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ARC 5, THE CULT

Safe time to save

1

$liName has been training you relentlessly at how to handle a sword and you can now comfortably defend yourself reasonably well. It has been a tough three weeks of training and traveling, but for some reason $liName seems particularly determined to get you in fighting shape so that you aren’t too helpless. Considering all the time you now spend together, you and $liName have started to grow much closer and the forehead flicks have finally started to die down.

You feel much closer to $bardName as well, who has fluidly become a core member of the group. Her snarky attitude and beautiful voice brings a lot to the table for the traveling gang, especially when everyone is tired after a day of horseriding. While passing through one of the many towns in $kingdomName towards the capital, $mName once challenged $bardName to a competition to see who could raise more money with their performances. While $mName certainly gave a great show he simply couldn’t keep up with the enchantment of $bardName’s melodies and finally admitted to her ability as a show woman.

During all this, $aName seems nothing more than happily content with the way things have been going. It is entirely possible she was looking for friendship this whole time rather than the Dragon, and if that was the case she had certainly been granted her wish. She happily berates $mName for his terrible jokes and poorly sings along with $bardName, doing her best to keep everyone in high spirits and simply enjoying the experience.

While the entertainment of it all has been great for you, it cannot be helped that in the back of your mind you can’t stop thinking about how the heck you are going to get home. You can’t just go on adventures for the rest of your life… right? You could ask the Dragon to return you as your wish, but you still don’t know if the Dragon is even real or not. You have been in this world for over two months now and the newness and excitement has slowly been eroded away, despite the best efforts of your friends. Will you ever be able to return to your modern world, and see your family or friends again?

2

After 23 days straight of travelling towards the capital, you finally notice something incredible on the horizon. You can’t believe your eyes, and it isn’t until climbing up a large hill overlooking this unbelievable sight that you can finally grasp what it is you are looking at.

Five stories tall and many, many football fields long and wide is the biggest warehouse you have ever laid eyes on. It is built of oxidized aluminum that gleams in the sunlight, and has huge garage doors that open every couple hundred of feet. Enormous crowds of people swarm in and out of the warehouse in the hundreds, perhaps even thousands, and cart after cart enters empty and leaves filled with bags of something you can’t quite make out. Surrounding this building are miles and miles of barricades and towers filled with guards. It looks as if it would take an entire army to break into this compound. Your jaw drops, and $aName walks up to join you.

[$aName] Isn’t it amazing? The Great Haven is said to be so large that the capital could eat solely from it for hundreds of years and it still wouldn’t run out of potatoes.

Your horse $hName trots up to you and whinnies excitedly, as if she can’t believe it either. You pet her reassuringly.

[$pName] A giant metal building filled with potatoes…

[$aName] The Dragon’s gift for us. One of the last remaining pieces of proof that he exists.

The scale of the building is truly astonishing. It is the largest and widest building you have ever seen, including when you used to live in the modern world. There must be billions or even trillions of potatoes in there, and just as many burlap sacks to hold them.

[$pName] There are too many potatoes to eat in there, wouldn’t they all rot and go bad?

[$aName] The Dragon’s magic keeps them from spoiling, as long as you don’t remove them from the Building. The king has special rationing measures in place to make sure it doesn’t get wasted as well. If you are rich enough you can even pay the king to rent spaces inside of it, since any food stored there doesn’t ever spoil either.

[$pName] That’s crazy. It’s like a giant refrigerator…

[$aName] Refiger… what?

[$pName] ah.. nothing. Well, lets keep moving then.

You rejoin the others and head past the warehouse towards the Capital. The line of people waiting to enter the Great Haven is astonishingly long and snakes all the way around and outside the compound and into the street towards the Capital, clogging it up and making it hard to progress. The road is conveniently wide but extremely busy, and the throngs of people pushing around each other to leave or enter the city slow your group down often.

Nevertheless, everyone finally makes it into the capital and continues along the main road towards the castle. There are no walls, the city is far too big for that, and immediately you are impressed by the stonework and quality of every house you pass. Compared to the other buildings you have seen thus far, even these simple homes far exceed everything else. Most are made completely of perfectly sculpted stone, with ornately carved wooden doors of sturdy complexion guarding the entrance and even well kept lawns and gardens decorating the fronts. Roofs are made of high quality terra cotta neatly stacked on one another, and in some windows you can spot finely woven curtains neatly watching the crowd as it passes by.

[$pName] The people in the capital live lives of luxury compared to everyone else I have ever seen, these buildings are remarkable.

[$liName] You haven’t been to the capital before have you, $pName? Such a shut in… Unlike most towns the wealthiest live closest to the Great Haven, while the poorest collect on the farthest side. These rich snobs get easy access to the kingdom’s most valuable storage facility of course…

[$bardName] Hey I was wondering, do we have to make an appointment? Like a reservation or something?

[$liName] What?

[$bardName] To see the king, I mean. Like do you have to book a showing with him.

[$liName] I don’t know, I’ve never met the king before.

[$bardName] Like, we can’t just show up you know. You can’t just show up all of a sudden and talk to the king. You need to ask all nicely and then they send a guy on a white horse with a big plume in his hat, and he hands you this big fancy invitation letter. And you use that to enter the castle.

[$pName] Is that for real or just something from one of your songs?

[$bardName] I don’t know! It’s not like I’ve ever talked to the king before either! But I feel like if we just show up and ask to see the king we are gonna get laughed at!

[$liName] Do we even talk to the king about this? If we just want to give them the ancient Scripture, it seems like more of a royal museum matter than an official one. Where is the museum anyways?

[$mName] I visited it once when I was little, I can lead the way if you like.

[$liName] For once you are actually proving useful $mName, I’m so proud!

Making a mock emotional face, $liName turns to $aName and pretends to wipe a tear off her cheek.

[$liName] How quickly they grow up!

$mName scrunches up his face trying to think of some kind of witty comeback, but after a couple seconds comes up with nothing and gives up.

[$mName] Grr… Maybe you’d like to find the museum without me then?

[$aName] Woah woah woah now, $liName was only teasing! Let’s stop wasting time and get rid of this creepy book as soon as possible. C’mon $mName show us where to go.

$mName crosses his arms in a big huff and takes the lead, continuing along the main road. You jog up to him and catch up easily.

[$pName] Hey sorry about $liName, I’m sure she…

[$mName] Shh! Don’t worry about it. If $liName thinks she went too far today then she will probably buy me a fancy meal tonight as an apology, don’t ruin my plan!

$mName chuckles to himself mischievously and leaves you behind.

Shaking your head, you walk along with the group following $mName along the main road for a long time before finally turning off onto some smaller winding roads. Now that you are closer to the center of the capital the buildings are of less quality, but still much nicer than most houses you have seen on your travels. Some are even covered in faded paints, which adds some welcome splashes of color to the urban sprawl. Small fences jut out into the street where homeowners attempt to steal a bit of backyard from the road, and clotheslines arc overhead and across the thin alleyways. Most of the buildings here are around three stories tall, and for some reason everyone has painted the shutters around their windows blue.

Finally after a lot of walking, everyone finally makes it to the Royal Museum. It is a large square building with a single tower jutting out from the left side, where from inside guards lazily look across the streets for trouble. Attached to the right side of the main building is a smaller room with people streaming in and out of it. Since the larger area appears to be locked up, you head for the smaller section and go inside.

Surprisingly, it is very crowded and exactly mimics the layout and appearance of a tourist-trap giftshop. The aisles are packed with people looking through the odd commodities and eccentric baubles, and children scream and sprint around chasing eachother with wooden sword replicas of some kind of fancy looking sword.

[$pName] What’s up with this place?

[$mName] What do you mean? It’s the Royal Museum.

[$pName] Well I was expecting something a little more… formal I guess.

[$mName] The artifacts are kept under close supervision in the larger building attached to this one, this is merely where the commonfolk go to learn about what is hidden away inside and buy cute toy replicas. You don’t think they would actually let the random citizens just walk up to the incredibly powerful and valuable artifacts in the museum would you?

[$pName] Oh, well I guess that makes sense.

[$mName] I’m not kidding, there are some truly crazy artifacts in there. For example, check this out.

$mName hands you a nearby pamphlet documenting the most famous artifacts held within the museum.

[$mName] The Ancient Forge is one of my favorites. Read that one.

You scan the pamphlet until seeing a paragraph describing an artifact called “The Ancient Forge”. It reads:

Thousands of years ago, the Original hero saved the world many times thanks to his abilities and the Legendary Ancient Blade, rumored to be the greatest sword ever created and a gift from the Dragon himself. Stories tell of the Blade’s power being so incredible that it could even slice through the fabric of reality itself. As the years went by however it was slowly split apart more and more, as the Original Hero’s children and other adventurers sought to obtain the valuable Dragonium stored within the blade. But what if all the Dragonium in the world was reforged into a single blade once more, would the Legendary Ancient Blade return? Historians disagree on the matter, but a pivotal component to this debate is none other than the Ancient Forge, an artifact found about 700 years ago by royal archeologist Sam Rockman. When discovered, Sam described the Forge being stored along with numerous scrolls and instructions that detail a prophecy about when the Ancient Blade will be recreated. According to these scrolls, one day a hero will rise up with power beyond all others to fire up the forge for the first and final time. They will wield a cursed sword of unparalleled strength and plunge it into the forge, activating the artifact. Instantly, all the Dragonium in the world will be teleported into the forge and transform the Cursed Blade into a reborn object of purity, the Legendary Ancient Blade. Fact or Fiction, you decide. But one thing is for sure: History Rocks!

There is a small drawing of a goofy looking archeologist giving a thumbs up to the side, with a speech bubble affirming that History Rocks. You scoff.

[$mName] Crazy stuff right? Anyways come on, we need to get to the acquisitions department.

$mName powers through the crowd towards the back of the room and you follow as best you can, with everyone else in close pursuit. Once you make it to the back wall you enter a small office tucked into the corner with a wooden sign reading ‘Acquisitions’ above it.

[$mName] Good Day Madam, my friends and I have an artifact to donate today.

[???] Do you now?

Behind a wooden table is a middle aged woman sharply dressed in a black robe. She peers down her pointed nose at you with her chin up, which makes it seem like she is looking down at you despite her sitting at a much lower height.

[Clerk] Well, let’s see it then.

The woman reaches behind her and grabs a sheet of paper, which she begins filling out with a quill and ink. After scratching some notes down she looks up to find $mName holding the Ancient Scripture, and raises her eyebrows.

[Clerk] Is that the Ancient Scripture you got there? The incredible artifact that has been sought out for hundreds of years?

[$mName] The one and only!

[$bardName] And we can prove it too, all you gotta do is peep inside. Don’t recommend that though.

[Clerk] Excellent, the King will be pleased to have such a prize added to his collection. The museum offers 100 Aureus for your donation.

[$aName] 100 Aureus!? What kind of scam is this!?

[$pName] I think you are misunderstanding what the word donation means…

[Clerk] You disagree with the donation reward?

[$liName] It is a priceless artifact! It surely must be worth at least one hundred thousand…

[Clerk] It is a book you can’t read, can you think of anything more useless than that? The only thing that makes it valuable is its historical significance. 500 Aureus.

[$aName] Deal!

[$mName] That’s still not…

[$aName] I said deal! We gotta take what we can get, plus that thing creeps me out…

And with that, $mName handed over the Scripture and $aName cheerfully pocketed the 500 Aureus.

[clerk] We appreciate your donation. Have a good day.

[$pName] I still don’t think anyone here is understanding what the word ‘donation’ means…

And so without further incident everyone left the museum and gathered together outside to figure out what to do next.

3

[$bardName] Ok guys, so now what?

The five of you are gathered together at the side of a road arching past the Royal Museum. Despite the chaos of the hurried crowds passing by, the small space created within your group is comfortingly calm.

[$aName] Well I think since we all worked together to obtain the Ancient Scripture, we should all share in the reward. 100 Aureus for each of us sounds fair to me.

[$mName] Yipee!

$aName takes the bag of money the clerk handed her and carefully distributes a fifth of it’s contents to each person. The clinking of coins makes $bardName’s face light up excitedly, and $liName grins slyly as she imagines what she should buy with the cash.

[$aName] And lastly, the reward for $pName…

A single coin falls out of the bag and lands in your palms, and you look up at her in confusion.

[$pName] Um…

[$aName] Let’s see, taking into account the horse, equipment, clothing, food, and training we have provided you, this should just about cover it.

The lonely coin flashes at you sheepishly, and you groan.

[$liName] I think everyone deserves a break. Let’s take a couple hours for ourselves, maybe spend a little money on touristy stuff in the capital, and then meet back here.

[$aName] and $liName, don’t forget about the plan…

You interrupt, holding your single coin up to her

[$pName] What am I supposed to buy with only a single Aureus!?

[$aName] Great question. Anyone else have any questions? Alright good, see you guys in a couple hours!

[$pName] Hey!

In an instant, everyone scatters into the city streets like startled squirrels and you found yourself completely alone.

[$pName] Ah… Drat.

You take a couple listless steps in a random direction before you hear a familiar voice behind you.

[???] $pName…

You turn, and see $liName sheepishly looking at you. It looked like she had taken off like the others but she must have doubled back.

[$liName] I’ve been wanting to tell you something…

Her cheeks are flushed red and she is having trouble making eye contact with you. You have never seen her act like this before.

[$liName] $pName I… You should know that I… I…

She gets flustered, looks into your eyes for a moment, then turns away again and crosses her arms.

[$liName] Ah… $pName you’re such an idiot. Try not to spend all your money at once.

[$pName] …

And with that, $liName marches off and disappears into the crowd.

Now you are truly alone, save for the throng of citizens busily making their way down the numerous avenues. You don’t really know where you are or what is around you at all so you know you can’t go too far or else you’ll get lost. If you lose your way around here you could end up wandering for hours with no way for the others to find you. Lazily, you begin plodding along the streets going in a circle around the Museum, trying to explore as much as possible while still staying close to what you know is familiar.

Despite the nice weather and pleasant environment, you quickly become bored. With nobody to talk to and no money to shop with there isn’t much for you to do. Craving stimulation, you continue to wander along the streets until you finally notice an opened manhole cover that leads into the sewers. Normally these would be closed off to the public, but someone left this one open in a hurry. A familiar aura of adventure radiates from the opening.

Enter the mysterious Sewer entrance. 5

Continue to wander the streets, bored. 4

4

What are you, a big baby?

You wander the streets uneventfully for another hour, and see absolutely nothing of interest. This is easily the most bored you’ve been ever since you arrived in this world. Eventually, your circular exploration pattern brings you back to the manhole cover and you are once again tempted to enter.

Continue to wander the streets, bored 4

Enter the mysterious Sewer entrance. 5

5

Glancing over your shoulder to make sure nobody is paying attention to you, you hastily make your way over to the manhole cover and peer inside. It is dark, but a torch at the bottom gloomily lights up the area so that you can barely see the ground. There is a ladder leading downward that you grasp, and clamber down.

Reaching the bottom, you take a look at your surroundings. You are in a small tunnel, about the size of a train. At one side is a small stream of refuse that smells terribly, but for the most part it is dry. A single torch lays on the ground forgotten, which you pick up and hold out in front of you. It is so dark that you can’t see more than twenty feet in front of you in either direction. Time to explore!

Go forwards along the tunnel 6

Go backwards along the tunnel 6

6

You make your way through the tunnel, careful not to trip on the numerous loose stones and cracked chunks of mortar lying around on the path. You can hear the sound of water rushing somewhere far off but it echoes of the walls in a way that you can’t find the origin of the sound. Before long you wander to a new section of the tunnel that breaks off into two different paths. One branches off to the left, and has piles of rubble stacked up along the sides. The other path leads to the right and has a small manhole cover over the ceiling with lets through a feeble amount of light. There isn’t much difference between the two other than that.

Take Left Path 7

Take Right Path 7

7

You turn and head along the branching path and carefully continue forward. The way ahead twists and turns and before long you start to get the uneasy feeling that you are getting lost in the underground maze.

Just as you are starting to get worried, you hear the sound of hushed voices ahead. They sound angry about something, and you decide to put the torch down carefully and continue ahead without the light giving away your position. Finally, you round a corner and see an open space ahead of you. It is much larger than the tunnels except for the low ceiling, and has a pillar in each corner helping to hold up the weight of whatever building must be above. Four men in fuzzy robes hurriedly scamper about the room, dragging either dead or unconscious people from one side of the other. They angrily whisper at one another every couple seconds accusing the other of not working hard enough or for being too careful with the bodies, and seem to be very on edge. At one point one of the people they are dragging groggily begins to wake up, until one of the robed men takes out a syringe from his pocket and injects something into him. The person instantly is knocked out and doesn’t stir again.

These are clearly cultists up to something fiendish, but you don’t yet know what. Before you even have time to think however a new person arrives, crashing in from the opposite side of the room through a door and surprising the cultists greatly.

He is a huge man, likely around seven feet tall and weighing at least 250 pounds. His broad shoulders and wide body indicate he is almost entirely made of defined muscle, most of which is hidden by a white collared shirt with two rows of black buttons running down the front. His features are hard to see in the dark, but it appears he has a sharply defined jawline and thick aggressive eyebrows. On top of his head is a chefs hat, which flops lazily across the side of his head. Gripped in both of his hands in front of him is an unbelievably massive meat cleaver, almost as long and thick as he is.

[Man] I CHEF NOW

[Cultist] Whaaat!?

The Man in the chef hat bounds forward with his powerful legs and quickly closes the gap between himself and the cultists. Before any of the robe clad villains can even react the Chef brings his cleaver back behind his head and then forwards with all his might, slicing diagonally across one of the cultists. The force of the blow is so tremendous that the cultist is completely cleaved in two before even having time to react, and each bloody half of his body separates onto the floor in a bloody spray.

[Man] I CHEF NOW

One of the cultists draws a syringe from his robes and holds it with one hand while brandishing a club with the other. Panicking, the last one abandons his friend and starts sprinting away from the gruesome scene, towards you.

[Man] I CHEF NOW

The sinews of the chef’s muscles flex impressively as he propels himself forwards like an unstoppable bullish force and smashes into the last cultist, sending him flying. The fuzzy robes do little to break his fall as he smacks into one of the pillars and weakly crumples to the floor.

[Man] I… CHEF NOW

Yet again the Giant brings the cleaver up and over his head, scraping it across the low ceiling. With a swift practiced movement he brings it across himself and cleaves the helpless cultist in two. The enormous cleaver makes a loud clang as it bounces off the stone floor, as if the cultist’s body did nothing to slow it’s deadly progress.

Meanwhile, the last cultist has dashed across the room and in his blind panic didn’t even notice you standing there. All it takes is for you to stick your foot out to trip him, and he propels at near comedic speed into the wall and hits his head terribly hard. The sound his skull makes making contact with the stones is not unlike a coconut being split open.

Stooping down, you grab him and flip him over and shake him violently in order to keep him conscious.

[$pName] What the hell are you crooks doing down here to these innocent civilians? What is going on here?

[Cultist] Ugh…

You give him a couple slaps for good measure and the cultists finally seems to come to. You repeat yourself.

[$pName] What the hell are you three doing down here?

[Cultist] Orders… dozens of sacrifices for the ArchBishop… Secret…

[$pName] Sacrifices? You were going to kill these people?

[Cultist] The ritual… just orders… Please don’t kill me…

[$pName] When is this ritual supposed to take place?

[Cultist] Please don’t kill… ritual… tonight at the cathedral…

You throw him back down and the cultist meekly closes his eyes. You feel a presence behind you. Slowly turning, you finally notice the brutish man in the chefs hat standing only a foot away, menacingly looking down at you. His hulkish figure is only surpassed in fear factor by the deadly gleaming of the cleaver he grips tightly, still dripping with blood.

[Man] Chef… NOW

You flinch as he reaches out to grab you, but instead of ripping you in two he instead pulls you to the side and out of his way. Without another word the man cleaves the third and final cultist in half.

[Cultist] AAAGGGGHHHHHhhhh… aaaa…..

It doesn’t take long for all the blood to run out of the cultists body, leaving him unable to scream any longer. Meanwhile, the huge Man turns and head back towards the larger room where the unconscious civilians lay and begins patting them down, as if he is looking for someone. After pawing over a few of the cultists victims, he finally finds an older gentleman and freezes as if he recognizes him. The huge Man stares for a few moments, then sits down heavily and begins to cry. He buries his head inside of his massive forearms and shakes with grief, whoever he found must have been familiar. Approaching, you notice an older gentleman hadn’t been sedated like most of the others but instead had already been killed; the cultists must not have been able to inject him like the others so they resorted to murder. Inside of the man’s vest is a business card and a bloody chef’s hat of his own. The card reads “Bill’s Butchery and Grill”.

[$pName] Hey mister… Are you Ok?

The huge Man looks up at you with tears in his eyes, surprisingly vulnerable looking considering his recent acts of intimidating violence. After catching his breath, he finally whispers back to you.

[Man] I Chef Now…

[$pName] You… chef now? What? Are you ok?

[Man] I Chef Now…

The fact that the man hadn’t butchered you like the other cultists means he is smart enough to at least know the difference between friend and foe, so it is likely he simply has some sort of speech impediment. Still, the idea of not being able to properly communicate with such a significantly stronger fighter in such a small space makes you uncomfortable. Uneasily, you give him a couple pats on the back reassuringly and glance over the room once more. There are perhaps 7 civilians laying around, and a couple of them are beginning to stir. Due to all the blood covering the room you would think it is the scene of a massacre, but all the blood mostly belongs to the recently deceased cultists. One civilian groggily stumbles out from the tunnel the cultists were dragging them towards, and leans against a pillar while holding his head.

[$pName] Sir, do you know what these cultists were doing here? What is going on?

[civilian] Ugh… I’m not sure… I was cooking at home one second and now I’m here the next. Some sort of kidnapping maybe… I want to go home…

The man doesn’t even look at you as he wanders down the tunnel you just came from in a daze, stepping over the bloody corpses of the cultists without pause. Putting the pieces of the puzzle together, it seems like the cultists were using this sewer system as some kind of incognito route to transport kidnapped victims to a ritual location to be sacrificed. The cultist mentioned that location might be the cathedral, where the ArchBishop would kill them as soon as tonight, and there is a chance there could be more victims captured there already with no chance of escape. You will have to move fast to save them.

[$pName] Hey, mister chef hat guy… can I call you Chef?

The Huge man nods.

[$pName] Ok Chef, hear me out. I’m very sorry about your friend dying, but the fact is that there are many more just like him that are currently imprisoned at the Cathedral by the ArchBishop and will likely share his fate by the end of tonight. These cultist guys are no joke and I could really use your help saving those who need it. We don’t have much time… will you join me to avenge your friend and save these innocent people?

Chef closes his eyes and breathes deeply for a while, calming himself down. Finally, he reaches into his dead friend’s vest and pulls out the bloody chef’s hat, putting it into his pocket. Rising up, Chef looks as determined and powerful as ever, and gives you a nod.

[Chef] I chef now.

[$pName] Ok, I’ll take that as a yes! Let’s go meet up with my friends, we will need their help as well. Once we are all on the same page we can infiltrate the cathedral through the path these cultists would have used.

[Chef] I Chef Now!

With that, the two of you backtracked the way you came and returned to the surface.

8

The sunset cast an orange haze across the city buildings, washing over the urban landscape with a fuzzy warmth in contrast to the cold tension you felt. It had been some time since you and Chef left to collect your friends, and now that everyone was finally submerging into the cities undercroft you feared it may already be too late to save the soon to be sacrifices. It took a long time for everyone to finally meet back up after their individual adventures in the capital, and even longer to explain how you came to meet the strange and intimidating man accompanying you. You remember $bardName’s reaction well;

[$bardName] You mean to tell me that in the amount of time it took me to shop for a new pair of shoes, you managed to uncover a major human trafficking ring, kill three cultists, and make a new friend to boot? Don’t you know how to relax for once!?

Luckily, a hurried explanation of the day’s events was all it took to catch the gang up to speed, and they believed everything you had to say immediately. One of the perks of being an adventurer is that even the preposterous begins to become normalized, and it seemed like no one was surprised about your strange day out. Despite Chef’s bloody costume and stature everyone immediately warmed up to him as well, and even attempted to communicate with him further. They say 80% of communication is simply body language, and thanks to this nobody had any problems understanding him.

After getting caught up, everyone headed straight for the sewer entrance where they hoped to navigate it’s corridors and find the secret entrance to the Cathedral that the cultists would have used. The orange glow of the sunset was the last thing you saw before finally descending yet again into the gloom of the sewers, and to the present moment.

[$pName] Alright, I made it down. Everyone have their torches?

Everyone except $mName and Chef hold up their torches in affirmation.

[$pName] Perfect. Sorry about the general store selling out of torches $mName, just try not to wander too far off and you should be fine. All good Chef?

[Chef] I Chef Now.

[$pName] Great! Alright everyone, this way!

You lead the way down the sewer tunnels, retracing your previous steps from before. It doesn’t take long before you arrive at the larger room with the four pillars again, and carefully climb over the cultist corpses. All the civilians they had abducted before have woken up and left by now, except for two unlucky ones that were killed before you had arrived. One of these is Chef’s friend, who mournfully glances in that direction for a moment before turning away.

[$pName] We’ll give him a proper burial once we save the others Chef, don’t worry.

Holding your torch out in front of you, you lead the way down the tunnel the Cultists were attempting to drag their victims before you had arrived. Like the other tunnels, it twists and turns confusingly and in some places has piles of rubble or pools of sewage you must navigate over and around. Unlike the other tunnels however this one eventually begins to slant upwards, and before long leads to a stout wooden door.

[$mName] I’ve been trying to keep track of where we are while stomping around down here, and while I’m not 100% certain I’m pretty sure we are right underneath the cathedral. This must be it!

$aName tugs on the wooden door, but it doesn’t budge an inch. Locked.

[$mName] Trapped in the sewers… I guess you could say this is a shitty situation…

The sound of $liName flicking $mName on the forehead echoes eerily across the stone walls.

[$aName] Well of course the door is locked, crap! Ugh, we are gonna have to backtrack all the way down these tunnels again and check those dead cultists for a key, then drag our feet all the way back up before we can finally…

WHAM

With a tremendous crash, Chef punches his arm straight through the wooden door and reaches around behind it, unlocking the latch and swinging the door open.

[$aName] … oh… that works too!

[Chef] Chef.

The six of you continue forward through the door. On the opposite side is a plush hallway, completely contrasting in appearance from the dingy sewer tunnels you just left. The ground is covered by soft red carpet and the walls are wooden and decorated with ornate carvings. Between carvings are paintings, most depicting biblical scenes involving a dragon. Through the walls, you can faintly hear a chorus singing. You have entered the Cathedral.

9

Everyone slowly ventures forward, eager to infiltrate the building and uncover its secrets. Before you can move however, $liName motions for you to stay put by the damaged door and waits for everyone to pass by. Hesitatingly, she talks to you in a hushed voice.

[$liName] I know this is the worst time ever for this but I’ve been thinking about it all day and I just have to get it out. Listen…

Even in the poorly lit hallway you can see the beet red color of $liName’s cheeks as she blushes. With one hand she pushes her hair behind her ear, and continues without making eye contact.

[$liName] So basically… I just wanted to tell you… how I feel….

She fidgets nervously.

[$liName] I mean its obvious really… but I thought I should tell you before $aName did…

She tries to push her hair behind her hair again but its already back there, and nothing changes. Realizing this she kinda stares at her hand for a moment before shyly looking back at you.

[$liName] Ahhhh…. Well….

[$bardName] $liName! $pName! Hurry up!

Down the hallway you see your friends annoyedly marching back towards you, clearly impatient to begin the mission.

[$aName] What are you two talking about back here?

$liName glances at them with a frustrated expression as they approach, then back at you before finally flicking you solidly on the forehead.

SMACK

[$pName] OW!

[$liName] I was just telling $pName what a dummy he is. Naïve as ever… Cmon guys lets get a move on.

$aName’s eyebrows are raised so high they look like they might fall off her forehead, but she doesn’t say anything as you and $liName rejoin the group. Tentatively, you take the lead and move down the hallway in search of the ritual. Deep down you want to think about what $liName was trying to tell you back there but you need to focus on saving those captured civilians right now.

The ornately decorated hallway takes a sharp turn left, where it opens up into a much longer stretch with numerous doors on either side. It is much better lit as well, with candleholders and their respective candles casting a decent amount of light all the way down. This hallway looks like it is a part of some kind of dormitory, where cultists rest after a long day of hard work and murdering. Most of these doors likely open into rooms, and a restless cultist could open one and raise the alarm at any time. At the far end of the hallway is a metal door that likely leads to some kind of storage room, and halfway down the hallway is a pair of sturdy oak doors.

You quietly tiptoe along the hallway, your movement completely silent thanks to the unusual red carpet muffling each footstep. After finally reaching the oak doors you crack one of them open just a smidge and try to peek through. It looks like there is a small courtyard in between this exit and the next building that is across from you, and is no larger than the length of a truck. Pushing the door further open, you can see the building across the open space more clearly.

The building across the courtyard is none other than the Church of the Dragon’s Official Cathedral, and stands 12 stories tall above the surrounding cityscape. It’s massive stone towers and flying buttresses keep it upright in an astonishing challenge to the laws of physics, and it’s huge stained glass windows gleam in the fresh moonlight.

[$liName] I still can’t believe they are using the church’s Cathedral for their ritual, I thought them and the church were at odds?

[Chef] I Chef Now?

[$aName] It sure is spooky looking now that it’s dark out. I don’t want to go in there…

[$liName] We are in too deep to back out now, $aName. I say we cross this courtyard and barge in before they hurt anybody.

[$mName] We could consider a stealthy option like we did back with the baron, right? Maybe if we looped around…

[$pName] The longer we mess around the more people are potentially being killed for this damn ritual.

[Chef] I Chef Now!

[$pName] Yeah, I agree.

[$bardName] Wait, what did he say?

[$pName] I Chef Now.

[Chef] I chef NOW.

[$bardName] That’s not what I meant!

[$aName] What if they curse us or something? I feel like killing cultists in a holy place is bad karma or something…

[$liName] You can’t get bad karma for doing something that…

$liName suddenly stops, and everyone spins around at the same time. Directly behind you is a cultist, who sleepily rubs their eyes while standing in the middle of the hallway. Frozen, you watch as he yawns and makes his way past you along the hallway only a few feet away. In disbelief, you glance at $mName who shrugs back at you. Luckily for everyone, the groggy Cultist must have been barely awake as he made his way to the bathroom and somehow never noticed the small crowd preparing to storm his home.

[$pName] We are running out of luck fast, let’s get the hell in there while we still have the element of surprise.

[$liName] Agreed!

With a swift movement you draw your sword, and make your way to the Cathedral across the courtyard. Behind you $liName and $aName do the same, and Chef brandishes his massive cleaver menacingly. $bardName and $mName hang back, but look ready for a fight if necessary. The six of you marching in formation draped in moonlight makes for an impressive sight. You’ve come a long way since your first day of poverty and struggle in Kingsbridge.

10

You throw the door open and step inside, startling a cultist guard who must have been shirking his duties by napping next to the entrance. He jumps up as fast as he can, but before he can pick his sword up off of the ground you plunge your blade into his neck. He quietly drowns in his own blood for a few seconds before collapsing, and you are confident his pitiful gurgling didn’t make enough noise to alert anyone. You take note of your surroundings.

You are in a small reception area with several chairs and a painting of a dragon breathing fire on a town, sending the inhabitants screaming in all directions. Fluffy red pendants and draperies adorn the walls and a few of the chairs. There are two pathways that likely lead to the main area of the cathedral, and a single staircase that leads to some kind of second floor observation balcony.

Scout using the balcony before attack 11

Charge! 12

11

You make your way up the staircase and onto the balcony, where you find a cultist archer watching over the Crossing of the Cathedral. Silently, $liName creeps up behind him and takes him out, dragging the body to the side and out of the way. Unhampered, you observe the Cathedral.

The six of you are on a second floor balcony overlooking the Cathedral Crossing. To your right is the Nave, the main area of the cathedral where dozens of rows of wooden benches lay empty. To your left is the Choir, where a group of around 18 or so cultists have gathered in a circle and sway side to side rhythmically in an eerie fashion. The cathedral is enormous and the huge empty space within it makes the voices of the cultists reverberate in a haunting way. All along the walls are impressive tapestries depicting the Ancient Dragon, and to your far left by the altar is a massive bronze statue of the Dragon twisting around a giant’s sword stuck tip first into the ground. Looking back to the circle of cultists now, you see that each one stands behind a torch fastened to the ground in front of them, sending their pulsating shadow cascading backwards across the Cathedral walls and floors. The torchlight reflects angrily off of the golden decorations and Dragon Statue. In the center of the circle is none other than the ArchBishop, leader of all the cultists, who spins slowly with his arms outstretched and his eyes closed. In one hand is a long dagger with a zig zag curve to the blade, and in the other is a disembodied head dripping with blood. The singing raises to a crescendo now as the ArchBishop raises the head above himself and allows the blood to wash over him as if he was taking a demonic shower. Beyond the circle of cultists near the Ambulatory about two dozen other civilians cower in fear, shackled together by iron chains.

You formulate a plan, and motion to $liName to come closer. You whisper urgently In her ear.

[$pName] Take $aName and loop around the right side to hit them from behind while Chef and I attack from the front. Have $bardName keep watch at the entrance downstairs for reinforcements and $mName alert us to any other archers creeping around. We hit them hard and fast before they can sacrifice any other innocents. Questions?

$liName gives you a look of surprised admiration for a second before nodding in approval and telling the others about the plan. You make your way back downstairs and wait for the others, who quickly follow and stack up on the door along with you.

[$pName] Try not to kill the ArchBishop so we can question him about where to find the Dragon. Other than that, our priority is saving the hostages. Lets move.

The six of you move in to attack. Striding forward confidently, you and Chef make your way along the center aisle straight towards the ritual circle, sword at the ready. To your right, $liName and $aName quietly sneak along the far wall in the shadows through the transept and loop around to the rear of the ritual.

[$pName] ArchBishop! We have come to stop your disgusting ritual, give up at once!

The singing stops, and the cultists turn to stare at you in amazement. None of them notice $liName and $aName approaching silently from behind.

[ArchBishop] How dare you!? HOW DARE YOU!? Begone infidels, begone at once! Minions, kill them!

You give your plot armor a quick adjustment and tighten your grip on your sword.

[Chef] I CHEF NOW!

You charge.

Continue… 13

12

[$pName] Try not to kill the ArchBishop so we can question him about where to find the Dragon. Other than that, our priority is saving the hostages. Lets move.

The six of you move in to attack. Striding forward confidently, you and Chef make your way along the center aisle straight towards the ritual circle, sword at the ready. To your right, $liName and $aName quietly sneak along the far wall in the shadows through the transept and loop around to the rear of the ritual.

Around you is the Nave, the main area of the cathedral where dozens of rows of wooden benches lay empty. In front of you is the Choir, where a group of around 18 or so cultists have gathered in a circle and sway side to side rhythmically in an eerie fashion. The cathedral is enormous and the huge empty space within it makes the voices of the cultists reverberate in a haunting way. All along the walls are impressive tapestries depicting the Ancient Dragon, and to your far left by the altar is a massive bronze statue of the Dragon twisting around a giant’s sword stuck tip first into the ground. Looking back to the circle of cultists now, you see that each one stands behind a torch fastened to the ground in front of them, sending their pulsating shadow cascading backwards across the Cathedral walls and floors. The torchlight reflects angrily off of the golden decorations and Dragon Statue. In the center of the circle is none other than the ArchBishop, leader of all the cultists, who spins slowly with his arms outstretched and his eyes closed. In one hand is a long dagger with a zig zag curve to the blade, and in the other is a disembodied head dripping with blood. The singing raises to a crescendo now as the ArchBishop raises the head above himself and allows the blood to wash over him as if he was taking a demonic shower. Beyond the circle of cultists near the Ambulatory about two dozen other civilians cower in fear, shackled together by iron chains. You waste no time.

[$pName] ArchBishop! We have come to stop your disgusting ritual, give up at once!

The singing stops, and the cultists turn to stare at you in amazement. None of them notice $liName and $aName approaching silently from behind.

[ArchBishop] How dare you!? HOW DARE YOU!? Begone heretics, begone at once! Minions, kill them!

You give your plot armor a quick adjustment and tighten your grip on your sword. Behind you, you hear a sharp twang as a bowstring is loosed, hurtling an arrow straight for your back. Before you have time to react, $mName dives between you and the arrow.

[$mName] Whoop!

In a flash the arrow is redirected by $mName’s palms and sent flying right back to the sender, a cultist archer waiting in ambush on a balcony above where you came from.

[$pName] Nice save $mName, lets go!

[Chef] I CHEF NOW!

You charge.

13

The 18 or so cultists reach into their fuzzy robes as you charge forward and draw a uniquely varied array of weaponry to point at you. Some have sickles, some have jagged daggers, but all have deadly intent to stop you. Holding your sword above your head, you bring it down with all your might towards the closest cultist but he dodges backwards just in time to avoid it. At the same time, another cultist makes his move to attack your left flank while you are vulnerable and you only barely manage to bring your sword around and deflect his blow. Meanwhile, Chef bullishly charges forwards into the center of the fray while hurling his massive cleaver about him in a deadly assault. The cleaver has such tremendous momentum by the time it reaches each cultist that no matter how hard they try to dodge they cannot escape, and even if they attempt a parry their weapons are instantly shattered by the impact.

You square off against the cultist who tried to flank you and prepare to strike. The cultist is no older than 17 and has bloodlust in his eyes. His head is completely shaven and his fuzzy robe loosely covers his rib lined chest. With a bloodcurdling scream the cultist lunges towards you, and you manage to barely dodge to the side and avoid it. In retaliation you attempt a lunge of your own, but the cultist narrowly dodges as well and prepares for another swing. In his hand is a long and thin short sword with no guard, and you can see the whites of his knuckles gripping it tightly. His eyes narrow, and he lunges again. You attempt a parry, but your form is sloppy due to the adrenaline coursing through you and you only manage to barely tip his weapon to the side while stumbling away. He keeps up the pressure, and you quickly find yourself fighting for your life.

Meanwhile, $liName and $aName spring their trap and attack the cultists from the rear. In a hurricane of bladework and deadly assault the two cut down eight or so within the span of seconds, and it is only after two more are swiftly chopped down that the ArchBishop finally notices and raises the alarm to the ambush. $liName and $aName’s synergy is perfect, and they attack and defend for each other in excellent coordination.

Meanwhile, you are busy keeping the young cultist at bay. You have a reach advantage thanks to your sword being longer, but the cultist rushes at you in a blood frenzy and closes the gap immediately. You both swing at the same time, and instinctively grab the other’s sword arm and find yourself locked in a struggle to control the other’s attack. If you focus on your sword arm you might get free and get a hit in, but that would leave you open for attack as well. If you focus too much on the other arm and disarm him, you likely will lose control of your own weapon. The two of you twist and pull on the other unable to gain an advantage for what feels like years until finally Chef reappears behind you and cleaves the cultists arm clean off, freeing your sword from his grip at last. The cultist grimaces at Chef angrily, as if he is accusing him of ruining the duel. Continuing to hold his sword arm as hard as you can, you bring your weapon back and then forwards with all your strength and impale the helpless cultist straight through the heart. He stares at you with hatred in his eyes for a second before collapsing to his knees and falling over, dead. By the time you look around you to thank Chef, he is already gone and attacking a new pair of cultists.

You march towards the ritual circle once again to help but by the time you arrive it is too late, all the cultists are either dead or defeated. Only the Archbishop remains, cowering in the center of the ritual circle. He wears a white fuzzy robe with a golden chain draped across it, three human skulls dangling from it’s links. Splattered across the pale whiteness of the robe is the gore from his sacrifice, and his shoulder length black hair is soaked in it as well. He is surprisingly handsome and has amiable features, the exception being his sharp orange eyes which appear to glow in the torchlight of the ritual circle.

[ArchBishop] Typical heretic behavior, resorting to violence so quickly. You’re just like the mainstream church, childish and brutish beyond compare. How dare you!

[Chef] I CHEF NOW.

Chef stomps up to the Archbishop and wallops him in the stomach, forcing the maniac to double over in pain. You have a feeling if Chef used his full strength there instead of holding back, his fist may have been able to go straight through the man.

[$aName] $pName told us all about your scheme to sacrifice these innocent people and looks like we caught you in the act too. What do you have to say for yourself!?

[$liName] There’s no point $aName, it’s gonna be some bullshit about…

[ArchBishop] Don’t… \*cough\* don’t you understand they want it? They crave to be sacrificed!

The Archbishop looks up from the ground with a crazed look in his eyes, locked onto $aName with an uncomfortable intensity.

[ArchBishop] By giving their blood to me, they achieve what most cannot: salvation! By halting our prayer, you have ruined their chances of true freedom! How dare you!?

[$liName] Shutup, I don’t want to hear your worthless lecturing. What the hell is the cult doing in the Capital Cathedral?

[Archbishop] The Chosen Ones have little fingers in the affairs of all who live in this world, you know. The mainstream garbage is nothing but a puppet we keep around out of convenience. They, like you and I, all have our role to play. And my role ends tonight, as foretold…

Unsteadily, the ArchBishop rises to his feet, and hugs himself tightly.

[Archbishop] reeeeeEEEEEEE!!!

[$bardName] Watch out, it’s a control word!

[$liName] Quick $pName, Save the Game!

[$pName] What?

[$liName] What?

Suddenly, the blood covering his head and robes rapidly disappear and absorb into his body, causing it to glow a faint red. The Archbishop triumphantly roars and visibly grows in size a couple inches. Not only that, he seems to completely recover from Chef’s punch and even gain strength.

[Archbishop] The dragon himself has given me this power, is it not fate, is it not the Dragon’s will to use it? DIE! reeeeeEEEEEEE!!!

The dead cultists, who’s bodies were lying motionless only a moment ago across the floor, suddenly fidget and convulse rapidly as blood pours out of them and gathers in pools. These pools then move with incredible speed towards the Archbishop, who absorbs the blood straight through his body.

[ArchBishop] BEHOLD THE DRAGON’S WILL!

The Archbishop floats several feet into the air now, curling up into a tight ball as he absorbs the cultist blood. Far away, you can hear the screaming of the trapped civilians as they witness the grotesque transformation. Finally, after all the blood has been absorbed, the Archbishop extends his limbs out and releases a shockwave, sending you and the others several feet backwards. His transformation is complete; his skin is completely red, like a demons, and within his eye sockets are literal balls of fire whose flames extend outward demonically. His body has now doubled in size and is now large enough to make even Chef look short, and a pair of Dragon’s wings extend from his back. His voice becomes so deep, so guttural, it sounds like it is echoing off the halls of hell itself.

[ArchBishop] TIME TO DIE

Putting both his hands together, he unleashes a fiery inferno from his palms like a flamethrower that completely engulfs the room. First he directs it at $aName, who has no time to react being completely incinerated. Within seconds her torched bones scatter across the floor leaving no trace of her existence behind.

[$liName] Save The G…

The flames are directed at $liName next, who is completely obliterated by the destruction of the demonic flames.

Sensing the need to do something quickly, Chef charges forwards and cleaves at the ArchBishop, who opens his wings and flies up and into the open air of the Cathedral with ease. Like a fighter jet strafing an enemy, the ArchBishop turns and Soars back down, unleashing hellfire onto Chef and melting him into a pile of bones and oozing flesh. Behind you, $bardName and $mName scream hysterically as they run for their lives. Frozen, you don’t move a muscle as the ArchBishop finally turns to you.

[ArchBishop] HAHAHAH! YOU WILL NEVER REACH THE FROZEN SPIRE NOW! DIE!!!

The last thing you feel before succumbing to the flames is the strange taste of your own flesh as it rapidly cooks and melts down your throat. Weakly, you crumble into dust.

THE END

14

[only unlocks after starting 13. Make sure that a flag is set after 13 starts so that 12 leads to 14 instead. If the game is saved on room 13, change it to room 14.]

The 18 or so cultists reach into their fuzzy robes as you charge forward, and they draw a uniquely varied array of weaponry to point at you. Some have sickles, some have jagged daggers, but all have deadly intent to stop you. You feel as if you had just woken up from a dream, and in a daze run forward. You were supposed to be attacking cultists right? Holding your sword above your head, you bring it down with all your might towards the closest cultist but he dodges backwards just in time to avoid it. At the same time, another cultist makes his move to attack your left flank while you are vulnerable and you only barely manage to bring your sword around and deflect his blow. Meanwhile, Chef bullishly charges forwards into the center of the fray while hurling his massive cleaver about him in a deadly assault. The cleaver has such tremendous momentum by the time it reaches each cultist that no matter how hard they try to dodge they cannot escape, and even if they attempt a parry their weapons are instantly shattered by the impact.

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Meanwhile, $liName and $aName spring their trap and attack the cultists from the rear. In a hurricane of bladework and deadly assault the two cut down eight or so within the span of seconds, and it is only after two more are swiftly chopped down that the ArchBishop finally notices and raises the alarm to the ambush. $liName and $aName’s synergy is perfect, and they attack and defend for each other in excellent coordination.

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Unsteadily, the ArchBishop rises to his feet, and hugs himself tightly.

[Archbishop] Behold my power! reee… ACK!

The ArchBishop stops in the middle of his control word, unable to continue due to the blade protruding from his chest. Looking down, you realize it was you who put it there, and you smile with satisfaction.

[$pName] Allowing the villain time to monologue is a little cliché, don’t you think?

You retract the sword from his chest and bring it around in a circle, loping the ArchBishops head off in a graceful spin. Even while rolling across the Cathedral floor, the ArchBishop retains his expression of petulant indignation. $bardName and $mName jog up to rejoin the group.

[$liName] $pName! We were supposed to ask him where the Dragon is!

[$pName] I already did. We need to head for the Frozen Spire, whatever that is.

[$liName] Oh… Um… Ok, wow. When did you…?

[$bardName] THE frozen Spire? The one all the way north, in the frozen wasteland?

[$pName] I don’t know where it is or how to get there, but I’m confident we need to head towards “The Frozen Spire”.

[$aName] That’s pretty far away… But if the Dragon is hiding there, that would explain why nobody has seen him for so long…

[Chef] I Chef Now.

[$mName] I’m really not a fan of the cold…

[$pName] Well I’m not a huge fan of the hot, but I got more than enough of that just a second ago. I’m sure you’ll be able to handle the climate just fine.

A loud clang rings out across the cathedral as $liName breaks the chains restraining the hostages, and she helps them escape out the back. As they escape in the night, each person makes sure to share their gratitude and profuse thanks for the aid you lent them. After returning, everyone gathers their things and prepares to leave.

[$liName] I’m not sure where or how you managed to get the Frozen Spire out of the ArchBishop, but at least I know for sure we did good today by saving those innocent people.

[$bardName] Do you think killing the ArchBishop means the end of the Cult now?

[$liName] Not likely, it’s a large organization. Defeating the leader in the capital city will severely weaken the cult’s influence however and likely restrain their growth for some time. This is a great victory for the people of $kingdomName.

[$aName] That ArchBishop guy gave me the creeps too. Kidnapping and sacrificing people… Who does that? I shudder to think of what the purpose of that ritual was…

[$pName] Believe me, you don’t want to know.

[Chef] I Chef Now.

[$mName] Well, we have a long journey ahead of us. The Frozen Spire is extremely far north, and we will have almost the entire kingdom to cross along the way. We better gear up and prepare for a long haul.

[$pName] Good idea about preparing correctly… Oh and $liName, about what you were trying to say earlier…?

$liName tenses up, and looks at you with surprise. Her cheeks immediately flush, and she looks away.

[$liName] Ahh, forget it! I’ll tell you some other time.

With that she rushes out of the Cathedral ahead of you, and $aName gives you a wink.

[$aName] You really shouldn’t play with a woman’s heart like that you know…

[$pName] What!?

$mName chuckles, and everyone heads out of the cathedral and back to the relative safety of the city.

15

Two days pass since the fight in the Cathedral, and everyone has enjoyed their short stay in the capital. The entire group is well rested, healed, and prepared for another journey into the countryside. It didn’t take long for word to get around about how you rescued those people from the cult, and every now and then a passerby on the street thanks you for what you did. On one such occasion while walking with $liName, you casually joked afterward;

[$pName] I’m not used to being a celebrity you know.

[$liName] The only thing you are famous for is your naivety, $pName!

$liName calls you names more than ever these days, but at least now she says it in a playful way.

[$pName] By the way… Do you remember me telling me to “save the game” back in the cathedral?

[$liName] Save the Game… What does that mean? I’ve never uttered that sentence before in my life.

[$pName] Well, technically you haven’t in THIS life but… Ah, forget it. Anyways, weren’t you supposed to tell me something important earlier? Something about how… you feel?

[$liName] I feel like you are a Nosy Noland right now, that’s what I feel!

With that, she skips merrily away in front of you.

Yesterday, you took some time to check in on the Butchery and Grill Chef used to work at, but unfortunately it had gone out of business without the owner to take care of it. Unemployed, Chef ended up sticking with your group and everyone was happy to have him. Considering how dangerous your journeys had been thus far, it was nice to finally get another proper fighter added in.

Eventually there was nothing left to buy or prepare in the Capital and the six of you headed out north, towards the Frozen Spire. You don’t know what is in store for your motley crew of adventurers, but one thing is for sure; every step forward is a step towards finding the Dragon. Now, you are closer than ever before.

END OF ARC 5, THE CULT