

## 58 — The New Pope?

Septimer had had a very unusual and stressful twenty-four hours. He had not only observed the destruction of his faith's most holy dungeon and temple of worship, but he had also seen an abominable entity that bore a semblance to a many-headed goose, and he had been deigned by the object of his worship, Lady Light, to stand in her presence as she ascended to the Mundane Realm.

The destruction of the dungeon had ended as swiftly as it began, with the many-headed goose responsible for the lion's share of the temple's destruction and massacre of the assembled Crusade's Paladins. However, the killing blow to the dungeon had, strangely, come from the metallic amphibian he had observed in the company of a small fat dark-skinned boy. When he had snuck off to the far depths of the dungeon in the hopes of finding shelter, he had gotten a glimpse of the exact moment that the metallic toad opened its hideous maw and began devouring the building-sized golden-glowing crystal that kept the holy dungeon alive. Once the crystal was gone, the entire dungeon had begun collapsing in on itself and Septimer had only barely made it out alive, his survival only possible due to his cunning and quick-thinking, as well as his healing spells.

After crawling from the ruins of the holy dungeon and the cliffside it had been situated within, he had witnessed the many-headed goose, now with nine heads instead of five, follow the metallic frog and fat boy into a pool of darkness that whisked them away to the realm of evil they must surely have appeared from.

No sooner had they departed than a pillar of light had shone down from above and onto the pebble-strewn beach that lay before the collapsed cliffside and its dungeon ruins. Within that pillar of light stood a towering figure, the curves of her body visible as a faint silhouette.

The figure observed him and he immediately fell to his knees in supplication, knowing her identity.

"My Lady Light!" he screamed in reverence and despair.

***"Those dog \*\*\*\*\*! How dare they destroy my beautiful dungeon! I'm totally crusading them now!!!"***

Septimer blinked in surprise. Her tone and choice of words was a far cry from what he had expected of so divine a being.

She pointed at him and he felt his body become enveloped by golden light that filled his body with a comforting warmth, then she said, ***“I just made you the new Pope! Go start another Crusade against those cretin scumfuckers!”***

Septimer gaped in shock and awe. It was true, his personal stats, such as his level, had absolutely skyrocketed, and he had been granted the super-unique advanced Occupation of Pope, along with a whole host of powerful divine spells and incantations.

Perhaps due to the overwhelming power he now possessed, he cleared his throat and asked, “My Lady, where am I to find members for a new Crusade? The ‘cretin dog \*\*\*\*\*’, as you call them, have killed the thousands of Paladins that’d been summoned from across the continent and there are no other holy dungeons for us to congregate at.”

***“I don’t care how you get a Crusade together! Just do it! Ugh! I’m tired from all this work. I need a martini. Can you make me one?”***

Septimer was about to protest, but then realised that, yes, he did in fact possess a new spell that allowed him to conjure up any drink he could imagine. He twirled his fingers around in air in a complex and elaborate pattern that, moments prior, he had no idea his body was capable of performing, and then, with a final gesture, he produced a glass of divine light within which was the alcoholic cocktail known as a ‘martini’, along with a decorative cross and a flimsy purple mini umbrella.

***“Thank you. It’s been ages since I had a Pope.”***

Septimer knew what happened to the last one. He had witnessed it only a few weeks after he had started studying to become a Priest. Still to this day he had nightmares of the ‘Divine Castigation’ that’d been performed upon him by Lady Light, when he had erred in some way that was known only to the two of them.

“By the way...”

***“What?”*** Lady Light asked, annoyed, while taking a sip of her drink.

“The vandals stole the most holy relics kept within the core room of the dungeon, before eating the dungeon’s core.”

***“They what!?”***

“They took ‘Kevin the Big-Lipped’s Longsword’, ‘The Selfie’, and ‘The VHS Tapes That Must Never Be Leaked’.”

Although he could not properly see Lady Light’s expression, he got the impression that her eyes widened in terror at the news.

***“Those fucking c—!”***

“How much more do we need before I can evolve now?” I asked.

Imu performed a gesture from his tome and the floating status screen appeared before us in the air:

[*Evolution Requirements*]

*Capital => Nation*

- *Have at least ten species thriving within your territory (9/10)* -
- ~~*Create a lasting peace between Toadkin and Frogkind*~~ -
- ~~*Evolve a Lord to King after one is chosen by popular vote, as decided upon by the denizens of your territory*~~ -
- *Have three generations of Royalty born under your King's lineage* -
  - ~~*Defeat the Crusade of the Church of Light*~~ -
  - ~~*Spread the Toaddom religion to neighbouring nations*~~ -
- ~~*Create a National Diet of elected citizens to advise the King on laws and governance, such that the will of the people is included in his rule*~~ -
- *Takeover three cities of Castle Town rank or higher, either through warfare or diplomacy* -
- ~~*Make at least ten million Toaken in profit from sales within or without your territory*~~ -
  - ~~*Find a Relic of Divine Power*~~ -
- *Conjure a National Guardian by combining a Rare Animal with a Divine Relic and infusing it with your essence* -
  - ~~*Build a Graveyard and evolve a Gravekeeper*~~ -

“Next order of business should be to make a National Guardian,” Imu advised.

“Can we use Pete for that?”

Imu sighed. “That’d be probably the dumbest possible thing we could do...”

“Great!”

I flew out of my vessel to find Pete the Hydra-Goose where he lounged in the gardens of my castle, drinking from nine different tubs of coffee.

*Someone, bring me the Relics we stole from the Crusade!*

While I waited for a minion to bring the sword, picture, and weird black boxes to the garden, I inspected Pete, who had doubled in size and sprouted four new heads, after eating all those Paladins in the dungeon.

**Name:** *Goose<sup>9</sup> ('Pete' aka 'The Honking Calamity')*

**Occupation:** *God of Geese*

**Species:** *Hydra-Goose*

**Level:** *????*

**Alignment:** *World-Ending Calamitous Deity of Evil*

**Faction:** *Toad Town (as long as they supply coffee)*

It was perhaps troubling that Pete's level was now so high that my Appraisal could not quantify it, but I figured it was fine, since he was on our side. The fact that my System also recognised him as a God was a new development, but, then again, who else but a God might stand against him?

A puddle of black ink appeared next to Pete and Imu hopped out of it, astride Goldie. "Toad, don't you do this! Just use a different animal! It doesn't have to be the Hydra-Goose!"

"But he's so cool!" I argued back from where I was floating some metres above in my Essence Form.

Just then a minion came running with the three relics in his arms and I immediately tossed my bountiful essence into the objects, as well as into Pete's body, causing a strange series of links to form between them, before a massive explosion of light covered the entirety of the castle and its garden.

As the smoke cleared, only the Hydra-Goose remained. It took me a second to understand how Pete had changed, but then I saw that one of his beaks now held a very large version of the longsword we'd taken, and his back was covered in a massive cape that was like a blown-up enlarged version of the image, apparently called The Selfie, which showed a glowing lady with no eyebrows hugging a bored-looking man with enormous lips.

"Hells damn you, Toad!"

"What happened to those black boxes?" I wondered, lowering myself to the ground so that I hovered next to Imu.

The Guiding Fairy shuddered. "Probably for the best we don't see what's on those."

“No, but I mean, how did those change Pete? I understand the sword and the picture, but I never really got what those boxes were.”

“**THEY WERE FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE THAT I NOW POSSESS,**” boomed a terrible voice. I looked up and realise that it was Pete who had spoken.

“Knowledge like *what?*” I asked, curious.

“**OBSERVE.**”

The Hydra-Goose opened a beak and from it shone a faint light that formed a pane of translucent glass in the air before Imu and I, and upon which a vision into the past began to play. I heard Imu groan in existential pain as he saw what the two figures on the pane of glass were doing: it was the eyebrow-lacking lady and the big-lipped man performing some bizarre acts that would make even the nastiest frog in the pond scratch their rubbery chin in consternation.

Just then, Bel flew in from the side of the garden, using jets of fire from her hands to propel herself.

“Hey guys! What are you watching?”

It took a moment as she observed the pane of glass as well, then she let out a scream and flew off, while letting a long stream of screamed-out expletives trail behind her.