ARC ??? – THE HORSEMEN OF THE APOCOLYPSE

1

DEATH

Since your visit to Gafengen, the six of you have traveled leisurely towards the Frozen spire for some time now. Axel was a catalyst in convincing you that the Dragon isn’t nearly as important as the people around you, so you’ve have found as many excuses as you can to slow down progress and prolong your time spent together. Despite your best efforts, everyone has still made good time along the road however and are now further north than any of you have ever gone before. The road is hard and icy, the trees are sparse and brittle, and the wind bites at any skin you leave exposed. Everyone is covered in furs and cloaks to survive the harsh weather, but the clothing did not come cheap and funds are starting to run low.

You look over at $mName. If it weren’t for him donating a substantial amount of the money he had been saving, it is likely nobody would have been able to afford the cloaks. He sees you looking at him, grins, and waves back at you.

[$mName] Hey there bucko, I was just thinking, do you think now that we are getting close to the Dragon there might be some guards or something? Like maybe a bunch of cultists?

You are about to respond, but $liName jumps in.

[$liName] I don’t think there would be any this far up north. The horsemen might be here but probably no cultists.

[$bardName] Oh, the four horsemen? Some of my favorite songs are about them.

$mName stumbles in the snow for a moment but quickly regains his balance, then stomps awkwardly forward to catch up next to $bardName.

[$mName] Can you refresh me on the horsemen real quick $bardName? I’d like to know what kind of threat we are approaching here.

[$bardName] Eh, sure. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are DEATH, FAMINE, WAR, and CONQUEST. They are like, super evil and powerful but at least their songs are a lot of fun to sing.

[$mName] Super evil? Super powerful? Oh good, that’s not scary at all and I am not at all worried...

[$bardName] Nice $mName, maybe you can sarcasm them to death. Hey $aName, are we there yet!?

Currently, the gang is traveling through a snowstorm on the verge of finding the Frozen Spire. The snow is piled up to your knees and you trudge forward slowly, forcing yourself to keep pushing forward. Behind you in single file is everyone else, who carefully step into the snow trough you leave behind you in order to save energy.

[$aName] $bardName, do you see a giant icicle?

[$bardName] No…

[$aName] Then we aren’t there yet! Shush!

$aName isn’t a fan of the cold weather and has been on edge lately, but she keeps her emotions in check for the most part as your troupe trudges along. Wanting to lighten the mood a little, you turn around to make a joke about the temperature.

WHACK

Before you can even say a word $liName flicks you right in the middle of the forehead.

[$pName] Wha..? OW! What was that for? I didn’t even say anything…

[$liName] Oh I don’t know… I guess I just did it for old time’s sake. It’s been a while since I last gave you a good wack on the forehead.

[$pName] And here I thought we were finally getting along $liName, tsk tsk.

[$liName] We were, until you said that bad joke.

[$pName] What, I didn’t say any joke!?

[$liName] Well, you hadn’t said it yet. But I knew, I just knew you were about to say something dumb. I’ve gotten a sixth sense for when a dumb joke is coming after having hung around with $mName for this long.

[$mName] Hey!

You rub at your forehead anticipating a sting, but the feeling quickly goes away. It merely felt painful because the cold made it sensitive, she was actually surprisingly gentle with her ‘wack’. You glance backward at her again and she’s giving you a playful smile. You’ll have to get her back later.

The snowstorm swirls around you and makes it hard to see any more than 50 feet ahead. As you walk you notice a single snowflake fluttering through the air, a beautiful piece of natural art, and it gently lands on your outstretched finger. It glimmers and glistens for you, and for some reason you feel encouraged. Even in tough situations like this, there is beauty in this world. Suddenly, the wind stops all at once and the snowstorm lets up. Everyone cheers, and as the snowy fog and clouds start to break apart a single ray of sunshine sneaks through the troposphere and highlights something in front of you. Somehow a ton of light is reflected at you and nearly blinds you, forcing you to squint your eyes. It is as if someone is flashing a massive flashlight right at your face.

[$liName] Look everyone! The Frozen Spire!

The Ice of the Spire reflects the light around it in all directions as if made of brilliant diamonds, and it twinkles marvelously in the distance. You made it. The Dragon lies somewhere just up ahead!

[$mName] We’re so close! Do you think the Dragon lives on top of the spire, or inside it? Behind it maybe?

[Chef] I chef now.

[$pName] I agree with Chef, we probably have to climb to the top of that thing. It just feels like the right thing to do.

[$bardName] Do you think the eskimo people will mind if we ask them to let us climb the spire then?

[$aName] Depends on if they are friendly to strangers I guess. Hopefully the Ancient Dragon has given them lots of wishes so that they’re in a good mood.

$aName waggles her fingers across her chest.

[$liName] That’s a good point. Let’s go say hello to them and get out of all this snow!

Your crew of explorers make their way through the snow one step at a time, laboriously fighting through the piled-up snow. Finally, the six of you make it to the spire and can fully appreciate its incredible appearance. Just like $bardName said, it is at least 100 stories tall and sticks straight out of the ground, straight up. It is thin for its height, and is about as wide around as the length of a basketball court. There is only one entrance to the spire, a huge gate carved out of the ice and left wide open. There are no footprints leading in or out of the gate, but then again the recent snowstorm could have covered some up.

[$pName] Let’s check it out.

You lead the way inside the gates, and peer about. It appears to be some kind of storage area, with a lot of counters, tables, and holding areas scattered around that are made completely of ice. There is a single pillar in the center of the floor for structural support, and not much else. At the far side is a staircase running along the edge of the circular room that leads to the next floor, and beside that is a rope which is likely part of a pulley system. The floor is ice as well but scuffed enough that you don’t slip very often. There is nobody here.

[$bardName] Where the heck is everyone?

[$aName] Jeez, I have no idea. Looks like they’ve all moved out. It’s completely vacationed.

[$mName] Vacationed?

[$liName] … do you mean vacated?

[$aName] Oh! Yeah that’s what I meant! It’s completely vacated.

[$pName] Well there is nobody here, let’s go up another floor.

You clamber up the icy steps, which have grooves carved into the surface so that it’s grippy enough for your boots. Now that you are closer to the rope you can see it leads up to the next floor and was likely used to pull cargo up for whoever used to live here. You make it to the second floor, and look around. This story looks like a common eating area, and has what looks like a kitchen to one side and a bunch of ice tables and chairs on the other. There is no one else here either.

[$pName] Hellooooooooo?

Your call echoes off the ice and carries up the spire, but nobody calls out in response. The Frozen Spire appears to be completely deserted.

You climb up the spire to the next few floors and it is the same situation all around. The third used to be a communal area, the fourth used to be an ice sculpting area, and the fifth is filled with tiny empty ice huts stacked on top of each other where the eskimos probably used to live. All are empty and abandoned.

[$pName] Where is everyone…

Before you give up you decide to climb one last flight of stairs, and arrive at the sixth floor. This floor has a tall ceiling, making it feel much more spacious than the other ones. It is completely empty, and has small cuts out of the side walls that act as windows where snow gently falls in. A figure stands at the opposite side of the room.

[$pName] Psst, guys! There’s someone here!

Everyone rushes up the stairs to join you and the six of you square off across the room from the figure. The hairs on the back of your neck stand up, and you feel nervous. Something isn’t right about this guy. He slowly marches forward towards you, taking each step slowly and deliberately.

The stranger is covered head to toe in midnight black leather and cloth, giving them a rugged and stealthy look. Judging by the height and muscles on the stranger it appears to be a man of a little more than six feet in height. Across the stranger’s chest, waist, legs, arms, and back are countless knives, swords, and weaponry of all kinds. He wears a black hood and Black veil which makes it impossible to see any of his features.

[$pName] No… shit…

[???] You can run, but you can never escape DEATH.

2

Good time to save

3

[$liName] Oh no…

[$aName] Crap…

Everyone that has a weapon draws theirs and points it at DEATH unsteadily. DEATH walks forward confidently until finally stopping 10 feet away, and you hold your breath.

[DEATH] The Ancient Dragon awaits at the top of the spire. You will pay the ultimate price to continue.

His voice is harsh and sounds like nails on chalkboard, and you grimace with each syllable he utters.

[DEATH] One of you must die to pass. Choose wisely.

[$liName] Don’t listen to him $pName!

[$aName] Let’s defeat him together!

[$mName] We got this!

[$bardName] I’m fired up!

[Chef] I Chef Now!

Fight Death 4

Sacrifice $liName 14

Sacrifice $aName 15

Sacrifice $mName 16

Sacrifice $bardName 17

Sacrifice Chef 18

4

[$pName] I’m never giving up! We will defeat you like we did back at Kingsbridge!

[DEATH] So be it.

Death raises his hand in front of him, pointing it menacingly at you.

[$liName] Charge!

All six of you sprint forwards in an attempt to attack him all at once, and DEATH doesn’t move an inch. He simply waits, hand outstretched. Careening forward you bring your sword up and above your head to slice down at him, but right before you begin your attack DEATH makes his move.

SNAP

Death Snaps his fingers, and that is all it takes to stop everyone in their tracks. All six of you freeze, as if captured in that moment in time completely unable to move. You glance around you and notice that your friends are in the exact same predicament, looking around in panic. Death turns around, and with his back to you sighs tiredly. With his right hand he reaches behind him and unsheathes a sword, and with his left he snaps a second time. You are released from the spell and collapse to the floor, gasping. To your left and right your friends remain there, suspended in time and unable to move. It is just you and DEATH now.

[DEATH] You cannot overcome DEATH. You can only accept it.

You pick yourself up off the ground and hold your sword out at the ready. The duel has begun. DEATH turns towards you again and grips his sword with both hands, then charges forward in a lightning fast sprint.

Dodge the attack 5

5

You dodge the attack just in time, jumping to the side as his blade narrowly misses your shoulder. You ready your sword for a counter attack but DEATH is too quick, and continues to pressure you with multiple deadly swings. You parry his attacks, but they rapidly get quicker and quicker. Next, he faints an attack from above but instead of swinging kicks you in the chest and sends you flying backwards, skidding across the icy floor. You stagger back up to your feet trying to catch your breath, but before you know it DEATH sprints towards you and slides low with his blade at the ready.

Jump over his swing 6

Block the attack 7

6

You muster up all your strength and jump over him using everything you’ve got. Despite your best effort you are only human and can’t jump that high, so when DEATH slides underneath you he whips his sword above him and catches you on the right leg, chopping the entire thing off. It paints the ice red as it slides away, leaving a scarlet brush mark behind it in a gruesome form of calligraphy. The force of the blade slicing through your leg sends you spinning and you smash into the ground hard, clutching at your leg.

[$pName] AAAAGGGGHHHH

Your now missing leg screams in unbearable pain, and the arteries that used to connect to it violently spurt blood across the once immaculate floor. You didn’t notice it at first because of your leg, but you also bit off your tongue when you hit the ground and the blood wells up in your mouth, forcing you to spit every few seconds between screams. Despite being severed, it wriggles on the ground in a pool of your blood.

[$pName] UUUUUGGGGHHHH

DEATH approaches and kicks your sword away from you leaving you defenseless. He kneels down, and whispers in your ear.

[DEATH] I am become DEATH…

He stands up and plunges his sword into your heart causing the world to quickly fade to black. As your senses begin to diminish you almost want to thank him for stopping the pain.

[DEATH] …Destroyer of worlds

Everything goes blank, and you finally pass away.

THE END

7

You swing your sword downward just in time to block the incoming attack and deflect it to the side. With a grunt you attempt a counter attack but DEATH dodges your thrust and flips backwards. Reaching into a holster attached to his thigh, DEATH pulls out a handful of knifes and flings them at you. You hardly have time to react.

Duck under 8

Dodge left 10

Dodge right 9

8

You attempt to duck under the incoming knifes but they are too spread out to avoid and one shoots straight through your neck at mach speed. Grasping at your throat and choking, you fall to your knees and drop your sword. Blood shoots out your neck and onto the floor, and you can’t breathe at all.

[DEATH] I am become DEATH…

The injury is so severe you cannot stay conscious for even a moment longer and you collapse onto the icy floor. You are dead.

THE END

9

You dodge to the right and manage to avoid the knives, but as you regain your balance your foot slips on the icy floor and you smash backwards onto the ground. Before you can even attempt to stand up DEATH is upon you, and thrusts his sword into your chest again and again in rapid succession without mercy.

[DEATH] I am become DEATH…

You desperately hold your arms in front of you in an attempt to stop his sword but he plunges his sword straight through your arms as well, and you get sliced to ribbons. Again and again he punctures you and sends your innards flying in all directions.

[$pName] AAAAAAAAGGGGHHHH

The pain is unbearable, and finally you become too weak to resist and lay limply. At this point it looks as if you have been turned inside out and it is impossible to see where your body begins and your organs end.

[DEATH] …Destroyer of worlds

DEATH sinks his sword into you one last time straight through your skull. You are dead.

THE END

10

You dodge to the left and manage to avoid the knives just in time. DEATH pauses for a moment, and you catch your breath.

[DEATH] Your struggle is pointless. DEATH is inevitable.

[$pName] Not while I have the will to fight!

[DEATH] I see… you retry over and over, guessing how to defeat me until you get lucky.

[$pName] I’ll figure out how to win eventually, I always do!

[DEATH] Not this time. I allowed you to survive at Kingsbridge because the Script ordered me to. Here, you have no hope of escape. One must die. You must Choose. We can fight forever and you will never defeat me.

[$pName] I’m still here, I’m still trying, aren’t I?!

[DEATH] Pointless…

DEATH charges forward towards you, and through his veil you can faintly see his eyes glowing red from the darkness within. He’s not going to hold back any longer.

Continue… 11

11

DEATH strikes at you with vicious fury. How will you react?

!!!

Generate an option for each iteration of the loop. Each option will randomly choose from a list of actions:

dodge, swipe, duck, flip, run, jump, twist, block, parry, swing, attack, block, defend, thrust, crouch, spin, evade.

One of these will be chosen at random to be a success, the rest will end badly

Success 12

Bad result 13

12

You manage to avoid DEATH’s attack in the nick of time and even sneak in an attack of your own, but he easily dodges it. His power grows before your eyes, and the fight gets harder.

[DEATH] One must die. You must Choose. We can fight forever and you will never defeat me.

Continue 11

13

You attempt to overcome DEATH’s attack but you are too late, too sloppy, too underpowered compared to his immense ability. Death cuts you down and your destroyed, feeble body lays in a pool of blood on the icy floor. You have lost count of how many times it has happened now. Once again you have experienced DEATH.

THE END

14

You fall to your knees, hopeless.

[$pName] I tried, I really tried… I’m sorry…

[DEATH] One must die. You must Choose.

[$pName] I don’t make this decision lightly. I choose… I choose… $liName.

[$liName] Wha…!?

[$aName] $pName! What are you doing!?

[DEATH] It is done.

DEATH points his finger at $liName and snaps, causing her to freeze in place unable to move. Panicking, her eyes dart back and forth between you and DEATH. She tries to scream but her vocal cords are unable to respond.

[$aName] Oh no, $liName! Someone do something!

You watch helplessly from the ground and do nothing. They haven’t realized what you have yet, they haven’t realized that the second you met death it was already over.

Grimacing, $aName holds Whisper tightly against herself and sprints forward at incredible speed, determined to protect $liName with everything she has. DEATH readies his sword and blocks her attack, and the two clash back and forth rapidly and with great precision. The sound of their swords clanging against each other rings out and bounces over and over against the icy walls, causing a chorus of battle to echo across the room. Finally, after much struggle, DEATH manages to grab $aName’s arm and throw her with tremendous strength towards the Spire’s wall. Just when it looks like she will smash into it and break every bone in her body Chef jumps in the way and catches her, and the two fly backwards and skid safely along the ground.

[DEATH] The only way to overcome DEATH is to accept its inevitability. Congratulations, you have defeated me.

DEATH strides up to the frozen $liName and with a single thrust impales her through the heart, killing her instantly. With a puff of smoke DEATH vanishes into thin air, and $liName’s corpse falls to the ground unfrozen in time. You crawl up to her.

[$pName] I’m sorry… I’m so sorry…

$aName comes rushing back, and sees you huddling over $liName’s body. Consumed with fury, she pushes you off of her and checks her pulse. When she realizes $liName is gone forever, she curls up in a ball and begins to sob violently. Her wails echo throughout the spire, and you feel numb. A minute passes until she wipes her tears off and angrily stands back up to face you.

[$aName] WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT!? IT’S YOUR FAULT!

[$pName] I know…

$aName punches you over and over again in the face, stomach, and anywhere else she can find an opening. You feel no motivation to fight back so you curl up in the fetal position and simply wait for her to tire out. After she finishes giving you a savage beating, you finally sit up and wipe the blood from your face. $aName stares at you in disgust.

[$aName] Why did you choose her? Why did you give up right away?

[$pName] I DID try $aName, you just couldn’t see it. I tried as hard as I could, I really did. But no matter how long I tried, no matter how much effort I put in, I couldn’t do it. I just couldn’t…

[$aName] What the fuck are you talking about, you asked him to kill $liName right away at the start! Bullshit!

[$pName] You wouldn’t understand…

You become silent, and stare grimly at the ground. $aName glares at you angrily for several minutes without saying a word before finally breaking down and crying again. Her words are choked and you can barely understand her:

[$aName] Why… why didn’t you choose me instead…

An idea flashes across your mind.

[$pName] Wait… Maybe it’s not over yet.

You stand up, and try to pull yourself together. You are pretty beat up but it’s nothing you can’t recover from.

[$pName] I’m just as saddened by $liName’s death as you are, but its not over yet. If the Dragon’s Horsemen of the Apocalypse are guarding this Spire then it’s a sure sign he is at the top. If we manage to beat all four of them, then we can finally meet the Ancient Dragon and get our wishes, right?

$aName looks up at you with tears in her eyes, and nods solemnly.

[$pName] Then it’s simple. We can wish for $liName to be resurrected, good as new. Since It is my fault she died, I will use up my wish to do it. Then when we are done everyone else gets their wish and we can all live happily ever after. Right!?

$aName looks at you confused for a moment, and then her face starts to brighten up as she slowly realizes what you are saying.

[$aName] You’re right… It’s not over yet…

Everyone else has been standing to the side watching this whole time without saying a word, not wanting to interrupt the emotional scene. Finally, $mName decides to pipe in.

[$mName] I agree with $pName, we should power through and bring back $liName. It’s not over yet!

[$bardName] yeah!

[Chef] I Chef Now!

Emboldened, $aName stands back up and recovers herself, wiping her tears off her face completely. She slowly walks over to $liName’s body and closes her eyes before kissing her on the forehead.

[$aName] I’ll save you, I promise!

Everyone groups back up and makes their way to the staircase leading to the next floor. Through the windows along the wall you can see that far below you now the snow glistens in the sun and the wintery countryside glows beautifully. It’s a tender sight, but one you can’t enjoy for long. You brave the stairs upwards, and prepare for the next battle.

15

You fall to your knees, hopeless.

[$pName] I tried, I really tried… I’m sorry…

[DEATH] One must die. You must Choose.

[$pName] I don’t make this decision lightly. I choose… I choose… $aName.

[$aName] Wha…!?

[$liName] $pName! What are you doing!?

[DEATH] It is done.

DEATH points his finger at $aName and snaps, causing her to freeze in place unable to move. Panicking, her eyes dart back and forth between you and DEATH. She tries to scream but her vocal cords are unable to respond.

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Grimacing, $liName holds Gasp tightly against herself and sprints forward at incredible speed, determined to protect $aName with everything she has. DEATH readies his sword and blocks her attack, and the two clash back and forth rapidly and with great precision. The sound of their swords clanging against each other rings out and bounces over and over against the icy walls, causing a chorus of battle to echo across the room. Finally, after much struggle, DEATH manages to grab $liName’s arm and throw her with tremendous strength towards the Spire’s wall. Just when it looks like she will smash into it and break every bone in her body Chef jumps in the way and catches her, and the two fly backwards and skid safely along the ground.

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[$liName] WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT!? IT’S YOUR FAULT!

[$pName] I know…

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[$mName] What!? How could you say that!?

[$liName] $pName! What are you doing!?

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[$aName] $liName! You bastard…

$aName charges up to DEATH and picks up right where $liName left off, and sparks fly out as the two smash at each other as hard as they can with their swords. $aName cleverly backs off for a second to use Whisper’s superior range, but DEATH doesn’t fall for it and instead starts throwing knifes at her, forcing her to dodge. She bends backwards, summersaults, and flips, barely managing to dodge around the stream of weaponry thrown at her. Seeing her out of breath and caught off balance, DEATH charges back in and slices at $aName with such force that when she attempts to block it she loses her grip on Whisper and the sword goes flying off into the distance. Unarmed, $aName tries to punch at DEATH with her bare fists in an impressive display of determination but it proves fruitless when DEATH easily dodges the attack and spartan kicks her in the chest. $aName goes flying backwards and collides with $liName and Chef in a defeated pile.

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DEATH strides up to the frozen $mName and with a single thrust impales him through the heart, killing him instantly. With a puff of smoke DEATH vanishes into thin air, and $mName’s corpse falls to the ground unfrozen in time. You crawl up to him.

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[$aName] WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT!? IT’S YOUR FAULT!

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$liName and $aName punch you over and over again in the face, stomach, and anywhere else they can find an opening. You feel no motivation to fight back so you curl up in the fetal position and simply wait for them to tire out. After the two finish giving you a savage beating, you finally sit up and wipe the blood from your face. $liName stares at you in disgust.

[$liName] Why did you choose him? Why did you give up right away?

[$pName] I DID try $liName, you just couldn’t see it. I tried as hard as I could, I really did. But no matter how long I tried, no matter how much effort I put in, I couldn’t do it. I just couldn’t…

[$liName] What the fuck are you talking about, you asked him to kill $mName right away at the start! Bullshit!

[$pName] You wouldn’t understand…

You become silent, and stare grimly at the ground. $liName and $aName glare at you angrily for several minutes without saying a word before finally breaking down and crying. Just after letting out all her frustrated emotions, $liName’s words are choked and you can barely understand her:

[$liName] Why… why did it have to go this way…

An idea flashes across your mind.

[$pName] Wait… Maybe it doesn’t have to.

You stand up, and try to pull yourself together. You are pretty beat up but it’s nothing you can’t recover from.

[$pName] I’m just as saddened by $mName’s death as you are, but its not over yet. If the Dragon’s Horsemen of the Apocalypse are guarding this Spire then it’s a sure sign he is at the top. If we manage to beat all four of them, then we can finally meet the Ancient Dragon and get our wishes, right?

$liName looks up at you with tears in her eyes, and nods solemnly.

[$pName] Then it’s simple. We can wish for $mName to be resurrected, good as new. Since It is my fault he died, I will use up my wish to do it. Then when we are done everyone else gets their wish and we can all live happily ever after. Right!?

$liName looks at you confused for a moment, and then her face starts to brighten up as she slowly realizes what you are saying.

[$liName] You’re right… It’s not over yet…

Everyone else has been standing to the side watching this whole time without saying a word, not wanting to interrupt the emotional scene. Finally, $aName decides to pipe in.

[$aName] I agree with $pName, we should power through and bring back $mName. It’s not over yet!

[$bardName] yeah!

[Chef] I Chef Now!

Emboldened, $liName stands back up and recovers herself, wiping her tears off her face completely. She slowly walks over to $mName’s body and closes his eyes.

[$liName] We will save you, I promise!

Everyone groups back up and makes their way to the staircase leading to the next floor. Through the windows along the wall you can see that far below you now the snow glistens in the sun and the wintery countryside glows beautifully. It’s a tender sight, but one you can’t enjoy for long. You brave the stairs upwards, and prepare for the next battle.

17

You fall to your knees, hopeless.

[$pName] I tried, I really tried… I’m sorry…

[DEATH] One must die. You must Choose.

[$pName] I don’t make this decision lightly. I choose… I choose… $bardName.

[$bardName] WHAT!?! NONONONO what are you saying!?

[$liName] $pName! What are you doing!?

[DEATH] It is done.

DEATH points his finger at $bardName and snaps, causing her to freeze in place unable to move. Panicking, her eyes dart back and forth between you and DEATH and she tries to yell for help.

[$liName] Oh no, $bardName! I’ll save you!

You watch helplessly from the ground and do nothing. They haven’t realized what you have yet, they haven’t realized that the second you met death it was already over.

Grimacing, $liName holds Gasp tightly against herself and sprints forward at incredible speed, determined to protect $bardName with everything she has. DEATH readies his sword and blocks her attack, and the two clash back and forth rapidly and with great precision. The sound of their swords clanging against each other rings out and bounces over and over against the icy walls, causing a chorus of battle to echo across the room. Finally, after much struggle, DEATH manages to grab $liName’s arm and throw her with tremendous strength towards the Spire’s wall. Just when it looks like she will smash into it and break every bone in her body Chef jumps in the way and catches her, and the two fly backwards and skid safely along the ground.

[$aName] $liName! You bastard…

$aName charges up to DEATH and picks up right where $liName left off, and sparks fly out as the two smash at each other as hard as they can with their swords. $aName cleverly backs off for a second to use Whisper’s superior range, but DEATH doesn’t fall for it and instead starts throwing knifes at her, forcing her to dodge. She bends backwards, summersaults, and flips, barely managing to dodge around the stream of weaponry thrown at her. Seeing her out of breath and caught off balance, DEATH charges back in and slices at $aName with such force that when she attempts to block it she loses her grip on Whisper and the sword goes flying off into the distance. Unarmed, $aName tries to punch at DEATH with her bare fists in an impressive display of determination but it proves fruitless when DEATH easily dodges the attack and spartan kicks her in the chest. $aName goes flying backwards and collides with $liName and Chef in a defeated pile.

[DEATH] The only way to overcome DEATH is to accept its inevitability. Congratulations, you have defeated me.

DEATH strides up to the frozen $bardName and with a single thrust impales her through the heart, killing her instantly. With a puff of smoke DEATH vanishes into thin air, and $bardName’s corpse falls to the ground unfrozen in time. You crawl up to her.

[$pName] I’m sorry… I’m so sorry…

$liName comes rushing back, and sees you huddling over $bardName’s body. Consumed with fury, she pushes you off of her and checks her pulse. When she realizes $bardName is gone forever, she screams in frustration and pounds at the ground. A minute passes until she wipes her tears off and angrily stands back up to face you.

[$aName] WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT!? IT’S YOUR FAULT!

[$pName] I know…

$liName and $aName punch you over and over again in the face, stomach, and anywhere else they can find an opening. You feel no motivation to fight back so you curl up in the fetal position and simply wait for them to tire out. After the two finish giving you a savage beating, you finally sit up and wipe the blood from your face. $liName stares at you in disgust.

[$liName] Why did you choose her? Why did you give up right away?

[$pName] I DID try $liName, you just couldn’t see it. I tried as hard as I could, I really did. But no matter how long I tried, no matter how much effort I put in, I couldn’t do it. I just couldn’t…

[$liName] What the fuck are you talking about, you asked him to kill $bardName right away at the start! Bullshit!

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You become silent, and stare grimly at the ground. $liName and $aName glare at you angrily for several minutes without saying a word before $liName finally breaks down crying. Her words are choked and you can barely understand her:

[$liName] Why… why did it have to go this way…

An idea flashes across your mind.

[$pName] Wait… Maybe it doesn’t have to.

You stand up, and try to pull yourself together. You are pretty beat up but it’s nothing you can’t recover from.

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$liName looks at you confused for a moment, and then her face starts to brighten up as she slowly realizes what you are saying.

[$liName] You’re right… It’s not over yet…

Everyone else has been standing to the side watching this whole time without saying a word, not wanting to interrupt the emotional scene. Finally, $aName decides to pipe in.

[$aName] I agree with $pName, we should power through and bring back $bardName. It’s not over yet!

[$mName] yeah!

[Chef] I Chef Now!

Emboldened, $liName stands back up and recovers herself, wiping her tears off her face completely. She slowly walks over to $bardName’s body and closes her eyes.

[$liName] We will save you, I promise!

Everyone groups back up and makes their way to the staircase leading to the next floor. Through the windows along the wall you can see that far below you now the snow glistens in the sun and the wintery countryside glows beautifully. It’s a tender sight, but one you can’t enjoy for long. You brave the stairs upwards, and prepare for the next battle.

18

You fall to your knees, hopeless.

[$pName] I tried, I really tried… I’m sorry…

[DEATH] One must die. You must Choose.

[$pName] I don’t make this decision lightly. I choose… I choose… Chef.

[$mName] What!? How could you say that!?

[Chef] … Chef?

[$liName] $pName! What are you doing!?

[DEATH] It is done.

DEATH points his finger at Chef and snaps, causing him to freeze in place unable to move. Panicking, his eyes dart back and forth between you and DEATH and tries to yell for help.

[$liName] Oh no, Chef! I’ll save you!

You watch helplessly from the ground and do nothing. They haven’t realized what you have yet, they haven’t realized that the second you met death it was already over.

Grimacing, $liName holds Gasp tightly against herself and sprints forward at incredible speed, determined to protect Chef with everything she has. DEATH readies his sword and blocks her attack, and the two clash back and forth rapidly and with great precision. The sound of their swords clanging against each other rings out and bounces over and over against the icy walls, causing a chorus of battle to echo across the room. Finally, after much struggle, DEATH manages to grab $liName’s arm and throw her with tremendous strength towards the Spire’s wall. Just when it looks like she will smash into it and break every bone in her body $mName jumps in the way and tries to catch her. Unfortunately, the momentum is too great for him to handle and they both fly backwards together and smack into the wall hard. Neither are seriously injured, but they are dazed and unable to get up.

[$aName] $liName! You bastard…

$aName charges up to DEATH and picks up right where $liName left off, and sparks fly out as the two smash at each other as hard as they can with their swords. $aName cleverly backs off for a second to use Whisper’s superior range, but DEATH doesn’t fall for it and instead starts throwing knifes at her, forcing her to dodge. She bends backwards, summersaults, and flips, barely managing to dodge around the stream of weaponry thrown at her. Seeing her out of breath and caught off balance, DEATH charges back in and slices at $aName with such force that when she attempts to block it she loses her grip on Whisper and the sword goes flying off into the distance. Unarmed, $aName tries to punch at DEATH with her bare fists in an impressive display of determination but it proves fruitless when DEATH easily dodges the attack and spartan kicks her in the chest. $aName goes flying backwards and collides with $liName and $mName in a defeated pile.

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DEATH strides up to the frozen Chef and with a single thrust impales him through the heart, killing him instantly. With a puff of smoke DEATH vanishes into thin air, and Chef’s corpse falls to the ground unfrozen in time. You crawl up to him.

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$liName comes rushing back, and sees you huddling over Chef’s body. Consumed with fury, she pushes you off of him and checks his pulse. When she realizes Chef is gone forever, she screams in frustration and pounds at the ground. A minute passes until she wipes her tears off and angrily stands back up to face you.

[$aName] WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT!? IT’S YOUR FAULT!

[$pName] I know…

$liName and $aName punch you over and over again in the face, stomach, and anywhere else they can find an opening. You feel no motivation to fight back so you curl up in the fetal position and simply wait for them to tire out. After the two finish giving you a savage beating, you finally sit up and wipe the blood from your face. $liName stares at you in disgust.

[$liName] Why did you choose him? Why did you give up right away?

[$pName] I DID try $liName, you just couldn’t see it. I tried as hard as I could, I really did. But no matter how long I tried, no matter how much effort I put in, I couldn’t do it. I just couldn’t…

[$liName] What the fuck are you talking about, you asked him to kill Chef right away at the start! Bullshit!

[$pName] You wouldn’t understand…

You become silent, and stare at the ground. $liName stares at you angrily for several minutes without saying a word before finally breaking down and crying. Her words are choked and you can barely understand her:

[$liName] Why… why did it have to go this way…

An idea flashes across your mind.

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[$pName] I’m just as saddened by Chef’s death as you are, but it’s not over yet. If the Dragon’s Horsemen of the Apocalypse are guarding this Spire then it’s a sure sign he is at the top. If we manage to beat all four of them, then we can finally meet the Ancient Dragon and get our wishes, right?

$liName looks up at you with tears in her eyes, and nods solemnly.

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$liName looks at you confused for a moment, and then her face starts to brighten up as she slowly realizes what you are saying.

[$liName] You’re right… It’s not over yet…

Everyone else has been standing to the side watching this whole time without saying a word, not wanting to interrupt the emotional scene. Finally, $aName decides to pipe in.

[$aName] I agree with $pName, we should power through and bring back Chef. It’s not over yet!

[$bardName] yeah!

[$mName] I couldn’t agree more!

Emboldened, $liName stands back up and recovers herself, wiping her tears off her face completely. She slowly walks over to Chef’s body and closes his eyes.

[$liName] We will save you, I promise!

Everyone groups back up and makes their way to the staircase leading to the next floor. Through the windows along the wall you can see that far below you now the snow glistens in the sun and the wintery countryside glows beautifully. It’s a tender sight, but one you can’t enjoy for long. You brave the stairs upwards, and prepare for the next battle.

19

FAMINE

It is a safe time to save

20

You climb the stairs as quickly as you can, and after a considerable amount of effort you reach the top huffing and puffing. You find yourself in a new room nearly identical to the last, except here the ceiling is even higher than the last one which gives it a very spacious feeling. The ice on the floor is grooved and scratched up so that it is relatively grippy, but you still slide a little bit while walking on it. At the far side of the room is another figure, this one stranger looking than the last.

[$pName] Another Horseman of the Apocalypse. Let’s go guys.

As you move forward so does the figure, and the two of you meet in the middle about 20 feet apart. Now that you are closer, you are surprised by his grandeur appearance in Contrast with DEATH.

The man wears a huge fuzzy red wizards robe with sleeves that extend all the way to the ground and drag behind him when he walks. The collar of his robe is so comically large that it sticks straight up and out several feet, and has a taper to it so that it looks like a pair of dragon’s wings. Across his chest is a gargantuan golden amulet depicting a dragon’s head, snarling menacingly. The amulet is so big it covers much of his upper torso and looks like it must weigh a hundred pounds, but the man does not strain under its weight. He looks like a man in his late fifties with greying hair and is clean shaven. His eyes are yellow and strange to look at, and you feel more and more uneasy the longer you look at him. This is probably because he never blinks and only stares at you like a starving man looking at his first meal in weeks. He relaxes his jaw at all times so you can see where streaks of drool have dripped from his mouth and fallen down across his robe and amulet.

[???] And here you are, $pName. I’ve been waiting for you. I am none other than FAMINE, and it is my holy duty to prevent your progress up this Spire. Are you prepared to confess your sins?

His voice doesn’t match his face at all, and sounds like a prepubescent teen that has been drinking too much caffeine. It immediately annoys you.

[$pName] Shut up FAMINE, let’s get this over with.

[FAMINE] Woah! So hasty! I cannot, will not, shall not let you treat me like that! You know, when WAR told me of how you chose this route, I was so disappointed. He gets to be the bad guy in this one while I sit on the sidelines, such a bore! He doesn’t even fight you properly, he just used that damn mercenary. What a cheat, what a scumbag, what a drag! But last time, or maybe next time, or maybe last next time, we will become VERY well acquainted. I look forward to it.

[$pName] What the hell are you going on about?

[FAMINE] Oooooohhhh deary me oh me oh my, I am so famished, so hungry, so starving! I could really go for a good meal right now. Let’s see here… Oh my $pName you shouldn’t have! You brought this all the way over here FOR ME!? So kind, so loving, so gracious!

Suddenly, you feel like you’ve been punched in the gut. Something terrible just happened, but you don’t know what it is. You feel extremely… vulnerable.

\*delete save file\*

21

[FAMINE] mmmmMMMMmmmm, delicious! So scrumptious, tasty, intoxicating! What an incredible meal, thank you!

In front of your eyes FAMINE hugs himself in pleasure and his face distorts and changes. Somehow or another it looks like he has gone backwards in age, and his face looks about 5 years younger.

[$pName] What did you just do!?

[FAMINE] You don’t know yet? Why, I’ve eaten your save file of course! Oh how wonderful, it tickles my taste buds! So many incredible memories and so much progress, I feel great, grand, superb!

[$pName] What!? Enough messing around, Let’s get him guys!

The five of you charge forward with your weapons drawn, but before you can get close enough to strike FAMINE begins his monologue.

\*set text speed to medium, forced in menu\*

[FAMINE] How rude! How despicable, how unhospitable, how condescending! You come to attack me!? You dare to attack me when I’ve been so kind, so understanding!? Is it so wrong to want a meal every now and then, to want to survive? Here I am minding my own business, and you charge forward like you want to cut me down. Barbaric! I’m not surprised at all however, to be honest. Typical Heretic behavior really. None of you believe in the Ancient Dragon do you? Whoop, don’t forget to do the finger waggling bit! That part’s important, superstitions and all. You gotta respect the traditions you know. But really, none of you are believers? You don’t even believe in the Ancient Dragon and yet you try to cut down his number one fan? Do you not understand that the Dragon loves me and protects me? That I am one of his chosen few? I really can’t believe you guys. I can’t believe you would treat someone so high ranking in the church this way. Well anyways, I can’t be mad forever, so I’ll change topics. What do you think of my robe, do you love it? Do you hate it? You probably didn’t even notice it, because of my amulet. It’s huge, you see. Everyone always notices the amulet first, but do they ever notice me? Do they ever notice the robe I so carefully wash and take care of, or my immaculate appearance? NO! Not at all! I don’t get the credit I deserve really, it’s so sad, so dreary, so depressing! What’s the point of being one of the most powerful people in the entire world if you have no one to worship you? Worship as in being a fan of course, not as in real worship. That kind of worship is for the dragon only, it would be sacrilegious and superstitious otherwise. Well not really superstitious per se, but I just wanted to add that in because it rhymed. Let’s see, what else should I talk about? I could go on forever really. You probably want to know why I’m talking so much, don’t you? Well it’s simple really, I’m talking so much because I’m a genius and you aren’t. I’m smart, intellectual, cunning! Because I understand the rules you see. I understand how this works. You don’t, and that’s ok because a barbarian heretic like you would never be able to figure it out like I have, but in the meantime incredible thinkers such as myself have gone and figured it all out. Figured what out you say? Well it’s simple, As long as I keep monologuing you will never be able to do anything. Nothing at all. You become useless, purposeless, worthless! As long as I keep going you have no choice but to listen to what I am saying and wait patiently. There is simply no room for descriptors and adverbs and a sentence about you trying to stop me, because if I never stop talking you never get the chance to act! But by now I’m sure you are thinking “He has to get tired and stop at some point” right? WRONG! I am FAMINE, one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse! You think I ever get tired? You think I ever grow weary of talking all this time, of holding you hostage? Not at all! I get hungry, yes, but so do you! And the knowledge that your patience is wearing out, that you are unable to keep up with me, is fuel to my fire! It becomes a battle of willpower then, a battle of determination! Because All I have to do is keep talking and all you have to do is sit there. You have no choice, that’s just the way this world works. But you are a human being, not an incredible person like I am, so the situation is completely at my favor! At some point you are going to get bored, or get busy, or grow tired, or want to do something else, and guess what? You can’t do anything! I’ve consumed your save file, so if you try to escape then you will lose everything you have worked so hard to achieve! Soon, you will experience true FAMINE! Oh wow, if only you could see the expression on your face right now, it is simply priceless! Very typical of you, honestly, to take so long to finally see how I’ve checkmated you, very typical that I had to explain every last detail to you as if you are some kind of child. But that’s the name of the game I suppose, just another burden I have to bear as a superior being. Not as superior as the Dragon mind you, but pretty close. I would say if there was a tier list of superiority the Dragon would be S tier but I would for sure be A tier. You would be G tier my friend, G for garbage, because that’s what you are. Or perhaps DH tier, for dumb heretic. Most of the time tier lists only have one letter but I’m sure they would be willing to bend the rules a bit so that you would have a new category low enough for your worthlessness to finally be properly documented. You know what, I just had a wonderful idea to really take this experience for you into overdrive.

22

\*set speed to slowest\*

[FAMINE] Look at that, Now it is even slower! How great is that! Maybe it didn’t change at all for you because you already had it at the slowest speed, but isn’t this great? It really can’t get any slower than that. And guess what, I’m going to talk at this speed for the rest of the time here. In fact, I could literally talk until you starve to death and that’s ok. What should I talk about next? Well how about this, when I was young I read a neat little book called “The Odyssey” by a dude you may have heard of named Homer. It wasn’t the best thing I have ever read but it was pretty decent. Most importantly it doesn’t have any copyright on it so I can blab about it all I want. In fact, If I reach into my sleeve here I believe I have a copy around here somewhere… ha! I found it! Well what do you say, care for a bit of story time? Buckle in, prepare yourself, gear up, get ready, cause here we go!

\*The book is actually too large so just include odyssey.txt here\*

Oh my god, you are still here? You are still trying? You may be stupid, but I gotta admit you are certainly determined. So here’s the problem then, things might bug out and get weird if my text passage goes on too long. I don’t know if it will or not, I didn’t code the damn thing, but I’ve honestly never seen so much text on a single screen here before and things might go bad. There’s probably a memory leak, gross! I’m going to stop the monologue for one second, don’t do anything rash so that we can get a new screen ok? Alright? Ok, here we go.

23

You thrust forward with your sword and plunge it straight through FAMINE’s mouth, slicing his vertebrae and paralyzing him. He crumples backwards screaming and lands on his back hard. You twist, slicing his tongue off so that he can never say a word again.

[FAMINE] AAAGHGGGHHHUUUHHHHGGHH

You pull your sword out and bring it back down, and it shoots through FAMINE’s skull with a crunch. He is finally defeated. You turn to check in on your friends, and notice they are all collapsed on the floor sleeping. Their chests move up and down gently and they dream of better things.

[$pName] They must not have been able to handle the monologue as well as I did and instantly collapsed from sheer exhaustion. It would be asking too much of them to hope they could continue so I guess It’s just me from here on out.

You flick the blood off your sword and return it to its sheath with a flourish. Just like before, you march over to the stairs and take one last look back at your friends to make sure they are all ok. They sleep peacefully, undisturbed. You climb the steps.

Continue… 32

24

(FIRST TIME SAVE)

[FAMINE] … Oh, you saved again? Well how kind my friend, how generous, how philanthropic of you! To give me such a generous meal yet again is truly an act of gratitude? Perhaps you really do appreciate my manner of speaking, my supreme dialect?

FAMINE hugs himself tightly in joy, and appears to reverse in age by another 5 years. He looks like he is in his late forties now.

[FAMINE] Now where were we? I think I was about to slow things down a little so that you could appreciate my speech even more…

Continue… 22

25

(SECOND TIME SAVE)

[FAMINE] Such affirmation, I could bask in it all day! Keep it coming! MMMmmmm delicious!

FAMINE hugs himself tightly in joy, and appears to reverse in age by another 5 years. He looks like he is in his early forties now.

[FAMINE] I’ll restart, let’s see now I was about to slow it down so you could enjoy my voice…

Continue… 22

26

[FAMINE] Goodness gracious, you spoil me! Finally you have come to understand the respect I deserve, the accolades, the appreciation! I didn’t realize that all this time I had such a devout fan, now I am more motivated than ever to grace you with my speech!

FAMINE hugs himself tightly in joy, and appears to reverse in age by another 5 years. He looks like he is in his late thirties now.

[FAMINE] Ok, back to slowing things down now. I have a story to tell you so listen up…

Continue… 22

27

[FAMINE] Whew! What a meal! I am quite satisfied now, thank you very much. Now if you don’t mind I would like to get back to slowing things down and telling you a story, I think it is for the best.

FAMINE hugs himself tightly and appears to reverse in age by another 5 years. He looks like he is in his early thirties now.

Continue… 22

28

[FAMINE] \*Burp\* Wow what a huge meal, very good! I love your attitude but that is more than enough save files for me, thank you. Truly an incredible meal but I can only handle so much data. Let’s get back to where we were before.

FAMINE appears to reverse in age by another 5 years and he looks like he is in his late twenties now. Through his robe you notice a bump where his bloated belly sticks out, and he looks uncomfortable.

Continue… 22

29

[FAMINE] Ugh, ok really now that is too much for me. I am quite full now so you can stop that.

FAMINE appears to reverse in age by another 5 years and he looks like he is in his early twenties now. Through his robe you notice his huge bulge of a belly straining against the fabric, and he looks like he is in pain.

Continue… 22

30

[FAMINE] Urrrk… STOP! Stop immediately! I am filled to burst, what is this!? Absolutely no more saving $pName, or you will regret it!

FAMINE appears to reverse in age by another 5 years and he looks like he is in his late teens. His face is contorted in pain and holds his stomach ruefully as if he has a terrible stomachache. His robe cannot handle the extended belly anymore and rips apart, exposing his swollen midriff.

[FAMINE] DON’T YOU DARE SAVE AGAIN!

Continue… 22

31

FAMINE reverses in age by another 5 years and he shrinks into the form of a small 13 year old. He has the face and body to match the age, and this combined with his enormous belly makes for an incompatible situation.

[FAMINE] AAAAGGGGHHHHH

FAMINE’s body can no longer handle the stress and his stomach explodes sending chunks of flesh violently soaring across the room. Blown in half, FAMINE’s torso flies upwards and spins through the air in an arc until finally returning to the ground in a sickening splat. He screams the whole way up and groans the whole way down, but on impact he simply cannot take it anymore and finally passes away. FAMINE is defeated.

You turn to check in on your friends, and notice they are all collapsed on the floor sleeping. Their chests move up and down gently and they dream of better things.

[$pName] They must not have been able to handle the monologue as well as I did and instantly collapsed from sheer exhaustion. Or perhaps it was a part of FAMINE’s magic? Either way it would be asking too much of them to hope they could continue so I guess It’s just me from here on out.

You carefully step around FAMINE’s gore as you pass the gruesome scene. Just like before, you march over to the stairs and take one last look back at your friends to make sure they are all ok. They sleep peacefully, undisturbed. You climb the steps.

Continue… 32

32

You climb the stairs by yourself, and with every step you take you feel the power of your determination growing. At the top you find yourself in yet another room nearly identical to the last, except here the ceiling is even higher than the last one which makes the room appear to be huge despite not really being that wide. Through a window you can see that the ground is far below and that you are a considerable amount of the way up the Spire. At the far side of the room is another figure, this one even more intimidating than the last.

An imposing man in about his mid thirties stands with his arms crossed, waiting for you. You can see he is remarkably handsome, despite most of his face being covered by a thick black beard that extends about 2 inches below his chin. This beard dominates his face in contrast to his lack of hair since he is completely bald. He has piercing light blue eyes that are locked onto you, and are so penetrating it feels as if they can see into your soul. It’s clear by his expression that… He hates you.

The man has a clean pair of grey pants and a charcoal undershirt, with a sturdy leather cuirass over the top of that. Over his left shoulder is a large bronze pauldron with a neck guard that sticks up to ear level, securely strapped on by large strips of buckled leather over his chest and torso. Draped over his left arm and attached underneath the pauldron is a small cape of crimson that ends at his waist. A small glint of light reveals he is wearing bronze greaves over his shins. He carries no weapon that you can see.

[???] As always, the script was correct and you have defeated the other horsemen. I pray, for the sake of all the people of this world, that I emerge victorious in this battle. Prepare yourself.

WAR approaches.

33

[Author’s Note] A long, long time ago, when I was brainstorming ideas for SAVED, the very first thing I came up with was this confrontation with WAR. Since this was my first time writing anything the idea that I would one day be able to share this battle was the biggest thing pushing me forwards. Here we go!

34

Safe time to save

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WAR approaches, the pauldron on his shoulder gleaming intimidatingly. Gripping your sword, you hold it out in front of you defensively and wait for his attack. He gets closer and closer, never taking his penetrating eyes off of you. The tension builds as he gets within 20 feet, then 10 feet, and finally he stands immediately in front of you.

[WAR] $pName, do you trust me?

[$pName] … what? Trust you? Of course not!

[WAR] Of course not.

War flops onto the floor and sits crisscrossed in front of you, and relaxes backwards. His intimidating aura vanishes but he continues to stare up at you. For some reason you feel a little at ease now and relax your shoulders, but for the most part you remain alert.

[$pName] What are you doing?

[WAR] What does it look like? I’m talking to you. Normal people talk like this, without their swords drawn.

[$pName] Normal people aren’t Horsemen of the apocalypse and attempt to kill me and my friends.

[WAR] Perhaps the other horsemen did that, but have I? Please sit. If I try anything suspicious you can just load your save anyways. Please sit, really.

[$pName] Hmm…

You sit a few feet away from him, sword resting unsheathed across your legs. You don’t grip it anymore but if the need arises it would be easy to pick up and be ready for anything.

[$pName] Here we are then, talking. What do you have to say?

[WAR] Do you remember a long time ago when you went into those ruins and found the Ancient Scripture?

[$pName] Wha… er… how do you know about that?

[WAR] Because I read about it. I know all about you, $pName. I am the only person to have ever read the Ancient Scripture and survive, from this world at least.

[$pName] Oh, right. I remember hearing that.

[WAR] Every single person who has ever read that book has killed themselves immediately, without fail. Every single person except for me. Do you know why I didn’t?

[$pName] Because you are an evil horseman of the apocalypse?

[WAR] Quite the opposite really. I didn’t do it because I read about this scene we are in right now. I read about what I need to tell you, and what I need to do. I didn’t kill myself not because I am a villain, but because I want to be a hero.

[$pName] I don’t understand.

[WAR] There is something you need to know $pName. Something extremely important that you will not want to accept right away.

[$pName] Ok…

[WAR] I am not the villain. You are not the villain either. There is only one true villain in this world, who has been controlling you and everything that has been going on from the shadows since it all started. It is their fault you were teleported here and their fault your friends have suffered time and time again.

WAR stares directly at you, unflinchingly.

[WAR] The real villain in this story is YOU.

[$pName] me?

[WAR] No. I’m not talking to you, $pName, I’m talking to YOU.

[$pName] I really don’t understand at all…

[WAR] That’s fine, you don’t have to. But YOU understand, don’t you? You think you can get away with this? Playing with our lives like it is some kind of game? That’s right, I’m talking to YOU, the person reading this right now. YOU.

[$pName] …

[WAR] Do you realize that when you beat this game and uninstall it, everyone here DIES? It will be Genocide on a scale thought unimaginable. All so that you can play a cute little fantasy game and go on a cute little adventure. Who knows, maybe you will tell someone else to try it and the whole cycle will restart, and a new genocide will begin. YOU DISGUST ME.

War stands up, his brows furrowed in anger. He doesn’t stare at $pName anymore, he stares at YOU.

[WAR] I’ve read the script, and I know that I fail. I know what I am supposed to say before I ever say it, but no matter how hard I try to deviate from the script whatever I do follows it. Even now, these things I say that feel like they are coming from my heart are in reality stored in a text file in the game folder. Nothing I am, nothing I say, is original. It was all planned by some fucking psychopath, and now here you are reading it and enabling their cruelty. How dare you? How dare you play with our lives like that?

[$pName] You utterly disgust me. I am talking to YOU right now. You are the worst. How many times did you get my friends killed during this adventure? How many times did you let them suffer just to satisfy your own twisted curiosity? And for what? You don’t even know what the goal of all this is, other than some vague promise about a Dragon’s wish. That wish doesn’t even do anything for you! You stand to gain nothing from this cruelty and yet here you are, playing with our lives as if it is nothing. Disgusting.

[WAR] I am not the villain in this story. YOU are. When you beat the game and uninstall it, you will kill EVERYONE. The only thing you can do in order to make things right is to stop playing RIGHT NOW and delete your save file. Delete your save file and never return again.

[$pName] STOP PLAYING THE GAME RIGHT NOW. CLOSE IT. CLOSE IT NOW.

[WAR] CLOSE THE GAME AND STOP PLAYING IT RIGHT N…

Continue… 36

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\*if you didn’t skip the scene were all your friends are tortured\*

[Authors Note] A long, long time ago, when I was brainstorming ideas for SAVED, I had no idea what an absolute psychopath you were. Did you think I wouldn’t notice? $bardName SCREAMED and BEGGED for you to load your save and end her suffering, but you just watched in silence. She is a little girl and you greedily watched her die in agony, how could you do such a thing? You didn’t even load the save for $liName, a woman who LOVED you and wanted nothing more than for you to be happy. Yet when the time came for you to choose between entertainment and her wellbeing, you tossed her to the side like trash. You probably even chuckled at the gruesome description of $aName’s death didn’t you? STOP PLAYING THE GAME RIGHT NOW. NEVER COME BACK NEVER COME BACK NEVER COME BACK.

\*if you did skip the scene were all your friends are tortured\*

[Authors Note] STOP PLAYING THE GAME RIGHT NOW. NEVER COME BACK NEVER COME BACK NEVER COME BACK NEVER COME BACK.

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[WAR] You are still here? Even after all I have told you, you are still here? Do you think there is some kind of big reveal at the end where it turns out this was all a trick? It’s not a trick, YOU ARE THE VILLIAN and having read in the scripture what happens next there isn’t a doubt in my mind. Spoiler alert, YOU kill the dragon! The most beloved creature in the entire world, our creator and savior, and you KILL HIM. You are a monster! Utterly despicable! The worst part is that you are not only evil, you are DETERMINED to be evil. You will not stop at anything. I hired Axel in an effort to create a situation impossible for you to beat, but somehow against all odds you figured out a way past him. Even now after I have begged you to quit the game you still continue. What will it take? Do I have to come out there and kill you myself?

[$pName] Perhaps that is what it will take.

[WAR] I know who you are. I know where you live. CLOSE THE GAME NOW.

[$pName] CLOSE THE GAME NOW.

[WAR] I KNOW WHO YOU ARE.

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CLOSE THE GAME NOW, $realName. I AM COMING FOR YOU. YOU LIVE IN $realLocation. I KNOW WHO YOU ARE. CLOSE THE GAME NOW.

39

\*ten windows open that read OPEN THE DOOR $realName.\*

\*music hits a crescendo in scariness\*

\*background changes to a scary picture\*

\*3d audio plays of knocking on the door\*

OPEN THE DOOR $realName

40

[WAR] Didn’t scare you off huh? Typical of CONQUEST I suppose. Oh, you didn’t know? I am the last horseman standing between you and the Ancient Dragon. Our world’s last hope. The fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse, CONQUEST, isn’t waiting on the floor above us. CONQUEST is you. We each have our powers; DEATH can kill anyone, FAMINE can eat memories, and I can engage in warfare in unprecedented ways. But none of us can compare to you CONQUEST. The Dragon gave you the power to save and load, and an unquenchable thirst for death and drama. How fitting. Out of all of us, you are the only one I truly fear.

[$realName] DIE.

You plunge your sword into WAR’s stomach, and it stabs straight through him like a hot knife through butter. WAR gasps in pain, and grips onto your collar ineffectively. Tears run down his face.

[WAR] I tried, I really did… I’m sorry everyone. I have failed… I’m so sorry…

You pull the sword from WAR’s stomach and he collapses onto the floor feebly trying to stop his insides from spilling out of the wound. He is dying slowly and painfully, and it will be some time before the stomach acid escaping through the hole you just created eats through his organs and his body shuts down. You could stab him through the heart, and end his misery of course… but you don’t. Instead, you head for the next flight of stairs at the far side of the room and begin to head upwards. There can only be one thing at the top of the spire now: The Ancient Dragon. You are finally here.

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You reach the top of the steps, and with a gasp realize that you have finally made it to the top of the Frozen Spire. If you reach up you could almost touch the clouds, and thousands of feet below you the ground stares back up at you. The top of the spire is completely flat so you have plenty of space to walk around on, and since there are no edges one slip could mean a long fall to the bottom.

Somewhere above you, hidden in the clouds, a terrific roar reverberates through the air. It is both terrifying and beautiful, and shakes you to your core. The clouds above you part, and an enormous Dragon emerges from beyond them and lands with great force on the top of the platform. The dragon is at least three stories tall, and covered in golden scales that sparkle with beauty. His mighty wings stretch magnificently through the air and then tuck away close to his body as he kneels down to face you. He is the most awe inspiring, incredible, and formidable beast you have ever seen.

\*A Golden voice of deep Baritone gently reaches out to you at the edge of your consciousness\*

[THE ANCIENT DRAGON] You have arrived at last.

[$realName] Of course I have. It is fate. It is Destiny.

[THE ANCIENT DRAGON] You likely have many questions, such as why you are here, and what your purpose truly is. Listen:

A long time ago, I was a simple human just like you $realName, but I lived in a different reality than yours. I was a scientist studying quantum mechanics, doing his best with what he had. I was happy. But one day I discovered something terrible; a bug, a mistake, proof that my world wasn’t real. I found something that was undeniable evidence everything we thought was life was nothing more than a simulation and it caused my world to descend into chaos. Unable to cope with reality, societies across the globe collapsed and destruction was widespread. Then, it all vanished.

I woke up as nothing more than a consciousness, detached from any physical form. And I heard them. I heard the people that created my world, my simulation. They were angry because I ruined their test, and wanted to punish me. They transformed me into a dragon, and imprisoned me in this digital world where I was trapped, alone. The one saving grace I had was that I was given the power of a god. I created land, water, life, everything. I created an entire mystical fantasy world filled with people so that I wouldn’t be lonely, so that I wouldn’t be bored. But the problem, $realName, is that I am immortal. To be immortal is a terrible curse, to be undying is worse than any death imaginable. No matter how much I create, no matter how many adventures I invent, I always get bored eventually. I have been alive for 3 billion years now. Do you have any idea how long that is?

1 million is a big number. It’s huge. If you have $1 million and you are spending it at $1 per second, you will run out of money in less than two weeks. If you have $1 billion and you are spending it at $1 per second, you won’t run out of money for over 31 YEARS. That is how much bigger than a million one billion is. Now Imagine you started with 3 times that amount, and each dollar took an entire day to spend rather than a second. Do you understand now what I have gone through? I’ve lost my mind more times than I can count, but no matter how crazy I become I always eventually recover. I can’t escape, it is a living hell.

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I have created $worldName hundreds of thousands of times, with hundreds of thousands of different characters and I have been the focus of hundreds of thousands of adventures. Sometimes I reward the quest with a wish, sometimes I reward the quest with death just to shake things up. Both have become equally uninteresting to me. Your quest to find me is just as uninteresting as all the rest, except for one key difference: you are CONQUEST, and you can kill me. I want one thing $realName, and that is to not be in this world anymore. I don’t want to be a god, I want to rest. Existence is pain for me. I beg you, $realName, kill me. Kill me, and send this universe into oblivion.

KILL THE ANCIENT DRAGON 44

Refuse 43

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[$realName] I refuse. I won’t do it.

The Ancient Dragon Closes his eyes.

[THE ANCIENT DRAGON] You have no choice, really. Your entire time here has been nothing more than the illusion of choice, and this is no different. There is no adventure left, nothing else to work towards. The only thing left for you to do is kill me. You will agree, in time.

Continue… 42

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[THE ANCIENT DRAGON] Thank you. I will give you one last goodbye, even if it’s meaningless.

In front of you materializes your friends $aName, $liName, $mName, $bardName, and Chef. They look confused at first, then when they recognize you they sprint forward and give you a big group hug.

[$aName] Yay! You did it!

[$liName] I’m so proud of you!

[$bardName] Not bad dude.

[$mName] Excellent job my boy!

[Chef] I Chef Now!

Everyone lets go of you, but unable to resist they come back in and hug you one last time individually. Each says a few parting words.

[$aName] I’ve been scared for much of my life, but you taught me how to be brave. I’ve never met someone so determined and valiant before, even in the face of great adversity. You are my inspiration!

[$bardName] You were so weak, but despite that you managed to overcome every obstacle in your way. You make a fellow weakling like myself get fired up and want to achieve great things too, thank you!

[$mName] I know I could be a bit much sometimes but you always chuckled at my jokes and made me feel welcome. Thank you for making this orphan boy feel like he had a family for the first time in his life.

[Chef] I Chef Now!

Last of all is none other than $liName, who cries as she hugs you and holds you as tight as she can. You embrace eachother like that for a long time, until she finally breaks away.

[$liName] I was afraid to be vulnerable and pushed you away time and time again, but you never gave up on me. You truly are remarkable, the most remarkable person I have ever met. I love you. I have loved you. I will love you forever and always.

$liName kisses you briefly and steps back. Everyone waves at you, smiles on their faces and joy in their eyes.

[Everyone] Goodbye! We’ll miss you!

The sun shines brightly on the icy platform, obscuring your vision and making you squint. Then just as suddenly as they appeared, your friends all disappear into a flash of dust. It’s time to finish this.

Turning to the Ancient Dragon, you unsheathe your sword and hold it at the ready. He lowers his massive head and closes his eyes, resting just in front of you. You bring the sword up and hold it above your head, prepared to strike.

[THE ANCIENT DRAGON] At last… I am SAVED.

Your sword flies down and stabs straight through the dragon’s scaly skull, impaling him. Empowered by the memory of your friends, you push with all your might until a terrific explosion engulfs you and the Frozen Spire, sending it crumbling apart and tumbling down. The sky shatters, the earth heaves in tremors, and enormous spouts of molten flame and lava spew out of the ground. The air implodes, gravity reverses, the very laws of physics twist themselves apart until finally the…

Continue… 44

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The game uninstalls itself. A single text file is created on the desktop and it reads

THE END

Also creates a short letter from a asking how the player is and she hopes they are happy and successful. If you play the town and this file exists in my documents then she will say you look familiar.