jerall View Inn, a pleasantly roomy tavern, where I talk to the innkeeper, Hafid Hollowleg. I'm rewarded for joking with him by my Speechcraft odometer turning over. My ascension to Level Four is suddenly imminent.

I'm a fool, all right! A level-gainin' fool! I won't gain my next level until I sleep tonight, but I think my new positive outlook is already working for me.

I proceed to buy up everything Hafid has in stock, squeeze the resulting glop into bottles, and sell them back to him, winding up with a nice 1320 septims when I'm done.

When I step outside again, it's begun to snow. How pretty. I stare dumbly at the peaceful beauty for a bit, then I poke my head into a shop called Novaroma, and see what they've got for sale.

	Brown Shirt	4
	Fur Gauntlets	7
	Monkeypants	6290
	Oiled Linen Shoes	2

Monkeypants!

I have nothing to add to that.

I also pop into a shop called Nord Winds to sell my wolf pelts and

a few other odds and ends and get my armor and weapons repaired. I take a look at some of the clothing they have for sale, and consider some heavier steel armor, but it's a bit expensive. When I'm done there I'm sitting pretty at 1475 gold. Next, I head over to the Mage's Guild where I find a fetching woman behind the desk.



Mushroom Daiquiri, please! Shaken, not stirred. I follow my usual pattern — leer, chat, buy, mix, sell — and wind up with over 1500 septims at the end. Hey, I'm getting pretty wealthy. Maybe it's time to price some real estate.

I stroll over to the Castle Bruma to see if I can get the skinny on houses for sale. Bowing low before the Countess (okay, I'm crouching, but it's the best I can do), I find



the usual obstacles in place: she doesn't know me well enough to talk housing.

Well, that can quickly be solved by telling a few jokes, bragging about my awesome abs, admiring the way she sits there all day doing nothing, and threatening her life. Bingo, now we're fast friends, and she informs me she's got a place for sale.



The price tag: 10,000 gold.

Now, that's pretty pricey. I've been playing for over three game-weeks and I'm nowhere near that. Still, the way I've been working the alchemy grind lately, it doesn't really feel so out of reach. I'm getting more persuasive, I'm a better salesman, and my potion skills are slowly increasing. Buying a house, for the first time, feels within the realm of possibility. That's kind of exciting.

Of course, even if I were loaded down with gold, would I just buy a house, sight unseen? Shouldn't I have a look at it first? While they won't let me poke around inside the house that's for sale, maybe I can get some idea of

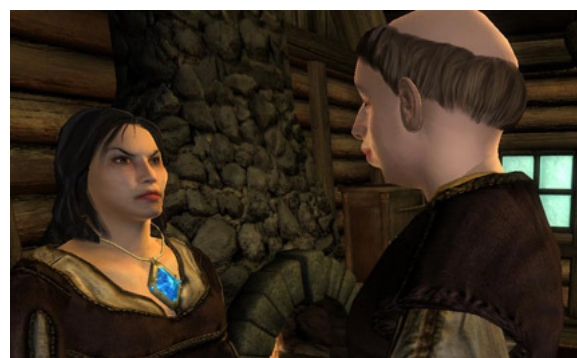


what the houses are like in Bruma by simply walking into people's homes unannounced.

So, I'm off to barge into people's houses and stare at their stuff like some kinda creep. On the way out of the castle I run into Gan Luseph, the castle mage and healer.

So, I get the third degree before the countess will reveal the city's real estate listings, but she lets *this* pervert wander around casting spells and hitting on tourists? Nice.

I wander around Bruma for a while, trying to get into people's houses. No luck. I encounter locked door after locked door. I thought people in the north didn't lock their doors? Finally, I get inside one, the home of Lyra Rosentia. [It's quite a nice place](#). The furnishings are pleasant, it's very cozy, and the breasts are fantastic. I talk to Lyra a bit, and not only is she pretty, she doesn't seem to mind that some weirdo has wandered into her bedroom. I check out her home while she walks from place to place, stopping every now and then to stare at a wall. Everyone needs a hobby.



I find another unlocked door, that of Arnora Auria. She is... not so pleasant. She glares at me with real anger, though it's hard to see her glare over the glare of the enormous gigantic jewel hung around her neck. Still, her house looks very nice, even though the atmosphere is a bit chilly.

I continue my tour of Bruma, walking into another home. Whoops. [Did I come at a bad time?](#)

A little CSI: Bruma,

huh? Despite the brutally murdered dead man lying on the bed a few feet away, I can't help but wonder if this house might be for sale shortly.

The sunlight is petering away. I head to the church for a quick prayer and blessing, then wander back through the falling snow to the Jerall View. There I'm happy to once again see the lovely Lyra Rosentia. I wouldn't have made her for a barfly, but knowing she hangs around taverns alone late at night certainly does nothing to lessen her appeal.



The Oblivion wiki has this to say about her:

*Lyra Rosentia is a completely generic female Imperial Commoner living in Bruma.*

Commoner? Generic?

Ain't nothin' generic or common about that caboose, baby! Nondrick likey!

Unfortunately, her conversation *is* a bit generic, and we quickly run out of

things to say to each other. So, I spring for a room at the Jerall (25 gold) and settle in for the night. Which means it's time to level.





Choose 3 Attributes to Increase			
	Strength	52	+2
	Intelligence	41	+3
	Willpower	35	+2
	Agility	44	+4
	Speed	45	+5
	Endurance	55	+2
	Personality	42	+3

Okay, after this I've *really* got to put some points into strength and endurance. But for now, I'm going to gamble another level on helping me become a better salesman, alchemist, and all-around charming bastard.

Well, except for one angry woman and an apparent murderer on the loose, Bruma seems like a nice enough place. The houses I wandered into without permission are cozy and I could see living here myself. The biggest downside to living in Bruma is that it would mean I'm living in Bruma — not the most convenient place to reach and a poor center of operations for a slowly wandering alchemist. There's not a whole lot of ingredients to pick nearby, and it's ages from anywhere else of interest.

Still, it's on the maybe list. It's the first town I've found that will let me buy a home without being a famous adventurer, and the price is high but not completely out of reach. We'll see.

Tomorrow, though, I'm out of here. Bruma is small and I think I covered most of it today, except for all those jerks who keep their doors locked for some reason. In the morning, I'll be on my way.

And this time, I mean it: I'm heading for Imperial City and nothing — nothing — is going to stop me. Not even me.

## Day 25: Adding to the Mix

As I stand outside the gates of Bruma in the early morning light, I let out a big, gusty sigh. Not Nondrick, but me, Chris, the guy behind the keyboard.

Here's the thing — I'm really not looking forward to the long boring walk back down that road. It's slow, it's tedious, the few ingredients I found on the way up probably won't have regenerated yet, and I probably won't even get attacked because I killed all the wolves on the way up. It took three game-days to get up here, it'll probably take close to that to get back. That translates to, I dunno, an half-hour or so real-time? Forty-five minutes? An hour? I don't know, but I do know I just don't feel like *doing* it.

I set a rule when I started — no fast-traveling. I'm not totally against breaking my own rules, and this seems like a fair cheat to skip what is certain to be a boring trip, but I'm afraid if I let myself do it once I'll do it again later, and then again, and then it'll be a regular thing.

Another option is to run instead of walk, but that's sort of another rule of mine. You really don't see NPCs sprinting around unless they're being pursued or in pursuit, and it's another habit I don't want to slip into.

Of course, there's a third option, and I'm standing right in front of it.

Could I buy Nondrick a horse? It's breaking one rule — NPCs, except for Imperial Legion Soldiers, don't have horses. Then again, the stable owner has horses, even if she doesn't ride them around, and the stable owner is an NPC. And I plan to buy a house someday, which NPCs don't do, though most of them already own houses. So, on some level it seems like buying a horse is fair enough. That's one sort of shaky way to justify it.

The potentially bigger issue is that the cheapest horse costs 500 gold, non-negotiable. That's more than a third of the money I've spent the last twenty or so days accumulating. That's a big purchase for something that I don't have complete control over. Horses can die — they can be killed by bandits or monsters or other animals. They can fall off cliffs. They can get just plain lost if you don't stable them — I think they eventually wander back to where they were bought, which would mean another long slow walk up to Bruma to retrieve it. It's definitely risky.

But the idea is in my head now. I really want to avoid that walk, and it would be cool for Nondrick, always the loner, to have sort of a pet. A pal. Plus, I won't take him with me everywhere. If I'm out scouring for ingredients or exploring, I'll leave him in the stable, but there are going to be times when I want to travel between cities quickly. Like right now.

Ah, why the hell not? I plunk down my cash and wander out to the stable to retrieve my horse, whose name is apparently "My Paint Horse." Really rolls off the tongue. I use the console cheat "setactorfullname" and rename my new companion. I'm an alchemist, so what's the first name that pops into my head?





Yeah. Beaker and I are totally BFF now.



It's a completely uneventful ride down from the Jerall Mountains. The dead wolves are still lying in the road, so new ones haven't spawned to replace them and we travel unmolested. While Beaker isn't going to break any speed records, it's much, much faster than walking and we reach the bridge to Imperial City before noon.

The weather has soured quite a bit, and it's gray and rainy as we make our glorious, thrilling... well, honestly, it's [just a really crummy ride to the gates of Imperial City](#) [YouTube] Stupid weather! It couldn't have been sunny? For this? Shouldn't the game know when I'm reaching its crown jewel for the first time and make the weather nice for the occasion? No. Guess not.

But hey, I'm here! I made it. Imperial City. No shit.

I park Beaker in the stable outside the gates, and step into the city, triumphant. Then I immediately dash back out to the stables, to make sure the game didn't teleport my horse back to Bruma or anything stupid like that. Yup, Beaker is still there, safe and sound.

I step back into the city again, slightly less triumphant than I was a moment ago, but still very, very triumphant. At least 96% as triumphant. I have a triumphant look around Talos Plaza.



I find my way to a hotel, the Tiber Septim. It's huge, classy, and 40gp for a room. I decline to make a reservation, but I chat with the woman behind the counter, Augusta Calidia, then buy all her groceries, smooch them into paste, and sell them back. I end up with 1062 septims after our transaction, so even after buying Beaker, I'm back in four figures again.



I head to the palace, and have a look around for famous spire that I've been getting tantalizing glimpses of since I got off the boat in Anvil. [I'm sure it's around here somewhere...](#)



I wouldn't mind taking some time to go sightseeing, but with the weather so crummy it doesn't seem worth it right now. Maybe I should get down to business first. So, I pick some mushrooms in the graveyard, then [head into the Market District](#).

There are all sort of shops here. Magic shops, potion shops, armor & weapons suppliers, bookstores, a store that just sells shields, a jewelry store, plus several inns and pubs. I head to a general store called The Copius Coinpurse, where I buy all the cheap ingredients they've got. Instead of mixing them up, though, I head over to an alchemy store called The Gilded Carafe. Again, I'm just stockpiling, and I buy everything worth 2gp and under. I wander over to an inn called The Feedbag, and buy all the cheap stuff there, too.

I'm down to about 600 gold now, but I've got sacks full of corn, bread, apples, pears, cheese, grapes, carrots, lettuce, and other general groceries. Time to mix. I whip up some two-ingredient potions, like Corny Pear Juice, Grapey Cheese Glop, Tomato Radish Squeezin's, Blackberry Onion Slush, Potato Rice Stew, and Ham Watermelon Surprise (the surprise is that it tastes even more disgusting than Corny Pear Juice).

It all amounts to 86 Restore Fatigue potions, which the proprietor of the Feed Bag is willing to buy for 10 dollars a pop. When I'm done, I'm back up to 1543 gold. I can pay off Beaker.

I find another alchemy shop, The Main Ingredient, and buy them out of rice and pears, selling back the potions for another couple hundred bucks. I also buy some of the more exotic (yet still inexpensive) ingredients, and make some more interesting brews, like five Burden potions (they sell for 60 gold), Resist Paralysis (12 gold), and Restore Intelligence (also 12). I'm close to 1800 bucks, now.

I stroll over to the Merchant's Inn, as I am more or less a merchant, where I find rooms that go for 20 gp per night. I also find yet another treasure trove of groceries, and when I'm done mixing and selling them, two things have happened.



There's that, which will make my potioncrafting much more versatile. And, there's this:



I made over a thousand bucks today, all by visiting a handful of shops. I wasn't in any danger, I didn't have to explore caves or ruins, I didn't even have to brutally slaughter any women. All I had to do was buy and sell. Amazing.

[I hang around the Inn for a bit, people watching](#), then head up to my room. In the morning, I'll be visiting the Office of Imperial Commerce, right here in the Market District. Something tells me there might be a house for sale around here I can afford. Okay, I happen to *know* there's a house around here I can afford, because I've played the game like five times before.

I also happen to know it's a real dump. So, like I had with Beaker earlier, I have another dilemma approaching. I can buy Nondrock a house, a real house, just like I've wanted to do since I started. But is the hovel in Imperial City the house I really want to buy him? Should I wait and find something nicer, even though it'll be much more expensive?

I'll sleep on it, I guess, and decide in the morning. And even if I don't wind up with a house tomorrow, at least I got a horse today.

## [Day 26: Gambling Man](#)

I'm standing in the Office of Imperial Commerce in the Market District of Imperial City, listening to a catcher's mitt tell me that she's got a house for sale.

A hovel, eh? I've worked hard for my money. I've picked weeds, I've killed wolves and women, and I've mushed up questionable potions for over three weeks. Do I really want to blow my wad on a hovel? A dump, maybe. A shack, perhaps. But a hovel?



I decide I'll think about it a bit. It's not like I can sell it later if I change my mind.



Part of the reason I'm hesitant is that the waterfront isn't the most convenient place to live. It's surrounded by a lake on three sides. I don't fancy Nondrick much of a swimmer, so anytime he wants to go a-gatherin', he'll have to walk all the way up to the bridge and cross it to reach the outside world. And that only gives him access to the area west of the city — if I want to explore

to the east I have to circle around the entire city, which takes a while. Most cities have at least two exits, but here there's only one real way in or out.

I'll think about it. In the meantime, let's take some time to explore the city and see what it has to offer a guy with a full change purse.

Like, say, gambling. Here in the arena district, you can bet money on the fights (or just watch them for fun). Two combatants, one from the BLU team and one from the RED — er, wait. One from the Blue Team and one from the Yellow Team will square off and fight until one of them is dead. I place 100 bucks on the Yellow Team (representing my own cowardice) and enter the arena.







With Nondrick watching from the balcony seats, the two combatants square off. For Yellow, a female with a two-handed axe. Blue's champion is a guy wielding a mace. Neither have shields, so they just pummel each other's faces with their weapons until finally, happily, the Yellow warrior fells the Blue. Nondrick won!

I rush back down to the bookie who gives me 200 gold. I doubled my investment and all it took was a man's life being brutally and irrevocably taken! I think I'll make another bet.

This time I bet on

Blue, and I'm glad. As the combatants rush each other, I notice the Yellow warrior, a woman again, has no weapon. She's just using her fists and her complete lack of intelligence in this fight.

[By the way, If you're wondering how I'm watching from the arena floor while Nondrick is watching from the balcony, there's a console command, "tfc", that lets you leave your character and fly your camera around, noclip-like. Wish I'd known this from the beginning.]



Not surprisingly, Blue wins the round easily. I win again, and I'm up 200 gold! Clearly, I have a gift for gambling. I plunk another 100 bucks on Blue.

Immediately, I realize I've bet on the wrong horse. They're both armed with one-handed axes, but the female Yellow gladiator has a shield, and the male Blue does not. Dumbass! Why don't you have a shield with you? Borrow one from a friend if you have to,



your life is on the line! I wish we could see the contestants before the fight, like you can do with racehorses. But then, I also wish racehorses would fight to the death. It'd be the best of both worlds.



The Yellow fighter strides away without even looking back, vanishing like my money just did. Dang it! Gotta win back my money! I don't have a gambling problem, I swear.

I run back outside and bet on Blue again. This time, I think it's a good bet. My guy has a huge two-handed hammer, and the Yellow chick has only a one-handed axe and no shield.







Wow! Blue immediately clobbers Yellow so hard she drops her weapon. Boink! While she bends down to pick it back up, he's got a clear shot at her head! He doesn't take it, however, perhaps being too much of a gentlemen. It doesn't matter in the end, though, she ain't got much game and it only takes a few more swings of his hammer to viciously pound her to death. Then he walks off, stepping on her face in the process.

So, I guess he's not a

gentleman after all. But who cares, he's my personal hero because I just won another 100 gold! I'm three for four today! And I've never even put points into my Luck attribute!

One more match and then I gotta go. I swear. This is the last time I bet on people murdering each other today. I do *not* have a gambling problem.

I put my money on Yellow this time, feeling they're due for a win. [You can watch the entire fight here on YouTube](#), including some thoughtful reactions from Nondrick in the booth after the match. I won't spoil it, but once again, someone thought it would be a good idea to show up without a weapon. Though this same someone appears to teleport during the match, a clever move, the outcome is never truly in doubt.

Okay, that's all the bloodshed I want to see today (this is a lie: I want to stay and keep gambling). That hovel on the Waterfront seems more appealing now, being so close to the Arena. That was fun. Reminds me of that [To The Death](#) feature some guy used to do on some website.

Even outside the Arena, people are getting in on the action, and I watch a lizard and a lady wearing a bra spar for a bit. They tell me they're busy training. I'd like to suggest they try training with weapons, because fists just aren't the way to go. I've just seen the proof.

I head over to the city's Arboretum, [which is quite lovely](#) [YouTube]. Along with all the lovely statues, trees, plants, and other foliage, I notice a sewer grate in the ground, leading to the tunnels under the city. I decide to take a look. You know, I don't want to just visit the cheesy tourist traps like the Arboretum, I want to really experience this city! I want to see the grit and the grime, the filth and the stink, the shadowy underworld of this gleaming city. Otherwise It'd be like going to New York and not checking out the subway, or going to San Francisco and not checking out Oakland.

Immediately, I'm attacked by a giant rat. So it is like the New York subway.

Wow, swanky city indeed, even the rats are born with silver spoons in their intestines. [It's so damn classy down here](#).

I find some other junk in a couple rotting crates — a hand scythe, a couple covered pots, a stone pitcher, a pickaxe... someday these will adorn my home. Possibly some day very soon, if I decide to buy the hovel.



I come across some mudcrabs and dispatch them with fireballs. I come to a door that informs me it leads to Bloodworks, which is directly under the arena. Maybe I could meet some of the gladiators, and thank them for killing people so that I may make fill my pockets with gold.

Or, [maybe I should get the hell out of here](#). One corpse dangles from the ceiling, another appears to be nailed to a wall. In an adjacent room, I hear the creaking of bones and see a skeleton pacing slowly about.

Time to creep back out the way I came.

It's getting late as I finally make it to the waterfront to check out the hovel firsthand. [It doesn't look like much](#), but [the view is nice](#).





I'm still not sure if I should buy it. In the meantime, I need to find a place to rest for the night. I stroll along the Waterfront, where some pirates sing to me and rudely insinuate that my pants are, as they put it, "fancy." A few minutes later I find an inn, called the Bloating Float. It's actually a boat anchored to the dock that's been converted to a restaurant and inn. How novel! I'm a tourist after all, I guess.

The rooms are 10 gold for the night, so after a quick meal and a drink, I head down to my bunk for some sleep. In the morning, this message greets me, appearing before my eyes.

Ah, crap. Is this game *still* trying to make me do quests? Haven't I made it clear that's not my scene? Sigh. I'll just do what I always do, ignore it and carry on with my day.



Then this guy greets me, appearing outside my door. A big ass dude with a *big* ass sword, wearing some impressive-looking armor. He's... not going to be easy to ignore.

It looks like adventure finally found me. It looks like my luck's run out.

### [Day 27: Trouble by the Boatload](#)

I'm interrogated the moment I step out of my bedroom on the Bloating Float, by a large Nord named Lynch, who cleverly determines that I don't look like a professional outlaw.



I tell him I'm just a passenger, hoping he'll leave me alone or not feel threatened. My other choice was to tell him to mind his own business, which I somehow think wouldn't defuse the situation.

Unfortunately, he doesn't accept this answer. Two things, only two, come to mind: I could tell him I'm with the City Watch, or tell him I'm in his gang. Unfortunately, there's no option to explain that I'm a humble radish-picker who took a nap in the wrong floating hotel.

I tell him I'm in his gang, despite the fact that he's already surmised I am not. This does not feel right to me. I should be able to beg for my life or offer him some money or something in exchange for not killing me, right? Apparently, the game has not caught on that I am a cowardly silverware collector. Hasn't it been paying attention?

He says something menacing that I forget to take a screenshot of, and then draws a gleaming sword that looks like it's about twice my height. Ah, fuck.

I'm not even wearing armor. Sure, I could pause the game by bringing up my inventory screen and put on every piece of armor I've got, but I'm trying to roleplay here. I'm trying to roleplay a very stupid peasant in a very dangerous situation. There's nowhere to run. There's nowhere to hide. A short sword and some humble merchants clothing are all that stand between me and the hereafter. Between me and the end of this blog.



We square off. I hold up my blade defensively, waiting for him to make the first move. Cripes, lookit that thing he's holding. If he misses he could sink the ship.

He takes a swing. I block, and then fling a fireball at him. I miss, despite being about an inch away. Stupid third-person perspective. I fling another and hit, and he lights up like a Christmas tree that's had a fireball flung at it. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to do much damage. Gonna have to use my blade to win this one, I think.





Our weapons clang off one another in the narrow hallway as we hack at each other. He's thrown off balance when I block one of his blows, and that's when I strike, then get back into defensive posture again, always keeping my guard up. I throw in a fireball or two, which hit but again don't do much damage. He lands a couple blows and my health drops to about half.

I back up and throw some more flares his way. My kingdom for a Backburner! Still, I think I have him on the ropes. One more good slash with my substandard blade and he flops dead against the door.



Lynch doesn't have much on him. A measly 4 gold, the key, and a set of leather armor. He's also carrying a note.

Guess Lynch doesn't read so well. I put on his armor and take his silver longsword. I have to admit, I look kinda badass.

At least until I put on my stupid fur helmet. Kinda ruins the look, but I need all the protection I can get. I heal myself a few

times, then free the bouncer, an orc, who's been locked in a closet. He tells me he can steer the hotel back to land, but he won't go up to the deck until it's safe. Looks like I'm not out of this yet.

I eat some food I find in the storage room, heal myself back to full health, and creep upstairs.

At the top of the steps I spy another brigand.



I think about attacking her before she sees me, but I'm just not that kinda guy. Maybe I can talk my way out of the rest of this quest.

I tell her I'm in the gang, and that Lynch sent me up to help her. I guess I'm as poor a reader as Lynch was — his note specifically stated not to bother her, and she knows I'm lying. Oops.

This time, I'm much better prepared. I've got armor, a shield, a dead animal protecting my head, and a sword that does three times the damage my old one did. She's a pushover. She also doesn't have much loot on her, except 5 gold, her armor, a steel sword, and a key to the top deck.

*Your instructions are to make your way to the bottom deck of the ship and secure all of the rooms there. Make sure you don't disturb Minx. She's to be left alone to do her assignment. Remember, after the ship is scuttled, we'll meet back in Bravil in three days. Make sure you destroy this note after you memorize it.*





I definitely can't swim home from here.

I head aft, and wind up directly behind a hulking Nord henchman named Wrath. He doesn't see me. I decide to poison my sword this time, to hopefully avoid any extended combat. The only potion I can mix up is a Burden (which could potentially root him in place), so I soak my blade in it, then talk to him.

I feed him some lines about how I'm in the gang, which doesn't work for the 3rd time in a row. Jeez! Why are these outlaws so suspicious of a complete stranger in their midst?

We fight. He dies. Man, I'm lovin' this new sword. I'm *keepin'* this new sword. I take his armor and steel sword and the handful of change he's got in his pocket. And yet another key, this one to the cabin of the hotel owner.

The wussy orc bouncer tells me he won't turn the ship around until he knows his boss is safe, so I'm going to have to rescue him from his cabin. I heal myself again, then prepare my ace-in-the-hole: my frost damage spell. It does 50 points of damage, but I have to be close enough to touch someone to use it, and I can only use it once per day. Still, it's gotta be better than my wimpy flare, which doesn't seem to hurt anyone but mudcrabs.

I enter the cabin. There I'm faced by a very attractive woman, Selene, the apparent leader of this gang. Behind her is the proprietor of the hotel.

I tell her I'm the ship's cook. She doesn't believe me. I'm getting a little TIRED of these distrustful BRIGANDS.



She's fast, and cuts into me with her sword, which is apparently magic as it starts draining my fatigue. Not good. The lower my fatigue, the less damage my attacks will do. I run right up to her and cast my frost spell right on her, well, bosoms, let's say. Immediately her health drops to almost nothing. Score! Thank you, Nordic heritage! I block her next attack with my shield and make a big swing with my sword while she's off balance. Whammo. She's down for the count. Whew.

Ormil, the guy who's hotel she stole and who she was holding captive, the guy I just saved from certain death, turns and walk right past me, leaving the cabin without a word of thanks or even a look in my direction.

Fine. Nice gratitude, asshole. I look around his cabin, and see a table with some food on it. I decide to take some, just for his rudeness. I'm totally stealing your carrots, jerk. And I DO. I STEAL HIS CARROTS. I take an apple, too. Let no one tell you Nondrick doesn't have a dark side.



I strip the dead brigand of her belongings, another set of armor, and her magic sword, the Blackwater Blade, which absorbs fatigue. That's pretty cool, a magic sword, but honestly, my new silver sword does more damage, and I think I'm gonna stick with it. If I get a magic sword, I gotta recharge it when it runs out of juice, which means paying mages for their magic, and then they always try to get you to buy the extended warranty, and it's just a big hassle.

With all the junk I've picked up, I'm over-encumbered and can't move. I drop some of my old fur armor on the floor until I'm light enough to walk, then head back into the bar.

There, Ormil finally shows me some gratitude for saving both his life and his stupid hotelboat. He explains that to boost his floating hotel business, he made up a story about some treasure he had on board, and that's what the four brigands were after, and what they died for. Good job!

We get back to the city, and Ormil gives me a reward: 75 gold. Wow, thanks. He then rifles through my pockets without my consent, removing all the keys I'd collected. Don't worry, I won't be back. And I'm not returning your produce. And, with that, I've completed my first, and hopefully last, genuine quest.





I do, however, have a personal quest to attend to. This adventure on the boat, while unwanted and unwelcome and, frankly, very un-Nondrick, has at least made up my mind about something.

I went to the Bloated Float because it was late and I needed a place to sleep. And I did that because I didn't have a place of my *own* to sleep. I didn't have a safe haven. I didn't have a home. I'm rectifying that right now.

I walk to the Office of Imperial Commerce and buy that shithole in the Waterfront District for 2,000 gold.

There. Done. Did it. Done did it. I've got Nondrick a home.

Now I can end the blog.

Just kidding.

My new home, um. [It ain't much](#). Just a bed, a fireplace, and a table. Not even a friggin' chair.

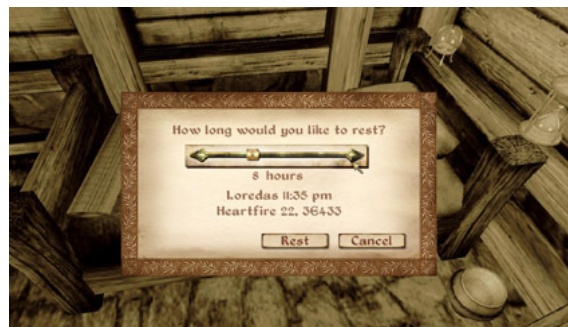
Still, four walls, a roof, and it's mine. Besides, I can cozy it up a bit, right? I start going through my pockets and putting my carefully collected items around the room.

On my bedpost, I put my hourglass. You know, so I don't oversleep. I also put out my crystal ball, so every morning I can see what kind of day I've got planned. And, I put the folded cloth I stole from the hotel in Anvil, my first hotel, down at the foot of the bed. I also put a pot on the floor. Fer, y'know.



On my table, I (awkwardly) lay out the silverware I've found inside dead, filthy animals. A couple forks, a knife, and a spoon. I also put out the stone pitcher and mug, and a couple pots. Guess I'll have to buy a plate at some point, or maybe find one inside a dead rat.

Well, it certainly ain't much, but it's home. And hey, there's my very own bed. I think I'll give it a test drive.



## [Hounds From Hell](#)

So, I've got a house. Of course, it's a bit plain, and in case MTV stops by I'd better spruce the place up a bit. The ugly lady in the Office of Imperial Commerce told me I could buy some furnishings for my pad by talking to Sergius Verus at Three Brothers Trade Goods, so I'm off to the Market District.

I find the store, but while his two brothers are manning the counter, Sergius is standing around outside and won't sell me anything. I wait, watching, as he strolls around aimlessly, but after an hour he still hasn't gone into the store. I guess it's his day off.

Well, there's plenty of ways to kill time. I hit up a few other shops and pubs, buying their ingredients, mixing them up, and selling them back. It's not long until I'm back up to about 1500 gp again.

Then I'm off to the arena, again, to catch a late match. I watch people in dresses slaughter each other while I bet on them from the safety of the stands. I put a hundred on blue, and I am not disappointed. Add another hundred bucks to my wallet.

The next morning I head back to Three Brothers and catch Serguis behind the counter. He's selling a lot of upgrades, but they're around 700 septims each, so I can only buy two: the sitting area and the storage area. I walk back home and my purchases have been delivered. Nice! No assembly required, so they're already better than IKEA.







There's now a couple seats around the fireplace and a chest and bureau against the wall. The chest has a bowl and some yarn in it already (I put the bowl on the table), and the bureau has a few outfits neatly folded in it as well. I put on the new clothes, store the old ones, and even place the skull I picked up in Weatherleah on the top of the bureau. This is really becoming a kick-ass pad. Anyone want to come over and watch some fire with me and my skull?

Unfortunately, being a homeowner carries

with it some responsibilities. I'm pretty much broke after buying the home and furnishings, so I think it might be time for a little business trip. Out into the wild, to gather ingredients, something I feel like I haven't done in ages.

So, no sooner do I have a home that I find I must leave it. At least it will give me a chance to hang out with my other expensive purchase, Beaker the horse.

Beaker is right where I left him, standing in the stables, and soon we're galloping along the road outside Imperial City, headed south.

The plan is this: make a big southern loop around the city, find an inn somewhere to spend the night (since it's already around noon), then, in the morning, strike out east for Cheydinhal, where I can stay for a few days while I scour the area for ingredients. I also (unwillingly) agreed to find out who was impersonating Reynald Jemane in Cheydinhal when I was back in Chorrol, so I'll look into that, only because I've already been paid to.

Man, I love Beaker. He just eats up the road. After all the walking I've done, it's nice to be able to get somewhere in a reasonable amount of time.

Of course, the first location we reach is the crosshairs of a bandit archer, who opens fire as we're crossing Old Bridge. I ride past him as a couple arrows strike me, get Beaker to a safe distance, and then dismount and charge.



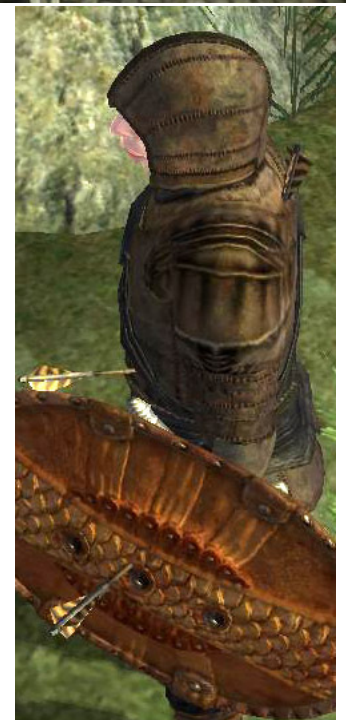
The bowman, not an idiot, runs as soon as I get close to him. I'm too slow to catch him, but I eventually manage to corner him against some boulders, and he draws a dagger. He drops shortly afterwards, and I take his clothes. As you do.

He also has a steel bow, higher quality than my iron one, so I nab that as well. Meanwhile, I've got a few arrows stuck in me.

Including one he somehow shot straight down into the back of my neck. Not sure how he managed that one, or how I can still move my legs with an arrowhead lodged in my spine.

A little further down the road I come across Pell's Gate, a small community of people who stand around staring into space, walking short distances, staring into space

again, and offering rumors to passersby. They don't have an inn, however, so we continue on.







The sun is starting to set when I spot a wolf or a dog in the distance. I slide off Beaker and take aim with my bow, not especially worried. I've been fighting wolves since day one, but if it's a dog, its master may be close by.

I score a hit and the wolf runs at me. I can't help but notice that even with a critical hit, the wolf does not appear to be hurt. At all.

I score another arrow

as it gets closer. Again, its health barely even registers the strike.

I stupidly don't get my sword and shield ready until it's already biting at me. And apparently, it hasn't been brushing its teeth.

**You have contracted Helljoint**

Oh, man. It gave me a disease called Helljoint. Will I still be able to enjoy my active lifestyle?



I notice a couple things all of the sudden. This isn't just a wolf, this is a Timber Wolf. That's, like, a better wolf than just a normal wolf, I guess, which would explain why the arrows didn't do much damage, and why this wolf is attacking much faster than they usually do and is not falling dead after a couple swings of my sword.

I also notice this:

That short red line that is so short it's almost not a line? That would be my health bar after just a few bites. I'm suddenly, scarily, very close to being much less alive than I've been accustomed to.



Luckily, the wolf isn't doing so great either by this point. Backpedaling, blocking, I finally manage to drop it. Man. That was my closest call yet, and I didn't even realize it until it was almost too late.

I heal up with Mara's Word, topping off my health, and take a look at this disease I've contracted.



Helljoint is draining my speed and agility? Not my speed and agility! That's what Nondrick is *known* for!

Well, I *am* an alchemist. Maybe I can cure it or something. I have some Root Pulp in my sack, which has curative properties, but nothing else I can match it with. Good thing I'm on an ingredient finding trip. I poke around in the woods as the sky grows dark. I find some ingredients, but nothing with Cure Disease elements. I find an angry woman, however.

She rushes toward me from a nearby fort, brandishing a huge two-handed sword. I guess there's two types of people in the world: those who gossip about mudcrabs, and those who want to cut you in half.



She has a dog, too, who joins in attacking me. Swell. What a great idea this trip was.

I'm back down to about half-health before she finally falls, and the dog, meanwhile, has begun to attack Beaker, who stands there like a fucking idiot doing nothing. GET AWAY FROM BEAKER, MANGY CUR!!



Luckily, the dog isn't tough to bring down, plus, he's carrying some silverware, a knife, which I can add to my dinner table when we get home.





The dead female marauder is wearing some iron armor. Hmm... wonder how that would look on *me*?

Completely different, that's how. This certainly is a realm of magic and mystery!

While I'm standing there, I notice two more figures rushing out of the gloom in my direction. Luckily, it's just a couple of

Imperial Legion Foresters, hunting deer. I follow one, who has managed to chase a deer into the river. He finishes it off with a few arrows, then runs off, not even bothering to collect the carcass. I guess he just hates deer. Everyone needs a hobby.

Works for me, though. I help myself to the meat (and the steel arrows stuck in the corpse), and brew up a potion of Restore Health using the venison and some lavender. I fills me back up to 100% within a few seconds.

It's gotten quite dark out, though it's a clear night [and the stars make it easier to see](#). Still, I haven't found an inn, so this may wind up being an all-nighter. I cross another bridge, where yet another Khajiit highwayman demands money in exchange for not killing me.

We square off, and he dies pretty quickly, but no sooner have we crossed the bridge than another bandit runs out of the darkness and attacks Beaker's butt.

**GET AWAY FROM BEAKER'S BUTT, MANGY CUR!!!**

It turns out I've got the only thing that will cure this bandit's hatred of horse buttocks, so I administer a lethal dose. A lethal dose *of death*.

We come upon a ruined, burned out shack that used to be an alchemist's (not a good omen, if you ask me), and I find some potions scattered around, and a few gp in a chest. No bed, however, so we press on into the night. Near Fort Magia, directly east of Imperial City, I run into a Legion Guard heading in the same direction. He's nice enough to clear the path by killing a couple wolves while I watch from my saddle like a big wimp.

As I make the eastward turn toward Cheydinhal, I find a cabin, which is locked. Jeez, I could have sworn there were some inns or camps along this road. If only Nondrick could open one.

We run afoul of yet another bandit, who attacks Beaker. Why do people hate Beaker so much? Beaker is cool, man. Another bandit appears and starts zipping arrows from the treeline, again, at my horse. This trip keeps getting worse.

As the bandit and I hack and slash at each other directly in front of Beaker's snout, a few of my blows go sadly astray, striking my horse. I know this because as soon as the bandit dies, Beaker attacks *me*. Well, that's just great. Dude, I thought you were cool!

As fitting as it would be for the hapless Nondrick to be kicked to death by his own horse (it would be pretty much the perfect way to end the blog, you have to admit), I defuse the situation by running away, then circling around and getting onto Beaker's back. That seems to calm him down. Meanwhile, arrows keep plunking in from the woods. Beaker doesn't seem to give a shit about that, for some reason.

Will this night never end? Sighing gustily, I get back off the stupid horse and race into the stupid woods to find the stupid bandit. He flees, but right back into the road, where I cut him down before he can draw a melee weapon.





Poor Beaker is a pin cushion by this point, at less than half health, partially due to my wild, inaccurate swings. I think if we make it to Cheydinhal alive, I'm going to need to buy a Heal Other spell.

At least I'm doing a lot of looting. I've got so many sets of dead bandit armor and weapons I can't even carry it all. I discard the cheapest items I've got — clothing, fur boots, some gauntlets, until I've lightened the load enough to move.

Finally, I reach Cheydinhal. It's seven in the morning. I need food and rest. I lead Beaker into the stable, then enter the city. Right by the main gate I stumble upon Newland's Lodge, rent a room for 10 gold, mix and sell everything I've got to the clerk, and head up the steps to bed.



Coming down the stairs at that moment is someone familiar-looking. It looks just like Reynald Jemane, the guy who gave me fifty gold to find out who in Cheydinhal was impersonating him. Looks like I found him.

Turns out, they're brothers, long-lost, and Reynald dashes off to be with his drunk sibling, inviting me to join them in Chorrol. Think I'll pass, thanks, I've got a long week of near-death experiences and horse abuse lined up.

Well, the unwanted quest is done. That was pretty easy. There's nothing to this adventuring stuff. Trying to make a living as an alchemist, *that's* hard.

It's 7:45am when I finally make it to bed. Rough night. I lost my clothes, dropped in the road so I could carry more armor. Almost lost my horse to various attacks, including some of mine.

And, almost lost my life. Again. I know I keep saying I've got to be more careful, but man, I've really got to be more careful.

## [Dog Day Afternoon](#)

In the interest of keeping this blog a bit more lively, I'm going to try something several people suggested: post more often but with shorter posts. That way, I don't feel like I have to write a book every time I sit down to play and blog, which hopefully means I will play, and blog, more often.

Anyway. Cheydinhal. I made it in early this morning, and as a result, Nondrick doesn't manage to crawl out of bed until afternoon. Not much on the roster today except to sell the loot I accumulated during the trip — the many bits of weapons and armor I took off the people who forced me to kill them. Also, if you remember, Nondrick contracted Helljoint, a disease carried by wolves. Gonna have to do something about that, too. It's a family motto of his: "Undiseased joints are better than diseased joints." Not the snappiest motto, but they were poor and it was all they could afford.

Just down the street from the hotel, I find a weapon and armor shop. There I sell the axes and armor cluttering up my inventory. I stroll out with about 900gp.

Considering how badly I've been getting pounded lately, I decide I need to beef up my defenses. So long, leather cuirass. So long, newly acquired iron cuirass. I'm moving up to steel, baby. It costs a pretty penny, but the assorted bandits, brigands, and beasties outside the cities are toughening up, and I've got to keep stride.

I go with the steel cuirass, iron greaves and boots, trade in my leather shield for an iron one, and nab an iron helmet. Naturally, after selling the armor off my back I forget to put on my new purchases, and wander around outside half-naked for a little while.

Eventually, I realize my mistake and check out my new duds.







Eh. *Kinda* badass. Too bad the helmet doesn't cover more of the face, though. The face remains a problem.

I'm going to spend the day in town, and I don't want to clank around the whole time, so I head to a trade goods shop for some street clothes. I also mix and sell some potions, as is my M.O. After all the selling and spending, I'm around 550 gold.

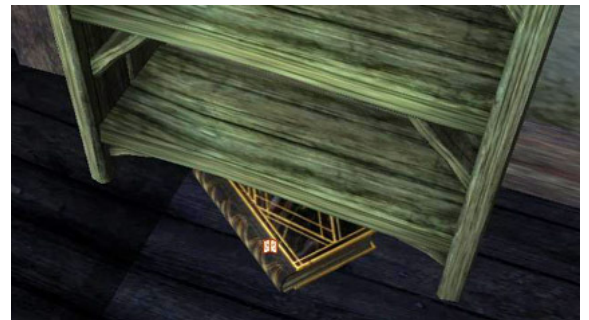
There. Lookin' like an alchemist again. I hit up the Mage's Guild, too, hoping to sell some potions and maybe find a 'Heal Other' spell I can use



on Beaker the next time bandits turn him into a pin-cushion. No luck. The mage on duty has a few affordable spells, but nothing to heal a hurt horsie. I buy some ingredients and mix 'em, winding back up around 900 gold again.

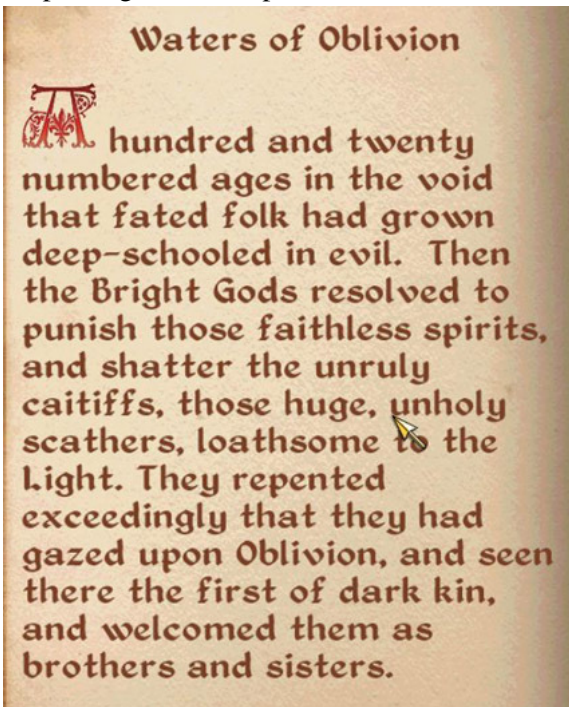


I come across an abandoned house as I'm wandering around. Hmm. If there's a bed in there, it'd be a free place to sleep while I'm in town. The door is locked, but my psychic powers clearly identify the house as being abandoned... it's a little against type, but I pick the lock and slip into the house. Harmless enough.



The place is pretty trashed. Cobwebs,

broken furniture. No bed, but I find a couple souvenirs for my own home: a couple mugs, a bowl, a plate, a broom. A real find is crammed under a shelf: a book!



It's called Waters of Oblivion. It's worth 75 gold, but I think I'll keep it.

I said keep it. Not read it. Snore!

In the basement I find a huge ancient evil talking door.

Plus, in a crate, I find a burlap shirt and some shoes. Sweet!

Back outside, it's a crummy day. Raining, pretty dark. I meet a drunk, a couple beggars, and a guy who threatens to have me arrested for some reason. Nice town, I guess? Not feelin' the love. I also meet a hot elf chick who really likes dogs.







Well, heck, I've got a disgusting dog disease. Does that do anything for you, sweet thing?

Speaking of which, it's already gotten a bit late, and that disgusting dog disease still needs curing. It's draining my speed and agility, plus, I'm feeling the urge to lick my own butt.



In this game, you can get any disease cured for no cost — Oblivion is

practically Canada in that respect. You just have to visit a chapel and get your pray on. There's someone already standing at the altar, so I patiently wait in line. Nondrick is a gentleman.

While I'm standing there, though, waiting for the lady in front of me to finish whatever the hell she's doing, I realize something. I don't think Nondrick is really much of a praying man. He just doesn't strike me as religious. I don't think he opposes religion, but, let's face it, the only reason I'd visit a church is to hit on a priestess or get my body cleansed of canine filth.



Besides, aren't I somewhat of an alchemist now? I'm not really supporting the trade if every time I get the sniffles I go running to the Gods for a hankie. I'm a man of science. Dammit, I'm not going to pray for a cure. I'm going to cure myself.

I leave the church and head back to the hotel to bed down for the night. That's it. I've wanted to find a quest, a personal quest, I mean, for Nondrick to undertake. Ever since I met that weirdo obsessed with tomatoes I've wanted for Nondrick to have some sort of personal goal for himself. I think this might be it.



Look, if Oblivion had achievements, surely this would be one. "As an alchemist, cure a disease using a potion you created from ingredients you gathered."

Screw the church. *I'll* cure what ails me.

### [Walk For the Cure](#)

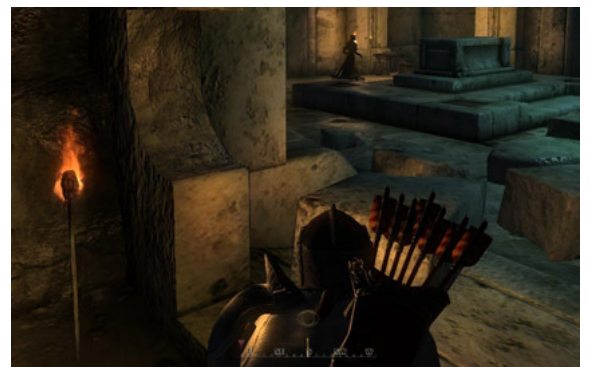
The crap weather continues as I slowly clank my way south to begin my new quest: to rid myself of wolf parasites that have infested my joints. Man. Picking flowers to cure wolf cooties. Did Aragorn have to deal with this kinda shit?

Right away, I can tell this isn't going to go very well. The landscape is green and grassy, but there aren't a whole heck of a lot of ingredients around. I gather what few I find, but nothing that bears the disease-curing properties I so desperately need for my knees and elbows.

I pass through Harlun's Watch, a small, seemingly pointless village with no shops or inns, head down to the Reed River, where I hope to find more plants around the water's edge. Nothing doing. I discover a cavern called Vahtacen, and poke around inside, hoping to find mushrooms. Instead, I find torchlit passages and a number of Welkynd Stones, which are semi-valuable and good for recharging your Magicka. Hmm.

I'd kind of like to swipe these, but I'm not much of a dungeon-scouring thief. I decide to poke around further to see who these stones belong to. If it's some sort of leathery bat monster, I won't feel so bad. I spot an Argonian woman walking around in a chamber deeper into the caves. She doesn't look like a bandit, more like a mage — robes and no armor. Still, I don't want to chance talking to her, and decide not to swipe all her stones.

Sometimes it really sucks not being adventurous.



Back outside, I spot some deer. Maybe venison cures disease? Can't remember. Can't hurt to check. Can't hurt *me*, anyway. I manage to take down a deer with a single critical bowshot, which is pretty cool except that it wasn't actually the deer I was aiming for. I was aiming for a running deer, and he just happened to run right by a stationary deer as I loosed my misguided arrow. Well, if anyone was watching, they wouldn't be able to tell. Venison, unfortunately, doesn't cure my ills, but it makes a nice snack.



The weather gets worse as I make the long, slow, wet slog back up to the city, having found nothing of real use. The next morning, after selling my take, I head north, aiming for Lake Arrius. The weather is better, but again, even though the vegetation is lush and green, there ain't much to pick. I discover Wind Range Camp, which appears to be abandoned. Excellent. If I can bed here tonight I won't have to walk all the way back to the city, and can spend some more time exploring.



A few moments later, however, a bandit shows up. He somehow spots the ugly dork in highly reflective steel armor crouching nearby, and we clash. I'd cleverly poisoned my blade while I was waiting, and I stick him once. He turns green as the poison eats away at him, and soon he's weak enough for a single slash of my blade to take him down. I loot his body, finding a few gold coins and a copper ring. Also, while fending off his blows, my block skill increased, meaning the next time I sleep I'll gain a level. At least the day isn't a total waste.

There's not much going on around the lake but a waterfall and a wolf. After killing the latter and collecting the pelt (and a gold coin the wolf was somehow carrying), I head back. Another fairly fruitless expedition. Very few ingredients to pick, and none have the properties I need. I'm getting a little frustrated. The east coast of Cyrodiil is a huge letdown for the traveling alchemist.



I'm nearly back to the city when suddenly I burst into flames.

Eep. Imp. After cutting him out of the air, I arrive back in the city, a little banged up. I think I need to upgrade my self-preservation skills. I sell some potions, decide to spend a couple hundred on a Cure Major Wound spells from the Mage's Guild, and head to bed, where I attain my fifth level.



I briefly consider going with Luck, because frankly, I could use some, but in the end I choose to raise my Intelligence, Personality, and Endurance. It's been about thirty days since I landed in Anvil, and I've finally reached level five.

I decide to bum around town the next day, since I haven't been to the castle yet and I'd like to see if they have a house for sale. I could use a day without bloodshed or drama, as well. It's at this point that I notice I've not only failed to cure my *current* disease, but I've also somehow acquired a *new* one.

Witbane is a disease that drains your intelligence, and (according to the Oblivion Wiki) it can



be contracted from dogs and zombies, neither of which I've been in contact with. Puzzling. Wolves, I've seen plenty, but no dogs. Unless I picked it up a few days ago from that dog-trainer lady, I have no idea when I might have contracted it. There aren't even any toilet seats in Cyrodiil. So, now I've got *two* types of canine-related diseases, and no cure for either of them. Spiffy. Won't be long before I'm chasing cats and eating my own poop.

I head to the Mage's Guild again, and find one ingredient with disease-curing properties: a mushroom called Elf Cup Cap. Well, I'm halfway there, at least. Now, I just need another ingredient to mix with it. Or, I could just ditch this alchemy nonsense and take up religion, which is sounding more appealing every day.

I make my way to the castle, where I notice a bunch of indoor planters. I spot some mushrooms growing among the plants, and, as is my habit, I start stuffing them into my pockets. They won't cure my diseases, but that's no reason not to pick 'em.







I do this for a bit before I notice that the little “hand” icon is *red* when I hover it over the mushrooms, which indicates items that, when taken, are considered *stolen*. I’m not just gathering mushrooms, apparently, I’m pinching them.

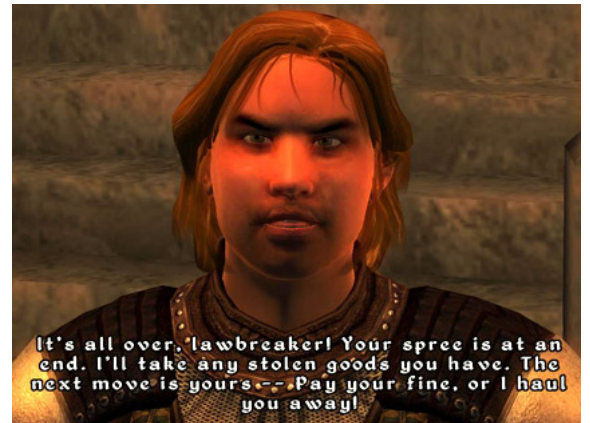
Yoikes! I’m no thief! On the other hand, the guards are standing *right there* and haven’t arrested me. Just a glitch, perhaps? Either way, I continue harvesting the mushrooms. If they’re a little lax on crime in Cheydinhal Castle, it works for out me.

I continue crawling around the bushes inside the castle, taking all the mushrooms I find. Eventually, I pop out near the throne.



The count is sitting on one throne, while on the other sits a little bundle of flowers. Hell, this castle is crawling with ingredients! Why did I bother with walking around the woods, putting myself at risk, when I could stock up right here? Without thinking twice about the red “hand” icon I’ve been seeing for the past few minutes, I snatch the flowers, just as I realize they are tagged as “bouquet of flowers”. Meaning they’re not an ingredient, but instead an object. Meaning I haven’t harvested the

flowers. I’ve stolen them. From the castle throne room. Off the throne. Right in front of the Count. And his guards.



Um. Whoops.

## [An Arrested Development](#)

Like everyone else in prison, Nondrick is innocent.

I’d been harvesting mushrooms inside Castle Cheydinhal, under full view of the guards, which indicated such activity was legal. It set a *precedent*, that did. I spotted some flowers on the throne, and figured, hey, free mushrooms, free flowers, right? So, I helped myself. Turns out, these flowers were a token from the Count to his late wife, who died, ahem, falling down the stairs.

This is a clear case of entrapment. One plant can’t be okay to steal and another be verboten. It just ain’t right.

At any rate, when you’re arrested in Oblivion, you have three options. Resist arrest, which means you fight or flee the guards (usually a combination of both), pay a

**Current Bounty: 1**



fine, or serve jail time. In this case, the fine is one gold coin, something I can easily manage.

Problem is, after agreeing to pay the fine, the game crashes to desktop. I reload, and, being the honest sort, pick the same mushrooms I’d picked and steal the same flowers I stole. Once more, I’m arrested, agree to pay the fine, and am treated to another crash. Swell.

I try this four or five more times, and each time I try to pay the fine, the game crashes. Looks like that’s just not going to work. I choose to serve time instead, and nary a crash — I’m sent straight to jail. Ah, well, that’s the legal system for you. My crime “spree”, as it was called, has landed me in the clink.

I’m stripped off all my belongings, dressed in tattered rags, and sent to a cell. This is a low-point in Nondrick’s career, to be sure. The lowest. Jailed, humiliated, no possessions, body festering with canine diseases.

I’ve got one lockpick, apparently smuggled in an unnamed Nondrick-hole, but if I break out I’ll probably just get in more trouble. I’ll just serve my time. You know what they say, you only do two days: the day you come in and the day you get out. West siiiiiiide. Of course, as it turns out, they only hold me a single day anyway.



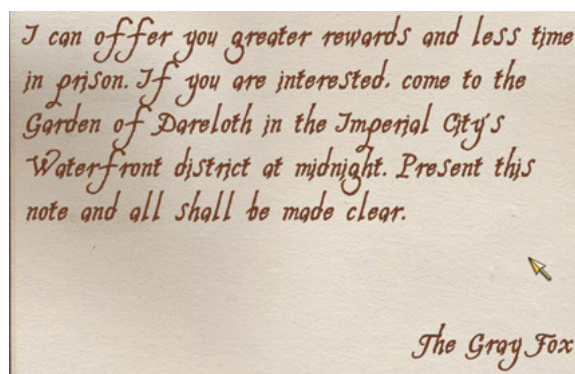
Serving time isn't good for you, though. With no rehabilitation program, spending time in a cell will lower one or some of your attributes. Luckily, I only lose one point in my hand-to-hand skill, a skill I'm fairly sure I've never once used.

The Count himself has arrived to watch me be released from prison. Despite me stealing his flowers, he's kind enough to introduce himself.

Sure, throwing a guy in jail for picking up some dead posies, that seems generous and just. I joke with him a bit about mushrooms, throw in some boasts about how I once stole some fabric from a hotel, admire his mohawk, and threaten his life until he trusts me enough to offer me a house for sale. For \$15,000. Pretty pricey. I'm hovering around the 1,000 septim mark, and have been since I got here. This just hasn't been a profitable trip for me so far. I thought, by now, I'd be rolling in loot, but I haven't been turning much of a profit since I left Imperial City.

I think I'm done with Cheydinhal. Time to move on. I've only got two more cities to visit, Leyawin and Bravil, and I think I can hit them both up before returning to Imperial City.

I head back to the hotel, selling my junk before I turn in for the night. Then, I'm roused out of my slumber by a terrifying visage.

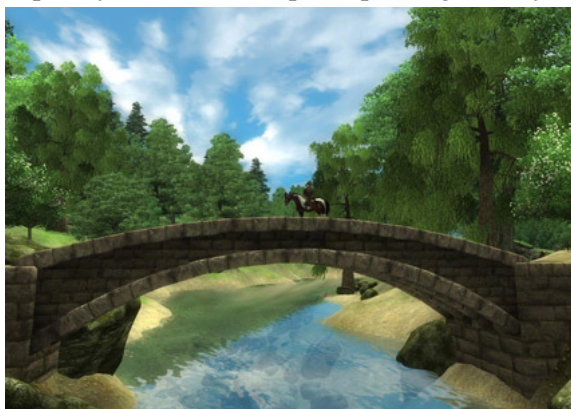


It honestly scares the bejesus out of me. I'm sitting there, watching the hours tick by on screen, and am suddenly treated to a jarring crash-zoom of that lady's scary mug. She forces a note in my pants and leaves.

Apparently, the

Thieves Guild has spotted my talent for stealing flowers while in full view of the most powerful man in town, and want to recruit me. Sure, who wouldn't? I've stolen one worthless item and gotten caught doing it. I'm clearly a star. What is the Gray Fox going to say to me? "I've seen your moves, kid. The way you walked right up to the throne and grabbed those worthless flowers and went to jail for it? You're good. You're *real* good. With my help, you could be the *best*."

I get a couple more hours of rest, and then find Beaker out in the stable. Come on, dude, time to blow this dump. I figure we'll make straight for Leyawin, following the river along until we reach the road, then hit Bravil on the way back up to north Imperial City. [That's a long-ass ride](#), though, so hopefully we'll find a couple stops along the way.



As we gallop along, I'm treated to a [nice view of Imperial City](#) and some ruins, [get chased by a couple wolves](#), stop to gather a few ingredients here and there (at one point I actually lost Beaker for about five minutes after leaving him to go pick up some plants). Eventually, I reach the river and follow it out to the road.



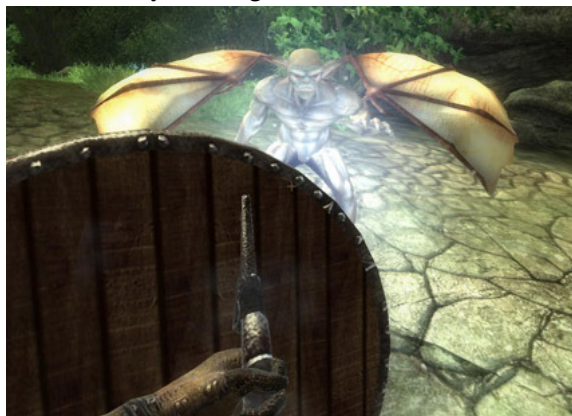


The road sucks. I'm chased by imps, wolves, and bandits every hundred yards or so. Luckily, running from a wolf leads me to a bandit, and they fight with each other. Running from another bandit leads me to an imp, and they fight. In each case, I wait until one is dead and the other wounded before cleaning up.

So, I've got a couple suits of armor, some weapons, and a few portions of Imp Gall. I explore a bit around the road, gathering herbs, but still have found nothing to cure my barkin' pnemonia or doggie woggie flu.



As the sun sets, another Khajiit highwayman accosts me as I try to cross a bridge. The whole "Your money or your life" deal again. Just for kicks, I give him 100 gold, then jump off my horse and stab him in the back.



We duke it out. He lands a blow with his axe and I turn green. He's cleverly draining my fatigue with poison. I retaliate by cleverly draining his health by killing him.

I take his stuff, retrieve my gold, and as I look up from his corpse, I spot something in the fading light.

Is that a boat?

It is indeed, a shipwreck in the river. Cool. Ships have beds, right? This would be a great spot to hole up in for a day or two, if so. I find a huge hole bashed in the side of the ship, and step inside. Granted, the last time I slept on a ship I got into all sorts of trouble, but what's the chance of that happening twice?

Guh-guh-guh-guh... ghooooooooost!

## Ghosts and Doldrums

I think the adventure of this game is catching up to poor Nondrick.

Today alone, I've served time, been recruited by the



thieves guild, killed a man over a hundred dollars, found a mysterious shipwreck, and been attacked by a ghost.

Two ghosts, in fact, that inhabit the aforementioned shipwreck. Forgive the lack of screenshots of the ensuing battle, but you do not fuck around taking pictures when ghosts are involved, not when you're a fifth level potion merchant with most of his skills in Personality.

No point in using my powerful frost spell, as ghosts are immune to frost. No point in poisoning my blade, as ghosts are immune to poison. I have two things working for me, however. I have a silver blade (coincidentally collected the last time I was stupid enough to get on a boat), which is especially handy because ghosts cannot be harmed with conventional weapons, only silver or magical ones. And, while ghosts cast frost spells of their own, as a Nord, I am myself 50% frost resistant.





I hack and slash madly, not even bothering to power up my swings, trying to ignore the other ghost behind me. My spastic attacks don't do a whole lot of damage but I manage to take down the first ghost, who collapses in a puddle of goo.



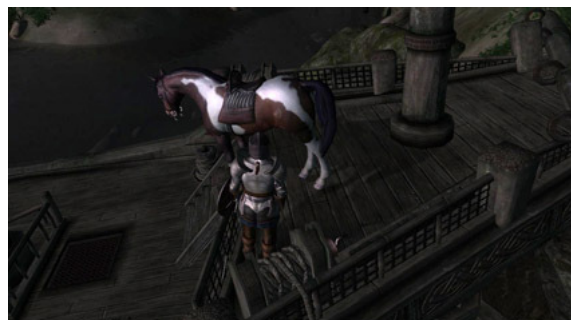
I'm worried about my health so I step outside to heal. The second ghost follows me and I wade in, swinging wildly, hacking and slashing and swinging until he, too, melts into a blob of ghost-flavored pudding.

Whew. I actually did okay. My health didn't even drop to half. Plus, I've now got a place to spend the night, as the boat has a couple beds.

As cool as it would be to live in a shipwreck full-time, this is only going to be a temporary stay. I assume the ghosts will respawn after a couple days, and there may be other ghosts on the lower level. I'll only live here one night, maybe two. I'm also a little concerned about Beaker. While I'm in here sleeping, will he wander off?

To be safe, I mount up, ride onto a rocky hill, and jump Beaker onto the deck of the ship. Hopefully he'll stay put for the night.

I eat and get some rest, and in the morning, Beaker is still in place. I head out on foot, to the east, along the river, to gather up whatever ingredients I can find. I also switch back to wearing leather armor. The steel and iron is good for protection, but man does Nondrick walk slow when wearing it.



The day is fairly uneventful, save running into an Imperial Legion Hunter, killing a mudcrab, and, oh, very nearly dying after being double-teamed by two imps, one that roasted me with fire and another that shocked me with lightning. At the same time.

Again, not much in the way of screenshots because I was much too busy trying to stay alive. How close a call was this one?



The closest yet. The arrow is pointing to my health bar, or rather, where my health bar should be. It's so low you can barely even see the end of it. Yoikes. I need some sort of Imp-proof outfit, clearly, because these guys are getting pretty vicious. I might have to invest in some sort of conjuration spell so they don't gang up on me so badly.

I heal up and head back for the night. In the morning, I try to get Beaker off the boat with mixed results.

I'll say this for

Beaker: he's got good posture, even when slowly sliding backwards off a shipwreck. Eventually, we're back on land and heading south again. Tired of getting ambushed by bandits, we follow the river and stay off the road.

I come across Blankenmarch, a small settlement populated by three NPCs who walk back and forth, having stilted conversations when they happen to bump into each other, which is every time they turn around. It's a pretty tiny town. I leave Beaker behind, and scour the area, still coming up short on curative ingredients. At some nearby ruins, some creature unlucky enough to have noclipped through the stairway growls and claws at me through the stone, but can't free himself except for one paw.





I'm not sure what it is. A troll, perhaps. I give it a wide berth.

I come across a tomb by the river. It sports a headless statue and some scattered bones.

I take action to correct the problem.



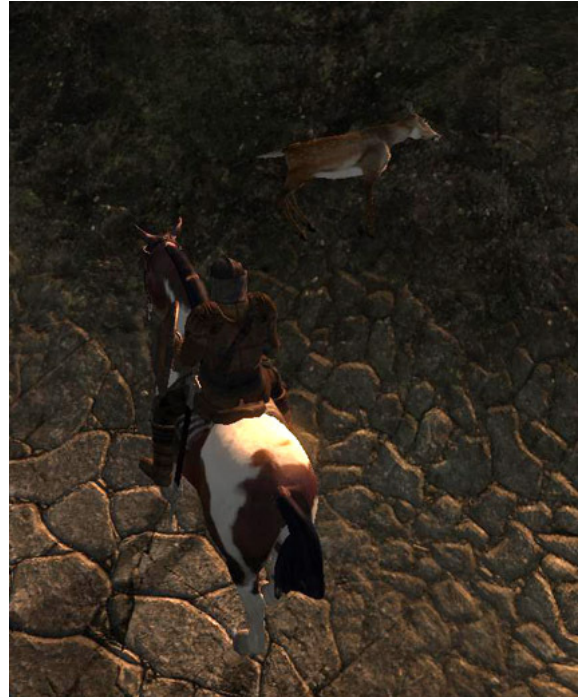
There. Now he has a head.

Later, I find a dead deer.

Hey, look. Those are some pretty big mushrooms.

Yeah, they're some big mushrooms all right.

Hah. *Hah!* Take *that*, game of Oblivion! You think you can force adventure on me? On *me*? Bring on your haunted ships and mysterious messengers! I'll respond by inspecting dead deer and noting the size of fungus! Try to entice me into becoming a shady, selfish thief? I just took time out of my day to make sure a statue had a *head*.



When are you going to learn, Oblivion, game packed with thrills and adventure? You can't win. You can't beat me. You can't beat me because I'm not even playing the same game.

And now, if you don't mind, I'm off to Leyawiin to sell my mushrooms. Some of them are quite big!



### [A Bitter Brew](#)

I reach Leyawiin at nightfall, meaning the shops have closed and I'm forced to peddle my mushrooms and mushroom-related potions at the DragonClaw Inn. This isn't a huge problem, except that innkeepers generally have a 50 dollar per transaction limit, so selling my 52 Restore Fatigue potions for 13 bucks each is going to take a lot of clicking.

Still, when I'm done buying, mixing, and selling, I'm sitting on over 2,600 septims. Noice! I'll have to see what a house goes for in this town. For now, it's off to bed in the Dragon Claw Inn.

In the morning, I hit The Dividing Line, a weapons and armor shop, get everything repaired, and sell off my extras. I'm ditching all my heavy armor — it's just too slow and clunky when worn by an alchemist who is already far too slow and clunky. Leather armor it is, until I can find something light to upgrade to.





Next, I visit the Great Chapel of Zenithar. Forget what the tour books say: it's not that great. It looks exactly like every other chapel I've been in. On the other hand, I finally find a priest selling a spell that will allow me to heal my horse, Beaker. It's called Convalescence, and it costs me about 230 gold. Worth it, though, as now I'll be able to take care of my beloved horsie.

I visit a few other shops, plus the Mage's Guild, looking for ingredients to cure my wolf-borne diseases. I'm also looking for some shoes, since I don't seem to have any for some reason, and a leather helmet to replace my iron one. No luck on either front. I'm also starting to get a bit frustrated about my disease situation. I just need one stinking ingredient with the Cure Disease property, but I can't find one, or buy one, anywhere. With all these canine diseases in my system, I'm more dog now, than man.



Meanwhile, the hot topic in this exciting new town is focused on one thing: a woman named Rosentia Gallenus and how her house smells.

Well, this is a bit sad. The game has definitely gotten the impression that I'm not looking for adventure — in fact, I'm actively avoiding it — and it's stooping so low as to repeatedly invite me to check out a stinky house.



Two things about this. First off, even as a non-adventurer, it's just not appealing. Okay, it doesn't sound dangerous and thrilling, which is a plus in Nondrick's book, but it doesn't sound pleasant, either. Why not have her house smell like fresh herbs? Then I might take a peek.

Secondly, if I *were* an adventurer, running about trying to close Oblivion gates and stave off demon hordes, why the hell would I want to check out a smelly house, either? Sure, it sounds like there's definitely a problem in there, but I'm busy *trying to save the frigging world*. This seems like a quest fit for absolutely no one.



Okay, that's a little better. An adventurer might pop his head in now and see what's going on. Still, I ain't interested.

At the castle, I discover that the house for sale in Leyawiin can be had for only \$7,000 bucks.

That's not bad at all. I

check out some nearby houses to see what mine might look like, and it's practically a mansion for your humble alchemist. Beats my one room hovel in Imperial City, though I'm not crazy about the location. Leyawiin is in the very deep south, at the very bottom of the game's map, and as a gatherer, I need fertile land in all directions to make a living. I'd better check out the surrounding countryside to peep what groweth there.

I strike out to the west and north the next morning. There's not much to find in the marshy landscape except more mushrooms. A Khajiit bandit (female, of course) attacks me after I poke my unprotected noggin into Undertow Cavern. She falls with just a two swings of my longsword. Should've spent more time practicing and less time on the complicated hairdo. Women!







Upon finding Telepe, some Ayleid ruins, I hear a voice yell “Showing your face around here is the last mistake you’ll ever make!” I’m a little confused, since the speaker sounded like he was about a mile away and hollering into a bucket. No one appears and attacks me as I wander carefully around. Eventually, I’m struck by a number of arrows, but I still have no idea where from.

I stroll away, arrows protruding, confused. I’ve learned my lesson, though, and I won’t show my face in that general area again.

In a small settlement called Water’s Edge, I let myself into the

home of Jolie and Eduard Retiene, a pleasant couple who have chosen to spend their day standing and silently contemplating one of the walls in their home. Guess they’re waiting for TV to be invented.



I’m so desperate for finding a curative ingredient that I break one of my rules and raid their garden, picking all the vegetables and examining their properties. No dice. Feeling guilty for stealing from these humble, gently retarded farmers, I drop a silver cup and a couple repair hammers in the garden I just molested, as a form of payment. It’s sort of like in a movie, when a mobster smashes a reporter’s camera and then chucks some bills from a roll of hundreds on the ground, only not even remotely as cool.

A little further up the road, I find the settlement known as Border Watch. It’s sizable, with several homes and a cluster of citizens all standing around talking to each other about horribly boring things. I stop at the Border Watch Inn, where the owner has – get this — a cheese collection.



How awesome is that? That’s way better than my collection of silverware I’ve pulled out of wolf rectums. Way better. I’m insanely jealous.

I step back outside, and chat up the locals. One of them has a cool black cloak and hood. Again, I’m jealous. Nondrick would look great in a hood like that. At least from the back. I’m starting to hate Border Watch – it’s making me feel inadequate. These NPCs are much cooler than I am.



I approach a house and, since it’s unlocked, let myself inside. It’s totally trashed. Weird. In a busted crate, a potion of Cure Disease mocks me. The game itself is mocking me, I decide. As I chose to snub the overflowing adventure it constantly attempts to drown me in, it has chosen to make my



own personal quest, to cure my own diseases with my alchemical skills, impossible. I'll never cure my diseases. Not without having to resort to theft. Not without breaking my rules.

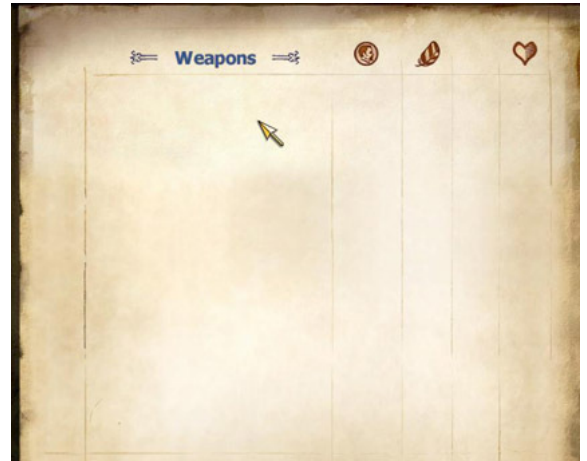
I'm beginning to feel like a failure of an NPC. I don't have a kickass cheese collection and for all my time spent picking ingredients and mixing potions, I'm still crawling with canine parasites. And I don't even have a pair of shoes or a nice hood. No wonder I never score with the honeys.



I wander around the town for a bit. There are several sheep walking about. Maybe it's the wolf parasites infesting my system, but I consider killing one of the sheep. Mutton might have some curative properties, after all. No one is around. I'm desperate. I hack at a sheep, which takes considerably longer to fall than the female bandit from earlier.

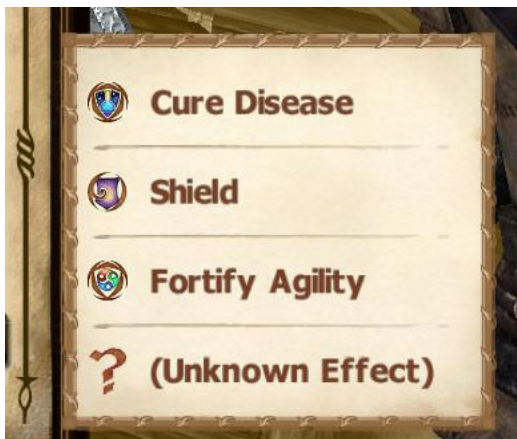
I kill it, and open it up to see what's inside.

This sheep, somehow, is completely empty. Mutton-free. I guess it was full of air. Goddamn discount sheep.



Despondent, I let myself into another house, which is also weirdly trashed. I spot some shoes on a table and consider taking them. Why not? I've raided a garden. I've murdered livestock. The game is clearly denying me the few things I want and need, and it's turning me into a crazed, thieving, half-wolf NPC.

I also spot a Shepherd's Pie on the table. I pick it up to examine its properties.



Bingo. It's the ingredient I need to cure myself. And all it will take is an act of theft.

Is it really theft if I leave something as payment, like I did in the garden? Am I being un-NPC-like? Am I failing in my goal in playing as a benign alchemist? Am I betraying my inner-Nondrick by killing air-filled livestock and swapping near-worthless items with unknowing NPCs?

Screw it. I mix up my Cure Disease potion. One part purchased Elf Cup Cap, one part stolen Shepherd's Pie. The deed is done. I drop a couple repair hammers as payment and walk outside.

I can cure myself right now. Right now! But should I? My one self-driven quest is at an end, but it meant buying one ingredient and stealing another, and then

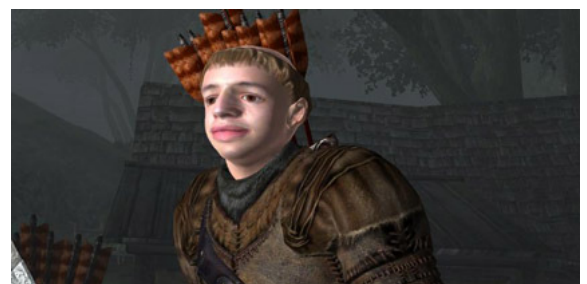
smooshing them together in a cup. One sip, and I'm cured.

But can I do it? *Should* I do it? Should I belt back this bitter beverage of betrayal? Should I deviously down this dirty drink of disappointment? Should I peevishly partake of this perverse potion of something starting with p?

## The Alchemist's Code

When last we left Nondrick, roughly eighteen years ago, he was faced with a moral dilemma. Stealing a Shepard's Pie from someone's home to cure his wolf-born infections (Withbane and Helljoint) was weighing heavily on his soft mind — was it the wrong thing to do? Was it in keeping with his NPC nature? With his back against the wall, would Nondrick fill his pockets with stolen goods?

In a moment of desperation I'd mixed up the ill-gotten curative and stood there, bottle to my lips, debating, worrying, and trying to remember the Alchemist's Code. What I eventually remembered was that I'd never actually invented an Alchemists Code. So, I invented one.





*What I can find is mine. What I can't find, I can buy. But stealing is kind of a dick move.*

Okay, it's not the most eloquent code ever written. But stealing, along with fighting, adventuring, romance, and writing eloquent codes, just isn't Nondrick's thing. I decided, eventually, to leave the potion in the house I'd broken into, along with a trinket or two to make up for ruining someone's dinner. With that, I trudged out into the night on aching, infected joints, to find where I'd parked my horse a year ago and to continue searching for a cure that wouldn't involve stealing a baked lamb entree from a stranger's dinner table.

Of course, this being Oblivion, when the game closes a door it opens a window. Unfortunately, opening a window in Oblivion is a dangerous prospect, because sometimes an enraged pig rushes through it and tries to kill you. Today, as I travel north atop my faithful horse, Beaker, boars finally make their appearance in the game.



Boars are actually pretty tough: they're fast, durable, and challenging for any character who hasn't leveled up properly, and Nondrick's improved speechcraft and mercantile skills, which certainly help with his career, haven't left him particularly capable of dealing with boars easily.

Killing a boar requires a lot of blocking, back-pedaling, and just plain running away, while making the occasional swipe with a sword or blast with a fireball. The first boar I encounter drops me quickly to about one-quarter health before I've even done him much damage. I heal quickly with my Mara's Gift spell, then find myself battered down to half-health again before I finally send the little piggy to market.

While I'm carving up the boar, a Timber Wolf leaps snarling out of the woods. I blast the animal with my frost spell and hack him down to size,

hoping he doesn't infect me with yet another disease. My health is now worryingly low, and I don't have much in the way of curatives. I use my Heal Major Wounds spell, but since I've never built up my magic abilities, I can only use it once or twice before running out of gas.

As soon as I'm back on Beaker, I spot a fellow traveler heading my way. He sees me as well, and thrusts a fist skyward. I'm hoping he's waving hello, but no, he's casting a spell: a scamp spawns beside him and attacks me. Ignoring the conjured beast, I chase the spellcaster around, trying to smack him with my sword. Cripes, can't these stupid animals and evil wizards just fight amongst themselves and leave me out of it?



A retarded little parade ensues. The conjurer can run backwards as fast as I can run forward, so it's a futile chase for a while as I follow him around. Meanwhile, his scamp is chasing me, so the three of us make circles all over the road and through the grass, nobody gaining on anyone. Finally, the warlock runs back-first into a boulder. Pinning him against the rock, I hack away at him while his scamp repeatedly sets me on fire.



Eventually, he folds and his scamp vanishes.

Back on Beaker, I proceed slowly up the trail, gathering ingredients from horseback (somehow). With the city of Bravil in my sights, I spot a plant with large leaves by the base of a tree. My keen eye for plant life tells me this is Mandrake. Wait a second. Wait a second!

I slide off Beaker and yank the Mandrake roots out of the

ground. I check the properties in my well-thumbed copy of Mushing Up Plants For Fun And Profit.

There it is. The Cure Disease property! I mix the Mandrake Root with the remaining sample of Elf Cup Cap that has been gently decomposing in my pocket for days. Bam! One Cure Disease potion. I chug-a-lug and check the active effects — all traces of the disease are gone. Hurray! I have rid myself of wolf-cooties!



Wow. I'd sunk pretty low there for a while, but finally managed to complete my personal quest, ridding my body of unwanted canine pathogens.

Nondrick was once again complete, and could walk triumphantly into Bravil. Or, if not "triumphantly," then at least proudly. Well, "proudly" may be overstating it. How about, "not crawling with diseased ticks."

Yeah, that'll do.

