

The town bell chimes once in the darkness as the city sleeps. A rat scurries from an alley with its prize of a meaty bone between its jaws and runs across the path. Pale moonlight shines down onto the cobblestone and for a brief second the rat halts to check its surroundings. Its ears prick up as a light noise in the distance slowly pierces the deafening silence.

Footsteps.

The rat races off into one of thousands of dark nooks in the city of Herostone, once a prosperous trading port on the coast, now a modern ruin. Piracy and gambling had run the last decent citizens further towards the borders of Newgate, leaving a husk of a town behind. Squatters, thieves, and other deviants now call this place home, giving new irony to its name of Herostone.

The footsteps grow louder, echoed across the hard stone walls of the street. A golden glow ebbs from the lean figure walking slowly into the darkness. The man is tall with a trim well cut beard and hair, the white robes hanging loosely from his gaunt frame are adorned in a runic alphabet and symbols stitched in gold. A pendant hangs from his neck in the shape of an open palm with a single eyeball in the centre.

It is the symbol of the ever-watching hand of balance. A symbol of The Pious.

A centuries old cult, in contradiction to their name, care not for the religions or beliefs of others, and serve only the higher power of celestial balance. They worship no gods, they ask for no charity, they exist only to seek out chaos and bring it to order. Their agents are taught from birth that their lives are meaningless, that by nature the world is constantly dominated by the workings of chaos. And only by rooting out all sources can order truly strive.

The Pious don't deal in notions of good and evil, nor the petty disputes between the city-states of Newgate and Ardenhall. Man will always kill man. What The Pious ensure happens is that the balance of power is always level. Men with too much power, as well intentioned as they are, will always fall to the agents of chaos.

The Pious man walks slowly through the middle of the road, a metal ball hangs from a chain from his hands, the ball is made from solid steel, and has similar symbols to his robes carved out, light emits from the carvings and shines out into the black. He lets it swing back and forth, throwing its light across the walls of the abandoned houses, and into the broken windows he walks past.

He comes to a door of a large house, it appears not unlike any other door in the street, but the man knows he has come to the right place. As quickly and quietly as a night's wind, he swings the chain over his shoulder in a large arc, sending the steel ball over his body and straight into the door, where it smashes through the aged wood, sending splinters in all directions. Still holding onto the chain he wraps it once around his arm and firms his grip. The man speaks a few words under his breath in an ancient language and the chain reacts to his command. On the other side of the door the metal ball shudders for a moment, then several large spikes extend out.

The man shifts all his back and pulls on the chain, the ball attempts to return back through the hole it made in the door, but the spikes catch on the wood. There is a split second of resistance, but with a grim determination The Pious man grunts, and the door is flung over his body, ripped from the frame. The spikes shoot back into the steel ball, broken fragments of wood scatter loudly across the street, the ball returns to his side, swinging on the chain inches of the ground. The man stands at the door frame and bellows a command into the black space that was once the door.

“This building is a den of murder, assault, and chaos. You have all been deemed unworthy of life,

and will be purged.”

Inside the house the man can hear stirring around him, his forced entry has awoken the inhabitants, footsteps and clashing of metal can be heard as people begin to arm themselves to face their fate. The Pious deal only in absolutes, once an area has been designated for purging, only on extremely rare occasions is this decision overturned. The house the man came to this night was where a refugee family from Ardenhall found themselves after hours of travelling away from the war. Brigands followed the folk and slaughtered them for a trivial amount of gold. The Herostone authorities, bloated with corruption and under-staffing, did little to investigate the murders, and those who committed this foul deed had the gall to turn the large abandoned house into their own. Now an agent of order stood outside what once was a door, and he began to slowly swing the chain of his steel ball in a high arcing circle at his side. Slowly, he took a step into the darkness.

The house had once been a somewhat upscale mansion, with large open rooms and a central staircase leading to the second floor, abandoned by its owners who moved on to the greener, more peaceful lands of Newgate, the house had fallen into disrepair and was now serving as a small shanty town for thieves, rapists, and murderers. Several of which appear to the Pious Man as he walks into the centre of the large entry room.

The sight of an Agent of Order is an uncommon one, and few who see them live to spread the word, so the gang of ruffians have little knowledge of the peculiar man who forced the door apart from the frame.

“Look at this guy, is he a priest?”

“What kind of priest breaks down doors during the dead hours?”

The Pious man finds himself surrounded by at least eight individuals, armed with swords, knives, axes. One even loading a crossbow from a balcony on the second floor. Several of the men are holding torches, casting a dancing firelight around the room. The man continued to swing the ball on the chain, which is still glowing dull in the dim light. He begins to speak in the same dialect he had in front of the door, the chain starts to swing faster, and he takes a slow footstep towards the men.

The brigands, still unsure who this man was in front of them, have grown tired of his unusual display, “let's kill this fool!” one of the larger men shouts as he raises his axe to attack. He takes a step towards the man and drops to the floor. The speed at which the chained ball flew was uncanny, with a simple turn of his body The Pious man sent the heavy steel mass into the left shin of the attacker, shattering bone, stopping his advance before it even begun.

The room falls silent, only the weak whimpering of the man on the ground and the gentle sound of wooshing from the chain remains. The Pious man does not wait for a second assault.

He steps at an angle towards two thieves, and extends his arm with the chain and breathes a command, the ball flies directly into the face of one of them, then bounces into the sword-arm of the other, the crack of bones is heard and a clash of metal as the sword drops to the ground. Three men run at him from different directions. Despite wearing large robes the man moves quick, inhumanly quick. The chain wraps around the legs of one of the men, and the ball hits another in the side. The third attacker is upon him, and brings down his sword with all his strength. Sparks fly across the room as sound of metal on metal echoes around the building. The murderer had cut through the robes on the man's arm, only to find that the chain he has been swinging is wrapped tightly around his body, acting as armour for the Pious man. The attacker reels back momentarily, but recovers,

and decides his second blow will be aimed directly at the uncovered face of the strange robed man. But he stops mid swing and drops his sword. Slowly reaching to the back of his head his fingers touch the extended spikes of the steel ball, embedded into the base of his skull. The Pious man utters another command and the spikes retract once more, both steel ball and boned skull drop to the ground, but only the skull hits the hard stone floor.

A “thunk” of a bowstring is heard, and a crossbow bolt flies into the man's shoulder, piercing through his robe and chained armour. He does not utter a word as he takes to one knee on the ground, the blow from the bolt stunning him, the steel ball that had always been inches from the ground in a display of skill and balance drops to the floor and rolls. Four men come down to the ground floor and surround the robed man. Who begins to speak passages from some unwritten book.

“Order is my shield, death is my fate.”

The men look at each other. “Who is this guy?”

“To die is to give unto Chaos. His wounds are my test, my gate.” He wraps his hand around the bolt lodged into his shoulder. “All men will die, and balance will return.”

The man with the crossbow lifts his weapon and aims a bolt at his face. “Some men die quicker than others...”

The man looks into his eyes and smiles “Order is my shield, Chaos is my sword.”

The robes of the man ripple in an unnatural pattern, his eyes roll back into his head and his mouth opens wide, letting out a dreadful guttural croak, his skin begins to blacken, and the symbols on his robes lose their golden glow and change to a red hue. Chains shoot out from his body in all directions, piercing through wood, flesh, bone, and steel, and root into the building's walls. Three of the men around him perish, one with a chain in his neck, another with two in his chest, and the third with a chain through his stomach, intestines dragged along the length of the chain out his back and against the wall.

The chains retract into the man's body but remain lodged in the walls, lifting him into the centre of the room, 8 feet into the air. The crossbowman is lifted as well, chains through his shoulders and thighs. His is lifted up to the Pious man, until they are face to face with each other. The agent of order, and chaos, balanced as one, his eyes roll forward and focus on the crossbowman.

“You are unworthy.”