

# I Have Answered

They came to me. They came to me, and they bowed to me, prostrated themselves, and they prayed before me. “Master,” they said, “please, speak your wisdom to us. Fill our minds with your great prophecies.” They built their altars, stone edifices that defy logic and proportion. They performed terrible rituals, sacrificed many living things to me, as if to appease me with their wicked madness.

I have heard their prayers.

And I have answered.

## Within

I. I Am

II. They Are

III. Those Who Were

IV. Those Who Are

V. Those Who Will Become

VI. The Servants Bow

VII. The Prophets Call

VIII. And We, Like Gods

IX. Bring Forth Destruction

X. And It Begins

XI. Before It Ends

## I Am

I was. I have always been. I always will be. For I am all things, and I am in all things.

I am.

## There Before

I was there before the beginning of the world. When the Ones looked upon the burning and empty rock that would become our world “Navis”, I was there. I was there when the pieces were brought together, when they forged the planet from its base components and cast it into the sky, spinning around the tiny star “El” in the forgotten arm of a distant galaxy. I was there.

I watched them with the others, those first things that would walk and talk and become. We watched them hatch from their eggs and rocks and chambers. We watched the First Men claw their way from the pits and caverns, watched them look to the sky, to the sun El, and reach out with groping arms. We watched them cry out for their unknown masters and to gods of their own invention. We watched them rise up to a place of knowing and understanding. They came into being before us.

We watched as they forgot us, one by one. And we smiled.

It was decided then, by all of us, that we would follow in our servitude to the Ones and observe these newly-awakened creatures, children of our own. We all cast our lots and stepped into our roles, each fulfilling our appointed tasks. We went our separate ways, becoming the enemies of one another over petty matters, and donned the cloaks of our various occupations. We all have our places.

## Leviathan

They call me many names, my children. Ozumat, Tiamat, Levitan, Kraken. But I am Leviathan.

Mine is the realm of the children of Men, the hand that guides great ones to do great things, to bend and shape the world in their own images and mine, to bless those whom I find befitting, and to sunder those whom I find wanting and lacking. From behind the liquid veil, I have shaped and guided

history as I have desired and lent knowledge and understanding that have molded the world and its inhabitants in ways that echo through the ages. Athelos, Mercator, Rugnar, Rendall, they are few among many whom I have touched; arbiters of the world that would become.

My champions are few, for my will is to remain hidden and unknown. With great interference as caused by the lords of Order and Chaos, I cannot accurately discern which of my actions yields certain results on Navis. For this reason, I keep my children close and endow them with the abilities to affect great change without necessarily letting them know what that change is. When I rescued Athelos Mar from the depths, I told him only that he would lead. When Mercator was spared the lions' teeth during the Age of Sultans, he knew just that he would amass great wealth. When I lifted up Rugnar's head, all I said was that he would have his justice against the Fey. In every case, I gave them only the luck of the gods who watch the world, and I observed what they accomplished with my great power.

Officially, I am the keeper of what the denizens of Navis call “human-likes”, all creatures of intellect that were chosen to be propagators, progenitors, the caretakers of the world. Mine is to guard and to guide, to ensure that the Original Purpose is adhered to. In the interim, I've taken to playing around. I have become bored with merely watching and waiting, for the world moves slowly, and the eons begin to drag on the mind. I find the ones I deem interesting, and I see what they will do.

Since the institution of the Original Purpose, we have all deviated to a degree. When the other god-beasts began meddling directly in mortal affairs, I took a step back and observed what became of the people upon whom they bestowed their gifts, and I began to form my theories from the data retrieved. These blessed few are those who became the titans of the world, those who raised their places up to threaten to reach the heavens, and the very same people who brought ruins on the heads of all they loved. While certain races have been more predictable than others and have followed the same paths as their ancestors, I find great fascination in the workings of humans, who are guided more by whim and want than all other species to have come before. They are the most like me.

Above all others, I have neither allegiance to a cause nor binding to an ideal. I am the one who observes and records, who puts his chosen to the test in a crucible of liquid fire. I bend them, and many break, for the small are weak, but I wait for the day when one of them rebuffs the taint of corruption and does something truly interesting. I am the scientist. I am the true neutral.

## They Are

Of course, there cannot only be one neutral; and of course, there cannot be a single master. The world is guided by several hands who often keep their fingers held too tightly onto what they perceive as valuable. Whether they're right or wrong is irrelevant. The lords of Order and Chaos will forever pick at each other, using their champions like chess pieces in the eternal board game for dominance. Even then, though, it's all a ploy, an exercise in meaningless, and I will discuss it later.

## Order

In the world of Men, Order is seen as the path of good and right, the way that is deemed most just and worthy. But these arrogant fools with their arrogant ways, they pray to gods who have neither hands nor mouths, holding onto beleaguered hope that their petitions may yet be answered. Order is the way of angels, those rigid creatures set in law and bound to stricture, who play judge and juror as executors to their masters. For this reason, the races of people believe angels to be heralds of goodness and light, progenitors of that better world and proof of the existence of any god; but I tell you, it amuses me how many people kneel to the whims of angels, believing them to be protectors, when they are truly no more than wardens and executioners.

These creatures and masters find themselves in the Realm of Order, a place so strictly governed by natural law that it would tear most people apart to be struck in awe of its flawlessness. Every tree is shaped like a spear, never growing, nor changing, nor ebbing in the wind. They line each of the eight highways in perfect symmetry, every twenty feet for ten-thousand miles. And these eight sections of the realm are, of course, identical, unchanging, as if forever trapped in a single frame of time. One-hundred twenty-eight thousand dwellings; six-hundred forty rivers, lakes, and streams; seven-hundred twenty intersecting avenues and highways; eight million residents, and each of them identical. When the first man, Morgan Black, looked upon it, he was driven to madness and drowned himself in Lake 81-F. Order is no friend to any living being, regardless of what they pray for.

Of the masters of angels, Golem is among few who have called me friend before. A beast of immeasurable stony girth, I am entertained by how he meddles in my affairs. As the "Great Defender" and a judge of the light, he intercedes on the behalf of my children or against them, always choosing the ways of Order and moving his followers toward those ends. He spies on mortal men through one of many "peep-holes" from where he perceives the state of the world. Because of this function, he is the

herald for others like us of his natural plane. When he sees the balance of power shift, as it has done many times, he has the bell struck and brings the call of the storm.

For all his breadth and power, though, he is as governed as I by whim and has selected his own champions in the past, among whom he found favor in the trolls so much that he crafted them in his image. In that distant time, he blessed them with a shard of the Stone and brought to them a notion of his vast wisdom. He was father to Barhab the First King, Galaguk the Protector, Halfaha the Banner Maiden, and the great thinker Tathoth. Pouring his blessings upon them, he forged an empire of Order that lasted longer than any of the greatest kingdoms has to this day, and he was so struck by its downfall and collapse that he has remained a hermit apart from us ever since.

In addition to Golem, four other defenders of Order remain to guard the gates to the Inner Sanctum. When the call is sounded, the messenger Harbinger is the one who sounds the alarm. Upon sixteen wings, he uses his nine arms to chime the Nine Bells of the Everlasting. Hordes of angels then rise from their resting state, awakened by the sound, and rally protectors, armatures, and the colossi of light in their defense of the Long Path. In battle, Harbinger is the swiftest of opponents, wielding four bows against those who would threaten our master. For Navis, he is the one who calls angels against the worst of the world, those whom he sees as irredeemably wicked, to be slain.

As one of several wards of Order, Harbinger is accompanied by the twin brothers Cynocephalus and Catoblepas, the wolf and the boar. Together, they watch over the gate entrance itself, the wolf with his swords, and the boar with his axes. In battle, they are the most brutal of fighters, never relenting until the opponent is dead and their entire body has been destroyed. In the world of Men, Cynocephalus is the father of the wolvren, those zealots whom he blessed with his own image, granting the strength and ferocity of his form to the human known as Caed Caerduness. Despite his intentions of the preservation of Order, his children were corrupted by an agent of Chaos to become the werewolves known and feared by the peoples of the modern age.

Of his own, Catoblepas is the keeper of the natural order. When the races of the world have become too great to maintain themselves, they threaten the sanctity and future of Navis. It is then that Catoblepas acts, breaking whole civilizations beneath the weight of his heavy head and blasting away what remains of their ruin with his breath of stone. From the old goblins of Bogglebog to the spires of High Heaven, he has shattered the kingdoms of the world to preserve what he feels is a necessary

balance between creatures of intellect and creatures from the hands of gods. And though his wrath is terrible, Catoblepas is as nothing compared to the last.

When the Plane of Chaos has been at its most successful in its assaults, it has breached the gates of the Long Road, trod the full ground, and burned the gardens of Order to black ash. I have seen every angel die, every defender crumble and fade, and even the brother beasts brought low before the horde. More than once, it seemed as if all hope was lost, but they've never made it to the Inner Sanctum, for just within the Halls of Everlasting Light stands Garth.

Garth is the Indomitable, one of the smaller among our number, yet a construct of unimaginable strength and tenacity. When the last dawn came and went, and the kingdom of trolls destroyed itself more than five ages past, it was Garth who stood as the final defender against the hordes of Chaos in the Last Grand Melee. It was Garth who fought viciously and destroyed Azmodias the Horned, the thirteen of our number and the only one to die. Covered from head-to-toe in armor of gold and brass and wielding his ten shields of unfading light, Garth is the force of will that stands forever vigil over the Inner Sanctum, ensuring that no force may ever enter beyond the shrouded veil. Not even us.

## Chaos

As much as my brothers among the Plane of Order revile their counterparts, it is the very existence of Chaos that gives validity to their work, and it is Chaos that makes my time as interesting as it is. While the people of the realm of Men fear Chaos as a destructive force and a source of trouble and evil, they fail to recognize everything it yields. While Order focuses on social structure, hierarchy, rigor, selflessness, and the common good, Chaos is spirit, ambition, powerful emotion, both the things that drive men mad and bring them the strongest joys and sorrows. It is surprise, lust, greed, hatred, the drive to be more; it is individuality, creative thought, and endless ruin; and its realm reflects that.

Except for the Hollow being at its center, there is of course no working logic to the Realm of Chaos. It is a burning hellscape, with rocks that grow in the shapes of trees and gold that pours up from the ground like a reversed waterfall of liquid metal. Millions of demons, archdemons, pitlords, and wargoths make up the realm's armies, but with such little organization, they have never posed a lasting threat to their enemies. As such, the Realm of Chaos has never come under assault from Order except during the Last Grand Melee, and the denizens of that realm seek more to engage and interfere in the

doings of mankind than dare challenge the will of Order.

The first arbiter of Chaos that comes to mind is my own dear Charybdis the Many-Mouthed, the only among their number whom I personally dislike. Ever since mankind first set foot on Illyria, it has been he who keeps the people of my favored plane trapped on their tiny stretch of rock. Every single time I have blessed the hands of the Illyrians to do my great work, it is Charybdis who keeps them stuck in their six-nation prison. With his endlessly-stretching maw and thousands of tentacles, he sucks down the great ships of history and crushes them beneath a million mountainous teeth. Despite his efforts, however, I believe it will not be long before one of my children brings about the invention of my design, the very thing that will yield the great beast's efforts fruitless.

In line with the destroyers of Men is the serpent Ladon, a titan god-beast among brethren of my own making. As much as Catoblepas seeks to maintain the ordered balance between nature and industry, Ladon wishes for the complete annihilation of the constructs of working hands. It would seem that every cycle, the serpent uses his forked tongue to trick the unwitting to serve him, to despise the world, and to will its destruction. For my own, it is interesting how every one of my champions has interacted with the children of Ladon; in certain times, they have been powerful allies who brought ruin upon the heads of unfit masters, but in others, they sought the death of each other to no other end. In all things, however, Ladon is as consistent as I am inconsistent, a servant of entropy to the end.

Despite the powerful workings of the previous masters of Chaos, neither is as pervasive in the minds of mankind as Typhon, the fire-breather. The keeper of demons and archdemons, and the commander of chaotic forces on the ground, Typhon is the most visible of their realm and is the one represented in the many frescoes, reliefs, and spoken legends that depict the forces of destruction; and it is with great accuracy that he is revealed-- a sundering beast covered in red-brown flesh, coated all over in gold piercings and jewelry, and with terrible black horns spiraling out the back of his head.

In recent ages, Typhon has taken advantage of the fighting across the continent to establish himself along a series of leylines that stretches across the land. With the fall of the Iron Wall and the sudden resurgence of the magics of before, his anchors are now strong enough to begin his march into the world. Having myself selected a new champion to receive my power, I am interested to see what they will do when the eventual conflict with Typhon comes to a head. It is my solemn hope that whomever Golem sends to combat the monster will be of equal strength. It will be entertaining.

While most emissaries of Chaos spend their time interfering with the mortal realm, one must remain to keep their home as secure as we keep our own. During the Last Grand Melee, after Garth obliterated his enemies and drove them back beyond their gate; stepping into the plane, Order began to persevere in the midst of Chaos, leaving the foundations of streets and the very stone trees that remain to this day. The forces of Order may have completely destroyed their foes had Garth not met his match in the titan Mageddon, whose name means “it ends”. It's not that they weren't a match for each other; on the contrary, the shielded warden is likely more powerful than his foe, but the scope of Mageddon alone, to consume an entire landscape, was far too great a risk to leave the Inner Sanctum vulnerable.

As dangerous as the aforementioned ministers of destruction are, however, I believe none may be as effective arbiters of damnation as Baelodiak the Whisperer. As no god-beast is truly bound to the strictures of good or evil, it is curious even to myself that the Whisperer so closely aligns himself with the ideals of individualism, greed, and the want for more; no matter the cause to which his champions align themselves, the sons of Baelodiak are always those who bring annihilation on their own houses and heads. It has been an age since then, that last time that he whispered into the ear of a kingdom and cast humankind from Aegora, but it is that very reason that they ever landed on Illyria to begin with. For that alone, I suppose I should thank him. Baelodiak put events into play that have allowed me to move my people where they are most desired, to bring an end to the Fey, and to usher in a new age.

## Trion

In the end, no matter who we are, no matter what we do, no matter how the wills of Order and Chaos fight against one another in the endless struggle for dominance, we are all still the servants of the great master of all. We kneel and obey the ultimate will. In the end, we all serve Trion.

As master of all creation and the great shaper himself, Trion is a being of unimaginable magical force of will. Myself and my brethren are largely bound to the physical world and our respective realms, only able to command thralls or take on forms as apparitions, but Trion is the embodiment of the arcane on the world of Navis, and he is the one who received our mission from the Ones. Trion is the being who ultimately assigned us each to our respective roles and realms, even reassigning me after the death of Azmodias to maintain balance between the two. Seeing my great curiosity and interest in the outcome of the world, and my investment in the lives of Men, he led me to become what I am.

Beyond merely ruling over magical law and binding it to nature, Trion is also the patron, father, and crafter of the trow race, manufacturing them in his appearance and power. He is their guide as much as they are the guides of light and darkness in the world.

Thus are the first children of the Ones, the god-beasts, who maintain the working structure of Navis according to our masters' designs. We guide the destinies of the races of the world through either direct or indirect means, and we ensure the legacies of our individual values are maintained. It has been ages since my brethren have come into true conflict with one another, but after the dawning of this new age on Illyria, a great change is about to take place. I feel it is only a short time before that change upsets the balance set forth and ushers Navis toward its true purpose.

## Those Who Were

Kingdoms rise and fall like the tide, and eventually all towers crumble into dust. I have watched many cycles come and go in this way, many peoples grow and disappear, many tides rise and fall. Every time, there is always some great leader, some arbiter, that heralds in the beginning of a new age and tolls the death bell of the old. Just when it seems that an empire is immutable and unconquerable, it is brought asunder in a single swift motion. I have always chosen that arbiter. They have always done the same things as those before. It is a subject of great interest to me.

Since the Dawn, it has been my purpose to watch over the caretakers of the world, those with the minds and powers to shape it according to their designs. Each of these great races has shown potential in commanding and ruling in their own ways, with strengths and weaknesses that have led to their coming to greatness and ultimate collapse and ruin. The people of Illyria and Vasena have believed that the Fey were the penultimate, and that they are now the rulers of all the world. Be the Fey were not the first, nor will Humanity be the last. For as there is one great Golden Age in every epoch, so is there a race that yields the land to the one who follows.

For the purposes of this text, I yield only information regarding the land of Illyria and those creatures that have molded its history. There is no need to concern oneself with the lands of Aegora, Phaestus, Xiaozhu, Formec, and Tengachegapo. The people of Illyria have been unable to ascend from their miniscule corner of the world, and it is unlikely that they will manage the feat for some time. For this reason, I will also avoid discussion of the denizens who live there: the shadow folk, dragons, pale humans, grey titans, and the yellow-eyed. As far away as these lands and peoples are, it would be unwise to think of these beings as anything more than fable in the meantime.

## The First Settling

In an age long-fallen into the fog of history, the land of Illyria was a testament to the incredible might and magic of creatures now known as the trow. When the bargain was struck with the Ones and we descended upon the world, it fell to Trion to craft the first lords of the lands. Illyria became the focus of magical influence in the world and, as his favored location, it also became home to his children, the trow. It was not so long ago, only twenty-eight thousand years past, that Trion whittled the first trow from a tree stump, then breathed the life that led to all of creation to follow.

They are a unique species, to be certain, wholly uncorrupted and pure in child-like wonder, but unimaginably powerful in a way that only my brethren and I can comprehend. Created as a test subject for the study of magic and its uses, the trow set about immediately from their low places; for centuries, they crafted spells only to aid in their survival, wielding words of fire, water, earth, and wind to shape the land into a more pleasant setting and drive back the terrors that inhabited their dark world. It was not until an eon or so into their reign that they finally became interesting, turning their magics into the fantastic and wonderful, and inventing the powers for which they are now famous.

For thirteen-thousand years, the trow ruled Illyria alone; they grew from being the simple creatures that couldn't count their own toes to the single most-powerful arcanists to ever walk the world. In their time, they had only three kings: Zoe, Apple, and Brown; each king ruled for his some few millennia before being put to rest in the great lake, and the one to follow after would yield unto his people the fruits of the new kingdom. Each had his turn, and each brought something new.

From Zoe the Warrior, the trow would learn those very shaping spells, the ones that hewed land, rose crop, and drove back threatening beast from their misshapen abodes. This kind of trow would most-resemble all other beings to follow; they lived in cities of wood and stone, and they made war with the creatures of darkness that consumed most of the land. After overcoming those terrible monsters with feats of magical prowess, their grasp on the continent was wholly unchecked, allowing them to live in peace forever after. After four millennia his hard life overcame him, and Zoe was laid out on a longboat that trailed into Lake Promarc, where the magics of the world would devour him.

After him, Apple the Scholar would lead the trow in their new age of rapid growth, seeing the expansion of spells in a way that began to defy nature itself. By his power, the second moon was given birth and raised high into the sky, and from his hands grew the floating cities that once threatened to block out the sun. The trow were infinitely wiser than the races to follow, though, and seeing the future of their way of life, Apple commanded the release of the chains that bound their cities over the land, casting them like many sailing ships over the horizon. With his kingdom now scattered over the world, he dedicated the remainder of his life to perfecting the spells that would one day make his entire race disappear from the world, taking their long and glorious history with it.

By the time Brown the Elder had come into kingship, Trion decided that his experiment was complete. Seeing magic flourish in the way that it did, he was satisfied at it being the greatest known

force and then allowed the rise of other races on the world. With the third king of the trow now lording over their great expanse of towers, islands, and risen citadels, the mighty trolls first rose up from the mud and the earth, being at first little more than a curiosity to the long-established people of Illyria. Seeing their hardiness and uncouth nature, Brown entreated Trion for a way to help the trolls, and thus was sent the Stone of Wisdom. The naïve king then handed the stone down to the fledgling race, hoping that they would one day contribute to the world as the trow had before them.

It was not to be so, however, as the trolls had been gifted with knowledge and power instead of earning it. Seeing the error of his ways and knowing the truth of the time to come, the last king set about doing the most difficult task of all-- making his entire race, every trace of its lands and its people, disappear. He looked to the powers of before, the binding spells and treatises on theory, and created the ultimate magics that exist today: teleportation and the creation of pocket realms. With the growth of many new races all over Navis, he knew that it was time. Brown ushered his ancient race through the door over Lake Promarc and watched with tearful eyes as the world he knew would vanish.

In the centuries since then, the trow have committed themselves to little more than living off the fruits of their labor. Since the death of Brown some ages past, they have neither studied nor beheld the workings of the races, seeing society as no more than a silly thing and witnessing the works of the hands of Men as a small wonder. Since none has rising even close to the level of greatness the trow once beheld, it is of no interest to them what happens to the world, and it will doubtless be otherwise until something finally comes from the people of Navis.

## The People of Stone

That is, after all, the most accurate descriptor of the troll race, the people of stone. Cast from the same rock that forged Golem, himself, the trolls are an exceptionally-well-known group that roams Illyria to this day, however not at all in the capacity that it once beheld. Since the Day of Ashes, no race on all of Navis has risen to the level of military strength that the trolls once beheld, and they themselves have yet to stand up from the mud and mire of their incredible failings.

As mentioned before, the trolls did not come into greatness by their own power. They were instead blessed by a construct, a giant sapphire called the Stone of Wisdom. Unfortunately for the trolls, the name is a misnomer. The stone does not grant wisdom but knowledge, and the distinction is

clear. When the first troll looked up from the ground with club in-hand and reached out toward the stone, it is doubtless that no one knew what would become of them. We had only seen the dealings of the trow, that most peaceful and selfless race that brought every brother up in kind and founded a kingdom of lasting peace. Even I did not foresee the terror that the trolls would enact.

Beginning with Barhab the First King, the trolls surprised us. As soon as magic was discovered, they immediately set about using it as an implement for war. They enslaved the youngling races that surrounded them, bending the majority to their wills and even driving some to extinction. They saw all other races as “small folk” and treated them with the same disdain that the word suggests. All other races: the serpentfolk, the ocean dwellers, the Fey, they were servants to their gigantic masters, property to be used until broken and thrown away. For thousands of years, the trolls would rule as thus, bending and ripping and tearing the land apart until the day that fractures began to appear.

In those days, Fey were very different from the ones seen by mortal men. They were a short race, tinged green and with small, angular faces. A construct of the trow at the end of their age, they were to be a brethren race, but the powers that crafted them lacked the foresight and abilities to see the project through, and instead the Fey became a bastard race, beholden to the many ills of their partial crafting. Nonetheless, the centuries of exploitation by the trolls had turned them into a united front.

As foolish as the trow had been in bestowing the Stone of Wisdom on the trolls, the trolls were just as foolish in the underestimation of their thralls. Seeing the small folk as weak and ineffectual, they force-bred the Fey and their ilk to such massive numbers that they would eventually be overwhelmed by their underlings. They warred with their servants and selfishly with one another in a final bid for dominance and, in an act of ultimate foolishness, they destroyed themselves.

It seems incomprehensible, but in that age the trolls dwelt in vast cities of steel and glass, living in towers that stretched to the heavens, and wasting away their years for base entertainment. Everything they had was dedicated to selfishness; society as a single great whole had perfected Order and twisted it to serve them, and it was all focused around the Stone of Wisdom. All their kingdoms, all their people, everything they had, built around that one blue jewel.

On the Day of Ashes, the two trolls kingdoms, east and west, attacked each other. At the same time, both nations saw the enemy in the mirror and let loose weapons of iron that fell like stars from the

sky and unleashed clouds of fire and dust and power that have remained unseen ever since. In an instant, the great kingdom to the west was evaporated in a series of explosions that would leave Vasena the empty desert that it is to this day. Meanwhile, the kingdom to the east would suffer such terrible destruction that troll society would be entirely erased. A lone bomb detonated on the Stone of Wisdom, blasting it to pieces and leaving the hole in the ground that would eventually become Lake Tiberon. In all of ten minutes, the longest-lasting kingdom ever built was reduced to the Stone Age.

It was not all at once, however, that the trolls would become nothing. For centuries thereafter, the lamias of the west would continue tending to their masters, watching with sorrow as the loss of the Stone of Wisdom slowly eroded away their minds. The goblins would rise and fall. The Fey would rise and fall. Even the lamias themselves would see a new dawn. But in that time, the trolls would look at the sky and slowly fade away, their faces twisting and their backs bending until the end came. One by one, every last troll wandered into the forest and disappeared, having no memory of the legacy they were leaving behind, only the foundations of ruins that scholars of the modern world ponder over.

## An Age Between

Of course, there are other societies that I have become invested in since the fall of the trolls, people I have seen and events that have occurred that shaped my reasoning into the apathy I contend with today. I was fascinated, perhaps childishly so, to the workings of the troll, how they maintained innocence in the eyes of overwhelming discovery of power. At no point did they wield their awesome knowledge against any other race, even as the trolls threatened to consume all. On the opposite, I was perhaps too hopeful for the trolls who, so committed to Order, bent every back in their creation of it until their own creation turned them mad and saw their end. Having seen both sides of the work of knowledge, I was left in wonder of what those after might do, and I was disappointed.

The iron stars that destroyed the troll world left Illyria changed forever. No longer were there the Fey of old. Instead, two new races would rise from the ashes of that short apocalypse. Those who had been closest to the blast and survived were irrevocably twisted into the goblins of today. Their faces and bodies were warped and ravaged, their skin gnarled and hardened to withstand the harshness of the world around them. Their minds were melted into a child-like state that still remembers what it was like to be whole, but cannot fully grasp it. Everything about the goblins suggests a fallen race, and it is not until recently that I have had any hope. With my championing of Agglmaggl and his discovery

of a fragment of the stone, I am interested to see what he makes of his little kingdom of Gurbobbl.

On the other side of the splitting of the race, those Fey who survived the dust and ash to follow were also changed, but by a different force. The splitting of the Stone of Wisdom was like the splitting of an atom. It unleashed waves both destruction and radiation that would fall upon the land and warp it forever. While that poison is the same that created the many monsters that exist, it is the very same occurrence that yielded the Fey the power they enjoyed for millennia to follow. They became upright, fair-faced, and maintained the intellect that all races once enjoyed. Even that fragmented dust of the stone falling on them was enough to help them rebuild their shattered world.

Until the founding of the nation Feya in what is now Feylanor, the people had no name, having only ever been tools of the masters who beheld them. With the dawn of this new age, they, like the trow before, sought out the power of the leylines that meet by the edge of the lake Promarc. The Fey existed for centuries in relative calm, ever wary of the lamias in the distant west. They united ten cities into the capital Decapolis over the lake, from where they ruled an empire that would eventually stretch from the tip of the continent to the mountains that guarded Vasena. It was not until the accidental arrival of another mysterious and foreign race that they would be forced to act.

## Wicked Children

The humans. My champions.

Never have I been so partial toward any race of any kind, that I pick champions so freely among one people, for I have always been curious to see what they do. The humans have had so little unity, even at their most desperate, that the possibilities are endless. Whereas other races and peoples are almost certain to follow a particular path toward Order or Chaos, any human can do any thing. They can be the great builders of the world that I have lent my word to, or they can usher in destruction in the vein of those to whom I bid an ounce of power. As a whole, humans fascinate me.

Hailing from the distant and cold lands of Aegora to the southwest, fragments of humanity were driven from their homes when Citadel was destroyed by the grey titans. It was one of the lowest among their number, a fisherman named Athelos Mar, whom I would select as my champion to lead the humans in their settling of Illyria. When he fell into the waters of my sea, I looked upon him, sinking

into the blackening depths, and saw the potential to change the fate of the world. I saved him from the drowning darkness and gave him the force of will to lead his people to the land that would become Kourmar, a place so like Aegora that humanity could flourish for a time.

And so they did. It was not even a thousand years before mankind had moved from Kourmar into the largely-uninhabited lands of the north. So occupied were the Fey with the reclamation of magic from the ruins of the trow and trolls, they did not even notice mankind until it had become a threat. With the darker-skinned humans having trickled out of the jungles to the far west, lamian society had all but disappeared and been replaced with the kingdoms of Vasos and Susa. When the Fey looked out their windows and beheld the pale-skinned humans from Aegora, they feared such a fate would soon befall them. They set out to destroy these most recent intruders, and thus began the Age of Men.

It wasn't long at all before the Fey used their superior technology and magic to begin murdering humans in droves. Just as the trolls had chosen to subjugate and annihilate all who threatened to oppose, so did the empire of Feya. And just as the trolls had been undone by petty jealousy and infighting, so too were the Fey divided into many kingdoms and ripped apart by hubris, each noble lord wishing to be the conqueror of the humans, and all of them slaughtering each other for the chance to slaughter Men. They would be their own calamity, and humans would grow stronger the whole time.

Seeing the very real threat that then existed, Emperor Justus made a choice, a choice that would cause him to be remembered as Justus the Last. He mustered his armies and drove them deep into human territory, where he butchered four million civilians, women and children, and incited the wrath of the whole human race. I saw what the Fey had become, what they had done with power bestowed upon them, and I had grown bored. From among the many orphans the emperor had created, I chose my champion, Rugar the Black, and unleashed him upon their crumbling world.

In twenty-six very short years, Rugar would herald the end of one race and call in the dawn of the golden age of another. He made many interesting choices driven by revenge and eventual madness, many of which I expected, though some that I did not. Of course, he crushed the empire of Feya and united humanity as a single front, but he drove them to such extinction that in his day, fewer than five-thousand Fey people were still alive. He united humanity as a single front in the east, but so great a threat was he that the people of Vasena erected the Iron Wall, cursing themselves with the death of magic for the sole hope of keeping Rugar out. And at the end of his life, at the height of his power, he

brought it all crashing down. He murdered every friend he had, forced away all of his loved ones, and donned the true mantle deserving of the title Ragnar the Black.

Since that day, humanity has seen and known history that is beholden to all. My prophets and their children know the stories of the children of Ragnar, how the five kingdoms were founded from the ashes of the old and how the Darcidian Empire was fragmented into ruin as quickly as it had risen, but as thoroughly and concisely as history has been written since the dawn of Men, there are few who understand the true nature of why things happened the way they did.

Eighty-seven years ago, I chose for myself a champion. For the first time in half an eon, I had seen the legacy of my Ragnar played out. The five kingdoms, though always locked in their petty squabbles, were at relative peace, and nothing had become of the ways of old. I reached up through the veil and touched the life of a young man who would be king, the greatest king to rise since his ancestor Ragnar walked the world. I set my hand on the shoulder of that eighteen-year-old prince. I spoke.

My son, in your lifetime, you will unite all the kings of Men and bring down the Iron Wall. You will spare the people of this land from the death of all magic, and you will lead them into a new dawn. Only drink of my power and do as I command, and I will make you lord over all these things.

And he did. And thus rose Rendall Brandt, the Last Emperor.

In forty-four years, King Rendall became emperor of the Hysperian Empire, leading nations one-by-one to join his fold in a mostly-bloodless manner. At the age of forty-five, his army had been raised and his conquest began. In five years, Nycenia had bowed to his power, and in seven, the child-queen Tonnil had knelt without so much as drawing a sword or firing an arrow. For ten long years, the king waged war against the people of Tortha, the purest sons of Ragnar, until Benton was deposed and cast aside to govern from his satellite castle. Peace was being brokered with the impoverished Kourmar and plans were coming together to herald a truce with those beyond the Iron Wall, but when all seemed to be falling into place, humanity proved itself once more to be unable to see things to the end.

On his fifty-ninth birthday, Rendall Brandt became ill after enjoying a celebration with his court; he retired to bed and never awoke, poisoned, though they never discovered the culprit. Within days, his two eldest sons also passed, killed by mercenaries while traveling, and the third son, Gareth

Rendall, ascended to the throne. I am always fascinated by the blindness humanity can show.

In a mere three years, Gareth had also poisoned his relationships with Tortha and Kourmar, making a mockery of the people who fought his father and installing his personal friends among Tortha's leadership. He also rapidly burned through his father's hefty coffers with massive celebrations of his own glory and the gifting of huge sums of gold to commoners. After nearly bankrupting the country in fashioning himself as the God-King, he then imposed heavy taxes on his servile nations to make up the difference. Seeing the fate that would befall them, Kourmar very quickly ceased all talks of peace, the Torthan city of Eriez revolted, and a silent war began that would take another two years to resolve. I found myself surprised that the solution would come from someone who was not a champion of mine, the disgraced and reviled Elric Faranthal, incorrectly dubbed the Parricide Lord.

In the aftermath of a series of civil uprising all throughout Tortha, many guard posts were left in cinders, and a number of Hysperia's finest were dead or wounded. The local governor of Eriez knew it was heavy taxation and the burden of new laws that were a thorn in the side of his tenuous peace in the region, but he could no more blame the god-king than he could us god-beasts. He worried for a long while before Gareth sent him an ultimatum: "Make it right, or be deposed." Knowing that death and the death of his family awaited if he failed, Pierrot Meirnour found the scapegoat he needed in the former master of his city, Baron Elric the Young.

On house arrest in an adjoining manor for months by then, the man and his family were easy to find. Guards broke in with the intention of killing only the young lord and implicating him in the uprising, but the fight that broke out set fire to the whole wing of the mansion. Lord Faranthal was the only survivor of his family and all his servants and retainers, having been caught in the edge of an explosion that killed all others and ejected him from the building. He fell deep into the waters of the Hyspus River, and he searched for any reason to live, but for all his trouble, Pierrot faced more.

I will never forget the face he made when he trod the wreckage of the manor and saw what he had done. Bodies were burned until they had melted into the wood and stone around them, the fires twisting them into praying forms. And at the end of the hallway, where all his soldiers had fallen, he found a mother and child alone, the flames having fused their bodies together in an embrace. Pierrot Meirnour knew that everything was going to come to an end, but he did not know how swiftly.

## Those Who Are

Forty-three years ago, Gareth Rendall Brandt made the same error that so many kings and lords before him made-- he believed he was invincible. The man had assumed that the authority of his station was alone enough to secure his throne forever, forgetting what end he'd brought to his own father only a few years before. Having alienated the alliances forged by the elder emperor, he fell prey to usurpers from every corner of the world, all of them rising to meet him in battle on the fields of Hysperia.

With the high taxes he levied on his thrall nations in the wake of his spending spree, he all but forced Nycene and Feylanorian loyalties to falter. They served him in name alone, more housing his implements of war than contributing to his cause. This lack of support would prove to be his undoing when a prophet of Ladon, the serpent of Chaos, sent the fallen Lord Elric on a quest that would ravage the whole empire. After speaking with the deposed King Benton, the noble widower gathered allies in the name of those whom Gareth had wronged: first the Saker priestess Gilana Bardeaux, then Jon Stalwart, a Knight-Captain of Tortha's old guard.

After making quick work of several powerful family names across southern Illyria, Elric also brought to his side Jysel Parcellus, a Fey who had been hunted by the xenophobic Purifiers; he then befriended Martin Kassel, grandson of the assassin Wirth Kassel, a champion of Typhon, and Rictor Morse, a hedge magus with great insight into the workings of the cosmos. With them, he destroyed the carefully-guarded strongholds of Gareth's allies and shattered the fragile supports that held the empire together. Allying with Kourmar and passing by the apathetic Feylanor and Nycenia, Elric brought a swift end to the delicate designs of a son gone mad with power. All at once, the land of Illyria was split into many pieces and cities were laid bare, just as Ladon had hoped for.

Twenty-two years later, the forces of Order were working to counteract Chaos in the most unlikely of ways. Seeing the disappearance of magic that would yield the death of Vasena, Cateoblepas selected as his champion a sorcerer-priest named Safir al-Hayyah. Convicted as he was to save his nation, the man rebelled against his lord, Pharaoh Atum-Rah, and led his band of warrior priests on a path of destruction that would allow him to bring down the Iron Wall and rejuvenate his homeland. He would have succeeded were it not for the meddling of an ignorant priestess and her compatriots.

Having witnessed the destruction of her home by al-Hayyah's men, Kepri bint'Kaman was easy

prey for the designs of Pharaoh, who wished only to use a very powerful and ancient relic for himself. She gathered both old friends and new, a strange group of both society's high elite and far outcast. She befriended the vagrant merchant Harran Saif ibn la'Mahad, her former companion Yenna bint'Abram, and Tarik bar'Nasser, her childhood friend. They would slowly undo all of al-Hayyah's careful designs while edging Vasena closer to its ultimate annihilation under the foot of Pharaoh.

Her journey took her to every corner of the continent, from Vajunaptra's Halls of Everlasting Silence to the waygate west of Hakeshet, and with the armies of her nation gathered behind her, she delivered the ancient relic, the Diviner's Crest, straight into her master's hands. Like so many foolish and power-mad men that had come before him and gone since, Atum-Rah overestimated his own abilities; he tried to wield all the magics of the Iron Wall within himself, and it tore him to pieces. With the lord of all Vasena dead, most of the army destroyed, and the priesthood in disarray, the people of Vasena looked through the great opening where the Iron Wall used to be, and they knew fear. It was in that dark hour that Kepri would stand up and become the next champion of Order in al-Hayyah's stead.

More allies joined her side, the widowed matron Isaf Ahdmanaji and an older Rictor Morse found themselves among Kepri's camp, and all the commanders of Vasena's armies pledged their support to her mission; she was meant to explore the lands beyond the wall. As a gift to reward her zeal, Catoblepas blessed the young woman with incredible luck and a silver tongue. One-by-one, she united the kingdoms of Illyria in trade agreements with her nation with promises of access to their long-hidden knowledge and exotic resources. She befriended every master of the continent, a feat I have seen only one other time, and drew even the most stoic of foes to her side. At the end of it, the people were brought together in peace, a tenuous peace that has existed for the twenty-one years since.

The world that exists now is not one of wars waged with swords and paid for in blood, but sliced with quills and shed in ink and gold. The armies of bankers, bailiffs, and bureaucrats that exists today are far more treacherous than any knight with his morningstar ever was. To all who wish to venture into this world and make a name for themselves, I lend a word of caution. You will need far more than the basic skills of combat and survival that once guaranteed a long life of promise. You must befriend the reckless, unite foe with foe, and draw every ally to yourself that you possibly can. There is not even the faintest glimmer of hope for survival otherwise.

## Those Who Will Become

It fascinates me about every race, just as it always has, that they seem to believe the world they live in is the one that will forever remain. When the trow first elicited aid for the trolls, they thought that the world might continue as it had, but with the edition of trolls. And just as their forebears, the trolls thought that their slaves might be slaves for all time. Even the proud and noble Fey had hoped to keep an everlasting empire, so long as they put down every human. Today, the children of Men think that every invention they yield and every discovery they make puts them toward a more glorious present, a better version of the lives they have, but they will soon encounter the truth.

Only one champion of true yield exists today; he stands as an affront to the wills of both Order and Chaos. Arrikur Seloria has continued to be a thorn in the side of either party, his inventions inspiring the people of Illyria to rise up and exist outside the bounds created for them by my brothers. The reason this is interesting to me is because as an affront to both parties, Mr. Seloria would only be a champion of mine. Since he's not, the only other god-beast who would have direct influence is Trion himself. I wait with baited breath to see what my master has in mind with the human.

As I look out upon the landscape, I see the many souls that my kind have picked as their own. Each of them is hidden in his or her own way apart from the others, their influence on the world being strong, but the source of their strength well-guarded. I feel no jealousy for the machinations of their lot, for they work against each other well enough to neutralize the effects of one another. In the middle of all of their petty pitching back and forth, I find myself bored without a plaything of my own. With every champion of the world dedicated to this cause or that, it would be truly something to have a man or woman committed to no cause at all. I believe I will soon select the one that will be my champion, and I will wait in stolid wonderment to see what they will do.

## The Servants Bow

Regardless of what we do for the mortals who wander this world, we are little more than keepers and caretakers in the end. The people always do what suits them most, despite the most earnest of pleas and precise of plans. They orchestrate their own designs and bring them to fruition as they see fit, even when their masters come to call and usher in an end. I am profoundly interested in the groups that the people have made by their own accord. As separate entities, it is amusing to see the humans partaking in the pleasures of secrecy, governing from beyond the veil as we do.

## The Fighters' Guild

Every knowledgeable human knows the name Caed Caerduness, the very man who founded both the city of Illviriam and the Fighters' Guild at its heart, but so few know the absolute truth. It was not of his power alone that the elder Caerduness would muster such a force in his old age, nor was it by coincidence that he lent that power to Vetali in the War of Nine Spears. At the age of seventy, the man overpowered proud warriors a third of his age and gathered the army that would birth the nation of Tortha, securing for himself vast wealth and lands, and putting him at the helm of one of Illyria's most enduring institutions. And the fools of the world think this somehow just happened.

Cynocephalus, seeing the corruption his nemesis Baelodiak was doing to the minds of mortal men, decided to bless the only human that he saw as being fully honorable in all ways. The wolf-god, being the keeper of oaths and binder of the spoken promise, struck an eternal bargain with the decrepit Caed Caerduness, granting him immortality, virility and strength, and the power to endure punishment of all kinds that poured from the lying mouths of Baelodiak's fork-tongued penny pinchers. A single drop of blood in the Well of the Moon forever blessed the children who would become the Fighters' Guild. They became sons and daughters beholden to indomitable strength, but were forever bound to the codes of honor that some were soon eager to forget.

These oath breakers spat upon the legacy of their master's work, thinking only of themselves and the power bestowed on them. As the people of Navis have always done with power, they twisted it for selfish purpose, and they in turn were twisted away from their brothers. No longer was the power of Cynocephalus a blessing of strength and valor; it warped its wielders into abominations that lost their mind in the throes of battle, becoming far more likely under the light of the full moon. Malformed, thought-addled, and thinking only of the vicious animal power that they held, they fled into the wilds.

Hunted as werewolves for nearly five centuries now, they have secured the ire of the people of Illyria who, quick to forget the debt they owed the guild, now hunt every child of Cynocephalus with voracity.

## The Mages' Guild

Knowing the history of the Mages' Guild, one would be quick to believe that such a controlling and vehemently-oppressive man as Gadarax the Blue-Clad would be an agent of Order, but it is not so. The first lord magus was no champion of any god-beast at all when he murdered the hedge magus Alan Despardeau and pulled nearly every spell caster into his fold. He was merely a very intelligent man with a great deal of vision and the will to see his plans through, and though I often favor these types, I am particularly disappointed at the extent to which he enforced Order for the sake of itself.

I watched him grow from a pitiful young boy in the slums of Rudil into something truly great. He devoured knowledge at every turn and thoughtfully secured every alliance he could with the game changers at the time, ensuring that he had friends in every corner of his world. In due time, the man's skill in magic would grow to marvel crowds and impress a king, at which time he flexed his political savvy and became the first court enchanter of any kingdom of Men. He was given near unlimited wealth and power from the crown to do as he saw fit, having assured his master that the control of magic was more important than its unbridled growth. As soon as he established the Mages' Guild at the college in Rudil, his abilities soured his relationships and his mind, and he did what any man would do.

Gadarax began murdering his enemies.

Necromancy was the first to be outlawed, then all blood-based summoning right after. Within a week, the archmagus had made criminals of a third of all spell weavers, and he used the position of his office so zealously that he earned the named "Blue-Clad", for it was said that his cloak was made of the weeping tears of his foes. After that, higher illusion magics were put to rest, then druidic spells and incantations, control spells, all remaining summoning spells, and all Fey magics. With a few strokes of his pen, the man had criminalized all arcanists who did not serve him and made it all but illegal to be a Fey. It would be centuries before his strict controls were undone and the guild became the more moderate magical education center that exists today. Modern people are thoroughly lucky.

Wholesome though the groups are, there are less savory guilds of importance to me.

## The Thieves' Guild

Few human groups have been like the Thieves' Guild: pervasive throughout the world, yet cloaked in shadow, influencing politics so directly, but from behind a painted window. This was not the intent of Anton Durham when he received the blessing of Baelodiak the Whisperer and donned the Cloak of Shadows. He became utterly invisible, wiped from the memories of all who knew him, and was reborn as the Sparrow. Even removal of the cloak would not cure his curse, for not until his death would a soul recognize him once more; and when the next wearer of the cloak was selected, so was born the next Sparrow, appearing identically to Anton and ensuring the legacy was secured.

As the guild would spread and grow, so too would their influence slowly encompass whole kingdoms and shape the rule of law. The group became more complex, dipping fingers from simple thievery into politics, the church, assassination, truly a hand in every jar. Operating beneath a series of groups called “hoods”, they divide their responsibilities accordingly and are all self-managing, only convening twice a year in the Council through representatives, the Hood Lords each fearing death at the hands of the others. In spite of their total disunity and inability to trust one another, they are one of the most powerful and influential guilds in Illyria, which is curious to me.

Today, the guild is almost in complete control of Nycenia; even with their new king threatening the long-held power they wield, every decision for the country is made through a series of bought-and-paid-for nobles and magistrates. Their lives are meticulously viewed by the guild through the many Hood organizations that exist, and if the local officials get too out of hand, become greedy, or otherwise err from the words of the guild, they are found to have suddenly died from an illness, though even the commoners of the country no longer buy into the explanations. For how deep the corruption goes, I am curious to see what becomes of the guild once the people finally tire of their antics.

## The Assassins' Guild

Now, now, now. Now, we get into one of my absolute favorite guilds.

Around five-hundred years ago, when Nerus the Elder first founded the Merchants' Guild as a control organization to shield his wealth from taxes, it was seen right away that his legacy would dwindle away if left in the hands of his descendants and subject to normal law. In order to secure the most potent use of his finances, he allowed his son Narcissus to create the Pale Blades, a group of

enforcers that would eventually give rise to the Assassins' Guild. Though they would at times pull away from their origins and go about dealings of their own accord, they have always returned to serve the whims of their masters, the very people who secure the money and protection they require.

Unlike the Grey Hoods of the Thieves' Guild, these murderers do not work on a purchased contract basis. There is no one that a man can pray to, nor a shelter any person can seek, that could alter their standing with the guild. And for all the money and power that the Merchants' Guild controls, there is no endless mountain of gold that can save a soul once he has been marked, and it is for this reason that the guild is immutable in its appointed tasks. When their masters say kill, they kill, and there is no stopping them until the order is revoked or the red right hand rests on their victim's forehead. From all whom I have seen, they are the only guild that has avoided the taint of such absolute power, and I find that intriguing. I closely watch the group, waiting to see what they will do, for I am The Watcher.

## The Merchants' Guild

Of course, without the Merchants' Guild, there would be neither thieves nor assassins, and it is that which is strange about them; at no other time in the history of the world, across all races, has there existed a more disorganized and self-absorbed group of people working as a single unit to great effect. The Merchants' Guild is of a power that it controls entire economies, sets the price standards for normal goods, and twists the arms of nations like Hysperia and Vasena with threats of capital burden and ruin. As much as each guildsman vies for petty attention and control, they are bound together by the strict laws that govern nearly every drop of gold that flows through Illyria.

The Three Laws are thus:

“Make no decision.” The guild is a bureaucratic mess. Every step that any guildsman takes against opposition must be evaluated and approved by the council. For this reason, every task is an excruciating process of paperwork and waiting, but each step is also precisely drawn out.

“Take nothing.” Despite the near-infinite quantities of wealth the guild controls, its people only have access to that wealth for as long as they kneel to the guild. It is not for them to achieve personal profit, but for the guild to achieve total profit, and many people who sought to benefit through greed found themselves penniless, having fallen like crashing stars from the pinnacle of success overnight.

“Let the guild handle it.” With its hands soaked in red through both the Thieves' and Assassins' Guilds, the Merchants' finds itself in no need to sully its already uneasy reputation by engaging in direct conflict with any other entity. When its members have grievances and its enemies surround, the guild need only snap its fingers before those who oppose it lay dead or destroyed.

Even with the laws keeping its members in check and total oversight holding everything in place, the guild is not without its flaws. Its governing center has shifted away from the old capitals and into Vasenian territory, where I am curious to see what the guild's new leader will do with all of her handed power. Considering her past, the guild could either rise to heights unforeseen or crumble into nothing. I will patiently observe until the outcome reveals itself to me.

## Mercenary Guilds

Humans have always done things in extremes. Either they are fully selfless and giving in all ways, or they are given to greed beyond comprehension. They seek to make good of the world, or they bring it tumbling down into ruin. They join together in harmony toward a common goal, or they are divided in the most solitary ways. From what has been observed over the centuries, their guilds are no different. For every long-standing and unified guild, there are ten smaller ones all vying for power.

When the children of Caed Caerduness forsook their master and used their powers for selfish gain, Cynocephalus withdrew his hand from them and cursed them to walk forever as werewolves. The guild then fractured between two parties-- those who forsook the wolveren blood as a curse of the flesh, and those who would forever continue the legacy of their founder by imbibing and taken on the power of the wolf. These torchbearers would become the Children of the Moon, maintaining the true leadership of the guild in secrecy while their disconcerted brothers and sisters led guild halls all over the world. In time, even these groups would split into smaller ones divided by petty differences in ideology, states of being, and the theory of combat. They would become the mercenary guilds.

Mercenaries are everywhere now, and the distinctions that define them are losing specificity. Today, guilds are not comprised of the professional masters that they once were. Anyone with a kitchen knife and the will to die are welcomed on any number of jobs. It's almost funny to see the lengths to which people of today will go, if they think they'll be famous for it.

## The Prophets Call

The religions of Illyria, and in truth of all Navis, are a humorous curiosity that I will spend little time dwelling upon. With my brothers and I having withdrawn ourselves from the face of the world, the many races of Navis have gone about inventing their own masters to worship, calling upon names that don't exist and pledging and pleading to the fiction of their own minds. But while much of the religions of Men are steeped in lunacy, I will admit that we've had a hand in leading their notions astray.

The main religion of the pale-faced Illyrians is one of animism, spiritualism, and many gods. Each of them commands a different aspect of the world, and every one is an invention of thought. The only true power in the Church of the Saker is the figurehead their self. Wanting to see the legacy of the Fey erased because of their insolence, Harbinger blessed the human Etyeric the Pure-Blooded, knowing the furor he would employ to wipe the Fey from history. By the time of his death, Etyeric had secured his power through a fragment of the Stone of Wisdom, housed in the robes worn by every Saker to follow since. And though the sciences of the modern world threaten to undo the authority of the church, it is the Saker's undeniable power and his command of angels that keeps the religion intact.

On the other side of the mountains, the Vasenians have two schools of thought that are as different as they could be, and both of them equally founded in nonsense. Like the Illyrians, some Vasenians follow the old ways, worshiping a series of animal deities that govern different aspects of the world. For lack of study, the western peoples invented beings that control the world, creatures whom they can entreat and find favor with, and at the center of which is the “living god”, Pharaoh. Until the death of Atum-Rah, it was the old way that was most fervently defended, but with his betrayal and ultimate demise, it is only a matter of time before the priests and scholars of that fading creed finally turn in their robes and take on the mantle of something more important.

Just as the dark-skinned children of the desert were fooled by sorcery into worshiping a man in a tall hat, so too were they tricked by the “prophet” Khalid bin'Khomeini. When the merchant lord arose from bed one day and decided to raise an army, people were rapidly gathered to his side or fell before the sword. To secure an enduring legacy, he built a religion around himself, claiming that he was the one true prophet of the living god, and led his soldiers on such a violent warpath that the lie would last half a millennium. The hope is that the work of Seloria, the servants of Chaos, and whomever I select may usher in the end of all these useless relics of a time long since past.

## And We, Like Gods

It is not without some satisfaction that I speak of control in Illyria. Though I was once a child of Order myself, I am continually amused at what the people of the world can do when given free reign to exert their wills. The god-beasts bind champions with promises of greatness and respect, and kings and guilds lord over every corner of a world they've only begun to discover, but in spite of the choking grip with which these entities clutch at the throat of liberty, humans, Fey, lamia, and even goblins are beginning to edge out slavery through a series of groups that seek the same thing: the freedom to act.

There is no unity in the majority of these clans, companies, and cooperatives, but they do not require it either. As long as they stand for the rights of the individual and against the oppressive grip of “common good”, they will have my attention. It is no concern of mine whether or not these people ever achieve the purposes for which they were designed. I want to see something change the world I watch.

## Human Companies and Families

I have already spoken at some length on those most important people who shape Illyria, and all learned people know of the families who head the guilds, but they are not who I speak of. I look down upon the world and see the activities of the outliers, the citizens on the fringes of the world only recently coming into their own; I tilt my head up to the horizon, to the edge of time, and I am glad to witness the change they will enact, the damage they will do to the established order.

House Seloria is one such family, likely working beneath the coveted blessing of Trion to invent the creations that will one day topple the world, just as the trolls had done before. Though Arrikur is patronized by the wealthy nation Hysperia, he has no true allegiance, serving only his own curiosity and wont of discovery. Money is no master to the man, as he sells only enough plans that he might continue his research, and he seeks no power for himself beyond what is required to keep the authority that yields his work. He looked at the power of water magic, saw the strength of steam, and smiled; he created the piston, the contained steel engine, the gearbox, and smiled; and now, now he holds a fistful of Vasenian black powder in his left hand and a matchstick in his right. And he smiles. Surely, either Arrikur himself or his brilliant son Sirius will see the unfolding of Order and Chaos.

House Brandt is another family that amuses me, though it has fallen into a deep and troubling pit since the death of its greatest son only four decades ago. Their wealth has trickled away, and they

have been forever disgraced by all communities due to the madness of the “God-King”. In that time, I have seen Gareth's son grow up, bear children, and watch them all die one-by-one, and I have seen his sisters and cousins depart from the family name, willing to topple the house in favor of securing their own legacies in other ways. Pushed to the edge of the world now for thirty-five years as a man, it will be interesting to see what will become of Alois Brandt. While his pirate armada grows in the sea to the east, it is only a matter of time before he decides to strike and take back everything his father lost.

The last of the Hysperian families of note also helms one of Illyria's most important guild-free mercantile companies. The Ardent Trading Company is a mix of several companies under different names, with all of them operating beneath a parent trust to provide cheap basic goods to every corner of the world; it uses its large market shares to provide low-cost alternatives to the common folk, giving it the large consumer base from which it has drawn so much influence. Its pockets are deep, having benefited from the growth of Hysperia during the War of Conquest, then even more in the times of trouble following the sudden fall of the Hysperian Empire. The Ardent Trading Company is still headed by its founder, Ansel Ardent, though in his old age, he serves only as a figurehead. Now, run by Ansel's oldest grandson, Dylan, the company is quickly becoming a thorn in the side of the Merchant's Guild.

Between the other nations of eastern Illyria, few families are as well known as the individuals that are yielded from them. Tortha has no great banners that are any interest of me, for all of their families are of the boring type-- noble, beneficial, and from fine stock. The houses Daud, Wald, and Dunnegan have forever been the most loyal of compatriots, all of them acting in kind for the good of their nation when battle has come to call. Even the newer House Stalwart, with its ancestors being great heroes in times of conflict, has done little of interest beyond contributing the aging Sir Jon.

In the same vein, Kourmar finds itself with even fewer families of the last age. Any people of import largely dissipated into the lands beyond when humanity took its first steps north away from the rock. Even with important families like House Hatch constructing the monolithic towers that guard the Illyrian trading highways, their people are so satisfied and set in their ways that they are rarely stirred to action. I have seen the signs. I know what to watch for. And the Kourmaran people lack the depth, complexity, and desperation necessary to be anything but content with their lives.

On the other hand, Feylanor lends itself well to desperation in the fall out of the collapse of the empire. In its time, House Meirnour was a family so influential, its youngest members were favored by

kings and emperors, and its wealth was so vast that it could stop entire armies with a single financial decision. Today, the house is a shadow of its former self. Most of its holdings were confiscated or destroyed over the course of two decades, and all but a few of its members have been evicted from their comfortable positions in court. Only a handful of people survive in the upper echelons of Feylanorian court and the Church of the Saker, but they see their positions as tenuous, and it is only a matter of time before they become wary enough to act against masters who now look down upon them.

Beside them, the Nycene House Greyvon has also come upon hard times. Once the darling of the church and companion to a mad emperor, it was not so long ago that a Greyvon patriarch found himself seated on the Torthan throne. But with the fallout of the Purifiers and the breaking of the old regime, the family found itself not only friendless, but privy to the whims of dangerous people. Their credit became meaningless, as they had allied themselves with the enemies of peace, and for more than forty years, the children of Donnald Greyvon have watched their belongings dissolve into nothing. Just as Meirnour looks forward and sees only darkness, so too will Greyvon; and together, they will sell their souls to the devil to reclaim what they feel is rightfully theirs. I expect quite a spectacle, indeed.

Beyond the mountains that split my favored land in half, I look upon the families of Vasena and find myself entertained by how much their world has changed in twenty-one years. The old ways of the world have fallen away almost entirely, and as a single unit, the people have stepped into the shoes of their own legacy. Daily, they discover the long-lost relics of what was left for them by their ancestors; scholars and magisters continue to uncover the secrets of their forgotten world. As the nation pulls itself from the ashes and builds back into the glory it once enjoyed, I see two new families that will benefit the most from the world to come, for they are the ones who anticipate it.

Together, the Houses Gadhze and Arsuf have attained influence that rivals the official military government in scope and power. Though rule has passed from sultan to sultan in the same familial pattern as all other rulers, House Arsuf whispers into its master's ear, using connections established long ago when its matron Yenna bint'Abram married Judge-Commander Rustam Arsuf, a close friend of the sultan of that day. In the same vein, House Gadhze controls the priesthood, wielding its bond with High Priestess Kepri to slowly turn the dying religion of the old ways into a political and economic machine. It is not of their own power that either of these families will achieve greatness, but I see a day close at-hand where Vasena would do well to kneel before their combined might.

## The Fey Clans

Five-thousand years ago, the great troll race destroyed itself in an atomic holocaust that left the rest of Illyria to pick up the pieces. From the ruins of that world, the Fey rose out of bondage and overtook the last of their masters, establishing a rule that would extend another four and a half eons before it too was destroyed by humankind. Now, with the death of the Purifiers, the last prime families of feyfolk climb from the gutters of Kourmar and their hidden places among the southern wilds. The Clans Victoria and Caelum both herald the return of the Fey people and hope to stir within them a rise to the glory that they once beheld, even if they must leave Illyria to do so.

Clan Victoria was one of the first to leave the ancient empire Feya when it first fell to Darcidia six centuries ago. At the time, it was privy to stretches of land the size of countries, and it held more gold than most kings ever have. Perhaps for those reasons alone, it was the only family to survive hundreds of years of exile and oppression while other clans flickered out like a thousand dying lights. When the Purifiers were all but destroyed by Elric Faranthal and the Iron Lady thereafter, it gave Victoria the opportunity to step out from the shadows of a world that forgot them, leaving behind the frigid and inhospitable Kourmar for lands more palatable to their tastes. Today, their strength is only moderate, but many nameless Fey have gathered beneath their umbrella, pledging loyalty for the promise of security and a share of the greatness that Victoria will have once again.

As its polar opposite, Caelum was never as wealthy or populous as Victoria, but that is perhaps why it was able to survive among the lowlands and marshes of Feylanor and Nycenia. In the massacres that followed Rugnar and Etyeric soon after, Clan Caelum's members fled to the last remnants of their sovereign kingdom and hid their new homes behind veils of powerful illusion magic. While blood swept through the land only feet outside their doorsteps, Caelum remained untouched, their enemies seeing only trees and rocks when looking upon their prey. Today, their homes have fallen into ruin, unkempt for hundreds of years as they waited out the storm; now that the clan has emerged, they have dedicated their time and energy to gathering every piece of their lost society they can and finding a new place to hide among the undiscovered corners of the world, Illyria or beyond.

## Bring Forth Destruction

It is not by accident that I have a constant curiosity about the world. While those like me use the many people of Navis against one another for small gains in dominance, I abstain. I give my champions great lateral to do as they wish, only recommending that they make the most of power and prophecy. I lend my blessings, I wait, and I watch. I watch to see if any of the races might do something the others did not, if any of the world's many peoples might come together in a way worth presenting as a challenge. This world is not one that will endure all time, so I watch. And I wait.

The day will come. And on that day, everything that is and everything that was will cease to be, and all possible futures will be cut short in a single wave of great light. For though my brethren and I are the keepers and watchers of this world, our powers are only to maintain. In truth, Order and Chaos serve the same master and the same end, to keep the planet growing toward a final goal, to keep the species of the world in a constant struggle for the rise to power, to select the finest and the strongest, to make everything ready for the day that the Ones return to claim their long-awaited reward.

The people of the planet Navis call it so because that's what we told them to call it. The name means "vessel", a vessel upon which to travel the stars.

But Navis is not a vessel. It's a cup. And soon, the Ones will return, and they will drink.

The trow were not worthy to take up the mantle. So given were they to child-like wonder and peace that, though they obtained advancement far greater than any people to have ever existed, they do not wield their magics as weapons. They are a wholly warm and thoughtful kind, unfit for the task I will have for my chosen race. When the time for reckoning comes, I know that the trow will do what they have always done. They'll hide. They will open their portals, step into their pocket universes, seal the doors behind them, and hide, even as the entire world burns black.

The trolls were not worthy to take up the mantle. I had hoped for a time that they might, for immense was their strength and monstrous were their weapons of war, but once they fully grasped the idea of total destruction, they took to it with unnatural zeal. Even with the Stone of Wisdom, they were unthinkably stupid and short-sighted, a disgusting race of selfish and witless creatures. I was glad when their rule was dissolved, their kingdoms destroyed, and the whole race brought to ruin, for they were

the most unworthy of creatures to rule. Had they lasted until that last day comes, they would have seen the opportunity to attack their enemies instead of the real threat, and the ultimate foe would have needed only to watch as the trolls undid themselves for Him. They truly deserved to die.

The Fey were not worthy to take up the mantle. As with the trolls, there was a time when I watched the Fey, wondering what they would make of their sudden freedom. No sooner did they come out from beneath the yoke of the trolls than the feyfolk turned and made slaves of all others. They learned nothing from the fall of their oppressors, and they did not use wisdom or foresight in the exacting of their military might. So petty and bureaucratic were the Fey that a single upstart with a handful of proud warriors was unable to undo an eons-old legacy and ruin all they had built together. Had the Fey been the dominant species when the days of darkness came, they would have pretended that no problem existed, taking little action until it was far too late to be victorious, just as they did with Ragnar the Black. It was good of me to turn my back on them.

Now, I look at these new people, the humans, having only existed on Illyria for a thousand years. I see the way that they act, how they can be both the saviors of one another and the destroyers and enslavers of all. I see how some work their whole lives to bring peace and happiness to the hurt and downtrodden while others drink the tears that fall from the eyes of the suffering. I have witnessed the kingdoms of Men reach up from the earth only to collapse all the quicker into mud and dust, and all for the sake of greed, of selfishness, of disunity. I have seen all that the humans of Illyria are doing, and I see what they are soon to do. The pages are open to me, and I am eager to read.

I believe the humans are the only race worthy of stopping the cataclysm to come, but I must wait and I must watch carefully to determine their worthiness.

I am fascinated to see what they will do.

## And It Begins

My champion. My champion. How long do I still have? How much time do I have to prepare you for the difficulty to come? I do not know if you will ever get to read this, but the hope is that you might; I can only wait and watch, hoping that these words may make it into your hands, that you will partake of the wisdom therein, and that you will use it on your great journey. I need you to be as prepared as possible for the time to come. I need you to be strong enough to endure the trials ahead.

I need you to be ready for anything.

## The Kingdoms of Men

The kingdoms of Illyria have long existed in their current forms, having been the same for more than the four-hundred years since Feylanor and Nycenia were cloven from one another. Each nation has its benefits and drawbacks, and so each will yield its different kinds of people. When I choose who the herald of my blessing will be, I'll have to consider what the nations could give to me. For my part, this one selection, the homeland of the arbiter of my will, may be my most important decision.

When the people of this world think of Illyria, the first kingdom to come to mind is often Hysperia. Because of its location-- with temperate climates, easy terrain, and an abundance of natural resources-- it would be the clear choice for an inheritor of wealth and power. Even with the crippling of its economy after the fall of Gareth Brandt, it has recovered from the heavy sanctions and tributes imposed on it by the victorious enemy nations. Chancellor Johnathan Billings is a wise and cautious ruler who watches over his people from his quiet garden; despite the obvious love he shows in helming so powerful a nation, he has yet to use it to his advantage. I find that strange, and I'm paying attention.

It's closest partner and trading rival, Nycenia is a land of duplicity and lawlessness hidden beneath a thin layer of pomp and prestige. Run in equal parts by the Thieves' and Merchants' Guilds and bound by the codes of the Assassins' Guild, one is as likely to become a millionaire in Nycenia as they are to end up dead. The nation is host to the largest shipyard on the continent and, naturally, the grandest armada, as well. They are the majority holder of all naval trading and provide the security for shipping on the eastern half of the continent. This vast wealth, however, has yet to make it into the hands of the people, who see their king as their source of grief. The irony is palpable, as Charle himself receives only what the merchants allow. Caution is the word when venturing through Nycenia.

As Nycenia's sister state, Feylanor could be no different. The queen who lords over the country took well in the footsteps of her grandmother, becoming a tight-fisted monarch who flexes absolute authority for the good of her people. Ruling a kingdom at the age of seventeen has forced her to be an icy and solitary individual who rarely delights in the company of others, but it has also made her difficult to influence or corrupt, and the Church of the Saker has seen its political muscle diminish greatly in the three years since Lady Alena took office. She has collected beneath her a sprawling array of powerful men, most of whom beg to be her suitor, but she hesitates to select anyone, fearing the faltering of her rigid throne and not wanting the strong influence of an outsider. So far, Feylanor has come to great benefit under the Iron Lady, but we will see what becomes of her rule.

Though Feylanor has done well through trade since the fall of the Iron Wall, it is Kourmar that has seen the most significant improvement, so much so that I find it difficult to see much of the old amidst all the new. Once an impervious hinterland waste, Kourmar now boasts three of the five main trading posts along the Spice and Olive Roads. Dark, old fortresses of weathered stone are giving way to the baroque style, and growing cities like Gathenport and Niskelmast are in vogue with young merchants. Now relying on tariffs instead of stripping down its own natural resources, Kourmar is being handled safely and efficiently by the Old Lion. A better statesman and negotiator than his uncle, the Pale King, ever was, the new king is doing well to advance Kourmar into the next age.

Of course, we must not neglect the contributions of one of the major players of the last age. Had Tortha not been the sort of nation it is, a certain madman may have had his way with the continent. Even with the growing trade of silver that trickles through the middle of the nation, Tortha has been largely unaffected by the sudden rediscovery of Vasena one generation ago. Even as its boy-king has come into his own as a dashing and proud man, political strife exists in many corners while the new ways of the world conflict with Tortha's proud and ancient traditions. Now, Edwin Godwinson must eliminate the internal forces that threaten his rule while also maintaining the peace and sovereign authority that his country's many lords maintain. The young master has quite a task ahead of him, and with important allies aging and dying all around, it will be interesting to watch what happens.

The largest of all nations on the continent and the wealthiest in terms of holdings, Vasena is a nation with an interesting dichotomy. It heralds in the dawn of the new age, yet it remains trapped in the old; it is a land of ultimate freedom, where one can do anything as long as they can afford it, but a tenth of all people are bonded slaves; its wealthy live in marvelous citadels cast in gold and bedecked

with precious stones, but its poor are the sorriest creatures in all of creation. Vasena is the best and worst of everything. It reveals the true face of humanity, that they can be the most worthy of races while at the same time the most despicable, and its harsh and inhospitable lands have created a people willing to do anything to survive and succeed. There is a saying among the Illyrians, even in Vasena itself: "Tan skin and a wide smile is bad luck for a long while." The phrase exists for a reason.

From whatever corner of the world I choose my champion to be from, they will have their strengths just as well as their flaws. A Hysperian would be charismatic and lucky, while a Nycenian might be sly or swift as a shadow. The Feylanorians, like their queen, would be stoic and strong, and fervently patriotic. A son or daughter of Kourmar might be rich, optimistic, or as tough as the elders, while a Torthan would have heavy arms and an even thicker skull. Still, a Vasenian would be the wild card, the most mysterious, and could yield any result. I may have to choose more than one.

I no longer care for maintaining the balance. It hasn't mattered for some time.

## Attributes

I look down upon the world, and I see a suspicious sort of working order, the truth that exists beyond the veil. Surely, the mortals of the world have noticed, whether they said anything or were merely thought mad and locked away. A young huntress draws an arrow on a deer, but the arrow misses by an inch, and a painful bolt of red passes through her mind. Failure. A man speaks to a group of merchants, trying to convince them that he's a priest who's been lost on the trail; they raise him up and bring him into the group. Pass. And at times, I have looked down upon the mortals as they made their wars, watched the people fight, saw numbers that did not exist. And there were red lines.

I remember the day of the falling stars, when the trolls brought about their own end. I looked down upon a city that was about to be erased from the world. I saw a million tiny red lines all flashing together, I heard their single great cry, and I saw a million tiny red lines disappear in an instant. Even I do not know the nature of these phenomena, but I suspect something dark and incomprehensible lying just outside my reach. With all my resources and the knowledge I have available, I cannot pierce the veil. How will these pitiable mortal peasants do the same without my help?

The life of an adventurer is often a short one, but it doesn't have to be. With the right skills and

attributes attuned to one's needs, a person can avoid all the failures that have led to the misfortune of others. And with proper guidance, someone starting out anew can embrace the world with little difficulty. It is all a matter of anticipating needs and meeting them before they become problems.

Preparing for an adventure means little more than preparing for life. One must have the proper articles to sustain life: food, water, protective gear, and willpower, for willpower is a requirement for surviving in the harsh outlands of Illyria. Managing these resources is important, but being able to obtain them by one's own power is even more so. For this reason, skills like hunting, alchemy, and engineering are more imperative than the “higher skills” like persuasion and stealth. With these basic skills, a person can seek out their own food and water and safely secure their supplies. They can heal wounds, avoid injury, ward off predators, and inflict pain on the unwary foe. Only once these skills are in place should a person focus on refining their abilities in higher areas of cognition.

If the three basic skills are meant to keep a person alive, then the talents of discernment and scouting exist to make life easy. The ability to sense danger, to see distant foe, and to identify a problem before it begins, these fall under the mastery of discernment and scouting, twin skills with scopes of practice that intertwine. Having become a master of either or both, one will find that nothing remains out of reach for long, and tasks that seemed distant or difficult somehow lose that edge. And for those who deny these strengths, they will likely meet a short end from a long-fired arrow.

It is no secret that the masters of the Thieves' Guild, between each sect of the hoods, employ the skills of persuasion and stealth with such deftness that they remain utterly unexposed. And it is no coincidence that the Merchants' Guild wields both abilities to great effect in all of its most important dealings. The skills from before will keep an adventurer alive and happy, but the mastery of stealth and persuasion will make a man rich. Every closed door will suddenly be open, every listening ear convinced of a truth. Like a shadow, the liar will melt into the wall, sneaking toward their target without an eye to fall on them. They will strike or they will steal, and no one will be the wiser.

I recommend the seven primary skills in a particular order, but that is not to discourage anyone from obtaining greater knowledge where and when they can. Mastering all seven makes one a master of the world, and only by employing the lot will an adventurer be prepared for the time to follow. Tread carefully, all who imbibe of the fruit of my words. I do not speak them for my own amusement.

## Surviving

Any good father lays a blessing upon each of his children, but I am no father, and you are not my children. In its stead, I grant words of wisdom, a guide of sorts to help the eyes of mortal men better grasp of the world before they go groping, tumbling, and falling into a land that wishes to swallow them up. Long are the roads that lead from Vajunaptra to Rudil, and they are paved with the bones of every fool who sought fortune and adventure with no inkling of how to handle either.

Slaughter has always been the nature of Navis. From the primordial days before the trow until this very day, almost every survivor of note has had their arms steeped to the elbows in the blood of another. If food was wanted but could not be afforded, it was stolen from a victim or cut from a carcass. If gold was a necessity and none could be had, a lie, a robbery, a blade to the chest would satisfy. Thirst, the thirst of water, the thirst for life, the thirst to rise up above one's brothers and be the one who conquers, it has driven all creatures to kill since the dawn of time, and they will continue until the sun comes crashing from the sky and the Great Consumer descends to claim the world.

Fighting is the only way of life on Navis. To fight is to survive.

In the beginning of any journey, an inexperienced adventurer will have access to few resources and likely no equipment. They will be weak, untested, and thoroughly without hope. My suggestion has always been to dedicate oneself to a path and stick with it. The butchered souls of history are always the indecisive, those weaklings who are caught in the crossfire between greater beings than their ken. The recommendation is to choose one of three paths: wielding one's strength, intellect, or agility against their foes and forsaking all other methods until the time is necessary. It has never benefited anyone to be poor at everything when they could be great at one thing.

After deciding on a style of combat, the recommendation is to select gear that most suits that style. A strong man can afford to wield both cumbersome and powerful items, but others may need to rely on their speed and wits to survive what may befall them. In the same vein, a sword is not the best way to deal with the spirits that haunt the night, but a blast of fire may send them back into the outer realms. And as dangerous as it is for the lightly armed to fight in close quarters, they may never need to if they can pick opponents apart with draw and loose. Whatever way is chosen, stay with it; outfit for the style as quickly as possible and never deviate until it is too costly not to.

Once equipment is in place and experience has been gained, the time has come for a traveler to grow their mind, body, and spirit. The only real teacher is life, so any amount of battle and success or failure in different endeavors will eventually yield change. Strength, intellect, and agility should be expanded as needed either to ease the burdens of carry or to advance one's place in the world. Tasks will become more difficult, and some money will follow, and that can be used for the combat skills that mark the fiercest of warriors and the most successful of adventurers.

More knowledge is obtain, more skills are learned, and abilities are increased to a formidable degree. The adventurer is then fit to be of use to guilds, all of whom have been recently handing down government contracts to handle either public or guild-related issues for a small price, which our adventurer collects. These guild jobs are done until such wealth and experience is accrued that the man or woman is ready to serve lords and masters. Just as with the guilds, governors have seen the value in using mercenaries that have shown fealty to their crowns over a period of time, and they are willing to let the most loyal become a part of the inner court, if they're willing to perform certain work.

The world is in great need of all the help it can get. With each country vying for every speck of gold it can wrestle from the hands of the others, and all of them wielding hidden blades beneath the table, they are more than willing to grant land, titles, and great respect to those who serve them best. There has been no more perfect time to be a wanderer, vagrant, skilled blade-for-hire wanting to do what is necessary for a chance at glory and power. It is in this strange and quickly-changing time that I look down upon this Illyria, this small thumb of land in the corner of the world, with the hope that what is to come may yet be stopped, and that the world of Navis might be spared the wrath of the Ones.

## Before It Ends

This is a blessing for my champion, whomever you end up being.

You are born unto a legacy of great heroes and destinies that have been remembered across the ages; you should do them justice by respecting and achieving as they did.

The whole of Illyria, and all of Navis in-kind, is threatened, though it does not know it, and is about to meet an end that I believe only you will be able to stop; meet the challenge.

Many trials and troubles will come against you, more than any person who has ever lived; you will survive what has killed many others like you, and you will endure.

The road ahead is a long and difficult one, fraught with ravage and ruin at every turn; you will stand against all who oppose you, and you will crush them with exacting ruthlessness.

The people of the world will grope and grasp, their bitter tears pooling on the ground beside you; you will either extend mercy, or you will lash out and bring a swift end to their pleas.

The masters of the world will befriend you, sing your praises, whisper sweetly into your ear; you will cater to their whims and serve them, or you will strike out on your own and conquer.

The world ahead of you is full of possibilities, both for good and for evil, and you are free to do as you see fit; I will not force you, for I do not own you. I am here to watch.

The world will enter a wondrous new age because of you, and it will survive the troubles ahead because of your great work, or it will break apart and turn to ash; it is entirely yours to choose.

Kingdoms rise and fall like the tide, and eventually all towers crumble into dust; I have watched and I have waited age after age for someone like you to come along and change the world.

I wonder what you will do.