

This is a cold opening scene I wrote during pre-production on *Sword of Atlas* while we were still exploring potential characters, plots, and world composition. *Sword of Atlas* is a Tactics RPG.

Scene starts mid-ritual within the cold belly of a cathedral. Guin stands in rank with the congregation as the priest fiddles with incense and dusty tomes.

PRIEST

My flock, there is an evil growing in our land. This evil wants to sow strife in our community. It wants to turn our devotion from the gods to the lords of vapid spectacle and unearned gluttony. It wants to tear our children from their mothers' breasts and sever the threads that bind us. The Lords of Industry and their blasphemous magic want to turn us into mindless tools for their greed...

The room grows darker as the priest speaks until the light shines only on him. Wind swirls within the cathedral and a palpable energy vibrates through the stone walls.

PRIEST

WE WILL NOT ABIDE THIS! They've brought their foreign hordes into our dear Arthania and they've corrupted our youth for too long. The time has come to fight fire...with fire.

The priest conducts some eldritch gestures and slams his hand down on his sacred text. A wave of light blasts in every direction and the screen fades to black. After a moment, Guin comes to.

GUIN

Ugh...What happened?

Guin looks around and sees the cathedral in ruins. Bodies lie beneath rubble and fire consumes the house of worship. The player takes control and is given one path out, blocked by a crazed member of the congregation.

GUIN

Madame? What's wrong? Are you okay?

Madame gives a growl and advances toward the player with a blunt object and deadly intent. The player is given a melee combat tutorial and they knock the enemy unconscious.

GUIN

Something's not right! I need to get out of here! I need to get to Mother's village and check on her!

The player exits the ruined cathedral and encounters bucolic countryside turned into a warzone. The King's knights are fighting the crazed members of Guin's congregation. Some members,

however, seem to be just as confused as Guin. Before the player can get to combat, they encounter two potential party members being run down by the knights. A divine female voice commands Guin from the ether:

MYSTERIOUS NARRATOR

They'll be slaughtered! You must save them!

GUIN

What? Who said that?

MYSTERIOUS NARRATOR

Act now or they'll die, child!

The two potential companions call out to you, one after the other:

COMPANION 1

Grab my sword from the stables! I can help you fight them off!

COMPANION 2

My bow will keep them at a distance! Fetch it from the apple tree!

The two request destinations are far enough apart that the player cannot get to both of them in one move. Whichever weapon the player retrieves will dictate who survives and who is seemingly killed (but really just captured by the knights and taken away in the heat of battle only to return as an enemy later). Once the player returns the weapon to its owner, she speaks:

GUIN

I can't fight! I don't know how! Save me!

MYSTERIOUS NARRATOR

Oh, but you do, child. Feel the spirit within that warrior and draw from it! Connect to the energy around you and focus yourself. Save him. Save him now!

The companion charges ahead into combat and the player is given a tutorial on magic-wielding. After defeating two or three groups of knights, the battlefield grows quiet.

COMPANION

Can't fight? Don't know how? SAVE ME!? I'll give you a tip, girly: don't ask a guy to save you and then show him up! I mean, I've seen magic like that in the capitol, but out here? You're not one of those company bounty hunters, are you?

GUIN (bursting into tears)

I, I, I don't know what happened...

PRIEST (emerging from off screen)

HERETICS! The devout all fell under my control as foretold. They united under the divine word just as godly men in every church across the land are doing right now. But YOU! Your wickedness disrupted the ritual. I saw your sorcery! We could have sacked the capitol and wrestled control from those heathenous tycoons by nightfall had you not summoned the King's guard. You've just thrown this country into civil war, vile witch! And now you'll pay for it.

The priest launches into combat and possesses the surviving congregation members, even as they lay wounded on the field of battle. This gives him numbers, but the possessed abominations are weak and easy to deal with on their own. The priest is the powerful one. An intense battle plays out until the player defeats the priest.

MYSTERIOUS NARRATOR

He had a powerful understanding of the energy which connects us all, child. But he did not understand the unity of true communion. You can still save his soul.

PRIEST (dying)

You might have defeated me, but my messengers will have you marked for death by the clergy before you can reach the city walls. As if those soul-sucking walls offer you any protection! A world of automated men, groveling for bread they haven't sweat for, numbing their hearts with material toys like children, marooning themselves in a waking nightmare where devotion to anything but the Lords of Industry is programmed out of--

Your companion plunges a dagger into the priest mid-sentence.

COMPANION

Oh, I'm sorry. Were you listening to him? Truth be told, I'm not much for religion myself. I was just looking for some free lodging for the night and this bloke seemed alright right up until HE TRIED TO KILL EVERYONE! The name's [NAME]. What's your name?

MYSTERIOUS NARRATOR

Forgive him, for he knows not what he does. Open your arms and welcome this connection. You have a journey ahead and he may help share the burden of your suffering, and you, his.

GUIN

I'm, I'm Guin. I can't believe everyone else is dead. I knew some of these people. I mean, not that well, but I was getting to know them. How could he call himself a man of the gods?

CHOICE A (just presents the illusion of meaningful action
before looping into CHOICE B afterwards)

We should bury them.

CHOICE B

I need to get to my mother's village and check on her and my brother.

COMPANION

Well, if you've got an extra haystack to sleep in, I could tag along. I mean, in case you forget how to use your magical powers and need saving.

Transition into companion intro dialogue on the way to a new scene.

END INTRODUCTION

Father Arthur definitely dies at the end of our intro sequence, but he is just one man in an army of clergymen. Furthermore, the Lords of Industry will crack down just as hard on dissension with civil war upon them. Of course we must account for the King's guard as well. Depending on scoping possibilities, we can go minimal with a big bad head of the clergy and big bad industrial mogul, or we can expand to fit any number of clergymen, industrial tycoons, and ruling aristocracy we want. Ultimately, we just need to represent that any institution larger or older than a community that is organically forged with the help of the protagonist is going to be oppressive in one way or another.