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WINDHAMMER PRIZE
FOR SHORT GAMEBOOK FICTION

**THE PRIEST AND
THE CLAW**

AN ENTRY IN THE 2015 WINDHAMMER PRIZE FOR
SHORT GAMEBOOK FICTION

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The Priest and the Claw

Ever since you were child, you marvelled at the priests of the Light. Healing deadly wounds, banishing demons, bringing back the sanity of the possessed, even helping poor villagers fend off bandit attacks. Besides, there was something in their cassocks that made them quite popular amongst the girls.

You didn't have to think much. As soon as you turned twelve, you left my village to become a Novice of the Light. Your elder sister was already following the path of Light herself. During the next six years, you were able to meet her a few times. You must admit you miss her much.

Setting

The story takes place in a fantasy world - a constant battlefield for the forces of the Light and Darkness. The Nature appears to be the third major source of power. Even though believed to have been created, together with everything else, by the Light, the Nature is autonomous and hardly predictable.

The Darkness is represented by a rebel group of angels, who underwent a metamorphosis to become what is now known as demons. Though imprisoned in a realm of their own, they somehow manage to find their way out and spread the seeds of hatred, disease and frustration. They watch them grow and then feed on them. Often, demons are unleashed by demonologists - brave and power-hungry sorcerers who seek to enslave demons. In most cases, the demons manage to take control of their masters, turning them into shadowborne abominations.

The Church of Light has the goal of protecting people from the Darkness and its minions. While widely respected because of the helping hand they offer, the clergy never tried to interfere with the king's politics.

Witches and witchers (as their male counterparts are sometimes called) comprise the third major group of wielders of the supernatural. They revere Mother Nature. Witches tend to be able to speak with animals and even persuade them to perform tasks for them. More destructive ones tend to summon the wrath of the elements - blizzards, earthquakes, even volcanoes. Another distinctive feature of witches is their ability to use a bit of both the powers of the Dark and the Light. The Church of Light has mixed feelings towards witches. Priests are instructed to preach that playing with forces of the Dark can lead to possession. At the same time witches (together with the Order of the Cleansed, see below) offer understanding of the way the Dark works that makes them likely allies of the priests of Light.

The Church of Light

... Is headed by the Patriarch. It consists of 7 orders. Each Novice of the Light is required to receive tuition by the clergy of the following 6:

- The Order of the Pure Heart is devoted to fighting demons by performing complex prayers. It's priests are also effective in returning the shadow borne back to their original form.

- The Order of Divine Restoration specializes in healing - both wounds and diseases. Their knowledge of herbs and ailments comes second only to the lore of witches.

- The Order of Penance pays more attention to the soul of the followers of the Light. In their ranks, they have the most eloquent scholars, who theorise on the social role of the priests.

- The Order of Celestial Wings is devoted to studying the mystical agents of the Light - the angels. There are records of actual contacts with them. Angels are known to feel very uncomfortable outside their heavenly realm. One of the responsibilities of priests from that order is helping them get over their sickness so that the angels can accomplish their mission.

- The Order of the Holy Shield is amongst the newest. Patriarch Aoro was the first to recognize the need for the priests to be able to defend themselves (and those who need protection). Members of the order tend to combine physical exercises, battle training and reading sacred books. The weapon typically used is the short metal mace used during lethurgies.

- The Order of Perseverance teaches reliance on the Light even in the most utter situations and not giving up even when the mind can find no hope.

- The Order of the Cleansed is the most controversial one. It is comprised of demons who underwent a special exorcism process. As a result, they look like human beings. The order is recognized as part of the Church, despite the protests of some of the clergy and the disrespect towards particular aspects of the Canon. The cleansed insist on wearing an all black cassock as opposed to the officially recognized white one adorned with the sigils of the sun and moon. More important, they would have no qualms about using magical trinkets, engaging in the rituals of the witches or even contacting their former kind. At the same time, they tend to put a higher value on other of the hallmark values of the Church of

Light - honesty, compassion, abnegation. And, their devotion is unquestionable. There are rumours that their demonic origin somehow allows them to achieve feats in the name of the Light such as resurrections or even changing the flow of time. Up to date, there has been no official confirmation

Specializations:

- Healing – would allow Jacob to restore the health, dealing with wounds or illnesses.
- Exorcism – would make him adept at fighting demons and Dark magic
- Confessions – would provide him with a natural inclination of making people believe in him and share their secrets.
- Zealotry is the choice if you want to play with a physically fit priest, excellent at fighting with the holy sword.
- Stoicism would provide you with self control and unconquerable spirit, allowing him never to lose his bond with the Light.

Adventure sheet:

Favour:	5
Specialization	
Respect:	0
Relations with Sister Amie:	2
Relations with the Lupines:	0
Sister Amie's Anger:	0
Altar:	
Symbol of the Light:	
Ritual power:	
Codewords:	
Score:	

Favour is the resource you spend when you pray. Make sure you have at least a single point left by the time you reach the end of the adventure.

Specialization defines the aspect of the Light you are most skilled at. Please, pick one from those mentioned above and write it down.

Respect refers to your popularity among the clergy, including the priests inhabiting your monastery.

Sister Amie is one of the most popular characters in this adventure. You will need to keep track of both your relations with her and her temper.

The lupines are a faction not to be trifled with. Your reputation with them is important... at least for your final score.

The altar and symbol of the Light refer to a riddle you will face towards the end of the adventure. They will help define your ritual power.

Codewords are vignettes marking important decisions you took or milestones you reached.

Score shows how well, according to the author, you played. Now, please, go to 1.

1

You enter the cathedral slightly nervous, wondering what the archbishop could want to tell you. Inside, you begin to soothe your anxiousness. The atmosphere inside is so relaxing, with the ripple of running water coming from the magic fountains and the colourful light radiated by the windows even in a cloudy day like today. Down the hall, you could hear the solemn tunes of an organ. You can't help but smile. In all churches of the light, you feel like home. And in the cathedral you seem to find peace of heart in its purest form.

You ascend the staircase leading to the archbishop's chambers. The heavy wooden door is open.

"May the Light bless your steps, Father," you greet him and bow in reverence just according to the canon.

"Be my guest, Brother Jacob," the archbishop waves. "You can forget the formalities. For all I know, you are much more important to the Light than me. Please, take a seat," he points the parched chair next to him.

You do as he asks.

"Tell me, what do you think about the conflict of the great woods?"

You sigh as an avalanche of suppressed feelings hits you. You lost both of your parents in the ongoing conflict. People need wood to survive the winter. The growing population makes woodcutters go deeper into the heart of the mother forest, which in turn makes them a prey to the forest protectors - the wolf-like lupines.

You tremble as the memory of that night comes to life. You were awoken by the last scream of your mother. A beast crouching next to your mother turned his bloody muzzle in your direction, his yellow eyes full of feral hatred. He sniffed the air. He must have sensed you but yet he left me alone. Most of the group, including your father, died that night. Only you and another boy survived.

What would you answer the archbishop?

"Lupines are monsters. They should be slaughtered as the creatures of the darkness they are." (3)

"It is a strife that should be solved before many more die." (4)

"Lupines are right to defend the forest." (5)

2

You were sent to the Great Clearing the very next day, to a small town called Forest Edge. The name perfectly describes it, as it is situated right where the century old woods begin. Its population's main source of survival is cutting woods and exporting them to the rest of the country.

The forest, however, proves not to be defenseless. Many woodcutters find their deaths, shredded by pieces by mysterious monsters. Rumours describe them as wolf-like creatures walking on two feet, hence the

name they are popular with – lupines. Despite the constant fear among the humans, lupines never ventured into the town.

You settle in the monastery on top of the hill overlooking the town. It is a huge building worthy of being called a castle. The priests there are devoted to helping the woodcutters, healing the wounded, soothing the families of the victims, even strengthening the ranks of their militia.

Fifteen years pass since the day of your arrival. Your devotion earns you the respect of the majority of the priests and when the time comes for the Abbot to retire, you are appointed as the new one.

Turn to 10.

3

"I know your past and I certainly understand why you say that, but I don't like the malice in your voice," says the archbishop. "I would expect more from a priest of the light. Especially from you, Jacob.

You look down, ashamed. Your heart is pounding in your chest and your cheeks get red. Turn to 6.

4

The archbishop smiles.

"I like your way of thinking. Certainly, both parties have their points but at the end of the day, there is a pile of corpses. It is the duty of the Church of Light to do its best to prevent it from going on.

Increase your respect score by 2 points and turn to 6.

5

The archbishop's eyes open wide.

"I know your story and I didn't expect to hear that from you. But, maybe seeing through the eyes of the other side is the key to ending the conflict. I am tired of all the massacre going on there. It pains me. It is the duty of the Church of Light to do its best to prevent it from going on."

You nod.

Increase your respect score by 1 point and turn to 6.

6

"There is a group of people who dedicate their lives to studying the nature and its laws. What do you think about them, Jacob? Can they be trusted? Could they help in the conflict?" the archbishop

suddenly changes the topic.

You couldn't answer immediately. There were witches in the village where you grew up and they were helpful and respected. Their aid in times of draught and mosquito swarms was invaluable. On the other hand, the church officially does not approve of them. What would you answer?

Yes - 7

No - 8

7

"The witches in my village helped a lot, just like the priests of the Lights healed the sick. I saw no Darkness in their actions. I know that the Church is unwilling to trust them, but I guess when it comes to something as complex... they shouldn't be cast out," you say assertively.

"Very well," the archbishop smiles. "There is wisdom in your words. Can you keep a secret?"

You nod.

"My wife...may the Light shine on her ashes... she was into witchcraft. I never met someone as willing to go out of their way to help the poor and deprived..."

You could swear that you see tears in his eyes. When he opens his mouth again, his voice is trembling.

"If some human could understand the point of view of lupines, that would definitely be a witch. Remember that, son."

Increase your respect score by 1 point and go to 9.

8

"You can't play with the Darkness the way witches sometimes do and fail to succumb to it," you recite.

"I've heard that before... But, remember kid, if someone could understand the point of view of lupines, that would definitely be a witch."

Turn to 9.

9

"You maybe wonder why I summoned you here and ask you all those questions, bringing back painful memories. I had a strange vision and I believe it was a prophecy. I saw you bringing peace to the cursed great clearing, getting lupines and wood cutters to work together side by side... forgetting the rivers of blood they shed. If anyone can end this madness, that could be you," whispers the archbishop.

"Are you sure that is a prophecy and not merely a dream...I mean, until yesterday I was just a novice.

How can I achieve what no one else managed to?" you spatter.

"I'm sure it was not a dream. I was wide awake at that point and it is not the first time the Light gives me a glimpse of the future. Have you heard about the attempt to assassinate the king last year? Or the mysterious beast ravaging the farms near Foldd?"

"Yes," you say. "Both cases ended with the Church interfering..."

"...after I told the Patriarch what the Light showed me in those visions," the old man interrupts you. "I'm more than sure what I saw... you can make it happen."

Go to 2.

10

The cold of the night makes you shiver under your cassock as you walk back towards the monastery. These late walks of yours seem to bring a lot of anxiety to your brethren as they fear for your safety, but you really need to get out of the monastery, to breathe fresh air and be alone with yourself. Besides, you tell them, people have never been attacked outside the forest.

Suddenly, you hear something large moving in the shrubs. The two moons provide you with enough light to see the furry bestial silhouette. Your blood runs cold as you realize the creature before you must be one of the lupines.

If stoicism is your specialization, go to 11.

If not, what would you do? You can take out your sword preemptively (16), take up your sword and charge (12), run (13), attempt to exorcise the beast (14) or stand in your place (15).

11

"Even the deepest darkness won't make me fear, 'cause the Light illuminates my heart," you whisper to yourself reassuringly, your training by the Order of Perseverance allowing you to keep a cool head.

Running seems pointless; the chance of escaping a beastly monster in the dark seems nonexistent. You remember that a couple of priests tried exorcising a lupine with no result. It seems that those creatures are simply not demonic in nature. Attacking with a sword is still an option and you are certainly thinking it over, but only as a last resort.

Go to 15.

12

"By the Light!" you shout as you attack the beast. It dodges and jumps out of your reach and growls.

"Have you lost your sanity?" it roars. Your next swipe connects with his forearm and he lets out a howl. Its eyes get red as he leaps towards you, too quick for you to react. Its paw hits your chest, a few of its

nails cutting our flesh, knocking you down. Its muzzle gets so close to you that you could smell its warm breath.

You believe this is the end of your journey and you could only play for a merciful death. But all of the sudden the red glow in its eyes vanishes and the monster runs away. It takes a few minutes for you to get over the shock and be able to stand up, your heart racing while you struggle for your breath. The wound on your chest hurts, but it is just a scratch. There is some superstition that the ones hurt by the lupines turn into monsters just like them, but you are not sure if you believe in it.

You can cast a healing prayer on yourself, in which case you need to reduce your favour by 1. Otherwise, you gain the codeword *wound*.

Go to 17.

13

Terror stricken, you run as quickly as you can, not even daring to peek back if the monster is following you. Unfortunately, it is very dark. You tumble and fall and hit your wrist badly. The pain is so strong that you need to say a healing prayer. Reduce your favour by 1.

Luckily, the beast is nowhere in sight. You wonder what it wanted from you. You really have no idea.

Go to 17.

14

Favour decreases by 1.

You say the prayer of exorcism with the corresponding zeal, but the beast does not seem impressed. It seems that it is not of demonic origin. It, however, seems intrigued by your words. You must admit there is intelligence behind its feral eyes.

What do you do now? You can take out your sword preemptively (16), take up your sword and charge (12), run (13), or stand in your place (15).

15

"I've come with peace," says the beast. "I am Howler, son of the forest."

So, the beast is male. You don't dare speak, not willing to interrupt him.

"My brethren said you were not like the others. They said you would listen. They were right," he looks you in the eyes and you feel compelled to look away. "My dearest Snowflake was captured by your people. I want to see her again. I want you to set her free and let her back in the forest."

"I am not aware of any capture," you explain, your voice sounding queer.

"It happened an hour ago, she must now be in your monastery. So far, we were only protecting the forest. If she dies, we will start an onslaught," he growls, making you step back. "Please, priest, I... beg

you, I can't lose her." The beast looks down suddenly resembling a bug plush toy.

"I will do what I can. I may be the Abbot of the monastery, but I am not almighty." You explain.

"I trust you," says Howler and vanishes in the darkness.

Go to 17.

16

The sword leaves the scabbard with a swash. The beast shows its teeth and gnarls.

"Put down your blade, human. If I wanted to hurt you, you'd be dead by now," the creature says.

You guess there is truth in what it says, but the hidden threat causes the fetus of anger to appear inside you.

What do you do? You can lower your weapon (15), charge (12), run (13), or attempt to exorcise the beast (14)

17

As you near the monastery, you calm down. It is a big sanctuary, you could call it a castle with massive walls encircling an inner yard, dominated by two high towers that provide eagle eye view of the town and the beginning of the great woods.

"Who's there?" The shout is accompanied by the clink of a sword leaving its sheath.

"May the Light bless you!" You greet as you approach the two priests guarding the entrance.

"May the Light bless us all!" replies one of the guards, lowering his crossbow.

"Happy to see you, Abbot Jacob! We were worried about you."

"May the Light forgive me for bothering you. By the way, does that 'you' include a certain Sister Amie?" you inquire.

The swordsman nods.

"You are going to tell her I am here, right?"

"We... have to."

"All right, I will be in my room. May your duty be uneventful."

The priests thank you. You enter and make your way through the yard. It smells of freshness. One of the Novices, Lilly, is an expert on growing various flowers and you encouraged her to indulge in her passion. After all, you tell her, plants have the wonderful ability to soak in the energies of the Light and make people happy.

The door of the main building howls as you open it. Maybe you should have someone oil it, you remind yourself. But then again, maybe it is better to know when someone is entering.

You make your way towards the end of the corridor on the first floor where your room is. As you pass by an armory, you take a torch and fire it using a single holy word.

The room is in chaos as always. The table is full of documents, piled one over the other. There are a few potions of holy water on the shelves, accompanied by dozens of books. The bed teases you, reminding how tired you are, but you know the time has not come yet.

You hear the clicking of armour and the knock of the door you expected. You open it and invite the woman in. Sister Amie is blessed by cold beauty. Her long red hair is in a braided pony tail and the torch light dances in her emerald eyes. She looks fit, the marks of spending most of her 28 years under the training regime of a true member of the Holy Shield. She wears a long chainmail tunic over her white garments. You can also spot the handle of the long but elegant sword showing just over her left shoulder.

The priestess looks angry.

"I was worried about you, Abbot. My duty is to protect you. How can I do so when you get out in the middle of the night without notice? We've discussed it before, you know how uncomfortable it makes me feel and you still do it."

You sigh. In moments like this, you wonder what she is. The rumours about the reformed devils from the Order of the Cleansed say that they are red haired, extremely attractive and easily angered. Could she be a devil in hiding? It would make some sense if she was not from the Order of the Holy Shield.

How would you reply?

"I apologize." (18)

"I won't take orders from you." (19)

18

Your humble answer makes her give you a silent smile.

Your relations with Sister Amie increase by 1. Go to 20

19

Her eyes flash for a moment, then she manages to control herself.

"I am sorry Abbott. You are my superior and I am not to give you orders."

Sister Amie's anger increases by 1. Go to 20.

20

"So how was your night walk? Did anything spectacular happen?" asks the priestess.
Do you want to tell her about your encounter with the lupine?
Yes (21) or no (22).

21

"Actually yes. I came across a lupine. I was scared but thanks the Light I am here safe and sound."

Sister Amie puts her hand up, her palm facing you.

"Say no more, please. As far as I understand, you neither want my protection nor need it." She frowns.
You can clearly see how frustrated she is.

Your relations with Sister Amie decreases by 1 point. Her anger increases by 1 point.
Turn to 23.

22

"No, thanks the Light, I had no problem making my way back to the monastery." Your muscles strain as you try to fight your consciousness about half lying to her.

"You just got lucky, Abbot." She gives you a wink, clearly relieved.
Turn to 23.

23

"Why are you wearing chainmail?" you ask her.

"Well, I was going to join the town's militia for tonight's shift. We have already met the weekly quota of we promised but I was actually hoping to find you out there. Now that you have already returned, there is no need to do that, however, I am all dressed up, so I think I will just go anyway."

How would you reply?

"Okay, if that is your wish." (24)

"I think you should rest." (25)

24

"Have an easy night shift." You smile at her. Sister Amie wishes you good night.

You gain codeword shift. Proceed to 26.

25

"Have you looked yourself in the mirror recently?" You ask the priestess.

"What don't I look pretty? Is the eye pencil I apply out of place?"

You laugh. "You look as beautiful as ever. The Light has blessed you with good looks. What I really meant is that you already look tired. I understand your willingness to help, to change the world... Or at least me. However, you are human, and humans need to get enough rest."

She sighs.

"I guess you are right. My eyelids feel quite heavy."

Go to 26.

26

Suddenly, you hear people running in the corridor. The door opens and Novice Lilly darts in, panting. Her long blonde hair falls freely on her naked shoulder. As a Novice, she is not required to wear a cassock - she can wear anything she likes as soon as the predominant colour of her garment is white. You must admit she looks beautiful in her long sleeved white dress embroidered with floral patterns and symbols of the Light.

"Abbot, we have an emergency. In the infirmary, we have a man badly bitten by a lupine. Brother Jensen asked me to come here and request your help."

Brother Jensen is one of the priests that helps you most in running the monastery. Apart from being a talented healer, he is also a very good confessor, able to heal not only the body but the soul as well. If he requires your assistance, then maybe the victim is indeed in a dire state.

Another Novice enters the room. You don't remember his name, but you've seen him train with a two handed sword, so he will probably join the ranks of the Order of the Holy Shield.

"Abbot, we've captured the lupine. She is being held in the dungeon."

"Good job, Novice Thomas. I am so proud of you." Sister Amie beams. The man blushes. It is not hard for that priestess to make a handsome young man get red, you deduce.

Sister Amie turns to you. "Where do we go first?" she asks leaving no doubt that she will accompany you.

What is your choice? Do you head for the infirmary (27) or are you going to see the lupine as soon as possible (28)?

27

“The infirmary. of course. If we don’t act now, the victim will probably die.”

Respect increases by 2.

You lead the way, striding as quickly as your tired body allows you, your steps deafened by the clanking of Sister Amy’s chainmail. As soon as you go outside, you hear the cry coming from the infirmary. Brother Jensen shouts something to the Novices. You’ve never heard so much desperation in his voice.

You fly in, making a young Novice drop the infusion she’s carrying. Brother Jensen gives her a threatening look, his dark eyes glistening in the torch light.

You behold a terrible sight in the middle of the infirmary. It seems that the shoulder of the man has been stripped of all the flesh. And the blood... there is so much blood.

Novice Lilly faints and only the quick reaction of Sister Amie saves her from hitting the floor.

“Get her outside,” the zealot orders Novice Thomas and gives him the body of the blonde.

The chainmail-clad lady comes closer to you and whispers in your ear. “He is suffering too much. End his pain. Present him with the gift of mercy.”

You look in her eyes. They seem more watery than usually. She tries not to flinch, just like a true warrior should, but you know that deep inside she is not oblivious to anyone’s pain.

“Abbot, I want you to join me in the healing prayer. I fear that even my connection with the healing hues of the Light will not be enough.

What do you decide?

If you want to fulfill Jensen’s request and you are a healer, go to 30. If you want to join his prayer but you are not a healer, turn to 31. Alternatively, you can follow Sister Amie’s advice and quickly kill the victim (32).

28

Every time you go down the winding stairs to the dungeon, you feel uneasy. Usually, you don’t have any idea about the reason. Now, you do.

You pass by the cellar where the praised vintage is stored and continue down a narrow corridor. A zealot guards the door. He salutes you and looks at Sister Amie, expecting orders but she gives him none.

There is another priest in chainmail inside... and a snow-white lupine with female features chained to the wall. Some of her fur is blood caked as she probably suffered wounds while being caught but there are signs of no serious trauma.

"Why did you attack the man?" you ask.

The beast looks at you with her red eyes and gnarls.

"What are you trying to do?" Sister Amie seems indignant. "That is a monster. It is not right to treat it like a human being."

"What do you suggest, zealot?" You ask her and see her face cold like never before.

"Make it suffer." She pronounces each of the words slowly.

Well, maybe she has a point. You abhor torments, but you could get valuable information out of the lupine. Alternatively, you can continue your first approach and talk to her, even though it won't be easy. You can go even further, ordering her to be executed... or set free. Last but not least, you may make the decision to do nothing for the time being and leave the minster in the dungeon.

What do you choose?

Talk with her (go to 33 if you are a confessor or 34 if you are not).

Torture her (35)

Execute her (36)

Free her (37)

Leave her in the prison (38)

30

You fall on your knees and mumble the holy words together with Brother Jensen.

Favour decreases by 1.

A whirlwind of Light encases the wounded shoulder.

"By the power of the Light, make this flesh anew!" Jensen cries.

As the whirlwind vanishes, there is not even the faintest clue that there was something wrong.

The victim rises up and touches his shoulder, unable to believe that he is healed. "What is happening? How did you do it?"

Brother Jensen stands up too and offers you a hand. It is only now that you realize how exhausting the

prayer was.

"What is your name?" you ask the woodsman.

"Caleb."

"Can you tell me what happened, please?"

"Well, I was walking back home from the inn when all of a sudden I was attacked by a lupine."

"Did you see anything peculiar?" you inquire.

"Well, I'd never seen a lupine in town. Other than that... now that you ask, it seems like the lupine was surrounded by some eerie darkness."

You thank the man and advise him to have some rest and stay in the infirmary until tomorrow just to be on the safe side.

"I knew you would be able to help me." Brother Jensen beams as you pass by him. "Thank you."

"You did a great job, Brother," you return the compliments and head for the dungeon.

Respect increases by 3. Go to 28.

31

You fall on your knees and mumble the holy words together with Brother Jensen.

Favour decreases by 1.

A whirlwind of Light encases the wounded shoulder.

"By the power of the Light, make this flesh anew!" Jensen cries.

As the whirlwind vanishes, you see that some flesh has appeared on the shoulder and the bleeding has stopped. The victim is far from being healthy but at least it seems that he will survive. The pain probably subdues and the woodsman falls into slumber.

"I knew you would be able to help me." Brother Jensen beams as you pass by him. "Thank you."

"You did a great job, Brother," you return the compliments and head for the dungeon.

Respect increases by 2. Go to 28.

32

"I am sorry, Brother Jensen. I fear it is too late." You put your hand on his shoulder. He sighs and leaves the infirmary, waving the Novices to follow his example.

"Do you want me to do it instead of you?" Sister Amie asks with trembling lips. You guess she has done

it before, somewhere on the field of battle.

“Thank you, Sister, but it is my duty.”

She nods and moves out of your way. You take a deep breath and take your sword out. With a single swipe, you decapitate the man.

“Now, let’s see the monster that did that.” You wipe the weapon in a piece of cloth. Sister Amie puts her hand on yours and you are amazed by how gentle it feels, despite all the swords play it has seen.

“That was brave.”

You feel overloaded with emotions and unable to reply anything. And maybe there is no need.

As you go outside, you evade Brother Jensen. You are sure he will understand.

You make your way towards the dungeon.

Go to 28

33

“No, Sister Amie. The way of the priest could be different. A tongue could be as useful as a sword.”

The priestess squints her eyes, almost killing you, but remains silent.

You approach the lupine and try to set her at ease. As you can expect, she is quite tense, but gradually she seems to begin to trust you. She tells you her name – Snowflake.

“What made you come into town, Snowflake?” you ask her.

She shakes her head, visibly confused. “I can’t tell you, human. I just don’t know. As a lupine, it is my duty to protect the holy wood, but my dedication does not extend to hunting woodsmen on their territory. But... something got into me. All of a sudden, I found myself surrounded by a cloud of darkness and my savage side took the best of me...”

The lupine seems to be quite uneasy by what she has done.

“Alright. Now, have some rest as much as the chains allow you.”

Sister Amie gives you an amazed look as you leave the cell. “Would you like me to have my guys use blades on her as an attempt to achieve a better result?”

“No, leave her alone... for now.”

The zealot sighs and grumbles something under her nose. Nothing to worry about, though, you know she will comply.

Your relations with the lupines increase by 2. Go to 40.

34

"No, Sister Amie. The way of the priest could be different. A tongue could be as useful as a sword."

The priestess squints her eyes, almost killing you, but remains silent.

You approach the lupine and try to set her at ease. However, the task does not appear to be that easy. You get more growls than actual talking. About an hour later, you decide to give up.

Sister Amie gives you a wicked smile as you leave the cell. "Would you like me to have my guys use blades on her as an attempt to prove you wrong?"

"No, leave her alone... for now."

The zealot sighs and grumbles something under her nose. Nothing to worry about, though, you know she will comply.

Your relations with the lupines increase by 1. Go to 40.

35

"See what information you can... extract from her."

Sister Amie tries to suppress her smile as she gives directions to her subordinates. You are quick to leave the cell. While violence might be necessary at times, you are by no means going to enjoy the sight.

You wait on the ground level for some time. Sister Amie appears from the dungeon, visibly frustrated.

"I fear we didn't achieve anything, so I ordered my men to stop. I believe she either had no idea what prompted her to come into town, or is going to die with it. Anyway, thank you for letting me do it my way."

Your relations with the lupines decrease by 1. Your relations with the Sister Amie increase by 1. Go to 40.

36

"She committed an act of cold hearted murder. I believe she deserves the same."

Sister Amie's eyes widen. It seems that you managed to surpass her level of hatred towards that lupine.

"But how... there hasn't been any trial..."

"That beast over there is not a human being and so she deserves none. Don't be fooled by the fact that she looks intelligent and can speak. She's a monster nevertheless. Did she conduct any trial before she attempted to kill that man? What if she manages to get free? How many innocent humans should die just because we don't have the guts to see what is right?" you ask.

Sister Amie just waves at her subordinates and leaves the room. You follow quickly, not really keen to watch the execution either.

“As a member of the Order of the Holy Shield, I must say I am impressed by your zeal. Yet, in the same time I am beginning to get just a little bit of scared by you,” the priestess whispers.

You return to your room and as soon as you hit the bed, you fall asleep. You twist and turn, tormented by nightmares, until a noise wakes you up and you feel a warm breath with hints of herbs and honey, and see the glowing eyes of a beast. A lupine is in your room!

“Where is Snowflake?” he gnarls.

You try to say anything, but you are stunned. The lupine smells you for a few seconds.

“You had her killed! Fool, what have you done!”

He bites your neck in half.

This is a sad end of the story. Please, start again from the beginning (or section 28).

37

“What?” Sister Amie can’t hide how appalled she is by your decision.

“As priests of the Light, we are supposed to exhibit its virtues. Forgiveness is one of the most precious ones and I believe it is the time to embrace it.”

“That is insane...” Sister Amie’s cheeks get as red as her hair. She is losing control.

“Say no more. What better opportunity can we have to show these creatures that we are kind hearted and we don’t deserve to be their enemies? We should give them an example to follow, an open hand to embrace.”

“You mean bite all the way to the bone, because I am sure this is what she would do if we let her go. You are making a big mistake, Abbot. The fact that you are in charge here does not mean you are right. It also doesn’t mean that we all should just let you do this.”

You gulp. “What do you mean Sister?”

“I am going to initiate a Spiritual gathering this very moment, before you manage to get your deed of pure insanity done,” threatens the young priestess.

“Watch your tongue, young lady!” you shout, unable to tolerate her lack of respect any longer.

“I will. You know I am a woman of actions, not words.” She turns around, waving her fiery mane.

You know it is going to be a long night.

Sister Amie summons the Council of the Seven Priests with the request to vote on impeaching you.

Do you have 4 or more points of respect? Yes (38) or no (39).

38

Respect decreases by 1. Relations with Sister Amie decrease by 2. Her anger increases by 1. Relations with the lupines increase by 5.

The other members of the Council don't appreciate your decision to set the lupine free and cancel it. However, you have earned their respect in the past and that saves your position as the Abbot of the monastery. You know that you managed to get away this time but you know that next time you don't comply with the views of the clergy, you will be out.

After the discussion is done, Sister Amie comes to you.

"Don't take it personally, Abbot. I think I got carried away by emotions."

"It is okay, Sister. This is why the Council was created – to keep obstinate Abbots from making bad decisions. It was your duty to summon it if your opinion was as strong as you stated."

She nods. "I am glad to hear that. May the Light bless you.

Go to 40

39

The other members of the Council don't appreciate your decision to set the lupine free and cancel it.

However, Sister Amie does not stop here, demanding that you leave your position on the ground of being potentially dangerous. The members of the Councils' vote is split, 3 voting for you to stay, 3 to leave. The one to decide last is Sister Amie herself, and you know what she will say.

"Enough of this," you say in an attempt to save at least some of your grace. "If you think I am not worthy of serving the Light as the Abbot of the monastery, so be it. You were the ones who gave me that privilege and now you are taking it back. I am sorry that I disappointed you. I wish luck to whoever you elect next. I am going tomorrow. May the Light be with you."

Later, Sister Amie comes to you.

"Don't take it personally, Abbot. I think I got carried away by emotions."

"It is okay, Sister. This is why the Council was created – to keep obstinate Abbots from making bad decisions. It was your duty to summon it if your opinion was as strong as you stated."

She nods. "I am glad to hear that. May the Light bless you. I really didn't want to get that far. I mean, I really want you to stay, even if you are not the Abbot."

"I am sorry. The decision is already taken," you announce.

The priestess turns back, but before that, you could swear you caught a glimpse of a few tears in her emerald eyes.

This is the end of your adventure. For a better one, please, try again from the beginning.

40

You return to your room and as soon as you hit the bed, you fall asleep. You twist and turn, tormented by nightmares, until a noise wakes you up and you feel a warm breath with hints of herbs and honey, and see the glowing eyes of a beast. A lupine is in your room!

"Where is Snowflake?" he gnarls.

"I am here, Howler!" The female lupine enters your room, her steps as quiet as a mouse. Howler embraces her. If you were not as scared, you would have been touched by the tenderness of those beasts.

"How did you... I mean, are my Brothers alright?" You ask.

"Let the children of mother nature have their secrets. I will just say that the suddenly felt very sleepy." The moonlight coming from the open window allows you to see her expression, a bow of a smile.

"We must go!" Howler gnarls.

"Of course." Snowflake turns to you. "We'll meet again."

You are not very sure, but you think you saw her giving you a playful wink before giving her hand to Howler and fleeing through the window.

To say that you didn't sleep particularly well during the rest of the night would be an understatement.

As the sun rises, you go to the chamber of meetings for the usual morning meeting of the seven priests who manage the monastery.

You realize you may be slightly late as all of the other six are already there: Brother Jensen; Sister Carmen (the angelologist); Brother Anthony (the librarian); Sister Paula (the exorcist); Brother Michael (the stoic); and Sister Amie.

Did you talk Sister Amie out of joining the night shift of the militia? No (41) or yes (42).

41

You notice that Sister Amie looks very tired. Her otherwise beautiful eyes are swollen. She is leaning against a wall, probably having a hard time even being on her feet.

"How was the night shift?" you ask.

"It was terrible. Sometimes I am wondering why we should even try helping these sheep."

"Sheep need guidance even more," you remind her.

"I know, but why do they need to be so..." she hesitates about the word. "Let me tell you what happened. We were informed about a burglar and spread throughout the city to try to find him, which was stupid to begin with. But, the head of the militia just wouldn't listen to me. The burglar managed to render about half of the militia unconscious, one by one. When I arrested him, it turned out he was the son of a noble, so we basically had to let him go."

"I understand. You did an excellent job, Sister Amie."

"Yeah, I only wish that there was more sense in doing it." The priestess shrugs and accompanies you to the big wooden table.

Sister Amie's anger increases by 1. Go to 43.

42

Sister Amie looks fresh, alive and kicking, just the way you are used to seeing her.

Go to 43.

43

"It appears that the captured lupine somehow managed to escape," announces Brother Jensen.

"But how? Why I was not informed?" Sister Amie shouts and jumps on her feet.

"The Novice who was supposed to bring the breakfast in the dungeon discovered the zealots sleeping. She didn't manage to wake them up, so she summoned me to check their condition. I am pretty sure they were put to sleep by some powerful drug. My hypothesis is that the lupine, being a forest creature, should be familiar with some herbs."

"But how did she manage to get them to drink it?" asks Sister Amie.

Brother Jensen shrugs. "They could have inhaled it. Both zealots remember a smell of wild flowers that made them dizzy."

"Whatever the method the lupine was using, my advice is not to be too hard on your men," you say to

Sister Amie. "Lupines are rarely taken as prisoners. They are creatures we still know very little about."

The priestess engulfs you with her eyes, green anger seething within.

As the meeting finishes, Novice Lilly comes into the room.

"Excuse me, am I interrupting your meeting?" The Novice blushes charmingly.

"Not at all, child, we have just finished. What is the matter?"

"Someone called Cain wants to speak with you. Should I turn him away?"

"Turn him away?" You laugh. "Why would you do that?"

"Well, he has a certain reputation..."

"What reputation. You can speak freely," you reassure her.

"There are rumours that he is a witcher."

Would you tell Novice Lilly to send him in?

Yes (44) or no (45)

44

"As a priest, it is my duty to communicate with all the creatures created by the Light."

"Of course, Abbot. I apologize," says the Novice.

"You've done nothing wrong, child. Thank you."

In a couple of minutes, a man in his mid thirties enters the room.

"Excuse me Abbot, I am sure a high ranking member of the clergy has a lot of responsibilities, but the matter is urgent."

Your relations with the lupines increases by 1. Go to 46.

45

"Tell him I am busy right now." As a matter of fact, you are not exactly lying. Or at least this is what you try to convince yourself.

"Of course, Abbot." Novice Lilly leaves the room.

In a couple of minutes, a falcon flies in through the open window and to your amazement transforms into a man in his mid thirties.

"Excuse me Abbot, I am sure a high ranking member of the clergy has a lot of responsibilities, but the

matter is urgent.”

Your relations with the lupines decreases by 1. Go to 46.

46

“Speak, then,” you encourage him.

“You must have heard that I am a witcher, a worshiper of Nature.”

You sigh. “Nature is just one of the creations of the Light. I believe that is better to revere the latter.”

Cain smiles. “This is what you are made to believe. I don’t want to argue with you.”

“You can sit,” you wave to him, inviting him to use on the chair in front of you.

“Gladly,” he replies. “I am here to talk about the conflict between the woodsmen and the lupines. What is your role here, Abbot. Why is this monastery here? Are you on the side of the humans?”

You shake your head. “No, we are here to help the ones who suffer. The best interest of the Church is to bring an end to this conflict. I just fear that we have not found the way to do it.”

The man’s dark eyes glisten. “Very well, then, we have the ground for some meaningful conversation. Have you asked yourself why so many woods are cut exactly here? Who organizes it. Who would be interested in supporting the deforestation here, where the resistance of lupines is so severe?”

“As far as I am informed, it is Lord Warwick who organizes the whole process, including the transportation towards the heart of the country. Your other question actually made me think. I haven’t heard of many contacts with lupines outside of this area.”

“Any guesses why?”

You shrug.

“These woods are sacred. They are imbued with powerful energies. This is why Mother Nature uses its guardians. Believe me, if they continue too deep, there will be a catastrophe. There will be very little of the world the Light created left.”

“How do you know?” you challenge him.

“How do you know the Light? Just like you spent your entire life studying the Light and trying to connect with it, I did the same with Nature.”

“Does it include speaking with lupines?” you inquire.

“Yes, I’ve talked to them. They told me a lot. Someone needs to be the messenger, to break the ice between the two factions in war.”

“What did they tell you?”

“They are scared. They tell me something is changing them, making them more aggressive, clouding their minds. I don’t know what you think about them, but they are not cruel mindless beasts.”

“I really don’t think that about them,” you assure him.

“That is good.”

“I’ve also had the pleasure of speaking to a couple of them,” you inform him.

“Howler and Snowflake are a sweet couple. Of course, when they are not enraged. Now, tell me, would you like to help me build that bridge between lupines and humans?”

How would you reply?

“Of course. The path of Light is a path of peace.” (47)

“No, I am not going to be an ally of a witcher.” (48)

47

Your relations with the lupines increase by 1.

“Thank you, priest. I knew you were the one. But before there could be peace, we should find what is making lupines lose control.”

“What do you mean by we? I didn’t say I would help the lupines,” you protest.

“You really did not. But, as a witcher I am sometimes able to see the future. We will meet again.”

Cain turns into a falcon and flies out through the open window.

Go to 49.

48

Your relations with the lupines decrease by 1.

Cain sighs. “You still don’t understand we are all the same. Too bad you don’t have much of a choice. The wheels of fate have turned, and we are cogwheels. We will meet again.”

Cain turns into a falcon and flies out through the open window.

Go to 49.

Soon after Cain is gone, Sister Amie rushes into the room.

"Abbot, we have a problem. The militia just brought a woman from the town. They said she killed her husband in a rage."

"Don't they have a judge?" you murmur.

The priestess shakes her head. "They believe she is possessed by a demon."

Sister Amie leads you down to the first floor, to one of the confession's chambers. There is a small girl talking to Thomas, waving her hands.

"You must let me in, she is my mother."

"I can't let you do that," the zealot says. "She can hurt you."

"But she is my mom!" Tears roll down her cheeks, making her wavy hazel hair stick to them. "She has been like that before. Only I can help her come back."

Thomas looks at you for help.

"Who is this child?" you ask Sister Amie.

"This is Victoria. She came a few days ago, saying she wanted to become a priestess. We explained to her that she can't even be a Novice until she is ten years old, but we couldn't really stop her from coming here and occasionally participating in our prayers."

What would be your decision? Would you refuse her to go in (50), allow her to get in alone (51) or go in together with her (52)

"I am sorry, child. There are things that should be left to the grown up."

Victoria gives out a sad sigh.

"Thomas, would you mind showing her the canteen. I am sure the Sisters there would have a cupcake or two for her."

The zealot nods and takes her hand.

"Now, let us see what we have here."

You find the woman in a destitute state. She still has blood on her hand and clothes and is desperately trying to tear the rope around her wrists. You initiate the exorcism ritual and spend a couple of hours in prayers.

Favour decreases by 1.

Finally, the woman calms down and asks to lie down and sleep. You ask a Novice to bring a few bags of hay in the room so that she can have some rest.

When you leave the room, you feel very thirsty and decide to go to that canteen. Thomas and Victoria are still there.

"Your mom is fine," you assure her as you take a jar of lemon juice.

"I know. She always is once it is over."

You dismiss Thomas and sit next to the table.

Continue (54)

51

Respect decreases by 1. Your relations with Sister Amie decrease by 1.

"You can't be serious, Abbot," says Sister Amie. "That woman has just killed her husband. We don't know what she could do to her."

"Come on, she is her mother..."

"And the man she killed today was her husband."

"I am sure your men have tied her hand."

"There are plenty of things that she can do to endanger Victoria's life."

You look at the girl. She looks quite fragile. You realize Sister Amie is right.

Continue (52)

52

"You can go in and see your mother, but I will be by your side, making sure nothing bad happens to you," you tell the girl.

She rolls her eyes. "We've been through this before. My mommy never hurt me. I am her little guardian angel.

You smile as you take her hand and you both enter the room. You find the woman in a destitute state. She still has blood on her hand and clothes and is desperately trying to tear the rope around her wrists. When she sees Victoria, she stops fidgeting and falls to her knees and starts crying quietly. The little girl approaches her and you make sure she is within an arm's length from you.

"What have I done? I... I killed your father."

Victoria hugs her. "You know it was not you, mommy. It was the demon inside you. It is not your fault that he chose to get inside you."

"I can't take it any more..." whispers the woman.

"You are in the right place. This is the monastery of Light. The priests here will help you recover."

"It is too late. I can never be the same after what happened. I should have listened to you."

"What is done is done. Be strong, mommy."

"I... feel so tired."

You ask a Novice to bring a few bags of hay in the room s that she can have some rest. The woman lies down and instantly falls asleep.

"Let's go grab some cupcakes and juice from the canteen. I will have an exorcist see her if necessary once she wakes up. I will also send Brother Jensen, our best confessor to help her get over the shock."

"You are a good priest, Abbot," says Victoria as you make your way towards the canteen. The sisters there offer you a couple of cherry cupcakes and a jar of lemonade.

Respect and favour increase by 1. Go to 96.

53

"So you want to go to the dungeon and try to banish the demon Victoria told you about?" Sister Amie asks you.

"I do believe there is something very special about this kid," you explain. "I think we should go there."

The priestess nods. "By we you mean the two of us?"

"Honestly, I doubt we could deal with the riddle ourselves. Besides, Victoria might be the single most protected against demons person in the monastery. Risking her life is something I don't want to do, but then again, she might be the most valuable asset in the path to solving the mystery."

"Don't you think we should get somebody else? I mean, a couple of grown-ups and a child might not be enough to deal with the horrors in the dungeon." Sister Amie proposes.

You shake your head. "I am pretty sure it will be quite narrow. Being in a crowd, we will just make more mess.

"Sounds logical. When do we go?"

"I suggest meeting in an hour. Let's hope that we will be able to come back for supper."

The priestess agrees and you leave her room. You spend the time meditating, going over prayers and polishing your sword. Then, you go outside to look for Victoria. You find her watering the flowers, laughing with Novice Lilly. The whole scene looks so stunningly beautiful that a part of you wants to forget about going to the dungeon.

“Victoria, I thought about your proposal to enter the dungeon. Let’s go. Sister Amie will come with us.”

Lilly seems perplexed by your announcement, but says nothing as the little girl blows her a kiss. You take the little one’s hand and lead her back into the monastery and to the entrance of the dungeon. Sister Amie is already there.

You lead the way downwards. “We will need torches,” you announce.

“Not really,” says Victoria. “See what my bracelet can do.” She blows it and a dozed of dancing sparks come out. They grow brighter and start dancing around you , illuminating the stairway,

“That is very nice.” Sister Amie smiles. “Having a torch in one hand and a two-handed sword in the other is not fun.”

“We should stop here,” Victoria announces.

“Why, we are in the middle of the staircase?” you ask.

The girl touches the wall and the slate opens like a door.

“I would have never guessed,” you say.

“The same about me, but I read about it in the demon’s mind.”

The new corridor winds a couple of time and you wonder whether there is something waiting for an ambush, but your fears were unfounded. Finally, you come to what looks like a torture chamber. There are a lot of dreadful instruments there... and you are not alone. A tall muscular figure rises up from the floor to greet you. Sister Amie takes her sword out, but you put your hand up, signaling her not to attack for the time being. The executioner seems like a powerful opponent and you hope there should be a way to avoid the battle. You take your time to examine him. There is a big axe next to him and he could grab it at any moment. He is half nude – wearing only a pair of black trousers and a chain around his torso that seems to act like a belt. On his head, there is a turban that slightly covers a star tattooed on his forehead.

“So, you have brought a child to the master. He would be delighted. Is that the case?”

You pause for a few seconds, considering his question. If your answer is positive, the executioner may make you proceed past him. Or, he could require that you leave the child here.

What would you answer? Yes (54) or no (55)?

“Yes, the little one is for the master.” You will never forget the look in Victoria’s eyes. You can feel that she is afraid. It seems that the executioner is not exactly demonic, so she can’t rely on the protection of her bracelet.

"Then, push her forward. The master wants his food prepared."

"No!" you shout.

"I knew you were lying," the executioner roars with laughter as the room is filled with black smoke.

"Let me tell you something fools. The only reason you are still alive is that you are claimed by the Light. But when you act against its virtues, you become vulnerable."

"I never acted against the Light!" you choke.

"You just lied. If you did not, I wouldn't bother use the dark gas because it would have been like fresh air to your lungs."

Favour decreases by 2. You have no choice but fight the executioner. Go to 55.

55

You take out your sword and charge. Sister Amie needs no second invitation to do so. The executioner swings his axe as if it is a pinwheel. Even though he is only one, he has the home advantage and makes the most of it, occasionally kicking tables and chairs towards you or throwing instruments at you. He manages to wound Sister Amie's leg with a sickle. Seeing the priestess fall down on the floor, you let out a cry of anger and deliver a ferocious attack, cutting your hand on his blade but piercing your heart.

Then, it is healing time. Your favour decreases by 2 points, or just 1 if you are a zealot (because while delivering the final blow, you received just a mere scratch) or a healer (because you can mend the two of you at a lower cost).

Go to 56

56

After you recover from the fight with the horrific opponent, you continue down the corridor. Soon, it comes to a vestibule. The corridor itself continues forward, but there are four other ones starting from here.

"Where do we go now?" you ask yourself.

Victoria, however, takes the question seriously. "I think we should try each of them before continuing forward."

Where do you go now?

The first one to the left (57)

The second one to the left (64)

The first one to the right (70)

The second one to the right (72)

Forward (if you have visited all the other locations - 77)

57

You come to a room that appears to be a lab. There are vials with all kinds of concoctions everywhere, some of which boiling. There is a strong smell of sulphur in the air. Sister Amie begins to choke.

“Are you alright?” you ask the priestess.

She just nods, unable to speak.

Would you suggest that she waits for you outside (58) or not (59)?

58

Your relations with Sister Amie increase by 1.

You really can't look at her struggling for breath, so you send her out where the concentration of sulphur fumes is lower. There are obviously no monsters to fight in the lab anyway.

Continue (60).

59

Favour decreases by 1.

While you examine the surrounding, Sister Amie struggles for breath and eventually faints, falling over a vial of nasty acid. You quickly pull her out of the room and say a healing prayer to mend the nasty wound the liquid left on her neck.

“I should have said it earlier, but you'd better stay here while Victoria and me check the lab. There are obviously no monsters to fight there anyway,” you tell her.

The priestess nods. Continue (60).

60

“Look at that, Abbot.” Victoria points a big cauldron in the back of the lab. It is filled with some orange mash.

“Do you have any idea what it is?”

“I think we should use it to test the blood.”

“What blood?” you scratch your neck.

“The sweet blood you need to mingle with merry snow. Remember the instructions for the ritual, right?”

“Oh, the ritual, right. What about this vial. It looks like blood.” You pick one and open it. “It smells of

cherries.”

“What about that one – she picks a nasty looking jar with what seems to be coagulated blood. I have another idea. Why don’t we pour this?” She takes out a small potion of holy water. “Maybe we should consecrate this cauldron.”

What do you put in the cauldron?

The cherry juice (61)

The coagulated blood (62)

The holy water (63)

61

As soon as you pour a bit of the liquid, the mash in the cauldron begins to disappear.

“So that must be the sweet blood we need,” says Victoria.

You guess she is right, so you put the seal of the vial back and return to Sister Amie.

Return to 56.

62

The mash in the cauldron does not respond in any way. Maybe you should try something else.

The cherry juice (61)

The holy water (63)

63

The mash in the cauldron reacts violently with the holy water, exploding. A bit of it falls in our eye, making you whine with pain. You quickly say a healing prayer, fearing that otherwise you won’t be able to see again.

Favour decreases by 1.

What do you put in next?

The cherry juice (61)

The coagulated blood (62)

64

You come to a small but very hot room. You soon realize why. There is a big furnace with live embers, and there are big eggs inside. It seems that a couple of them have already hatched, but the babies are nowhere to be found.

In fact, another one is just hatching in front of your eyes. A baby dragon comes out! It looks around, gives out a shriek and starts crawling towards you.

“Oh, how sweet!” says Victoria. “I want to have it as my pet.”

“Stay back!” Sister Amie orders. “Do you see its big fangs? It can be dangerous.

If you are a confessor, go to 65.

Otherwise, what do you do?

Say a prayer of detect evil to find out the nature of the dragon (66).

Slay the dragon (67)

65

You step up, trying to connect with the spirit of the dragon, just like you would do with a human being before a confession. You feel that the dragon’s soul is as pure as that of any child.

Victoria takes it in her arms and hugs it.

“Abbot, can I take it with me. It is so sweet.”

Would you allow her (68) or rather not (69)?

66

Favour decreases by 1.

It is a wise move since you really don’t know much about dragons. You connect with the spirit of the dragon and feel that the dragon’s soul is as pure as that of any child.

Victoria takes it in her arms and hugs it.

“Abbot, can I take it with me. It is so sweet.”

Would you allow her (68) or rather not (69)?

67

The act of cruelty decreases your favour by 2 points!

Victoria screams as you behead the dragon. Sister Amie covers her eyes and takes her out. You remember the instructions for the ritual, so you cut a bit of the still twitching dragon's claw and come back to the vestibule (56).

68

"Sure. But only one condition. You take care of it at all times, which could mean that you may have to carry it all the time."

"I would do that for my dragon!" she says with determination that makes you smile.

You gain codeword dragon and return to the vestibule (56).

69

"I am sorry, Victoria. Its mom may come back and get very upset when she doesn't find it here."

"But I will be a good step mother!" Victoria doesn't give up.

"A step mother could hardly compare to the original mother," you explain to her.

"I see." She puts the dragon down and pets it one last time. "But we need a dragon claw for the ritual. Look, my dragon has one of its nails broken, probably while popping the egg."

You take it, say goodbye to the baby dragon and return to the vestibule (56).

70

The narrow corridor leads you to a small library. Despite the meager surroundings (consisting of a table, a chair, and a couple of bookshelves), there are probably hundreds of books there.

"What are we looking for?" Sister Amie asks impatiently.

"I need to find the whole instructions for the ritual of banishing."

"Great. Where do we start from?" The priestess picks up a book and throws it down.

"What is wrong?" you ask.

"There was a big spider!" She makes disgusted faces.

You laugh as you could never imagine the otherwise brave assassin could fear such small creatures.

"I know where to look for it." Victoria picks a book, opens it and starts reading. "Mingle merry snow with sweet blood. A long dragon claw shall write the executioner's light on the altar of dread. And then sacrifice your soul. Hm, this last sentence seems written between the lines, that is weird." She puts the book back on its shelf. "Very well, let's move out. There is too much forbidden knowledge here."

"Did you see that?" Sister Amie points at a beautiful ritual knife on the table. "If we are going to perform a ritual, we would need that."

"What do you think, Victoria?" you ask the girl. She just shrugs.

"I am a little girl, I don't know every detail."

Would you take the knife (71) or not (in which case you return to the vestibule – 56)

71

The knife feels unnaturally heavy and cold. You put it in your belt, careful not to cut yourself. Note that the cursed blade decreases your favour by 1.

Codeword blade gained. Return to 56.

72

The corridor leads you to what looks like a child's room. There is a colourful bed and a lot of toy scattered on the floor.

"Oh, dear Light, what is this?" Sister Amie cries. It seems she found the child. It turns out to be a humanoid with long black fur. It is breathing, however it appears to be unconscious or sleeping. Actually, the reaction of the priestess nullifies the probability of the latter.

"Oh, the poor goblin is sick. I will go and heal him," says Victoria.

"Wait a minute. You are going nowhere, at least until we sort things out. First of all, what kind of a creature is it, and second, you told me you are not a healer."

Victoria rolls her eyes. "People think goblins are creatures of the Darkness, but they are not. They are like... like your cassock. When you entered the dungeon, it was all clean and now it has absorbed some of the dirt here. It is the same with goblins. That one needs just a little bit of love to wake up and come back to the Light."

You look at your cassock. You would definitely not want to appear on a mesa looking like that. You are about to ask Victoria where she learned that, but decide that there is no point.

"I wouldn't trust that creature. It looks like a creature of the Darkness to me."

What would you do?

Say a scanning prayer to make sure the goblin is not a creature of the Darkness (73)

Allow Victoria to do what she proposed (74)

You take the responsibility (75)

Leave the room (56)

73

Favour decreases by 1.

The prayer confirms that the creature's origin stems from the Darkness.

"I am sorry, Victoria, this does not belong to the Light."

"Oh, Abbot, aren't you listening to what I say. It doesn't belong now but it will if you show it just a little bit of love."

What would you do?

Allow Victoria to do what she proposed (74)

You take the responsibility (75)

Leave the room (56)

74

"Thank you, Abbot." Victoria gives you a quick hug and then rushes towards the creature. She puts her palms on its forehead and gently whispers something. The goblin bathes in bright light and its fur changes colour from black to snow white, then it wakes up. Go to 76.

75

"Let me face the peril!" you say as you move towards the goblin.

Victoria gives you a warm smile. "You are my hero. I wish I had a father like you."

The compliment makes you blush.

"You know how to make impressions, don't you?" Sister Amie laughs. "Be careful, though."

"No doubt about it. What should I actually do?" you ask Victoria.

"Just heal it. It is not exactly what it needs, but is quite close."

The healing prayer costs you 2 points of favour (or just 1 if you are a healer). The goblin bathes in bright light and its fur changes colour from black to snow white, then it wakes up. Go to 76.

76

Sister Amie raises her sword, but you know that even she realizes that there is no need for that. The goblin just radiates Light.

“You are so beautiful,” it says to Victoria. “You remind me of my sister I lost a few years ago.”

You try to suppress your laughter, which only brings tears to your eyes. You have no idea how Victoria can even distantly resemble a white furry creature. Sister Amie gives you a questioning look, then she realizes the funny part.

The goblin searches the piles of toys and picks up a snowball. “This brought her a lot of joy. I wish that you have it.”

The girl takes it. “Oh, you shouldn’t have!” She gives it a hug and then looks at you. “Can we bring him up?”

“I’d really love to come with you, dear sir,” says the goblin.

You can’t say no to what currently appears to be a creature of the Light. However, you are afraid that it could transform back to a monster when it gets close to a demon.

“Alright, we have a job to do, but when we are done, we will come here and take you with us back to the monastery.”

“You’d really do that? I haven’t seen daylight in quite a while.”

“You can have my word.” You say and leave the room. Return to 56.

77

“It is now time to go to the ritual chamber,” says Victoria and leads the way. The room you come to makes you say a prayer to the light just by the smell of sulphur and suffering. “We’ve arrived at our final destination. Now, let’s make the ritual happen.”

There are five altars and there is a carved picture on each of them.

#1 has a bleeding heart.

#2 has a drop (probably blood).

#3 has a demonic-looking rune.

#4 has a scared face.

#5 has a skull.

Write the number of the altar in your adventure sheet and go to 78.

78

Victoria approaches the altar you chose. "We already know what the sweet blood is. Now, about the merry snow..."

Do you have codeword snow? Yes (79) or no (80).

79

Victoria looks at the toy the goblin gave her. "I am sorry, my hairy friend." She crashes it on the altar, and then you pour the cherry juice on top.

Do you have codeword dragon? Yes (81) or no (82).

80

Victoria looks around and sees a bit of wool. "I hope that will suffice even though I doubt it is that merry or snowy."

Do you have codeword dragon? Yes (81) or no (82).

81

"Now, we need a dragon claw," announces Victoria and lets the dragon walk on the ground. Then, she grabs his claw and pulls it towards the altar. "What should I draw? What symbol is the executioner's right?"

Please, write down your answer in the adventure sheet (it is one of the most popular symbols of the Light – a star, moon or sun). Then, go to 83.

82

"Now, we need a dragon claw," announces Victoria. You hand her the nail and she takes it with disgust.

"What should I draw? What symbol is the executioner's right?"

Please, write down your answer in the adventure sheet (it is one of the most popular symbols of the Light – a star, moon or sun). Then, go to 83.

83

"And now for the final part. We need someone's soul." Victoria says in a cold, creepy voice.

"You can take mine," Sister Amie steps forward.

"That is insane, I am not going to kill you."

Victoria shrugs. "This is what is written in the instructions. However, I doubt you will manage to sacrifice one's soul unless you have a proper instrument.

What is your choice?

Use the ritual knife to take your life and sacrifice your soul (84)

Just say a prayer (85)

Do nothing (86)

84

"Without saying a word, you plunge the knife in your heart. The pain lasts for a couple of seconds and then you fall into the endless abyss.

It is a sad end to your adventure. Please, go back to 1 (or 83)

85

Favour decreases by 2 (or just 1 if you are an exorcist). Codeword prayer gained.

"Forget about this nonsense. I am a priest and if I need something I do it by praying to the Light."

There is no prayer for a ritual of banishing performed on a dark altar, but you need to improvise.

Go to 86.

86

Now , let's check the ritual power. You get 1 point for each of the following:

You chose altar # 4.

You have codeword snow.

You have codeword dragon

You have codeword prayer.

You told Victoria to draw a star.

If the ritual power is 4 or 5, go to 87. Otherwise, go to 88.

87

The altar starts glowing.

"Well done! You did manage to complete the ritual!" says a voice coming from Victoria.

You see her facial expression distorted beyond recognition.

"You've helped me a lot. Thank you, dear priests. You will have my gratitude but let me have some fun before that. You let a child lead you by the nose, so you deserve that," says the demon.

Sister Amie takes out her sword, but you stop her.

"You don't want to hurt her. If you slice her, the girl will die and the demon will just run away," you remind her one of the first lessons in exorcism."

"I feel your blood seething with anger. You can't hold it any longer. Let it all out," the demon taunts her.

You see a cloud of darkness engulf Sister Amie. Do you have codeword darkness? Yes (89) or no (90)

88

The ritual is finished but nothing happens.

"Fools! You can't even conduct the most stupid ritual," says a voice coming from Victoria. "Die!"

The girl leaps towards you. The last thing you see is her twisted expression bearing nothing of the child's innocence, before she reaches you and crushes your neck with a single move.

This is a sad end to your adventure. Please, start again.

89

“Sister, Darkness surrounds you, just like the one who lost control...”

The priestess looks at you and nods, but will she be able to resist?

Is Sister Amie’s anger more than 1? Yes (91) or no (92)

90

If Sister Amie’s anger is more than 0, go to 91. Otherwise, go to 92.

91

The priestess charges at Victoria and slashes her torso.

“Oh, dear Light, what did I do!” She weeps, realizing what she has done. To make the matters worse, the demon subsides, leaving Victoria in command of her body.

You quickly recite the healing prayer (you lose 2 points of favour or just 1 in case you are a healer) and just when her wound is closed, the demon returns to the girl’s body.

Continue (93)

92

The priestess freezes, her sword pointing at Victoria. You can only imagine the magnitude of the struggle behind her green eyes. But, it seems that she won, as she puts her weapon down.

Continue (93)

93

If your favour is 0 or less, go to 94. Otherwise, go to 95.

94

“I offered to a reward,” says the demon. “I swear I really meant to fulfill my promise, but your soul is so holy and so weak right now. I can’t resist.”

The feeling is hard to describe, but the demon just sucks in your soul. The cold abyss takes you.

This is a sad end to your adventure. Please, start again.

"I offered you a reward," says the demon.

"I don't want anything from you. Just free the child."

The demon laughs. "I don't feel very comfortable here anyway. Her soul is so holy, so pure. It is like swimming in a lake of chocolate and not being able to even taste it. Not even a powerful demon can crush the soul of a child of the Light. Besides, the ritual is complete. In a few minutes, I will be gone from this realm, so thank you for letting me go."

"Why do you thank me?"

"My duty here is done. I paved the way for a couple of more powerful demons to come. Now, it is time for me to return to the Abyss."

"What do you want?"

The demon laughs. "You already know."

You do. Feeding on the suffering of others. The weakened souls of those who kill. The exhausted ones of the priests who call the Light too often. You sigh, realizing you won a small battle in the war that will probably never stop.

But when you look in Victoria's eyes again, you realize there is sense in going forward with it.

*

Dear reader, congratulations for reaching the happy end. It is just the beginning of a long journey I am planning to write about, but it is nevertheless an important milestone.

If you want to receive an evaluation of your game, please add: your relations with Sister Amie; your relations with the Lupines; your respect score. If your ritual power is 5, add 2 more points if the score.

If your score is 5 or less, you rank as a Hopeful. There is much hope you will do better next time.

If your score is 6 to 9, you are a Master of Prayers. You are masterful at focusing the Light.

If your score is 10 or more, you are a Champion of the Light – one of the greatest assets in the fight with the Darkness!

"I am sorry about your father," you say with a trembling voice. You are not quite sure you should bring the topic.

"Oh, he was not my real father. Mommy said mine died while I was a little baby, so she decided to find

another one. But this one was very rude. He also wanted to do bad things to me. The world is a better place without him."

Your jaw drops. Is that really a four-year-old girl.

"What kind of... things?" you inquire.

"You know, those kinds of things. Like... the ones you want to do with the red-haired priestess in the shiny armour, but really, really bad."

You blush and look around, making sure nobody hear Victoria.

"I would appreciate if you don't tell anyone. But, how do you know in the first place?"

"Have you heard of the Rainbow children, Abbot?" the girl finishes her cupcake.

"Yes, they are children gifted by the Light. You must be one of them, right."

"Well, not really. Rainbow children are masters of all the ways in which the Light manifests itself. I can only read minds and sometimes I receive prophecies."

"When did you understand you are one?"

"I became one. One day, an angel came to me. She was very injured. She said she fought demons and barely managed to escape. About to die, she instead gave me this bracelet and hid in it." Victoria pulls her sleeve up and shows you a brilliant white piece of jewelry. It just radiates Light.

You sip your drink. "That angel must have felt you were unique. By the way, did any demons come to look for you?"

Victoria nods. "One of them comes to my room every other night and we play with my dollies."

You shake your head. "Aren't you afraid of him?"

"I am not afraid of creatures of the dark. They can do nothing to me as long as I have my bracelet. Besides, nobody wants to play with me and my dollies." She shrugs.

"Tell me something more about him," you ask her.

"Well, he is very bad and leaves in the dungeon of the monastery. He always wants to have me remove my bracelet and give it to him. He thinks he can use its power. The demon thinks humans and lupines should kill each other so that he and his friends could drink their pain or even consume a few of their souls. That is disgusting." Victoria makes a funny face.

"And you say he lives here... in the monastery." You realize you are getting sweaty.

The girl nods. "Yes, here in the dungeon. I think we should go there and defeat him before he does something very bad."

"Maybe I should organize a party of the best exorcists we have."

"I doubt it will help. This one is very powerful. He thinks he can be defeated only by performing a complex ritual in an altar in the dungeon."

"There are no altars there," you argue.

"There is a secret passage leading to a room with five of them. I am sorry, but I don't know which of them is the right one. I also didn't manage to get the complete instructions for the ritual."

"Then, tell me what you know," you ask her.

The girl looks at the roof and recites. "Mingle merry snow with sweet blood. A long dragon claw shall write the executioner's light on the altar of ... I am not sure. I only know that these are reagents we must take from there."

"That is okay, dear. You are such a good girl. Now, I will introduce you to a Novice who will take care of you for the remainder of the day."

"Novice Lilly grows the most beautiful flowers I have ever seen!"

"Yeah, she does. Wait, did I tell you I was going to bring you to that Novice?"

"Nope," Victoria smiles.

"I see."

Go to 53.