

YOU'RE THE MAIN CHARACTER. YOU MAKE THE CHOICES.

CAN YOU SURVIVE?

*Edgar Allan Poe's*  
**THE PIT AND THE  
PENDULUM**

adapted by  
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Minneapolis, Minnesota

# A NOTE TO READERS

This is a Choose Your Path adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Pit and the Pendulum*. It is **much shorter** than our other *Can You Survive?* titles, but it is an excellent introduction to the series.

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# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

As you read this short story, *Edgar Allan Poe's The Pit and the Pendulum*, you will sometimes be asked to jump to a distant page. Please follow these instructions. Sometimes you will be asked to choose between two or more options. Decide which you feel is best, and go to the corresponding page. (But be careful; some of the options will lead you to disaster.) Finally, if a page offers no instructions or choices, simply go to the next page.

Enjoy the story—and good luck!

# PROLOGUE

## THE SPANISH INQUISITION

The year is 1808, and your world is in chaos. The French have invaded Spain. To make matters worse, you have been arrested. You are a prisoner of the Spanish Inquisition, a court that punishes people it believes to be evil.

You don't know why you've been arrested or what you've done wrong. The Inquisition captures people for being members of different religions or for saying something the Inquisition's leaders do not like. You might even be in jail because of a lie someone told about you.

You are on trial in the city of Toledo, in Spain, and you are scared for your life. The Spanish Inquisition is known for its cruelty.

You do not have a lawyer, yet you are forced to answer difficult questions—while tied to a large cross! The ropes are so tight that they pinch you. Your legs are weak and wobbly. But you do your best to answer; your life depends upon it.

Many witnesses are called to speak against you. They say awful, terrible things—and none of it is true. Yet no one says anything in your favor, not even your family or your friends. They are afraid that, if they help you, they will be arrested too.

And so, the trial comes to its terrible end...

# 1

## THE PIT

You are sick. When they untie you and allow you to sit, you feel your senses slip away. The sentence of death is the last clear noise to reach your ears. After that, the sound of voices becomes a dreamy hum. Then, soon, you hear no more. The judges vanish. Darkness overwhelms you. Then stillness. You have fainted.

You become aware of tall figures. They lift and carry you in silence down, down, still down. You feel dizzy at the idea of the endless descent. Then comes a sudden pause, as if those who carry you need a rest. After this, you note flatness and dampness, and then you fall once more into sleep.

As you awaken, there is motion and sound: the motion of your heart and the sound of its beating. So far, you have not opened your eyes. You are on your back. You reach out your hand, and it falls upon the hard floor. There you remain for many minutes, trying to imagine where you could be. You dare not open your eyes. You dread the first glance at objects around you. But which is worse: to know what horrors surround you or to remain unaware?

You quickly open your eyes, and your worst thoughts are confirmed. You are surrounded by a blackness of eternal night. You struggle for breath as the darkness seems to choke you.

You lie quietly and try to think. You remember the trial. Have you been put in a dungeon to await further punishment? Will you be here for many months? This, of course, cannot be. Victims are in high demand.

A fearful idea drives your blood quickly to your heart. You jump to your feet, trembling. You thrust your arms wildly above and around you in all directions. You feel nothing, yet you dread to move a step. You fear that you will find the walls of a tomb.

Cold sweat bursts upon your forehead. The suspense grows unbearable, and you cautiously move forward, arms extended. Your eyes strain in the hope of catching some faint ray of light. You proceed for many paces, but all is blackness.

You continue to step onward, and you remember rumors of the horrors of Toledo. Are you left to die of starvation? Or what more fearful fate awaits?

Your outstretched hands touch a cold, stone wall. You follow it around, stepping carefully. This process does not reveal the size of your dungeon. You might walk around it endlessly, never knowing when you return to where you started.

You grab the knife from your pocket, surprised it's still there. You can plunge it into a crack in the wall, using it to identify your point of departure. Or instead, you can rip your clothing and use a piece of it to mark your starting point. What will you choose to do?

**To use the knife, go to page 14.**

**To use a piece of clothing, go to page 23.**

The burning walls are certain death. The pit, at least, offers you a chance. You know what you must do. You turn and step into nothing. You fall violently down, down, down.

You have time to register pain; your body scrapes against the stone walls of the pit into which you have fallen. Then you feel the sting of cold water as your body plunges into it.

You struggle madly to the surface. Your right arm throbs, and you wonder if it might be broken.

You do not wonder long, for a new terror seizes you. This hole is not just a pit filled with water. It is your living nightmare. It is your greatest fear come to life—too unspeakable to mention.

Panic swells within you, and you scream with all of your might. It is the last sound you ever make.

**Go to page 26.**

For many hours the dungeon has been swarming with rats. They are wild and bold, their red eyes glaring upon you. They have devoured all but a small chunk of meat. You hold it tightly and rub it against the strap everywhere you can reach. Then, upon finishing, you lie breathlessly still.

For a moment, nothing happens. But quickly the rats observe that you are without movement. One or two of the boldest crawl upon you. This seems the signal for a general rush. Hundreds and hundreds of rats leap on top of you, not bothered in the least by the movement of the pendulum. Avoiding its strokes, they busy themselves with the meat-scented strap. They press and swarm upon you in heaps. They scurry upon your throat. Their cold lips bite your own. Disgust swells within you, chilling you to your heart. Yet one minute and the struggle will be over.

You feel the strap loosen. The rats have done their work. The stroke of the pendulum presses onto you, tearing your robe. A sharp sense of pain shoots through your nerves. The moment of escape has arrived.

At a wave of your hand, the rats hurry away. With a steady movement, you slide out of your strap and beyond the reach of the pendulum. For the moment, at least, you are free.

**Go to the next page.**

# 3

## THE WALLS

The pendulum immediately stops and is pulled up through the ceiling. You realize that your every motion is being watched. You roll your eyes nervously around your prison. You observe the outlines of figures upon the walls. Their painted eyes, wild and ghastly, glare upon you in a thousand directions.

And while you breathe, there comes to your nose the vapor of heated iron. A deep glow settles in the walls and in the eyes that glare at you. You pant. You gasp. There can be no doubt of this evil design. The walls are heating up. You are to be burned to death!

You retreat from the hot, glowing walls to the center of the cell. The idea of the coolness of the pit comes over

you. You rush to it and look down. For a wild moment, you refuse to believe what you see. Oh, horror! Oh! Any horror but this!

With a shriek, you rush from the pit and bury your face in your hands, weeping.

The heat increases. You look up and find another change in the cell. There is a low rumbling sound. The walls—and their heat—begin to close in upon you.

The end is near. There's little else you can do. Will you stay where you are and take your chances with the burning-hot walls? Or will you jump into the pit? What will you choose to do?

**To jump into the pit, go to page 9.**

**To stay where you are, go to page 28.**

Your fingers blindly scan the wall as you search for a crack. You find one, and you jab your knife into it. You will feel the handle again, upon completing a lap around the prison.

The ground is moist and slippery. You stagger onward for some time, until you stumble and fall. You are too tired to stand again, and sleep soon overtakes you.

Upon awakening, you resume your tour around the prison and at last return to the knife. Before you fell, you had counted 52 steps. Upon resuming, you counted 48 more. There are in all, then, 100 paces.

Quitting the wall, you decide to cross through the middle of your dungeon. With your knife in hand, you proceed slowly. The floor is slick with slime, but soon your courage grows. You step firmly, attempting to cross in a direct line.

You advance twelve paces. Thirteen. Fourteen. At fifteen paces, you step onto nothing. You fall violently down, down, down.

You have time to register pain; your body scrapes against the stone walls of the pit into which you have

fallen. Then you feel the sting of cold water as your body plunges into it.

You struggle madly to the surface. Your right arm throbs, and you wonder if it might be broken.

You do not wonder long, for a new terror seizes you. This hole is not just a pit filled with water. It is your living nightmare. It is your greatest fear come to life—too unspeakable to mention.

Panic swells within you, and you scream with all of your might. It is the last sound you ever make.

**Go to page 26.**

Trusting your fate to a bunch of wild rats sounds like a fool's plan. You will put your life into your own hands. You wait and you watch, carefully arching your back to push the strap upward. It makes almost no difference, but every little bit helps.

**Turn to the next page.**

The steel blade is close—so close! The strap is long and tangled. Will you have time to escape, once the strap is cut?

You lift your head to form a plan of action. You study the many places where the strap crosses your body, and your heart sinks into your stomach.

The strap winds tightly around your limbs and your body in all directions—except in the path of the deadly pendulum. The terrible blade will strike, but it will miss the strap!

You struggle madly as desperation turns to panic. The stroke of the pendulum presses onto you, tearing your robe. A sharp pain shoots through your nerves.

The pendulum slices lower. And lower. And lower. And then, at last, your pain ends forever.

**Go to page 26.**

You cannot resist. You eagerly empty the pitcher. It must be drugged, for you once more become drowsy. A deep sleep falls upon you.

**Go to the next page.**

# 2

## THE PENDULUM

When you open your eyes, the objects around you are visible. You can see the prison. You were wrong about its size. It is much smaller than you had guessed, and the general shape of the prison is square. You notice the floor, too, which is stone. In the center is the pit that nearly ended you.

You see all this with much effort, for your situation has greatly changed. You now lie upon your back against a slab of wood. You are securely bound to it by a long strap that wraps around your limbs and body. Only your head and left arm are free enough to move. With great effort, you grab food from the dish that lies beside you, and you eat.

Looking upward, you study the ceiling. A ghastly figure is painted upon it, holding a huge pendulum, as seen on antique clocks. The pendulum appears to be in motion. Its sweep is brief and slow.

A slight noise distracts you. You look to the floor and see several enormous rats. They have crawled out through cracks in the walls, lured by the scent of the meat beside you. You do your best to scare the rats away.

You again gaze upward. The sweep of the pendulum has increased, as has its speed. It is a little closer, and you now observe with terror that its steel edge is a large razor. It hisses as it swings through the air. You can no longer doubt the doom prepared for you. You avoided the pit's horrors by accident; now a different destruction has been planned. The pendulum will slowly descend until its blade finishes you off.

You spend long, long hours of horror counting the sweeps of the steel blade. Inch by inch—line by line—down and down it comes! Days seem to pass before it sweeps so closely that it fans you. You grow frantic and struggle to free yourself, until you black out.

You awaken feeling sick, weak, and craving food. You look up at the pendulum. Down and down it creeps. It is designed to cross your heart. It will tear your robe first. Then it will return and repeat its operation, again and again, lower and lower.

Soon the blade passes within three inches of your chest! You struggle to free your left arm further. You gasp and squirm at each swipe of the pendulum. Your frightened eyes follow its every move.

**Go to the next page.**

You decide that, if you are to die, you will not die hungry. With painful effort, you stretch your left arm and grab a small scrap of meat. As you put it to your lips, a thought of hope rushes to your mind. You realize that the strap which holds you down is unique. You are not tied by separate cords. You are entirely held down by one. If any portion of the strap is cut, you will be able to move away.

Of course, the pendulum could cut the strap. Or perhaps you can get the rats to gnaw through it. This causes you to wonder: If you wait for the blade to be close enough to cut the strap, will you have time to unwind the strap and escape? For that matter, could you really coax the rats to free you? These are your only options, so you must pick one. What will you choose to do?

**To wait for the pendulum, go to page 16.**

**To get the rats to eat your strap, go to page 10.**

You tear a part of the hem off your robe, and you place it on the floor beside the wall. You will find this rag upon completing a lap around the prison.

The ground is moist and slippery. You stagger onward for some time, until you stumble and fall. You are too tired to stand again, and sleep soon overtakes you.

Upon awakening, you resume your tour around the prison and at last find the piece of cloth. Before you fell, you had counted 52 steps. Upon resuming, you counted 48 more. There are in all, then, 100 paces.

Quitting the wall, you decide to cross through the middle of your dungeon. With your knife in hand, you proceed slowly. The floor is slick with slime, but soon your courage grows. You step firmly, attempting to cross in a direct line.

You advance 12 paces when a part of the torn robe becomes tangled between your legs. You step on it and fall violently on you face. Your chin hits the floor of the prison—but your lips and upper head touch nothing.

A peculiar smell of decayed fungus arises to your nostrils. You put forward your arm and shudder at your

discovery. You have fallen at the very edge of a circular pit. You also realize the knife is no longer in your hand.

You blindly search the floor but find no sign of your weapon. However, you discover a small chunk of rock. You let it fall into the pit. For many seconds you listen, until finally there is a splash into water.

At the same moment, you hear the quick opening and closing of a door overhead. A gleam of light flashes through the gloom before fading away.

You understand the trap that was prepared for you, and you congratulate yourself for your luck. Another step before you tripped, and the world would see you no more.

Shaking in every limb, you crawl back to the wall. Your fear of what might come next keeps you awake for many long hours, but eventually you again sleep.

Awake once more, you find a loaf of bread and a pitcher of water beside you. You are too exhausted to wonder how it got there. You are so hungry that your stomach aches, and you are so thirsty that your throat burns. But do you trust this meal that has been given?

Is it safe to eat, or is it poisoned? Should you eat and drink, or should you refuse—even if it means starving to death? What will you choose to do?

**To eat and drink, go to page 18.**

**To refuse the meal, go to page 27.**

**THE END**

**TRY AGAIN**

You are so hungry that you almost ignore the alarms going off inside your head. But you trust your instincts, and you listen to yourself. Instead of eating the bread, you throw it into the pit. The pitcher of water follows with a loud splash.

For a moment, you feel powerful. You feel as if you are in control. But your tormentors do not allow your spirits to rise too high. A doorway opens, and a beam of light shines upon you. You catch a glimpse of three hooded men barreling toward you.

You feel a blast of pain as you are struck upon the back of your head, and you once more become drowsy. A deep sleep falls upon you.

**Go to page 19.**

“Death,” you say, “any death but that of the pit!”

Flatter and flatter the prison grows. You shrink back, but the closing walls press onward. Within moments, there is no longer an inch of foothold on the floor of the prison. You struggle at the edge of the pit and let out one loud, long, and final scream.

There is an angry hum of human voices. There is a loud blast of many trumpets. There is a harsh boom of a thousand thunders. The fiery walls rush back!

An outstretched arm catches your own as you fall toward the pit. It is General Lasalle. The French army has arrived. You are saved.

**Go to the next page.**

# **THE END**

**YOU HAVE  
SURVIVED THE PIT  
AND THE PENDULUM!**

Go to the next page.

YOU'RE THE MAIN CHARACTER. YOU MAKE THE CHOICES.

**CAN YOU SURVIVE?**



**CHOOSE WISELY, OR ELSE . . .**

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