

The structure past the clock tower was almost certainly a cathedral. It held a lot in common with Oedon Chapel, the ornate tiling and sculpting, but once again instead of eldritch monstrosities the statues depicted beautiful robed men and women, saints or angels. Of course there were more beasts, roaming around in the rafters, hiding around corners. I hacked through them when they chased me down, heading out onto a balcony that overlooked the central chapel. What I saw there...

At first I couldn't explain it. A massive beast, partly flayed, was crucified and hanging from some broken rafters. The more humanoid beasts of Old Yharnam gathered around the corpse in a circle. What were they doing? Why were they here? Then it hit me: these creatures, formerly people...they were here to worship. They were paying reverence to the beast corpse, honoring it like the central figure of their religion. They were once people and not only had they embraced beasthood, whatever remained of their humanity had them worshiping a symbol of beastliness, a symbol of what they could become, something to which they aspired.

I bit my lip hard enough to draw blood. My breath was coming in great storming heaves. I was overwhelmed with rage, with burning hatred. These creatures were praising monstrosity, the capacity to harm and kill their loved ones, to slaughter innocents and scuffle in the dirt and mud and viscera. I let out some sort of a noise, a horrific rumble from deep in my throat which I hadn't even thought a human being capable of making. The worshipping beasts turned to stare up at me.

The next thing I knew, I was standing in the central chapel. My body was shaking violently from adrenaline, still gasping for air, my body and face and my surroundings absolutely slathered with blood. I'd killed them all. My clothes were undamaged, but I'd found that – bizarrely enough – my clothing repaired itself when I absorbed blood to restore my wounds. I'd almost certainly taken damage in the preceding fight. What worried me was that *I couldn't remember it*. Had I been so furious that my conscious mind had shut down, putting me entirely into an animalistic fighting state?

And why had I been so angry?

Well, no, that answer came easily once I took a moment to consider it. My home was falling apart. People died every day. The world was coming unspooled, monsters obliterating cities while petty gangs tore at the scraps. And it was all even worse in Brockton Bay. The defeat of the Marquis was supposed to have been a new leaf in our history, an end to the Bad Old Days. But if anything, the city was even worse. At least when the Marche had been around the gangs held to a gentlemen's agreement and much of the violence was contained. Now we had racial supremacists to the left and right, one side actively attempting ethnic cleansings while the other played on those very acts to encourage unity despite preying primarily on the very demographic they claimed to unite with their sex-slave farms. And in the middle were drug dealers, trash so vile the other two gangs could actually agree on something – even if only on their hatred of the Merchants – that would never have flown in the days when the drug trade was much more heavily regulated by the criminals. The evils back home gloried in their wretchedness, and to see things that were formerly normal people join in that gleeful destruction...it had unleashed something within me.

I just hoped I could keep it contained.

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Old Yharnam went deeper and deeper, now the massive buildings were fully underground and pressing against rough stone ceilings. Was this how it had been, built out from the depths of the earth? Well,

from what Alfred had said, Yharnam was supposedly connected to ancient underground tombs. Had near-literal mole people dug their way out of the dark? Anything was possible in this twisted place, I supposed.

Some of the wolves were even bigger now, the size of pickup trucks or more. They certainly hit like trucks, and I nearly died several times. I used my saw spear to hack at their limbs, their joints, rip them apart. Once a wolf lost a leg, due to how their bodies scuttled and flopped they were much easier to deal with. I ripped open throats, severed spines, readied myself for whatever would come next. Because I still hadn't found the Church of the Good Chalice. And something told me that whatever guarded my prize would be far worse than anything else I'd found in Old Yharnam.

Upon finding a lantern, I opted to return to the Dream and consult with Gehrman.

"Some of their claws burn, eh? Even after all this time? I suppose ashen-blood lingers," he commented.

"I don't have to worry about that, do I? Getting infected?"

He shook his head. "No hunter who fought ashen-blood beasts ever came down with the sickness. Well, I can't say no hunter and be entirely honest, but it takes long-term exposure. I'm talking about years of living among the plague."

I showed him the tablets. "And these help deal with it? I found them in an old kitchen."

"Aye, with those you're safe as houses. Antidote, we took to calling 'em in our line of work. Very strong antitoxic properties. If you get poisoned, a tablet or two will flush your system. I think the white things collect them, so you can check the birdbath if your supply gets low."

I decided to ask him something directly. "Gehrman, do you know what's in the Church of the Good Chalice? What the Healing Church would want so badly?"

The wheelchair-bound man shrugged. "Before the Hunts I spent a lot of time out of the city but my guess is that the name is the answer: it likely contains a Dungeon Chalice." At my expression of total incomprehension, Gehrman shook his head. "Damnation, you've not heard of them in your time here?" He took a breath. "There's no way I can easily explain it to you, because they defy explanation. With the right ritual, you can travel to another place, a time in history. We call them Dungeons because they have universally been places of pain, violence and suffering. But you can learn much, find blood gems that don't appear in Yharnam, discover ancient artifacts. They're exceedingly valued by the Church as part of Laurence's legacy."

I didn't press him on that, despite recognizing the name Laurence. Why would Gehrman's friend have a legacy important to the Healing Church? Well, I opted to go behind his back and ask Doll.

"Laurence was the first Vicar," she explained, "the founder of the Healing Church."

That floored me. Gehrman's old friend founded Yharnam's healing church? How old was he? How long had he been here? The questions only continued to pile on and I had no satisfactory answers. Alfred had mentioned a Vicar Laurence but I'd had no idea it was the same one as Gehrman's friend. Did this mean that Gehrman was familiar with this Byrgenwerth place as well?

Before leaving, I took the time to stock up on antidote tablets and got Doll's help fortifying myself further.

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The final trek to the Church of the Good Chalice wasn't as bad as the preceding journey. Certainly it wasn't pleasant, with beasts leaping out of smoke to attack, but compared to freightcar-sized wolves the smaller ones just didn't pose that much of a threat.

Upon pushing open the doors to the smaller church, I was assaulted by a horrific stench. It was a combination of rotting meat and wet dog, with the sickly sweet undercurrent of some kind of overripe fruit. Then I saw the monster within. Horribly emaciated, flayed and wearing its own ravaged skin as a cloak, the same kind of beast as in the other church. Were these some sort of devils that lived to profane churches? It paced before an altar upon which something rested, snuffling and scrabbling at wrecked stone floors. The church was set with many stone columns to support the roof, the central channel wide open.

The beast whirled around and saw me somehow, throwing back its head and rearing up on its hind legs, letting out a screeching bellow that caused the flayed skin to flap. Saliva and sweat and slime flew everywhere scattering that sickly rotting-fruit stench all over the church. It came storming at me, practically walking on its elbows as its gangly arms continually lashed out at me, punching and clawing and grabbing and smashing. I dodged and wove all around it, taking minor blows, already beginning to feel sick. My veins were burning: was this thing *secreting* ashen-blood poison!?

I slashed and danced back, downing a tablet and quickly feeling the pain fade. This was now a battle of attrition: I needed to finish it off before I ran out of antidote and dropped dead. I couldn't wait it out, kill the beast with a thousand cuts. I charged back in, spearing my weapon at the monster's ribs. I struck true and was rewarded with a backhand so forceful that it ripped me from my spear, leaving the weapon lodged in the beast's side. Thankfully I'd come prepared this time, the saw cleaver resting at my side as a backup.

The flayed monster bled harder as it moved, my saw spear still tearing apart its insides. I kept dodging to the left around a pillar until it lunged and, just as I'd hoped, the handle of my spear caught on the pillar. The serrated head was therefore forced upward and deeper into its ribcage, hopefully tearing apart its organs. The monster screamed and I felt my gorge rise.

Its tattered skin flapped, letting me see the emaciated wolf skull gazing up at me with disturbingly human eyes. Its skin was pulled tight like latex over bone, and a thick maroon haze began filling the air around it. I vomited in my mouth immediately and popped another two tablets, which didn't do much. Somehow the creature was producing so much poison that the tablets couldn't clean my system!

I needed to end it now. Looking at the beast, my mind formulated a plan. As the beast stormed toward me, I met its charge. This wasn't the real world. This was the Dreaming World. Metaphor and meaning could become physical. Hunters killed beasts, using serrated weapons that symbolized the slaughter of these animals. And right now, "I am a hunter!" I screamed, putting all of my focus on the metaphysical concept of being a hunter, killing these monsters to protect the innocent. Both hands gripped the saw cleaver and I brought it up into the flayed beast's elbow, pushing through the joint. I pushed off the ground in a forceful forward leap, shoving with my arms, every muscle in my body focused on a single point. I moved through the beast's arm, which fell to the ground with a wet thud.

It whirled and gave chase, now stumbling with only one full arm but not stopping. It had to rear up a bit now in order to attack and not lose momentum by faceplanting into the floor. I briefly holstered the cleaver and waited for it to rear up again, then once again put all my force into a *leap*. I caught it by the flapping skin and pulled hard, yanking it further and further backward until I threw it fully onto its back! One hand kept a grip on the skin, trying to keep the monster from righting itself, while the other drew the cleaver. I approached from the side that lacked a claw and brought the cleaver down, opening its throat. I slashed and sawed again and again, wanting to make sure it'd bleed out. I grabbed at the saw spear as I retreated, trying to pry the weapon free, but only wrenched it around more. Well, I'd hoped to open another gushing wound but hopefully the sheer internal damage I was doing would count for something.

I leapt out of the beast's aura, popping another tablet and a blood vial as I felt the burning within my veins stop. It finally righted itself and gave chase, and after two laps around the church I began to worry that I'd miscalculated and it was somehow living through all of the exsanguination. But no, it was running solely on spite. When my spear's handle once again caught on a pillar, the creature let out one last shriek and collapsed dead. Once the haze of violet-red subsided, I ripped my spear from its ribcage and moved to claim my prize.

What I suspected to be the Good Chalice still rested on the altar, atop a stained silk sheet. It was a small thing, hewn of polished stone, and reminded me of the Holy Grail from *Last Crusade* if it'd been made of stone rather than wood. I picked it up, feeling no special supernatural effect, and tucked it into a pocket.

I opted to take the Dream Express out of Old Yharnam, rather than making my way back through that madness.

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Before returning to Oedon Chapel to regroup, however, I checked in on Siobhan's house. Whatever had screamed like that was hopefully gone, but I wanted to know just what had happened.

Her home had been turned over, practically upside-down, but it definitely looked to be the work of some kind of looter rather than a beast. No claw marks and there weren't signs of monstrous strength, but rather things were flipped by someone running on adrenaline and overtaxing their body. I eventually decided I wasn't going to get any answers and headed back toward the Chapel, passing many little houses. One of them had a dish of incense burning, and the acid tongue of an old woman was hurling insults at a corrupted dog that scratched and barked at her door.

I pegged the animal in the head with a bullet and approached the door. "I know guns like those," the voice creaked from within. I could see the shadow of a classic old lady, with the frilled mushroom-looking nightcap, through the barred window. "You're a hunter, aren't you? And not like those clumsy fools who take up a pitchfork and think it makes them a hero. I can't even hear your steps."

"I guess I'm a hunter," I replied. "By necessity rather than any search for glory, though."

Her already bitter-sounding voice turned outright hostile. "And an outsider, at that. This is all your kind's fault, you know! Bringing your diseases here and spreading them: something the Church couldn't cure took hold and now we're all doomed! Well, Miss Hunter," she condescended, "it's your

job to protect people like me, and make up for what your sort unleashed. It's clear my incense isn't working anymore – you'd best have some sort of home base that can hold someone like me!"

I wanted to leave her there. She knew nothing about me but was already making snap judgments, and saying them aloud to my face. But I wouldn't be able to live with myself if I just abandoned her: simply being a bigot wasn't worth a death sentence. "I'm headed there now. I'll take you, but I'm warning you now: I have a scared girl there who's just lost her parents and a kindhearted cripple. If you hurt them, if you make them feel bad or rant against them, I'm dragging you outside and locking the door behind you. I'm here to keep everyone safe, and I won't let you harm or chase away other survivors." There was fire in my voice, a firmness I hadn't known I still possessed. I could retaliate but this was the first time I'd really laid down the law.

There was a pause for a good period of time, then a wheezing laugh. "At least someone still takes her job seriously. Fine, foreign girl. If you're keeping people safe I'll still my tongue best I can." Her door began to rattle as she undid multiple locks, stepping out with the help of a cane. She was ancient, eyes suffering the early stages of cataracts, skin blotched with liver spots and as thin as paper. Her body was stooped so far forward that with that cane holding her up she looked like a lower-case h. "Well?" she snapped. "Let's get going before I keel over from old age just standing here."