

74 – Gravelight

I was trying to half-meditate as I sat on an improvised chair made from bits of a torn-up market stall, while flicking through pages of my Encyclopaedia.

“What are you looking for?” Armen asked.

I’m thinking that it could be useful to summon an entity of light and contain it within an object to produce something like a flashlight.

“I can produce light,” he commented. **“It is a Priest ability.”**

I didn’t know that, I replied, but that would still require my energy as upkeep.

Suddenly Seramosa appeared beside me. She had stayed with Elye at the Guild Hall, but was still able to listen in on my thoughts.

“Let me set ablaze the darkness!”

Absolutely not. The inside has a wooden floor and furniture, and the trapped people are on the top floor, which means that they would probably die of oxygen starvation before we could get to them.

“We could use a ladder to reach the windows up there, and evacuate them first,” Armen countered.

I don’t know if the hostages are only on the top floor, so I won’t unleash Sera unless I’m absolutely certain that she won’t kill the people we’re trying to save.

My fingers paused on a page of the tome. I’d found something close to what I was seeking. It was a sub-type of a trickster and illusionist Elemental called a Faerie Light, which used its powers of light to lead people astray in forests and mountain passes.

“A ‘Gravelight’?” Armen asked. **“Why this one?”**

“It seems to have more utility than just this particular instance,” I said. “It’s said to be a benevolent guiding spirit, so the opposite of a Faerie Light in a lot of ways.”

Its depiction was a stylised ball with dots for eyes and a little smile. I recognised the drawing as belonging to Owl. The description was brief, but said that it was an entity of light, formed from the positive energies released by the passing of a great person, hence why they could be found naturally in some cemeteries and tombs. It said that it was capable of dispelling optical illusions and guiding lost souls led astray, whatever that meant, not to mention possessing the ability to create light from its body.

If not for the summoning requirements, it would’ve been an instant pick. Unfortunately, one of the requirements was a Consecrated Corpse, which seemed to lead me towards something illegal, like grave-robbing. Additionally, the invoker had to test their morals against the summoned Gravelight, as it refused to be called upon by a person who was not virtuous. With how my life had been going as of late, it didn’t seem a sure thing. I wondered why Owl was the one who had written this entry, as I was fairly sure he was not a virtuous man, although perhaps he had once been?

Seramosa had left my side, perhaps returning to find Elye and watch over her, while Armen stood silently in front of where I sat, seeming to contemplate the matter.

“Which object would you confine it to? Would such a being even allow itself to be confined?”

I’d like it to be something easy to bring with me, like a piece of jewellery or a small object like the whistle.

“One of the collapsed stalls nearby peddled trinkets.”

Are you suggesting I steal?

“You could leave some coins behind.”

I thought about it, then nodded. I had an idea for where and how to procure the Consecrated Corpse as well, though I still had to wonder if it was a virtuous act I was about to undertake.

After getting up from my seat, I started making my way back towards the marketplace I’d travelled through an hour prior. The Branch Master noticed me leaving and came running up to me, panic on his face.

“Are you leaving!?”

“I need to perform a summoning to aid in this exorcism,” I told him. “I doubt it would be received well if I performed it in front of the injured. After all, such rituals tend to be macabre, even at the best of times.”

I saw the shift in his aura as he took in my words. Dread, disgust, and acceptance, all of these flowed through his spirit one after another. “What about the torches you wanted?” he asked.

“If you can acquire enough for me to light up the entrance inside the Barracks, then that will suffice.”

He nodded and returned to his guard escort with these requirements, while they made a great effort of not staring daggers while I could see them, but I could still tell from their auras that they found me repugnant for demanding compensation in the middle of a crisis.

When I reached the marketplace, the sights and smells assailed me. I’d done my best to ignore them as we passed through, but now that I was actively searching for what Armen had seen, I was forced to confront the massacred remains of people and the incredible loss of life. The children who lay amongst the dead were the hardest to bear looking at.

A single wizened Priest was walking past each of the bodies, performing rudimentary rites like the Rite of Obsequy, while laying a pure-white cloth over the dead faces and sprinkling them with drops of holy water from a large jug carried around his shoulder on a rope string.

I approached the man, who must’ve been in his sixties. He seemed the sort that had stayed with the Church and not sought personal accomplishments and accolades like those in the Adventurers’ Guild. It was a respectable life he had chosen, I thought to myself.

“Would you mind if I help you perform the rites?” I asked him.

He looked up at me, his gaze distant and sorrowful. After a wandering gaze across the many bodies that yet remained for him to bless, he gave me a curt nod. “Do you know the words? I can teach you if you don’t.”

“I know them,” I told him.

“You’re an Exorcist, aren’t you?”

I blinked in surprise that he’d realised, then smile weakly. “That’s right.”

He patted me on the shoulder warmly. The gesture surprised me and also made my chest hurt strangely. It was such a simple thing, but carried great meaning within it, at least to me. Like a show of faith in my abilities and a thanks for my aid.

“**To consecrate a body, you must sanctify it,**” Armen told me.

I thought it was the same as laying them to rest.

“**Most dead are cremated by holy flames, but only those deemed extremely virtuous or saintly are consecrated before interment.**”

I see.

“**Before the ritual, let us aid this man in his work. I will help.**”

I nodded. It hadn’t been part of the original plan, but I thought the Priest might need to take a rest, if he’d been working on laying the dead to rest ever since the fighting had stopped.

I pulled out my Singing Branch and started intoning the Ritual of Obsequy on a family who had died together, their bodies a tangled mess of limbs and blood now.

Armen moved over to some nearby bodies, following suit and starting first with the youngest.

Soon, the old Priest could focus on spreading his holy water and untainted white face-obscuring cloths, as the two of us performed the rituals in his stead. This greatly increased the efficiency of the whole sordid affair, which I thought was probably for the best.

After maybe just shy of an hour, we had lain the nearly hundred dead to rest, leaving the Priest with an impressed and thankful look on his face.

“There are injured by the Guard Barracks who still need help,” I told him.

“I will head there at once,” he replied, patting me on the shoulder before leaving, the jug of holy water he carried now nearly empty.

“**It will not be difficult to argue your virtuousness now,**” Armen told me, when the old man had disappeared around the corner of a nearby building.

“We’ll see,” I replied, “I just hope the time we spent here will not have led to deaths within the Barracks.”

“**Better to go in prepared, than to risk it all and potentially cause more suffering.**”

He didn’t mention that such an approach was what had led to the fiasco at Hearthshire, but I could tell he was insinuating it.

While we’d been blessing the dead, I had found the ruined trinket stall and spotted the object I wanted to use for Containing the spirit of the Gravelight. I returned to the scattered remnants of the stall and knelt to pick up an adjustable silver ring with an opaque stone shaped like a triangle.

I held it up before my familiar. “How much do you think *this* is worth?”

“**Perhaps twenty silver crowns?**”

“I’ll leave thirty then,” I said and pulled out the coins from my coin pouch, leaving them in the same spot I’d taken the ring from.

I fitted it to my left index and squeezed it a bit so it fit my skinny finger. “Question is now, how do I summon the Gravelight directly into the ring?”

“**Does your tome not mention such a thing?**”

“No, it hardly mentions the Contain Spirit ability in the first place.”

“**Perhaps you would make a separate ritual drawing for it and conjoin it with the summoning sigil?**”

I had no idea how to draw something like *that*, so I instead decided to just try and replace the ‘Pact of the Familiar’ part of the invocation with the Binding Litany of Contain Spirit.

While I’d located the object to use, Armen had chosen a body for me to consecrate. I gritted my teeth when I saw that it belonged to a small child. The white cloth on its face fortunately made it a bit easier for me to deal with, as he carefully laid the body before me.

“Before I do this, can you explain to me what exactly the effects of Sanctify are on a human body?”

“The effects depend on whether the person is alive or not,” he answered. **“Sanctify is a purifying spell. If used on someone living, it purifies their blood and flesh, removing contaminants, as well as beneficial elements. I have seen Priests use the ability on themselves, out of some mistaken belief that it would make them holy, and they died from malnutrition a few weeks later as a result.”**

“Wait... so you’re saying it can kill people?”

“Most of the abilities that Otherworlders possess can be utilised for nefarious means.”

I frowned. “And what about on the dead? What effects does it have then?”

“It can serve as a means of embalming, to prevent decay, hence why it is utilised on those deemed important. It is possible that, following my death, my body may have been preserved in such a manner.”

“Because you were a Bishop?”

Armen lowered his head slightly, like a half-nod.

“Alright,” I said, I will start with the consecration then.

With my staff in my left hand and my right palm aimed at the shrouded corpse, I imagined my energy flowing to my arm and condensing in my hand, before spreading out through my charred Ifrit Claw like a golden mist. “Sanctify.”

Each of the corpses had a white sort of faint aura emitting from them, but when my spell connected with the body that Armen had brought, *that* energy became like the billowing smoke I’d seen flow from the Flayed Ones trapped within his Consecration circle.

I held my hand steady while continuing to send energy through it for the spell, until eventually the smoke stopped and the body before me was completely lacking the faint aura of the other dead bodies. It seemed as though the Sanctify was obliterating the aura from the body, leaving a purified husk of nothing behind. The thought was unsettling, so I tried not to focus on it.

With my right middle finger I pushed my Spirit Glasses back up onto the ridge of my nose, before stooping down and pulling out my Blood Chalk, drawing the simple sigil for summoning the Gravelight, right in front of the Consecrated Corpse.

The symbol was a circle with a triangle inside, which had a line bisecting it and two squiggly doodles on each portion of the triangle. After finishing the drawing and checking the linework, I pulled out a handful of Sacred Corpse Ash, sprinkling it directly on the tacky red lines, before taking out one of the candles I’d gotten in Skovslot Enclave to replace my Black Tallow Candle. I placed it in the middle of the bisecting line, even though there was no info on where the candle ought to go.

I stood up, rubbing my lower back and readjusting my glasses again, then took a step back. I tapped the tip of my Singing Branch into the ground and held out my right hand at the summoning sigil.

“Virtuous light. Guide in the dark. Dispeller of illusions. Judge mine heart upon thy scale of virtue and bloom to life within the Consecrated Remains that I offer up to thee. May the virtue that gave thee life become the lantern providing travellers comfort and may wickedness shudder beneath thy glare.”

Immediately the candle melted all the way down, becoming a puddle of sticky tallow, and the linework of Blood Chalk and Sacred Ash was scalded black. I thought I’d been deemed wanting in virtue, until I saw that, true to the words of the invocation, a light emerged from the chest of the consecrated body, slowly rising into the air.

Despite being an entity of pure light, it did not hurt my eyes to stare directly at it. It was a warmly-glowing amorphous sphere of energy, which, unlike Owl’s drawing, did not have a face, eyes, nor mouth. I was momentarily dumbfounded by its manifestation, until Armen took the staff from my hands, reminding me that I hadn’t yet formed a bond with the entity.

I pulled off the ring from my index finger and placed it in my palm, then held out my right hand to the glowing Gravelight.

*I name thee Kōtama, virtuous Gravelight,
Obey mine desire and render thyself to mine design,
Hark mine words and kneel to mine command,
Lest thy service to me is ended,
Kōtama, Guiding Light and Dispeller of Illusions,
Offer me thy entire soul and thy service,
Become one in bond with the ring that I have prepared,
And until thy Pact be dissolved,
Obey mine whims and wishes.*

The orb of golden energy shrunk and disappeared, as though sucked into the palm of my Ifrit Claw, before moving through my body and filling it with a deeply-familiar warmth, ending up within the opaque triangular stone of the ring in my left palm, which shone brightly as the Binding took hold.

Armen looked at me and the ring that now housed a Gravelight. **“Impressive,”** he said.

“I had to improvise and perform the naming within the Binding Litany, but it seems to have worked.”

“This name, ‘Kōtama’, what does it mean?”

“It is a way to pronounce a combination of two symbols in my native language, which mean ‘Light’ and ‘Orb’.”

“Will that not be possible for someone like Leopold to Banish?”

“I do not believe so. It is not a normal translation and thus it should be impossible to brute-force with an ‘Omniglot Banishment’.”

I pulled out my Guild Card to see how the new item appeared on there. Unlike the Bone Whistle, the ring was armour-adjacent and thus might be described by the system’s strange rules as a Possessed Weapon.

<i>‘TEMARU RYUUTA’</i>			
ROLE: <i>Exorcist</i>		RANK: <i>Seeker</i>	
GENDER: <i>Male</i>		AGE: <i>18</i>	
ACUMEN: <i>B</i>	DEXTERITY: <i>E</i>	INTELLIGENCE: <i>B</i>	LUCK: <i>F</i>
PACT: <i>A</i>	SOUL: <i>S</i>	STRENGTH: <i>E</i>	VITALITY: <i>F</i>
ABILITIES <i>‘Omniglot’</i> <i>‘Exorcist II’</i> <i>‘Curse of the Excruciating Bond’</i> <i>‘Ifrit Claw Wielder’</i> <i>‘Armour-Bound Wraith Wielder’</i> <i>‘Gravelight Ring Wielder’</i> <i>‘Pact (????)’</i> <i>‘Pact (????)’</i> <i>‘Pact (Observer)’</i>			

Sure enough, it was listed on there with a simple default name.

To test my new ring, I slid it back over my index finger, then said, “Unleash Gravelight Ring.”

The opaque stone intensified its subdued glow, until it became like a field around me where everything was lit up by an omnipresent golden light, removing all shadows.

I smiled in satisfaction. “*This* will be perfect against the Haunter in the Barracks. And hopefully I won’t need Sinner’s Ash for dispelling illusions ever again.”

“We had best return then, they are likely to believe you have fled.”

I scoffed, “I doubt they would assume something like *that*.”