

When Gehrman had told me to ascend Oedon Chapel, I'd expected there to be some sort of elaborate staircase behind the door, maybe a multiple-flight rectangle or an elaborate spiral. I hadn't expected the hallway to only extend ten feet at most before connecting to an open cylinder, maybe five feet wide at most. There was no bottom that I could see in the darkness, and the ceiling looked to be capped. Before I did something so moronic as to leap into the darkness, I tossed some glittering coins down the hole to see if I could follow them: they vanished from sight and I heard no impact. Yeah, not going down there. Instead I grabbed the nearby lever and wrenched it despite its protests: a rumbling noise carried down a disc-shaped platform, a little column popping up in the middle as the platform came to rest. I saw no lever on the interior so, presumably, that column at the center was a switch. I stepped inside and applied pressure to the button, which depressed and locked in with a click. The platform carried me up, up, up. Dozens of feet, probably ten stories or even more!

The room at the top was beautiful. It was all white stone, lovingly carved with the same attention and care as the rest of Oedon Chapel, the room itself a little bigger than the chapel's central dais downstairs – in other words, a sizable place, and one that looked to have been carved from a single piece of stone. The platform was slightly offset from the center of the room, and surrounded by four columns that seemed to help hold up the ceiling. I felt bad for anyone who might fall down this hole when the platform was on the bottom floor.

I heard a wet chuckling, the click of a trigger, and immediately dodged to the side. Hidden from my sight by the column had been another crazed old man in a wheelchair. These maniacs were unfortunately common in Yharnam's interiors, invalids armed with destructive weapons. While I'd seen one or two with a flamesprayer, their favorites were what this one toted: a compact gatling gun!

Bullets skipped off the stone as I circled the man, steadily closing the distance until my saw tore open his throat and chest. These chair-bound nutjobs weren't quite as far gone as the huntsmen with whom they cooperated, so serration didn't do as much to them, but they were still clearly insane and worked alongside half-wolf beastmen.

With no other threat currently present I took the time to look out through a carved, glassless window. I'd never been so high within Yharnam: it was beautiful from up here, in the dying light of evening. It was still a disturbing place, all of the architecture gothic and forbidding, but there was a dark loveliness about it. I could see the Grand Cathedral in the distance, its vaulted rooftop looming over most of Yharnam. Only this tower here attached to Oedon Chapel rivaled it in height.

Exiting from the only doorway up here, I was briefly struck by incomprehension: the little bridge, unguarded with railings or other protection, attached to a second tower that stretched further into the sky. This...this made no sense. I'd seen nothing like a second tower from outside the chapel, and there's no way something this massive could have been hidden. I understood, intellectually, that Yharnam wasn't quite real. It was the Dreaming World, after all, but I think that this was the first time I truly grasped that the world genuinely didn't work quite the same way as the real world.

My moment of hesitation was enough for two huntsmen to begin closing the distance from the other tower. It was the click of a trigger that got me moving, however, as two more fired down on me from above. I shoulder-checked through the two sword-wielders and sent one careening off the bridge to his death, slapping my back against the other tower so that I could face the remaining huntsman without being peppered full of holes. He was slow compared to me: as he drew back his blade for an impaling stab, I smoothly stepped to his left and slashed a 7 across his face and neck. If he didn't immediately die of shock or bleed out, the sliced eyes would leave him helpless. He staggered to his feet, face in a

snarl, and a gurgle sent blood bubbling through the wound in his neck. He took one step forward and fell, unmoving.

I circled the tower, noticing a massive rent in the attached walkway. It led to more paths down below, but Gehrman had said to ascend the chapel. I didn't want to go exploring down when I was expected to go up. I stepped inside the tower and was immediately confronted by seven huntsmen waiting in ambush. They were all armed.

It wasn't enough.

I lunged to my left, hacking into a black-cloaked huntsman and wresting his pitchfork from him as he bled to death. He'd been hiding between two upright coffins, and at the base of the spiral-staircase seemed to be some kind of embalmer's set. I had no idea what this existed for, nor did I much care. I hurled the pitchfork at the man with a shield and he, of course, caught the weapon with his shield while yelping in distress. To his credit, he kept his shield up even with a tine through his arm. To his disadvantage, he now had a pole attached to his shield-arm. I holstered my saw and grabbed the pitchfork with both hands, swinging the attached huntsman as a meaty bludgeon to beat his cohorts to death.

Heading up the stairs, I was greeted by three more wheelchair maniacs. Thankfully none of them sported a flamethrower or I'd have been screwed in the tight quarters: instead they unloaded gunfire at me and I was forced to juke, jump and scuttle out of the way. A bullet to the head stunned one, followed with a life-ending slice. Rinse and repeat. Up here on the second floor were more coffins, further tools befitting an Edwardian embalmer (or butcher) hanging from the ceiling. The floor was slatted, and I realized the previous floor had been as well. I supposed it was to let blood drip down? Maybe there was some method of collection, considering how obsessed Yharnam was with blood.

I stepped outside and was instantly forced to snap backward in my best *Matrix* as a bullet flew past my face. Ah, right. I'd forgotten about the two assholes outside. I straightened up and sprang forward, catching the standing man by the ankle and using him to bat his chair-bound comrade off the walkway. I threw my living bludgeon to his death next.

Heavy footfalls drew my attention and I wished I'd held on to my human club. A huntsman's assistant came around the tower and sputtered at me through missing teeth. The creatures weren't terribly articulate but could at least manage to enunciate "Die!" as they charged you.

"I've had a bad day," I said simply, waiting for the assistant to close the distance. He raised his arms and I fired, catching him off-balance. My hand plunged into his chest, claws rending his organs asunder. I'd learned from the mad huntress in that jail: before I wrenched the assistant off my arm, I maneuvered it so the force would send it toppling from the tower. If it hadn't been killed by my claws, the fall would finish the job.

I scaled a ladder, feeling very nervous that the wind would carry me away, and made it to the topmost level of the tower. All that remained above was the roof. I entered inside and was confronted by a combination I really hadn't wanted to see. A huntsman's assistant and a wheelchair-man with a flamethrower.

In trying to juke out of the fire's path I got clotheslined by the assistant and then it stomped on me as I burned.

(BREAK)

The second time I scaled the tower, I made sure to shoot the old man in the face before he could pull the trigger on his flamesprayer. The assistant still got a good hit in my side as I went to kill the fire-spitter, but that could be fixed with a blood vial. It turned out I didn't even need that, as finishing him off with a claw to the heart drew enough blood to fix my wounds.

This room was also full of coffins: I had no idea how they moved the coffins between floors, but considering that this tower shouldn't exist I figured the logistics wouldn't make sense no matter how I looked at it.

The only other exit led further upward. The sides of the little staircase were loaded with votive candles and the walls were embossed with religious iconography. At the top was a massive pair of golden doors. I placed my hands on them to push them open and immediately felt uncomfortable. I felt frightened, sickened, drowning in sorrow. Worse still, they wouldn't open. I pulled my hands away from the offensive metal and checked: yep, there was a keyhole, and the stinkhorn key didn't fit. I took a few seconds to stabilize my breathing and then turned around. Either Gehrman expected me to already have the key, or what he wanted me to see was in fact down the broken walkway.

Upon descending the walkway, I discovered it led to a massive interior that descended for stories – back into the ground beside Oedon Chapel, and probably below. The wooden platforms that had made up the floors in here were devastated, most of them gone. In the dim light I saw an elegant set of double doors set in the wall about halfway down. I might have been able to make it normally, but I didn't trust it. I withdrew one of the Bold Marks I'd received from Eileen the Crow and held it to my forehead, eyes fluttering closed. I awakened within the Dream to retrieve and fortify a new weapon which would, hopefully, make the difference.

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A quick little fight through the base floor of the tower and I returned to the lower rungs with my new weapon. The threaded cane hung loose in my hand, swaying lightly in its whip form. I will deny until my dying day that I was humming the *Indiana Jones* theme under my breath. "Let's see if this'll actually work..."

I swung the whip and cracked it forward, using my wrist to add additional leverage and spin to the strike. It looped around the nearby beam and snapped tight. I gave it a couple tugs to satisfy myself that it was stable, then grabbed the cane's handle with both hands to support myself, and swung across. The harder part was detaching the whip: it took me several minutes of frustration to successfully undulate the thing into untying from the beam.

A few more goes of this (and copious swearing when the whip refused to come loose for minutes on end), and I found myself at the massive doors. They were beautiful, carved with symbols I couldn't recognize, but somehow instinctively I knew this was a place of protection, a place where the strong gathered to arm themselves and defend the weak. I placed my hands on the doors and pushed.

I stepped onto familiar cobblestones. My eyes glanced across wilted flower patches and wrought-iron fencing, my gaze sweeping up to the small cabin ahead. This...this was the workshop. This was the workshop from the Dream!

I jogged to the edge of the area, looking out at Yharnam rather than the infinite fog interspersed with strange stone columns. Looking down, I saw areas I'd previously trod. There had been no tower beside me, no workshop above me. I didn't understand any of this. There were no gravestones that I could see, just grass. As I approached the workshop, I saw Doll slumped beside the garden wall she favored. I ran up to her to find her unmoving, eyes blank. It was like the first time I'd seen her in the Dream.

I took her hands. "Doll? Doll, are you there? C'mon, talk to me..." I jostled her and her structure rattled. Her head lolled slightly to the side. I could feel no consciousness within this. I wanted to shove it away but my care for Doll kept me from doing something so violent. I set the lifeless model down against the garden wall once again. My gaze was now drawn to the chest where the birdbath was in the Dream. It was another huge, reinforced thing. I approached it cautiously and opened it, finding a set of clothes. They were the same gentle burgundy and black, accented with white lace. This was another set of Doll's clothes, identical to the set worn by this lifeless doll and Doll in the Dream. Beautifully sewn, every detail in perfect place, I could feel the love that had been poured into creating these clothes. Whoever had created them had loved their recipient very much. As before, the little ones rose up to take the clothes for me. "T-take good care of them," I whispered, and one of the glowing creatures gave me a serious nod before they sank back into the wood of the chest, leaving it empty.

Before I entered the workshop, I circled the place and finally found a grave. A single stone, at the side of the house. I'd seen Gehrman lingering there in the Hunter's Dream... Was this grave important to him in reality? Vegetation had begun to overtake the grave. I pushed ivy aside to read the name, but there was none. Just the Hunter's Mark carved into the stone. Something glinted from the dirt, where there had been nothing before. My first reaction was to draw my pistol, then I noticed it was a bone. A single arm bone, the humerus if I wasn't mistaken, protruding from the dirt. I don't know what compelled me to reach down and touch it, but before I knew what I was doing I'd closed my hand around the off-white protrusion.

*So different, yet an instant connection. They always enjoyed operations together. In-jokes and stories shared, secret smiles by firelight. They were never to be, nobility and a dirt-born autodidact. Over time, it began to wear on her. He could see her tired expression when she thought he wasn't looking. Then she'd smile, putting on a brave face for him. He didn't know how to bring it up. He never knew what to say.*

I jerked back to myself. I could feel my eyes were wet with tears, saddened for loss on behalf of someone I didn't know. I was standing straight, the bone in my hands. As morbid as it seemed, the bone felt deeply important and so I slipped it into a pouch for storage. I returned to the front doors and opened them: they'd been slightly ajar so it wasn't much effort. There were no stacks of books, but the rest of the place was frighteningly similar to the workshop I'd come to know. The various desks were in the same place but devoid of any tools. Lying on a white cloth was a coil of *something* that made me deeply uncomfortable. I decided to save that for last in case it woke something nasty and I needed to run for it. I circled around the rather cramped area to something that glittered on one of the recessed shelves. Lying there, slightly dusty but otherwise in an impeccable state, was a gold-bronze hair ornament – little comb tines to help it stay in place. I picked it up.

*He found the body and collapsed into her lap, weeping in despair. She was so cold, so empty. All of the beauty and vibrance was gone. Worse still, her face was frozen in that tired, sad expression that she had always done her best to keep hidden from him. He had never been able to give her the gift he'd scrimped and saved to acquire. He had no way of knowing if she'd ever understood his love for her.*

I looked down in awe at the ornament. It had been intended as a gift, a courtly-love present to show his devotion to someone with whom he could never truly be. That was a tragedy, one that tugged at my heartstrings. He'd found the love of his life dead, as well... I looked down at the ornament, and something told me it would look best in gray or white hair. In that moment I understood Doll and Gehrman's words about not being ready to know certain things. I had suppositions, certainly, but I didn't think I was ready to ask and have them confirmed – and I was all but sure that they would be confirmed.

I moved back to the desk with the small white sheet, to look at what rested upon it. It was something dried, organic. A withered cord, covered in... Oh my god, were those eyes!? They barely protruded but they were decidedly of a different texture than the mottled flesh around them, the eyes shaped rather like a goat's. Or maybe a cuttlefish. I reached down, thumb and forefinger extended to gingerly pick up an examine this thing.

*Fear. Panic. Run away! Don't touch it! Don't look at it! It will change you! It will consume you! You will never be the same! Run! Run now! Don't look back!*

I didn't realize I was running until my hand snapped out on instinct, winding the whip around another beam to let me swing lower. A couple more broken flights and I was back on solid stone ground, some of the intricate relief on the floor broken up by shattered stone supports that had fallen from upper levels.

A heaving, bestial breath drew my attention: from a shadowed section of the tower stepped the closest thing to Satan I'd ever seen. Its head was that of a fanged goat, ears sticking out from the sides, two coiling horns above it: the perfect pentagram silhouette. In its hands danced flames, and the creature approached on two long legs. Its limbs were spindly and long hair shagged around it.

“What the fuck are you!?” I didn't give it the chance to respond. Slipping back into my hunter's stance and behavior, silencing my voice, I slammed into it shoulder-first to throw it off-balance and hopefully halt its calling of fire. Thankfully this thing wasn't as powerful as I'd expect the Devil to be, as it fell after a few dozen savage slices. I gripped its fur, crawled along its tall and lanky body, hacked into it again and again until it collapsed and its chest finally heaved its last breaths. I almost didn't want its echoes: I was afraid of what they'd do to me.

The doors at the bottom of the tower opened into Cathedral Ward, an area I could have sworn I'd been through before, and likewise I could swear that there had never been a tower here. I recalled this had just been another building. Were my memories wrong? Had this tower appeared here? Or had I somehow been unable to see it before? I made my way to the nearest lantern and returned to the Dream.

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Doll wasn't at the garden wall. I looked around for her and found her at the very gravestone where I'd found the bone in the old workshop. Her eyes were closed, her hands folded in prayer. I approached and froze when she dipped her head, lips slightly moving. “O Flora,” she whispered, “of the Moon, of the Dream... O little ones, O fleeting will of the ancients... Let Taylor be safe, let her find comfort. And let this Dream, her captor, foretell a pleasant awakening. Let it be, one day, a fond, distant memory...”

I couldn't say whether she had waited until I drew near to utter her prayer. But, as she didn't stand up and seemed to continue praying, I wasn't going to interrupt her. Instead I went back to the front door and entered the workshop to find Gehrman. He saw my severe expression and gave me a sad grimace of his own. "So you found it, then."

"Was your workshop always there, hanging in midair off the side of a tower?"

He quirked a brow and then shook his head. "Not in the least. Sounds like the damn city's gone loopy again."

"You were the one who found her," I said, and his eyes shot open wide. "Her face was set in that same expression she always tried to hide..."

Gehrman hiccuped, his shoulders shaking and he fought back tears. "You're a mite more insightful than most, lass."

"That's why you can't stand Doll." I didn't phrase it as a question. He nodded severely, looking a bit ashamed. I withdrew the comb and watched a single tear run down his long face, glistening in the pale moonlight. "Do you want this?"

He shook his head, almost violently. "It brought me nothing but sorrow, bad memories and worse decisions. If you want to keep it for your own ends, I won't stop you."

It was my turn for a severe nod. "What was her name?"

Gehrman swallowed heavily, looking me in the eyes. I couldn't stop my own tears from gently flowing as I felt his sorrow. "...Maria. Lady Maria of Cainhurst."

Neither of us said anything more. I departed and found Doll back at the garden wall. She held out her hands wordlessly and I stepped closer, letting her wrap me in a hug. I sobbed in her arms and she wiped my tears when I was done. I looked up into Doll's pale eyes and forced a smile. "I...I have something for you."

Her own smile was even more gentle and tentative than usual, but when I placed the comb in her hands her eyes went wide – even more so than when I'd told her my name. Her mouth fell open and she took in a sharp breath. Her hands trembled. I was frightened that I'd done something horribly wrong when finally she spoke in a shuddering voice. "What...what is this?" I could tell immediately she wasn't asking about the ornament. "I cannot remember, not a thing, only... I feel...a yearning. Something I have never felt before. What is happening to me?" She looked up as I was still frightened, and I saw her face curling into a melancholic smile as a single tear began to descend her cheek. "Taylor, tell me... Could this be joy?"

I enveloped her in my arms as she let out a tender sigh, and wiped away her tear. It crystalized in my hand, glittering like a diamond. Or like... I looked up toward the moon as I held Doll. It was huge and yellow rather than the glittering opalescence it so often showed here. I gently walked Doll over to sit at the garden wall as she experienced emotions that were most likely foreign to her. I had no idea what to do, so I did what I could.