

100 Gold

Sam Huffer

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"Welcome to Zagalo's Forge," says the bearded baldy up the back of the smith's shop when I enter. "Let me know if you need anything."

"Yeah, sure," I reply, not really paying attention. My focus is instead on the contents of the racks of weapons filling the shop. Half of them are filled with axes, maces, spears and all sorts of other weapons I don't care about. The swords are all straight with normal, pointed tips. I take a deep breath, suppressing my irritation, and turn to shiny-brow up the back. "Hey, you don't have any hook swords stashed away in the back or something, do you?"

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"That's a very interesting design," he says, downing the rest of his ale. "I've never seen a sword like this, let alone made one."

"Well, guess I'm done here." I drop the charcoal on the sketch and get up to leave the Falling Barrel.

"Buuut . . . I'll bet you fifty gold I can make it."

I consider for a moment. "Make it two, and I'll bet you one hundred."

Sep – the eponymous Mr Zagalo – offers his hand. "You're on."

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I stroll around to the forge out back. This is my third visit to check his progress. Sep is lighting the furnace, eyes aflame. I guess this job is pretty good for anger management.

"You seem cheery this morning," I say. "What's up?"

"Oh nothing. Just an aggravating customer," he says, wiping his brow, then picking up his shovel to stock the furnace.

I glance over at a work bench littered with dodgy dagger-like blades with extra curved tips.

One curves all the way back on itself.

"Tell me about this customer."

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"So, what do you do for work?" he asks on the fourth visit.

"Just a sword for hire," I say, withholding the full truth for now.

Looking over, I see a half-length blade has joined the misshapen daggers. The tip curves back perfectly.

Better earn the gold to fork over, I suppose.

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"Seen Dipshit von Jerkface lately?" I ask innocuously.

"Nope, thank the gods," he says, laying a slender cloth package on the counter.

I smile, hopefully not too knowingly, and nod. "Good. May I?" Sep waves his assent, and I peel back the cloth, unveiling two swords with knuckle-guards and round-tipped scabbards. I take one and draw it. The blade extends from the guard, as straight as a rapier and almost as slender, curving flawlessly back to a point. I draw the second blade and give them both a swing.

I grin. "I do believe I owe you some gold, my friend."