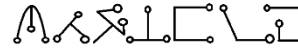


The Siiklagradivad



or

The Song of the Great Circle

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English.

by

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ABSTRACT

THE SIIKLAGRADIVAD

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Western Carolina University (April 2023)

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The Siiklagradivad is a mythopoeia (defined as a narrative genre where the author invents a fictional mythology) setting up the foundational lore of the literary fantasy universe that I have created and am working in. Taking inspiration from other foundational mythologic works such as the Norse *Poetic* and *Prose Eddas*, the Homeric epics (*The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*), Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedies*, and especially J.R.R. Tolkien's own mythopoeia for Middle-earth *The Silmarillion*, *The Siiklagradivad* will chronicle, in a mythic way, the origin and life-death/creation-destruction cycle of a fictional universe. *The Siiklagradivad* begins with the births of the twin sibling "Ur-Deities" to the All-God known as Chaos, Father of the Void, named Nephthys and Set, whose incest is responsible for the scientific Big Bang (in-universe called the "First Creation" or the "Ur-Event"), and the creation of the Twin Dimensions of *Luxios* and *Tenebros* as a result of their mating. Following this, *The Siiklagradivad* tells of the punishment and binding of the twins by their father for their blasphemous union, as well as the divine war that ignites between the twins' children—chiefly the rival pantheons of 100 gods each called the *Eliker* and the *Wyker*—for control over the perceivable universe and wardship of the twins' youngest child, the Primal Abyss. *The Siiklagradivad* will also explain our own creation (based off the Abrahamic interpretation, in-universe known as the "Second Creation") in the context of this universe. Following that, it will prophecy two more subsequent creation events before the apocalyptic *Körvlagradivas* (based heavily off the Norse Ragnarök) and the cyclical death-rebirth of the universe. Included will also be two fictional alphabets: one based off the celestial alphabet (also known as angelic script), the other runic (but incomplete). *The Siiklagradivad* will

be an attempt to create a fully functional religion and mythology, rooted in existing, real-world faiths, that will serve as the backbone and “bible” for my entire literary career, providing critical lore that will be built upon and expanded with the novels and short stories that I create within the scope of the universe. Through the display of extensive personal research into real-world faiths (chiefly Greco-Roman, Norse, and Judeo-Christian, with some aspects of Egyptian and Shintō) and existing, seminal works within the fantasy and mythological fiction sphere—both of which are critical to the formation of the mythopoeia and the story it tells—*The Siiklagradivad* will also showcase all that I’ve learned in the Creative Writing graduate program at Western Carolina University, and function as the culmination of six years of education within the greater English program, and many years more of personal, private research and development.

THE FIRST VERSE:

Isiahn



OR

The Ur-Event

In the Primordial Era, ageless and timeless, there was but one entity: the Primeval Queen Desolas. Alone for an eternity, she dwelled within the dark and ancient Empty until she sought to Create for herself kin for company and fellowship. Possessed of sexes both Male and Female, Desolas made herself pregnant, she christened herself Matriarch and set in motion the flow of Time, and she soon gave birth to Chaos, her son.

Chaos was born mature, and when Desolas's eyes first fell upon him, she was taken by his beauty and lusted for him. Using her control over Time, she appeared to him as a young woman and mated with him, and soon gave birth to the twin Chaos Dragons Set and Nephthys. Set had large scales of black on his back, with night-blue scales on his belly, glowing eyes of gold, and a mane of feathers alternating blue and purple around his head and neck like a lion. Four ribbed, black horns curved back upon his head, spines like jagged spikes lined his back from the top of his head to his bulbous tail, and his musculature was strong and frightening. He was the Dawn-King who watched the world with his Solar Eye, while Nephthys was the Night-Queen and stood vigil with her Lunar Eye.

Snow-white scales were on her back with cyan scales upon her belly. Her night-black spines were thin and curved like fangs, creeping down her back from the top of her head to her tapered tail. Her eyes were a brilliant, cyan blue and set deep within her feathered face. Two great, ivory horns curved sharply back from the crown of her head, and her musculature was the definition of her sex, sleek and slender. While her brother's strength and prowess were unmatched, her skill laid with her intelligence and cunning, and her speed matched Set's might.

When Chaos saw Desolas nursing their children, he realized the sordid truth of her seduction. So stricken with shame and righteous fury was he, that he slew her as she slept and consumed her. Joining her power with his, he molded the Empty into the sinless and perfect Void.

It was ever his proudest achievement, and the Father of the Void desired only to maintain its purity. So, when Set and Nephthys, close and inseparable even from infancy, reached maturity and began to look upon each other with lustful eyes, Chaos sought to prevent the repetition of the grievous sin that had resulted in his children's births. He kept them apart and fixed his all-seeing Eye upon them, but this did not dissuade them, for there existed still primeval elements of the Empty, outside the reach of his Eye, where the twins would go to scheme under the guise of hunting. Nephthys presented her brother a simple plan: she would place upon the Void a particularly dark night, where even her Lunar Eye would not shew its face. Then, she would descend from the Sky-Ocean where she resided and place upon their father's eyes a deep and dreamless sleep.

And so it was that Nephthys shrouded her Lunar Eye in shadow and laid on the land an impenetrable darkness. Chaos, blinded by the night, retired from his ever-present vigil and Nephthys placed upon his eyes a weighty tiredness. When she knew he was asleep and all his Dream-Eyes were blinded, she went to her brother and mated with him. The intensity of their mating roars cracked the firmament and brought on the rain, and the passionate conclusion of the First Creation birthed the Twin Dimensions of Luxios and Tenebros. Set's seed quickened in Nephthys's celestial womb, birthing for her the Eliker, while that which was spilt into the Void became the Wyker.

When Chaos awoke, he was furious. He saw Set's strength and power, and so banished his son to Tenebros, where the Dawn-King would rule over that lawless, amoral land as its master. For Nephthys, Chaos saw fit to banish her to Luxios, where she would be its mistress. Set attempted to escape from his prison in anger, but Chaos subdued him and bound him waist-deep within his Solar Eye, ever to bathe in the fires of his own passion and lust. Unlike her brother, Nephthys was wily and quick, and with silver-tongue she appealed to her father's mercy and was cast into Luxios to lord over the land as its Creator-Mother, with only Chaos's Dream-Eyes fixed to her as restraint. And so they remained there, for a time, longing for the day they could reunite.

Meanwhile, as Brother and Sister schemed in secret beneath their father's paranoid gaze, the children spawned by their mating matured, and they searched both themselves and the realm they now inhabited for a purpose or dominion that could justify their existence.

THE SECOND VERSE:

Diviköron



OR

The Divine Children

The Elikers and the Wykers were both of one hundred gods each, but they shared no similarities besides. The Elikers, produced by father's seed quickened in mother's womb, were with greater intelligence and powers unimaginable by the Wykers, who were born without the influence of their mother. The Elikers took for themselves domains within Luxios, and commanded them as laws of Nature. The eldest-born became their king, and was named Mortis. He claimed the throne of Death, and christened himself the Prince of Death in response. His charisma and intelligence—even higher than his Elikian kin—enabled him to command the rest of his brothers and sisters, and he wielded this power liberally. Mortis greatly resented the Wykers—his unborn brethren—whom he saw as infantile and barbaric, and so he convinced his Elikian brothers and sisters to scorn and condemn them.

He made soldiers and warriors out of the Luxian life born from the sleeping Nephthys's dreams, which he called the Einherjar, and had his brothers and sisters train them for his intended genocide of the Wykers who, as incomplete progeny untouched by their mother's womb, revealed in discord and disarray. Four factions made the Wykers: the thirteen Dream Demons, the two-and-eighty Void Wyrms, the four Greater Elementals, and the three-eyed Midgardsormr, the Alpha Breaker, who was the most powerful and discordant of them all. While the Elikers resided in their domains of Order, the nomadic Wykers remained unsettled within the Void of Chaos. The Dream Demons would come to assign themselves to aspects of intelligent Life, the Greater Elementals would seize control over the Natural Elements, while the Void Wyrms would indulge themselves

in their discord to wreak havoc and misfortune across all that was seeded by their great Creator-Mother. They remained unaware of the Elikier's resentment towards them, all except for the Dream Demon Theos, who both knew and feared his brethren's hatred.

Thus, in the days preceding the great Voidal War, Theos prepared for the inevitable conflict. All attempts to appeal to his Wykerian brethren and warn them of Mortis's growing Elikierian armies failed, and so Theos was left with little else but to flee and wait.

* * *

With rising strife and growing conflict in the Light Dimension of Luxios, a different sort of trouble took root in the Dark Dimension of Tenebros. Set, from within his solar prison, looked to the galactic sky above his cell and saw his sister's Lunar Eye creep across the firmament, teasing and taunting him as it had done throughout their courtship. It ignited his lust and flared the fires of passion consuming him, and the relief he found spawned depraved abominations to populate his realm. The life that propagated in Tenebros possessed a twisted kind of intelligence. They formed great churches and shrines to their Creator-Father, and held great orgies and sacrifices and feasts in his honor. He made oracles in the Black Priests that led his worship, and through them he prepared a great army to assist his escape to Luxios. All of this was done outside the knowledge of Chaos, whose every eye was fixed to the growing conflict in Luxios that threatened to taint his Void in blood.

* * *

Nephtys saw both of these growing conflicts from her den atop her Lunar Eye, and desiring to reunite with Set, assisted in growing and shielding his army from their father. At the same time, she watched as the Elikier rallied around Mortis and he prepared his *own* army for war against the Wyker, and though the imminent slaughter of her children distressed her, she

nevertheless saw how it distracted their Father Chaos from her brother's conspiratorial scheme, and so chose not to intervene in the coming Voidal War.

THE THIRD VERSE:

Vayahva



OR

The Voidal War

Mortis, the Prince of Death and lord of the E liker, began the Voidal War with a bloody strike against the Void Wyrms. Three fell beneath Mortis's sword by day's end: Sympathos, Amitios, and Generos. Each kill was answered by the mournful wails of their mother Nephthys from within her lunar den, and from her sleep emerged great Nightmares that joined the battlefield and slaughtered all in their path. Mortis used the High Speech and Voidal Oaths to bind them to his will, and led them against the unsuspecting and unprepared Wyker. Another Void Wurm fell by week's end: Honestos, and a fifth fell but a fortnight later: Trustios. The Dream Demon Fovos traveled through the gaze of Midgardsormr's third eye, called Bilröst, to Tenebros, where she appealed to Set for assistance. Although reluctant, he nevertheless gave to Fovos command of a contingent to return with her to Luxios, although they were cloaked so as to appear as Nightmares to all but the Dream Demons commanding them. Thus marked the conclusion of Körvlagrana, the first great battle of the Voidal War.

Soon after began Körvladivisi, the second battle of the Voidal War. The Tenebrosian forces, joined by two of the Greater Elementals and their Lesser Elemental armies into the Wild Hunt, ambushed the Einherjar under the watchful gaze of Nephthys's Lunar Eye. To cover them from its light, the Greater Elementals conjured a thick fog to shroud them. Nightmares descended upon the battlefield, but beneath the commands of Fovos, the Fire Guardian Firanon, and the Ice Guardian Isacuss, they were taken to be integrated into the Wild Hunt. The rest of the Wyker, fearing further losses, fled to the Empty with the assistance of Windaco the Storm Guardian and

Terrasoce the Stone Guardian, where neither Set's Solar Eye nor Nephthys's Lunar Eye could see them. Terrasoce remained with his Lesser Elementals to defend the Wyker while Windaco returned with his Lesser Elementals to rejoin the fight alongside Isacuss and Firanon. Windaco weaved great whirlwinds and tornadoes to sweep away the Einherjar, Firanon's roars caused great eruptions and firestorms to burn them to ash, and Isacuss froze them solid with his icy breaths. Mortis, beneath the assault, was overwhelmed and ordered the retreat of the Elikers to their dominions—inaccessible to the Wyker—while the Einherjar were left behind to defend them.

For a thousand years Körvladivisii continued unabated. The Einherjar, though vast in number, were nevertheless slaughtered beneath the Wild Hunt. Chaos, desiring to halt the bloodshed staining his Void, descended onto the battlefield and invoked the Void Wyrms' misfortunes to drive the Wild Hunt into retreat. Seeing his hated enemy flee, Mortis emerged from his domain with the Einherjar to pursue them into the Empty, where they were swallowed by great canyons opened by Terrasoce's world-quakes. He raised towering mountains and volcanoes—with Firanon's assistance—as walls to block off the Einherjar's advance, and Isacuss and Firanon worked in tandem to create great rivers and oceans as additional barricades. When the Einherjar raised bridges and boats over the waters to continue their relentless pursuit, Windaco worked with Isacuss to form sweeping floods and typhoons to drive them back.

Yet even *these* obstacles failed to prevent Mortis's advance, and so out of desperation, Firanon and Windaco worked together to make burning winds that seared wide swathes of land, hoping to starve out their foes and force them to retreat. At last, all these obstacles took their toll on the Einherjar, and defeated, Mortis was left with no choice but to command his army to retreat. Thus marked the conclusion of Körvladivisii, the second great battle of the Voidal War.

For a time, there was a tepid peace between the Eliker and the Wyker as their armies nursed their wounds and buried their dead. But while the Voidal War remained stagnant, Set was readying his escape, and Nephthys watched with bated breath as her father's gaze began to wander away from Luxios and the War to Tenebros, and she—as closely observed as she was by their father's Eye—was unable to warn her brother.

THE FOURTH VERSE:

Watrallgradivas

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OR

The Great Flood

Though Luxios suffered greatly from the Voidal War, Tenebros, in all its depravity and lawlessness, thrived. Nephthys cast her Lunar Eye upon the Dark Dimension and continued to taunt her brother within his prison. But his desire grew stronger, and soon it could not be so easily quenched. The Tenebrosian armies grew larger as he prepared for war against Chaos, and on the eve of his escape, Nephthys sent to her brother a message in the form of a coyote: that the Voidal War had calmed and Chaos's attention was wandering again. She advised Set against escaping so soon, and warned him that their father was already bitter from the bloodshed tainting his Void. Set then, in response, sent to his sister a message in the form of a cock. His request was thus: that she could repeat the trick that had earlier allowed their tryst. Nephthys agreed, but informed him that the Empty had been scarred and transformed by the Voidal War, and so they no longer had the shroud of its endless darkness to conceal them.

Her risky plan was thus: she would put a deep night over the land. She would cast a potent sleeping spell upon Chaos and her children, and would appear on the side of a lake in the form of a horned mare with a mane of silver, eyes of blue, and hair of snowy-white. There, she would await him, so that their tryst could be met and their desires fulfilled.

So it was, that when the night rose the day after this message was sent, Nephthys shrouded her Lunar Eye in shadow save for a single moonbeam on the lake as a beacon to guide her brother. Chaos and her children fell deeply into sleep, and Nephthys descended from her lunar den in the shape of a mare, where she took up vigil on the lakeside. With the aid of

Midgardsormr, ever loyal to his father, Set escaped from his prison and entered Luxios through the gaze of Bilröst. There, he transformed himself into the shape of a leopard, as black as the night that concealed him with eyes of gleaming gold, and he found and followed the light beam to a lake. There, he saw a beautiful, horned mare shrouded in mist. From the shadows of the wood, he stalked her, and when she knelt to drink, he pounced. Their union was quick and violent, and satisfied, the Great Wyrms retreated to Tenebros. Nephthys, too—sated and with child—returned to her lunar den.

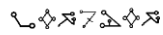
But her escape would not go unnoticed, for Chaos had suspected that an attempt would be made by his unruly children to mate, and so he had placed a warding barrier around the Sky-Ocean within which Nephthys was contained. When Set, newly returned to his prison, sent his Solar Eye on its patrol, and all who slumbered awoke, the breach in the ward through which the Night-Queen had escaped set loose a raging torrent of cleansing water that lasted for one hundred years. All life that had taken root in Luxios was drowned, even the Einherjar and the Wild Hunt, and soon only the Elikers and the Wykers remained.

Chaos was furious, and to prevent any further blasphemies committed between Brother and Sister, approached his daughter and slew her. Mortis, however, refused to reap his mother's soul, and so her body was removed from its den and cast into the Sky-Ocean before it could reawaken. A deep, dreamless slumber was weighted upon Nephthys's eyes, from which she could never wake, and she was bound to her Lunar Eye by great, impenetrable chains. But as the father left his drowned daughter where she was shackled, she gave birth to her final child: the Primal Abyss. Chaos saw this infant, and saw her great Creative potential, and so took her as his ward and fled to his palace, where he enthralled her as his guard and slave.

Mortis, too, was furious. For with the dreamless slumber within which resided his mother, the birthing of new life and nightmares for his army was forever halted. Already the Wyker made pacts with his father to borrow those Tenebrosian abominations, and the Elikier came to him out of fear of a Wykerian victory. What they did not expect, however, was that the Dream Demon Theos, too, saw the great Creative potential of the Primal Abyss, and finally made his own attempt to stake for himself a kingdom of law and order to rival that of the Elikierian dominions. And so the stage was set for the dawn of the Second Creation.

THE FIFTH VERSE:

Avlathevla



OR

The Theft of the Abyss

Theos, from his home within the Empty, envied the Elikers and had long resented his brothers the Wykers, even as he warned them against the imminence of the Voidal War. While the Wykers shewed no desire to develop civilizations and kingdoms, the Elikers' feats in the forming of their lawful domains impressed the Dream Demon and inspired him. It was this distaste for his birth as a Wyker that led to him taking no role in the War and cowering in the vast Empty while the bloody conflict was waged in the Void. When word came to him of the birth of the Primal Abyss, his desire ignited like a raging fire, and his envy grew only stronger. With the Abyss, Theos knew he could obtain the same Creative power that had so come to embody the Elikers, and he saw a chance to ascend beyond his imperfect birth to potentially rise even above them. His intelligence rivaled that of Mortis, the Prince of Death, and Theos knew that if he could Create and sustain his own kingdom, he could become more powerful and influential than even *that* esteemed Lord of Order.

So, immediately upon discovery that Chaos had taken wardship of the infant Abyss, Theos made plans for his *own* theft and use. Soon, he learned that the Elikers, too, had taken interest in that powerful child, and he began to hear whispers that Mortis was planning his *own* theft of their mother's youngest spawn. Theos knew he had to act quickly, and so when next the Lunar Eye was shrouded by shadows and a deep night visited the Void, he emerged from his home in the Empty and infiltrated it. With Nephthys's Flood, the Elikers had no army, and so he encountered little resistance on his way to Chaos's celestial castle.

Theos infiltrated the house of the Father of the Void, and stole from her bed the infant Abyss as she slept. Then, without a sound, he carried her away from the palace and brought her back to his house in the Empty. There, he drew from the child the power of the Abyss, and he weaved the Second Creation: a great Divine Kingdom. He made Angels to defend the Kingdom from the inevitable retaliation of his brothers and Chaos, he made Beasts to feed its denizens, and then he made Men, his most treasured and beloved Creation, to populate it. Then, Theos took on the name Yahweh, and he christened himself God among all that He had Created. He made himself King over His Creation, and set His seat in the Divine Citadel within the utopian garden paradise of Eden.

He forbade Man from consuming the knowledge-giving fruit of the Mother Tree, yet put the tree in place so as to forever tempt them and test their faith. He made great walls around Eden to keep out the Elikers and His fellow Wykers, and structured His army of Angels to stand guard and fight in His stead. When the Wykers, betrayed by their brother, retaliated first and overpowered Theos's Angels, He then molded three Primordial Dragons, the lowest in the ranks of His Divine Armies, in the image of the Void Wyrms of old to combat them. These Dragons were named Asriel, Lucifer, and Amaliel, and all three would later come to join the Old Regime as commanders of the Divine Armies. Theos then restructured his Angels into Nine Circles of Command.

Above all save Theos Himself were the Seraphim, of the highest in the High Orders. They were the caretakers of Theos's throne and sang unendingly of His divinity and purity. They had six flaming wings: two of which covered always their humanoid faces, two their feet, and two more with which they flew.

Then there were the Cherubim, of the middle rank in the High Orders. With two pairs of wings and four faces—one of a Lion, one an Ox, one an Eagle, and one a Man—they had straight legs with the hooves of a bull and shined like polished brass. They were Theos's advisers, and received orders from Him to transmit to the Dominions beneath them.

Below them were the Thrones, of the lowest rank of the High Orders. Comprising Theos's chariot throne, they wore the image of great, interlocking wheels containing many eyes, chanting of Theos's glory and always within His presence. The Cherubim drove them as a Horseman would his beast.

Of the highest rank in the Middle Orders were the Dominions. They received commands from the Cherubim and passed them to the Virtues beneath them. Tasked were they with watching and maintaining the boundaries of Theos's Divine Kingdom.

Beneath them were the Virtues, of the middle rank in the Middle Orders. They assisted in healing and governed the Laws of Created Nature as a facsimile of the Eliker by whom they were inspired. They informed the Dominions on enemy threats, and acted as liaison between them and the Principalities, between both they carried orders.

At the bottom of the Middle Orders were the Powers, assigned by Theos to guard and govern powerful nobles and lords, both Angel and Man.

Then beneath them were the Principalities. The highest rank of the Lower Orders, they served beneath the Virtues and were tasked with gathering knowledge and intelligence on enemy forces. They also served to safeguard the lands of Theos's kingdom, and received orders from the Virtues to pass to Iudex Michael beneath them.

In the middle of the Lower Orders were the Archangels, tasked with commanding legions of Lesser Angels. They served on the front in battle, and acted as captains and commanders of

Lesser Angel forces. Iudex Michael was the highest ranked and oldest of those mighty beings, who received orders and information from the Principalities to be dispersed to his Archangel brothers, who thus dispensed them to their legions. Though often with an appearance like Men, Archangels could also take the image of Beastly Soulforms, in which much of their business on the mortal plane was conducted. There were seven natural-born: Iudex Michael, Uriel, Raphael, Archreaper Azrael, the Prophet-Watcher Gabriel, the Primordial Dragon Lucifer, and Archreaper Messoremel. An eighth would be Ascended from Man, the Lifegiver Vitamel.

Beneath the Archangels were the Lesser Angels, the lowest in the Lower Orders. Known by Men as Guardian Angels or simply Angels, the Lesser Angels comprised much of the Divine Armies and were the only Angels—save Archreaper Messoremel, the Lifegiver Vitamel, and the Prophet-Watcher Gabriel—to interact directly with mortal Men.

With His Creation formed, overtaking entirely both the Void and the Empty, and the power of the Abyss nearly spent, the retaliation against Theos began, as Chaos, the Elikar, and His fellow Wyker all united as one to confront and destroy the treacherous Dream Demon and His Second Creation.

THE SIXTH VERSE:

Elakerava

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OR

The Elikieran Retaliation

The response to Theos's seizure of power was swift and violent. The Wyker struck first, and though the first few skirmishes were won with ease, the advent of the Primordial Dragons quickly turned the tides against them. Those ancient Dragons, earning themselves the title of "Wyrms' Bane", slew most of the Void Wyrms and also the Dream Demon Dimiourgia. Chaos, furious at the mangling and transformation of his perfect Void, also sought revenge, but as he possessed no army of his own, he could do little but watch as the Elikier prepared the next retaliation against the rogue Dream Demon for His betrayal. The restructuring of the Divine Armies and their prowess in battle—especially beneath the command of Archreaper Messoremel's Old Regime when it would eventually come to power—proved devastating for the reformed Wild Hunt, and so the gravely-reduced Wyker retreated to the furthest corners of the transformed Void of Chaos to await the Elikier's attempt.

When Mortis—particularly aggrieved by the annexation of his domain by Messoremel, which he foresaw even in the days before the Archreaper's advent—rallied the Elikier in the first of many skirmishes against the walls of Eden, he was repelled by the Angelic forces. His attempt, however, was not entirely fruitless, for he was able to recapture the Primal Abyss and return her to the safety of Chaos. An agreement was made to allow the Elikier to use her Creative power to reform the Einherjar, and this reignited the Voidal War between the Elikier and Wyker as they clashed over her wardship and control.

Both sides, however, possessed the numbers to fight two fronts, and so while they battled to the death against each other in the Voidal War, they also set aside their disagreements to make attempts at slaying Theos and reintegrating the Divine Kingdom into the Void of Chaos.

Alas, though the beings of the Second Creation held their own against the combined efforts of the Elikier and Wyker, they were impure and imperfect as the children of the unborn Theos, and so were easily susceptible to corruption and manipulation. The Elikier, and Mortis in particular, were skilled in these exact arts, and so the Prince of Death set in motion the events that would lead to the downfall of the Second Creation. He tempted the Primordial Dragon Lucifer with the corrupting power of the Abyss, and through his subtle machinations and subterfuge weaved the civil War in Heaven between the loyal Angels of the Divine Armies and the rogue Angels of *Filios Diaboli*, as well as many wars between mortal Men. He invented a pantheon of worship with both himself and his Elikierian brethren at its head, called it the Centatheon, and also relayed forbidden knowledge to mortal Men, including of the Twin Dimensions and the true nature of their Creator-God Theos. Despite this, he resented the mortals even more than the Wyker, for he saw them as imperfect children of incomplete and lawless gods, and so he built an undead armada of warships with which he could harass and cull the numbers of mortal Men every ten millenia.

His rivalry with the Wyker was not forgotten, however, and he schemed in secret to slay his mother and usurp her power so that he could challenge Chaos for the Voidal Throne and annihilate those imperfect beings forever.

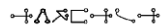
For now, he was content to conceal his matricidal intentions and bide his time, and so he continued his subtle manipulations while sending the Einherjar in mass to strike down the great

walls of Eden. And when the Lunar Eye crowned over the Void and he laid his head to rest, his dreams were filled with a burning desire to slay the false idol that had claimed his domain.

Unknown to Mortis, he had not long to wait to overthrow his unsuspecting rival, for trouble was stirring in the Divine Kingdom as both Men and Angels began to succumb to the corrupting influence of greed, lust, and power, and the seeds were sown for Theos's downfall not by the Eliker or even the Father of the Void, but by His own imperfections as the incomplete progeny of His father's spilt seed.

THE SEVENTH VERSE:

Imladivini



OR

The Divine Immolation

With the Fall of Man as they betrayed Theos's commands and consumed the Mother Tree's fruit, the Archangel Messoremel saw himself bestowed with command over the domain of Death. With the title of "Archreaper", it was his task to harvest the souls of living Men upon their deaths to be reborn through the gifts of his wife, the Ascended Archangel and Lifegiver Vitamel. To assist him in his divine task, he was given command of the three Primordial Dragons and five-and-thirty Lesser Angels called the Old Regime, and with them he not only fulfilled his mission as Reaper of mortal souls, but also fought in many of the skirmishes between Theos and His brothers. Their skill and efficiency in these immortal wars made the Old Regime heroes to their brethren, and a bane to their enemies.

But Messoremel, like the other Creations of Theos, was not infallible, and so became enraptured in the affairs of Man far beyond his intended role. He befriended the mortal Legate Raziel, took him as a lover, and to him bestowed the Archreaper's one-time gift of Immortality. The pleasures of Men and the influence of the Abyssal Aspect Sekhmet corrupted Messoremel's soul, and he soon took many lovers, including Sekhmet herself, and bore many children. From the Human Whore Kalmiya he was given Avias-Kalmiya, First of the Harpies; from his wife Vitamel he was given Deitus, First of the Satyrs, and from the Primordial Dragon Amaliel he received Epocius, First of the Dark Dragons, the ancestors of mortal dragonkind.

But his insatiable lust and polyamorous desire was not the only imperfection he possessed, for he also fought in many a mortal war, and to many civilizations took on the title of

God of War. This angered his Angelic brothers, and angered Theos, but Messoremel's skill was unmatched and his role in the Divine Kingdom was invaluable to the Dream Demon's objectives, and so his flaws were overlooked. Alas, it would only prove to be the beginning of Theos's troubles, for the Dream Demon treasured greatly the Men He had Created, and saw them as His true children. The Angels, who realized that they were but slaves and servants to carry out Theos's whims and die against His enemies, greatly envied them.

Lucifer, eldest of the Primordial Dragons, the youngest Archangel save only Messoremel, was also Theos's favorite of the Angels, and was bestowed greater freedoms and intelligence than his Angelic brethren. But Lucifer was envious of Theos and envious of Men, for he possessed the powers to become a god not unlike Theos—yet lacked the means to do so—and he resented Men for their free will and freedom from servitude beneath their Creator. Seeing this damning flaw within Theos's command, Mortis whispered unto him dreams and visions of power and authority, even a promise to wield the power of the Primal Abyss to force Theos to kneel before him. Lucifer, tempted by these sweet-nothings, rallied together other Angels disenchanted from the endless wars Theos fought against His brothers, and Angels broken by their enslavement, and formed them into the rebellious *Filios Diaboli*. Taking on the name “Satan” to shroud his identity, Lucifer led his armies in many skirmishes against the Divine Armies, and even seduced Messoremel and Vitamel's son Deitus to take the Primal Abyss within himself and use it as a weapon against his abusive father.

With the eviction of Man from the paradise of Eden after their consumption of the Forbidden Fruit, Lucifer was assigned by Theos to guard its gates and forever prevent mortal return into those immortal gardens. Alone within Eden, Lucifer was allowed to scheme in private with *Filios Diaboli*, and the corruptive influence of the Abyssal remnants weaved into the Void

for the formation of the Divine Kingdom was allowed to fester with no Angels to resist it. He fell to the Abyss along with Eden, and it was corrupted into the twisted domain of Hell. Within the privacy of Hell, Lucifer used the Primal Abyss to Create the shadow-creature Sombra, and Sombra was positioned to become Reaper once the throne of the Divine Kingdom was taken.

But Lucifer's pride, and his vulnerability to corruption as the imperfect Creation of an imperfect Creator, meant that his rebellion was doomed to fail. Messoremel, in his final duel against the shadow-reaper intended to replace him, took the power of the Primal Abyss within himself to stop Sombra. With his blade to the shadow-reaper's neck, he betrayed his Creator's orders to capture the creature alive, and he slew it instead, and as punishment, he was tried for treason and executed via immolation. Messoremel's Old Regime, out of loyalty to their master, burned with him, and the title of Archreaper was stripped from him by Theos and bestowed to Archangel Azrael.

But Messoremel's fall was devastating, not just to his brethren Angels, but to Theos and His war against His brothers. The First Reaper's skill in war was unmatched, particularly against Theos's brethren, and so He knew that without Messoremel, there would be no chance to prevent the inevitable reclamation of the Divine Kingdom into the Void of Chaos, and no chance to stop the Eliker and His fellow Wyker from slaying their treacherous brother. An example had to be made of what would occur should Creation betray their Creator, to prevent another rebellion like Lucifer's, and so Theos was left with no other option.

But Theos's greatest skill was in His foresight, and so He set in motion a plan to restore Messoremel and the Old Regime once the terms of their punishment were fulfilled. Until that allotted time could come to pass, however, Theos took advantage of the naïvety and neutrality of

His Wykerian brother Midgardsormr. With the power of Bilröst, the Dream Demon sundered His Divine Kingdom into six fragmented realms.

Theos set his Divine Citadel and throne in the celestial realm of Divinis, a facsimile of the lost Paradise of Eden now fallen to the Abyss-tainted remnants of Lucifer and *Filios Diaboli*. In Divinis, the Dream Demon was unreachable by anyone, save His Higher and Middle Orders of Angels, with only Iudex Michael of the Lower Orders allowed to travel there.

Below Divinis was the realm of Paradis, the skies of Elysium and the “high heaven”, where those mortal souls most valorous and chivalrous upon death would go to live in eternity. A realm of ever-blue skies and mighty castles, Paradis was a land where warriors could attend great feasts and ever hone their skills in battle, training for the final confrontation between Theos and His celestial brothers. It was protected from outside threats by the Archangels and a small contingent of well-trained Lesser Angels.

Below Paradis, then, lay the realm of Minoris, the Elysian earth, where those mortals who passed were to go. It was a land of endless fields and farms, ever to grow food for the great feasts of Paradis while the elderly told stories to the children. But Minoris was not without protection, for the Lesser Angels resided here as its guards from outside threats.

Below Minoris was the realm of Mortalis, where all of the Beasts and Men Created by Theos lived their mortal lives free of the threats of the celestial gods and the Angels, both faithful and rogue alike.

Beneath Mortalis laid the dark and snowy tundras of Trivilis, where those souls either mundane or inconsequential in life were to wander for all eternity, braving the bitter winds and cold without reprieve or shelter.

And then, at the bottom of all the realms, laid Primalis, the twisted, transformed remnants of Eden now called Hell. It was in this realm where Lucifer resided: an endless, dark forest conquered by the Abyss. Primalis stood as a hunting ground for the warriors of Paradis, where those souls consumed by sin were transformed into Beasts and hunted for Paradis's great feasts.

Now Chaos was outraged at this further mutilation of his Void, and so he had Midgardsormr imprisoned and tortured, and he cut out Bilröst and cast it into Tenebros. There, it took root within that dark land's corrupted soil, and sprouted forth into a great tree that pierced the firmament and reached through all the realms of Luxios to bathe in the light of Set's Solar-Eye within Divinis. Chaos saw this tree and was astonished by its beauty, and so christened it *Iggtrasilia* the World-Tree. Midgardsormr, too, from within his cell, saw *Iggtrasilia* and was ensnared in its beauty, and so that ancient serpent—driven mad by his suffering—escaped his prison to roost in its canopy. But it was inaccessible to him without Bilröst, and so he became the Alpha Breaker, ever to shatter the light-branches of *Iggtrasilia*—what the Angels called the Greater Beams—dividing the realms to unite them once again.

With these divided realms, it was Theos's hope that His enemies were kept at bay and His Creation safe until the time came that the Old Regime was restored and His war with His brothers resolved. To ensure that all this came to pass, He sent His messenger Gabriel to the tainted remnants of Messoremel floating uselessly within the Void, and bestowed upon him a great prophecy.

THE EIGHTH VERSE:

Diviothro

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OR

The Divine Promise

With the death of Messoremel, his soul was torn in twain. Those pieces left untainted by the Abyss were cast into the bodies of mortal Men, as were the souls of the Old Regime.

Amaliel's soul was sundered, too, but *her* soul was divided not because of corruption by the Abyss, but because of her love and desire for her master. Married as she was to the Primordial Dragon Asriel, it was her love for Messoremel and that affair that split her soul into two pieces: one drawn to Messoremel, the other her husband. Both fragments, like the untainted shard of Messoremel's soul and the completed ones of her brothers and sisters of the Old Regime, were cast across many different worlds within Mortalis, each longing to reunite with their kin.

The tainted shard of Messoremel's soul, however, calling itself Thráfsma, drifted aimlessly through the Voidal remnants, lost in its pain and wretchedness. There, it encountered the wandering Abyss, which took pity on it and formed a pact: that she would bind to Thráfsma and all those rogue Angels cast out of Divinis for their treachery to restore them to corporeal forms and heal them. But Chaos discovered this, and so he punished the Abyss severely for her transgression. To prevent herself from suffering further harm at her master's behest, the Abyss sundered herself and cast aside those Aspects of her body and soul tainted by this treacherous alliance. These Aspects, now called Shards, took themselves new names, and though they remained attached in mind to their greater body, the connection was minimal and tenuous. Among these pieces was the fragment Isis, who loved mortal Mankind and decided to teach them her ways of elemental black magic and necromancy. She thus sent an avatar into every world

within Mortalis, and in each world gathered together a party of seven other fragments that she christened the Order of the Crimson Eye, to train select Men in her mystical and arcane ways.

One of these fragments was none other than Messoremel's lover and temptress Sekhmet, who upon meeting an incarnation of the Archreaper's mortal form, was so enraptured by his power that she formed a second pact to bind her soul to his. The effect of this pact, however, was that she was condemned to the image of only one mortal form, what she called Casimiro, whenever she reincarnated, and she retained all the memories of this singular form across each incarnation.

Mortis witnessed Isis assembling her Order and found himself conflicted. It was *her* fragment that he had allied with for so long to replenish the Einherjar for his war with the Wyker, and his love for her conflicted with her love of Man. Nevertheless, he came to Isis and married her, and through their mating birthed the water-beast Kraken. Then, Isis went to the Order of the Crimson Eye, which she treated as her own children, and instructed them to worship the Prince of Death as their master.

But all these events were still yet to come when the Abyss encountered Thráfsma, and so after the pact with her was made, it finally arrived in a world on the precipice of Apocalypse. There, Thráfsma was met by Archangel Gabriel, who bestowed upon it a prophecy that there would come a day when the Old Regime would be reunited in full within a single world, that they may have their status restored and returned to Divinis for the final battle to defend the Divine Kingdom from its reclamation by the Void. In return, Thráfsma was given but one task: to visit every world at the edge of ruination and initiate its apocalypse. The terms were agreed upon, and Thráfsma, now calling himself the Archdemon Necrondousk, set out on his divine crusade against Creation.

Across the many worlds he put to the sword, Necrondousk grew in strength and power as he encountered his Old Regime brothers and sent their souls towards the prophesied Reunion. But the Abyss's power continued to consume him, and for each world he ended, he suffered not only the agony of his immolation again, but the pain of the Abyss's mangling of his imperfect soul. Madness and self-pity soon took root his mind, and he grew to resent his wife Vitamel, who had now lost her title as Lifegiver and was now called Ruby. Ruby sought to ever keep Necrondousk in check, to protect and defend the worlds marked for his destruction, and this bitter stalemate between her and Necrondousk continued to fester and stagnate for countless ages.

But while this occurred in Luxios, prophecies and turmoil of a *different* kind began in Tenebros, as that dark land of amorality and depravity initiated its *own* manner of transformation.

the reincarnations of seven of the Acolytes Twenty. With them, he conquered the land in death and hellfire. He relieved the Black Priests from their exile and had himself and his Seven bestowed with the power of Immortality by Set as reward. He became their Archon, and ruled Tenebros harshly for many, many ages.

But Light Gaia, too, was eventually reborn, into the body of a peasant boy, and soon he and his twin sister—herself embodying the soul of one of Gaia’s Acolytes Twenty—were summoned to Tenebros from their dwelling in Luxios. There, they reunited with the thirteen remaining reincarnations of their ancient Acolyte companions, slew Dark Gaia, and overthrew his seven treacherous minions. The Twins became great lords and monarchs, and they, along with their reincarnated allies, established the kingdom of Dis to continue Gaia’s transformation of the land. Alas, mortality soon claimed them, too, but not before they could set Tenebros to continue its taming even without them to oversee it. Their souls were thus returned to Luxios, as they had been before, but the Dark Dimension’s draw is powerful, and any soul tainted by its energy is bound to be returned to it in time.

The denizens of Tenebros mourned the passing of their benevolent monarchs, and to honor them erected many other kingdoms around that once feral land in the image of Dis. Hades reemerged, and there was founded Tartarus, and Acheron, and Styx, and Nilfheim, and countless others, and though there was peace for a time, the nature of Tenebros is its amorality, and soon wars ignited among the kingdoms as all vied for control of that wretched land. Nevertheless, the taming was progressing, and soon, the Dark Dimension would come to resemble a dark facsimile of primordial Luxios.

But while Tenebros was improving and transforming, Luxios was reaching a crisis. The Elikier and Theos’s fellow Wyker, relentless in their war against the treacherous Dream Demon,

were swiftly closing in on Him, and the Divine Promise was still yet to come. Theos realized that He had run out of time, and realized He would have to make His last stand against His brothers without the aid of His Divine Armies. And so, as the Einherjar and Wild Hunt joined together to storm Divinis and topple the Divine Citadel at last, Theos rallied together what forces He could in preparation for their imminent siege.

themselves unable to reach their Creator as the Wyker slew all who drew near to that bloodstained battlefield. Gabriel relieved Lucifer and *Filios Diaboli* from their exile to assist, but even *they* were helpless against the joint Einherjari and Wildling forces. Mortis slew Archangel Azrael and once more secured control over his domain, and through the Prince of Death's interference, no mortal souls could be returned upon their eviction. Without a Reaper to guide them, they were left to aimlessly roam those wastelands poisoned by the Primal Abyss, and were twisted and transformed into insatiable, bloodthirsty Abominations quickly enthralled by the Elikers to join their Einherjari forces against their will. When at last Mortis breached the walls of the Divine Citadel, he confronted Theos on the floor of the Council Chamber and slew Him.

With His demise, His Divine Kingdom began to unravel. The Abyss tainted every centimeter of those Created lands molded from the Void, and the very laws of reality ceased to function. Though it caused the Elikers great agony to let their domains decay beneath their watch, the Second Creation had made great mockeries of them and their laws, and Theos's folly had irreparably altered their dominions, leaving them with no other option. Mortis, however, reveled in the chaos that reigned with the collapse of his most hated enemies, and with the threat of the Divine Kingdom neutralized, he began at last to set his matricidal mission in motion. He set his sights on betraying his Elikarian brethren, and he used his marriage-bond with Isis to claim full loyalty of the Primal Abyss and finally begin his long-awaited Ascension.

Once this loyalty was secured, he turned against his Wykerian brothers once again. In a final effort to halt the inevitable, still yet unknowing that Theos had already fallen, Archangel Gabriel, the last of his kind, reemerged and sacrificed himself to fulfill the Divine Promise and restore the Old Regime. Messoremel and his divine army rose to challenge Mortis, but the Prince of Death in response recreated Sombra, and infused the shadow-reaper with the power of the

Primal Abyss. The Archreaper stood no chance against these odds, and were it not for the intervention of the Order of the Crimson Eye, he would have fallen. Casimiro, née Sekhmet, came to him and fused the Order with him, and Messoremel became the false Dream Demon Thánatos while his mistress and draconian partner Amaliel became the false Dream Demon Amartía. The Old Regime, too, was transfigured by this arcane ritual, and its soldiers became the Nightmare Kings, whose sole purpose was to empower and strengthen those false Dream Demons with the worship of mortal Men. Even with that incomprehensible power, Mortis could only be repelled, and those few mortal survivors fled to escape the Prince of Death's rampaging armies.

Alas, the Elikers allowing the deterioration of their lawful domains had a terrible effect on reality, and the influence of the Primal Abyss on the Void initiated a Third Creation: a wretched, vile, and mutilated land where Time and Space both ceased to function. It would become a land that could rival even early Tenebros in its sheer inability to sustain even the most primordial of life.

But Tenebros was also altering in this era, and the transformation initiated by Gaia now eons past was nearing its completion. There, it experienced its *own* Second Creation, a natural one, as pure and incorruptible as the Void of Chaos in the aftermath of Nephthys's Flood.

married ones that lay within their midst, and he intensified his crusade against the natives to expand his kingdom's borders, he was met with great resistance by the land's people.

But they could not stop him, for the Dark King was a respected general and greatly-feared warlord. His armies were infamously well-trained, and any protests or complaints that stirred within the common populace were met with swift reprisal by his secret police. He established mandatory military training and enlistment into a civilian guard, and initiated many wars and atrocities in his pursuit of power and control.

For years, the Dark King reigned in terror, until Men within his own circle began a conspiracy for his demise and usurpation. This was led by his youngest daughter, the Moon Princess, whose affinity for dark magic and the moon came as a result of her birth as Set's true oracle. She discovered a peasant boy and his younger sister living within Dis, and saw that they were carriers of the Founding Twins' ancient blood, and she wedded herself to him. With this Dark Princess's aid, the unified beast tribes, and his own bonded dragon, the boy waged a rebellion against the Dark King and overthrew him, and once more restored the blood of Gaia to the throne of Dis.

For centuries, there was peace in Tenebros as the beast tribes founded their own kingdoms, the Black Priests continued Lord Gaia's ancient objective, and relations with Dis's neighbors were restored. Technologies continued to be founded, and soon the Dark Dimension's cultural and social advancements reached a point not unlike the days of Theos's Divine Kingdom in Luxios. But war again appeared on the horizon, for the Tenebrosians grew to resent the manipulative hand of the Black Priests, and saw that ancient cult as incompatible with their post-theocratic society. The nations of Tenebros sprouted from those ancient kingdoms were divided by their loyalty to the Black Priests, and this division quickly escalated into violence. The

conflict was known as the War of the Black, and saw the massacre of the last of the Black Priests and Tenebros's liberation from their control forever. With their deaths, Set removed himself from the Tenebrosians and created no more oracles, and he let his dominion fall into death and destruction while he awaited his final reunion with his sister.

In Luxios, Theos fell at last to His brothers, Messoremel and the Old Regime were transfigured into false Wykerian deities by the Order of the Crimson Eye, and the dawn of the Third Creation had come to pass: the birth of the Abyssal Void called Pandæmonium.

THE TWELFTH VERSE:

Isiikörva

→A&LIT

OR

The Birth of Pandæmonium

As Theos was slain and His Divine Kingdom fell to ruin, the Primal Abyss's Creative power, unfettered by Chaos for the conflict, came fully unleashed as she reached maturity. Mortis's subtle manipulations of her through her connection with his shard-wife Isis drove her to madness. She saw the wasteland remnants of Theos's Divine Kingdom left ravaged by the war with her rogue brother, and at last realized her true potential. She was swiftly returned to Chaos, and seeing the growing rebelliousness within her, his abuse of her intensified. He attempted to bind her as he had done his own children, gravely afraid of what she could do to his healing Void, but she proved too powerful to be restrained. She escaped him and fled to the wasteland remnants, where she initiated the Third Creation of Pandæmonium.

As the child of the Ur-Deities Set and Nephthys and the inheritor of their powers of Creation, she gave birth to a realm over which she had absolute control. She reformed the remains of the Void, she brought together the realms, and attempted to recreate the land into a new Void where Chaos was powerless to stop her. Isis, foreseeing Mortis's coming betrayal, broke her oaths to him and fled with the Order of the Crimson Eye to escape him, and the Prince of Death entered into sacred marriage with the Primal Abyss. She remade the laws of Pandæmonium to strip away the Elikor's control, and gave their powers to Mortis, who then slew his brothers and consumed their rotted dominions. Ruling over the land with Mortis as her king, she bore him many eldritch creatures and abominations as children, and he trained them into a new Voidal army he called the Primordians.

Fearing for themselves, the surviving Wyker fled to the furthest reaches of Pandæmonium to escape the Primordians, and they entered a tepid alliance with Chaos—who still possessed his omniscience and enough influence over the Void to thwart the Primal Abyss’s whims—with the intent to resist and stop Mortis from completing his Ascension. It was then that a new era of the Voidal War was ignited. Victory for the Prince of Death, the Wyker knew, meant the end of all reality, for Mortis would slaughter not just Nephthys, but Set in his lust for power and control over the Twin Dimensions.

Meanwhile, those few mortal survivors of the war against Theos fled to the distant star of Ouroboros, where they worked closely with Isis and the Order of the Crimson Eye to prepare for the Primordian Expansion. Mortis and the Primal Abyss knew not of this growing resistance beneath the command of Isis, and so they were blind to the Order’s conspiracies involving the souls of Messoremel and the Old Regime, which they still held under the protection of Casimiro, née Sekhmet. Together, their combined forces set the Ourobosian city of Surtr as their capital and christened themselves the Surtrians, and they began training their armies for the inevitable Körvlagradivas, all while Pandæmonium’s expansion across the Void continued unabated and both Mortis and the Primal Abyss grew in strength and power.

With the Surtrians in hiding, and the Ourobosians still yet unknown to them, the Primordians pursued war with the Wyker and what remained of the Wild Hunt. But those unborn children of the Ur-Deities knew that their fight against Mortis was hopeless, for Isis relayed a message to Chaos one night as he slept. He was told that his death at the hands of the Primal Abyss was imminent, and the ultimate extinction of the Wyker would precede Körvlagradivas, where Mortis would be stopped at last and both he and his wife slain.

THE THIRTEENTH VERSE:

Kaokönso



OR

The Consumption of Chaos

And so came the time for prophecy's fulfilment.

In the days preceding the fall of Chaos, his sleep was haunted by nightmares of the grisly murder to come, and he spent much of his time plotting to escape his horrific fate. But prophecy cannot be so easily dissuaded, and so came the day of his foretold demise. He demanded the Wyker's protection, and so a guard was set outside his bedchambers to watch for his killer. But those gods of discord, in truth, cared not to spare him the sword. His chickens had come home to roost, for he had, after all, cared not about the Wykerian slaughter at the hand of Mortis and the Eliker during the Voidal War, fixated as he was only on restoring and maintaining the purity of his precious Void. He had slayed and bound his own daughter and stolen her child in this selfish pursuit, and had beaten and imprisoned his own son. There was no pity for him, and no mercy left to give.

And so the Primal Abyss descended upon the hideaway where the Wyker cowered, alone and without Mortis's knowledge. She had personal grievances to settle with her old master, and saw no reason to involve her husband in these affairs. When she arrived at the forested glade where Chaos resided in his cabin, she saw that the Wykerian guard set out to watch him had fallen into a drunken slumber outside. Nothing could stir them, and so the Primal Abyss wandered into the shelter unmolested and undeterred. There, she found Chaos sleeping dreamlessly in his bed, and for well into the night she stood over him as she prepared to fulfill her long-awaited revenge.

When Chaos awoke, it was raining, and thunder and lightning burst through his windows. He saw the dark shadow of his killer looming over his bed, and he screamed and begged for help. But the Abyss was swifter than he, and so she drew her sword and severed his tongue and jaw in one swift slice. He was made silent and deeply afraid, and though he was now mute, he pleaded pity from his ward and forgiveness for his mistreatment of her. But the Primal Abyss was deaf to his cries, and so she raised her sword and cut off his arms. Then she cut off his legs. She cut off his genitals. And finally, she cut off his head. She now wore the black blood of her master, and the walls and bedclothes were streaked in gore. Then she took up the pieces of the corpse and devoured them, and felt the power of the Void grow through her limbs and body. She joined her power with his, and during her omniscient awakening, she discarded her name and christened herself Void.

With her transformation complete, she left the murder site behind her and left the slumbering Wyker, and she returned to Mortis's palace in Pandæmonium's heart. She bathed herself in those ruby waters and entered their shared bedchambers. The Prince of Death awoke from his slumber with a start. His own nightmares of his coming demise disturbed him, and Void descended upon her husband like a raptor and laid with him. And when he was finished, she caressed her pregnant belly, for she knew even then that his seed had quickened in her womb, and she whispered the name of her daughter Annihilus, for this child, she knew, would bring about the End of Days and the shattering of the Great Circle.

No more did she care about life and mercy, for her mission was fully intertwined with her husband's, and she took within herself the tenets of Nihilism, as she now realized that life was meaningless, and the only outcome of Life was Death.

THE FOURTEENTH VERSE:

Meortasvan

ΛΔΘΠΖϞ†ΤϞ

OR

The Ascension of Mortis

The time now came for Mortis, the Prince of Death, to finally fulfill his matricidal intentions. Plagued by prophetic nightmares of his demise and the death of Void, as well as visions of Annihilus's defeat at the hands of Isis and her Order of the Crimson Eye, Mortis at last struck the fortress of the surviving Wyker. Chaos was dead, many of the Wyker fallen, and Void herself was bedridden by birthing pains. Though Mortis saw the Surtrians in his dreams, he had yet to learn of their existence, and so he believed that his rumored slaying would be at the hands of his dwindling brothers. Early into the morning on the eve of his daughter's birth, Mortis descended upon the Wykerian castle to strike at its towering walls. His brothers fought to the best of their ability, and attempted desperately to repel the Prince of Death's invasion, but beneath the sheer might of the Primordians and the power of the omniscient Void's blessing, the Wild Hunt's ramparts fell and its towers collapsed within hours.

Mortis marched into the heart of the Wyker while they were in counsel, and declaring to them his grand scheme to slaughter all, sacrifice his wife, and reinvent Pandæmonium in his own image, he invoked the power bestowed upon him by Void with the deaths and consumption of his brethren and bathed the Wykerian castle in hellfire. The intensity of his firestorm set the skies aflame, and it was said that even from Ouroboros, the Sutrian armies could see the smoke rising off the burning citadel of those diminished gods of discord.

The Greater Elementals, the most level-headed and respected of the Wyker, approached their errant brother and appealed to his mercy. They promised an amicable end of the Voidal

War, and claimed that with Theos's demise, the massacre of the Dream Demons, and the loss of most of the Void Wyrms, peace could finally fall between the siblings. They promised to no longer wage violence against the Elikers, but Mortis laughed at them, and made mockery, and declared that the Elikers were no more and their power coursed through him. It was here, then, where the Greater Elementals first learned of Mortis's greater conspiracy, and so they took up arms and fought to their bloody ends. They fell swiftly, and the elemental balance of Pandæmonium—remnants of the Void and Theos's Creation both, infused and shaped by the power of the Elementals during the earliest days of the Voidal War—fell entirely into disarray. Fire rained, water consumed in ash, rock and stone blew like wind, and the air weighed down like lead. Pandæmonium fell into chaos, and the pained wails of birthing Void filled the vast expanse like the roars of a great and ethereal beast.

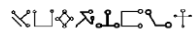
Mortis consumed the Wyker and fused their collective power with his, and when he heard the cries of his wife in her bed, he came to a grim epiphany: that Annihilus was now the only being capable of challenging his claim to the Twin Dimensions, and so he returned home to find the infant suckling at the teat in her swaddling clothes. He looked upon his child with disgust and resentment, and ignoring the cries and pleas of its mother, he took the child up from her mother's breast and separated her head. Then he consumed the girl as he had his siblings, and he cut out Void's womb so as to prevent further offspring. Laying in the blood of his unconscious wife, the spirits of prophecy caressed his cheek and whispered into his ear the name of the last stronghold to stand against him.

His eyes turned to Ouroboros, that distant star nested in the darkness at the outermost end of Creation, and summoning forth his armies, he ordered them to begin their final preparations

for the march to Surtr. Thus, all the pieces were finally in play for the great Körvlagradivas, and the final conclusion of Mortis's bitter war.

THE FIFTEENTH VERSE:

Körvlagradivas



OR

The Great Confluence

The desert star of Ouroboros was a hostile land to all, and bred hardened men and women undeterred by ill tidings and dark omens. Many generations of Men and Beasts had been born and died between the survivors' escape at the dawn of Pandæmonium and the Last Days of the Third Creation. But their memories were eternal, and all were taught to expect and prepare for the Prince of Death's last stand. Even the land where Körvlagradivas was prophesied to occur was known: a plain called Vigrid, in the land called Múspell by those world-weary Surtrians. It was the valley which the city-fortress of Surtr overlooked, and was a common sight to all who dwelled in that distant star.

So it was, of course, the Surtrians who first saw the branches of Iggtrasilia come down on that hellish, inhospitable plain, and the first wave of the Primordian armies that came from within ready for the war. The alarum was sounded, and calls were sent all across Ouroboros for the armies to descend upon Vigrid, for the fated battle had come at last. From all across the star they came: from the snowy far northern lands of Niflheimr, to the cold and lifeless plains of Hel to the far south, and even the eastern mountains of Jotunnheim, and the desert wastes of Nidavellir, and of course their own land Múspell. No one was spared the summons, and all came to Vigrid just as the last two Dream Demons—corrupted and tainted by Void—descended upon the plain in service to Mortis.

But even against impossible odds, the Surtrians were only encouraged by the challenges they faced against the Primordians, and for the first and final time, Mortal Men slayed those

immortal Dream Demons. With the fall of Mania and Agonia, the Primordians retreated and the Surtrians recovered their wounded. At the coming of dawn on the second week of battle, Void, mourning still the murder of her child, descended to the battlefield with those last remaining Void Wyrms. Again, the Surtrians reigned victorious, and by the conclusion of the first month, Void herself lay among the forgotten dead.

The fall of their mistress sent the Primordians into a frenzy, and out of desperation, they threw themselves at the great walls of Surtr to slay their foes before Mortis arrived to join them. Most of those Abyssal abominations fell to the Surtrians, but so, too, were the impenetrable walls of Surtr felled. And so when the Prince of Death arrived on Vigrid, and he split the firmament to summon forth the slumbering body of his mother, the skies were set aflame and many of the Surtrians lost their minds to the Abyssal Song. But what the Primordians lacked in morale and motivation they made up for in numbers, and as they invaded Surtr, and sacked that city, and slaughtered its people, a Priest of the Order of the Crimson Eye set forth to the Temple of Sin deep in the woods of Vanaheimr, where Thánatos and his mistress Amartía awaited the Last Days.

The Nightmare Kings guarding their tomb were stirred by the Order's song, and they began their prayers and lamentations to their masters to revive them. Awakened by the desperate pleas of the dying Surtrians, Amartía stirred first and awoke Thánatos, and together they arose from the Temple Grounds to descend upon Vigrid. Beneath the burning sky, that wretched land was bathed in Nephthys's light, and Mortis consumed the body of his beloved to begin the great Ascension.

Amartía and her ethereal rider landed atop the plain, and they interrupted the ritual, and in his fury Mortis and those Created Dream Demons began their battle. For two weeks their duel

persisted, until at last Mortis felt exhausted, and Thánatos slew him upon that sacred earth. The demise of her last child awoke Nephthys and she shrieked in mourning, and she summoned from the bowels of the land great floodwaters that drowned all of the Third Creation. Thus, did she find herself alone in the now-purified Void, and she wailed and screamed to mourn her children lost.

THE SIXTEENTH VERSE:

Nethyahva

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OR

Nephthys's Awakening

And so came the conclusion of Körvlagradivas, where Mortis fell beneath the blades of those false Dream Demons Thánatos and Amartía. And with his fall came celebration across Múspell and all of Ouroboros. With Mortis fell the Primordians, and the surviving Surtrians were allowed rest from preparation and conflict at last. But the rest was short-lived, for the Night-Queen Nephthys awoke at last from her long slumber, and she saw the carnage that remained of her children and the armies beneath their command, and she turned her head to the sky and loosed a great and mournful wail. And all who heard it fell to their knees and sobbed, for her grief weighed heavily upon them, and many of them took their own lives from their suffering. But Nephthys saw their suicides, and she saw the agony of the Surtrian survivors, and she realized that as long as Creation persisted there would be suffering. So Nephthys took to the wing, and she shattered the firmament once again, and she flooded all of the mutilated Void with water so that it could be purified of the corruption of the Voidal War and the Primal Abyss.

And all of life perished beneath those drowning waves, and when the floodwaters receded there was but an empty wasteland devoid of light and dark. She summoned her brother and announced that their father was dead, and above her, Set sent his Solar Eye on its arc, and when *he* beheld the wastes he bathed it in light. In that fleeting moment of intimacy, where Brother and Sister were almost reunited as their eyes shined upon the Void together, they made a pact. Nephthys took the empty remnants of Luxios, and forged it anew in the Darkness of night. From his prison in Tenebros, Set forged his land anew in the Light of dawn, and he and Nephthys

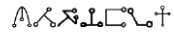
united their realms into one to form the Fourth Creation Neutralis. Life sprouted anew in this unified land, and Set and Nephthys ensured that it could bear witness to both Light and Darkness. So Nephthys claimed the mantle of Light not unlike dead Theos, and Set took up the dominion of Dark like Theos's Creation Lucifer, and so they ruled Neutralis together for one hundred thousand years as King and Queen.

Life flourished with complete freedom, and those who were kind and good, taking within them the tenets of Light, passed from their mortal coils into the warm embrace of Nephthys, while those who were cruel and evil, taking within them the tenets of Dark, passed into the cold embrace of Set. For one hundred thousand years this was the law of Nature, but Set remained bound to his solar prison, and he longed to be reunited with his sister. Between them lay a great, earthen barrier, through which none could cross, and the only passage between the realms was the World-Tree Iggrasilia. Set began to wear down his bonds, and promised that when he was free, he would return to Nephthys's side.

Iggrasilia was withering and dying, ancient as it was and flawed as part of the Old World, and Set knew that once his tainted aura touched its innards it would die. He knew that by poisoning the World-Tree he would poison *all* of Neutralis, and though he desired not to end this paradisaical world, his desire to reunite with Nephthys and join with her overwhelmed all. So he continued to wear on his bonds, and he prepared to join her. Meanwhile, Neutralis continued to flourish, and all were unaware of Set's coming Apocalypse, and the imminent rebirth that would follow its occurrence.

THE SEVENTEENTH VERSE:

Siiklagradivas



OR

The Great Circle

Quickly came that prophesied time, where Set's plans were set in motion. After eons of peace in the Fourth Creation Neutralis, life slept unsuspecting of the imminent Apocalypse to come. At last, Set broke free of his bonds, and he escaped from his prison in the sun. But hellfire followed with him, and it burst forth from the ground as a great geyser that consumed all of his underworld dominion. He pierced the rot-softened flesh of the World-Tree Iggrasilia, and traveled across its roots and up its branches towards the overworld above him. The flames followed with him, and the withering tree was left at the mercy of its fiery consumption. In his lustful rage, Set consumed the poisonous leaves of Iggrasilia, and he devoured its roots and branches as well to fill his insatiable hunger. The poison quickened with him, and like the World-Tree, so, too, did Set begin to wither and die.

As the World-Tree burned the sky was set alight. Set's taint poisoned the roots and so poisoned the land. The denizens of Neutralis collapsed and cried as they perished, and they cried that the apocalypse was nigh as the sky burned above them. Their sobbing woke Nephthys from her slumber, and though she was afraid to witness her dominion perishing, she could feel her mate approaching, and her breast filled with a passionate and lustful fire. So, she descended from her sky-palace to greet him, and landed upon the ground to find it quaking. Her followers gathered around her and pleaded for mercy. They prayed for salvation and forgiveness from their sins, and Nephthys bestowed this to them before they fell over and died.

From the canopy of Iggtrasilia burst Set, and an ocean of fire followed with him. It melted the earth and the sky and the clouds, and the water boiled and vanished. The grass and trees blackened, the Beasts and Mortals burnt to ash, and at last the gravely wounded Set landed beside Nephthys. They embraced and confessed their loves, but the poison blackened Set's flesh, and soon he collapsed into death at her feet. Nephthys mourned him and let the flames consume her, and soon she, too, fell beside him into a final death. Iggtrasilia burned until it was no more, and within days there was but an empty Void left behind, where no life flourished and no one remained to replenish it.

But the land cooled in the following years, and the sky was filled again by clouds. Rain returned to nourish the realm, and Life sprang anew from ash. But this Life was twisted and malformed with no Creator there to shape it, and this new realm became a hostile plain worse than even Pandæmonium. From the blackened bodies of Brother and Sister laying together on the ground burst forth an infant Chaos Dragon, and it awoke to look upon the primordial darkness. Possessed of sexes both male and female, the infant called herself *Umbris Eternis*, and set herself as queen of the realm, to which she bestowed her name.

But Time in Umbris Eternis was broken, and so even while the dragonling aged normally, for her realm it flowed backwards and all that was done was made undone. After countless ages, the world's restoration was complete, and upon its queen's awakening to find she had matured, she changed her name to Desolas, and looked upon her Empty realm to find that she, in her loneliness, desired company and fellowship.

—END—

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APPENDIX A:
Characters of *The Siiklagradivad*

The Ur-Deities

(Deities that existed prior to/during the First Creation)

Desolas/Umbris Eternis

The All-Mother, Desolas is the hermaphroditic mother of Chaos and the twins Set and Nephthys. Born after Set's Apocalypse from the bodies of the twins, she was originally named Umbris Eternis and aged into maturity while the flow of Time reset. Upon reaching sexual maturity, however, she renames herself Desolas and impregnates herself with the first of her children, Chaos, who is born already as an adult. Seeing his beauty, she disguises herself and seduces him, becoming pregnant with Nephthys and Set. When Chaos finds out about this, he kills and consumes her, thus absorbing her power into himself.

Chaos

The Father of the Void, Chaos is the oldest son of Desolas and the father of twins Set and Nephthys. After finding out he was seduced by his mother in disguise, he is horrified and decides to kill her, after which he consumes her body and absorbs her power, which he uses to form the Void that becomes the object of his obsession. When Set and Nephthys trick him and mate, he is disgusted and binds his children away from each other to prevent their incest from further tainting his Void. Although he stays out of the interpersonal bickering of the Elikers and the Wyker, he isn't afraid to become involved when it poses a threat against his realm. He adopts the Primal Abyss—Set and Nephthys's youngest child—and enslaves her to do his bidding, unaware that this directly leads into his eventual demise and consumption at the Abyss's hand.

Nephthys

The twin and sister-consort of Set, Nephthys is a Chaos Dragon, the daughter of Chaos and Desolas, and the mother of the Elikier, the Wyker, and the Primal Abyss. After deceiving their father to mate with her brother, Nephthys is cast to the moon as punishment and ordered to lord over the Light Dimension of Luxios: one of two Twin Dimensions born as a result of hers and Set's mating. She takes an active role in the Voidal War between the Elikier and the Wyker, supplying soldiers to the Elikier's Einherjar army via her nightmares that become the twisted creatures aptly-named Nightmares. She spends the early days of her banishment teasing Set's unquenchable lust in Tenebros. When she tricks their father again to arrange another tryst with her mate, conceiving their youngest child the Primal Abyss, Chaos drowns her in the Sky-Ocean and binds her to the moon in eternal slumber. Their oldest child Mortis, one of the Elikier, attempts to overthrow and usurp her power, although he fails. Mourning the death of her children, she initiates the Fourth Creation, and reigns as queen of it until Set's Apocalypse. She is the Night-Queen and watches over the Twin Dimensions through the Moon, which functions as one of her eyes.

Set

The twin and brother-consort of Nephthys, Set is a Chaos Dragon, the son of Chaos and Desolas, and the father of the Elikier, the Wyker, and the Primal Abyss. After deceiving their father to mate with his sister, Set is bound waist-deep into the Sun as punishment and commanded by Chaos to lord over the Dark Dimension of Tenebros: one of two Twin Dimensions born as a result of his and Nephthys's mating. He longs to reunite with Nephthys and spends much of his imprisonment

agonizing over their separation. In Tenebros, he develops a cult of worshipers called the Black Priests and also populates the Dark Dimension with twisted, depraved, and immoral denizens. These denizens end up joining the Wyker in the Voidal War to become the Wild Hunt. Eventually, he manages to escape his prison and return to Nephthys's side by passing through the World-Tree Iggrasilia, although this has apocalyptic consequences for Creation. He is the Dawn-King and watches over the Twin Dimensions through the Sun, which functions as one of his eyes.

The Divine Children

(Children born from the union of Set and Nephthys)

The Elikers

(*EL-i-KYER*)

A pantheon of one hundred gods led by the eldest of Nephthys's and Set's children: Mortis, the Prince of Death. They hold dominion over the laws of Nature and Order, and have a bitter rivalry and resentment for the Wyker. Through Mortis, they establish a religion with Men, and are christened the Centatheon by them. Mortis is the cause of much of the conflict throughout *The Siiklagradivas*, and is directly responsible for the Voidal War and the events leading up to Körvlagradivas, the final battle. The Elikers command the armies of the Einherjar in the Voidal War. They are as follows:

- **Hydrisa**, Queen of the Sea; **Sora**, King of Skies; **Gaia**, Prince of Land; **Aerys**, Lord of Wind.
- **Sol**, Lord of Sunlight; **Lux**, Lord of Moonlight; **Dea**, Lord of the Day; **Noctis**, Lord of the Night.

- **Kosmos**, Prince of the Stars; **Voya**, Queen of Space; **Kronos**, King of Time
- **Aquis**, the River Goddess; **Oasis**, the Lake Goddess.
- **Arte**, Princess of the Hunt; **Platus**, God of Harvests; **Plutus**, God of Shepherds.
- **Organa**, Queen of Seasons; **Amos**, the Rain Goddess; **Iris**, the Snow Queen; **Baal**, King of Storms; **Thundrus**, King of Thunder; **Elektra**, Queen of Lightning.
- **Amora**, Goddess of Love; **Vitra**, Queen of Fertility; **Mia**, Queen of Childbirth; **Vulvis**, Queen of Lust; **Vanity**, Queen of Beauty.
- **Fortuna**, Goddess of Fortune; **Valtus**, Lord of Wealth; **Solomon**, King of Glory; **Merin**, Mistress of Trade; **Quentus**, Sage of Wisdom; **Gentus**, Keeper of History.
- **Rine**, Goddess of Physical Health; **Het**, Goddess of Mental Health; **Magnus**, Lord of Magic; **Stele**, Mistress of Strength; **Nocturne**, Prince of Shadows.
- **Lyra**, Queen of Music; **Simone**, Princess of Song; **Tiberius**, Master of Food; **Nero**, Master of Drink; **Julius**, Master of Comedy; **Caligula**, Master of Theater; **Augustus**, Mistress of Art; **Alabaster**, Master of Crafts; **Temper**, Master of Trades.
- **Decite**, Mistress of Lies; **Furis**, Lord of Vengeance; **Greta**, Goddess of Envy; **Davidov**, Lord of Power.
- **Prospos**, Lord of Prosperity; **Dementus**, King of Madness.
- **Papyrus**, Master of Scribes; **Mica**, King of Exiles; **Cedric**, Lord of Slaves; **Caine**, Queen of Elders.
- **Demis**, Lord of Plagues; **Festus**, Lord of Famine; **Corvus**, Lord of Pestilence.
- **Leviathan**, King of Monsters; **Epocrius**, Queen of Dragons; **Melanie**, Queen of Fae; **Avis**, Queen of Harpies; **Leonidas**, King of Elves; **Haruk**, King of Dwarves; **Mordran**, King of Beasts; **Vilus**, King of Insects; **Vren**, King of Lizons; **Midas**, King of Giants;

Ukvensth, Queen of Orcs.

- **Arbus**, Queen of Trees; **Floris**, Queen of Flowers; **Gensis**, King of Gemstones; **Argus**, King of Precious Metals; **Zentazan**, Lord of Deserts.
- **Sebastian**, Lord of Voyages; **Pietas**, Lord of Pilgrimages; **Dagon**, Prince of Sacrifices; **Titra**, Princess of Tributes; **Eli**, Prince of Martyrs; **Cristus**, Prince of Salvation; **Rahs**, King of the Afterlife; **Heide**, Queen of Damnation; **Deitus**, Prince of Destiny; **Whispra**, Queen of Spirits.
- **Aurelius**, King of Memory; **Arendus**, Queen of Dreams; **Ezekiel**, God of Prophecies; **El**, God of Creation.
- **Fira**, Queen of Fire; **Volcanon**, Lord of Disasters; **Citadon**, Queen of Civilization; **Bastion**, God of Protection; **Arkeus**, God of War; **Serenity**, Goddess of Peace.
- **Anastasia**, Queen of Light/Good; **Dimitri**, King of Dark/Evil; **Vita**, Princess of Life; **Mortis**, Prince of Death.

The Wyker

(VYE-KYER)

A pantheon of one hundred gods, the Wyker were born from the spilled seed of Set during his and Nephthys's initial mating, in direct contrast to the Elikers, who were born from the fertilization of egg by sperm. They hold no dominions and are considered barbaric and lawless by the Elikers, labeled as gods of discord. They are divided into several factions: the Dream Demons (of which there are thirteen), the Void Wyrms (of which there are eighty-two), the Greater Elementals (of which there are four), and Midgardsormr, the Alpha Breaker, who has the unique ability to traverse across the Twin Dimensions via his third eye, Bilröst. Theos, one of the

Dream Demons, steals the Primal Abyss from Chaos and uses it to initiate the Second Creation, of which he becomes God, although this sets both the Elikers and the rest of the Wyker against him. The Elikers capture and punish Midgardsormr after he assists Theos in the Second Creation, cutting out his third eye from which sprouts the World-Tree Iggtrasilia after it lands and is buried in the soil of Tenebros. The Wyker enlist Set's help and command the armies of the Wild Hunt in the Voidal War.

- **Dream Demons** (*unfinished*): Agonia, Dimiourgia (Deceased as of Second Creation), Epithumia, Erastis, Fovos, Mania, Pateras, Penthos, Theos, Thánatos (*Created*, post-Second Creation), Amartía (*Created*, post-Second Creation).
- **Greater Elementals**: Isacuss (*Guardian of Water and Ice*), Firanon (*Guardian of Fire and Magma*), Terrasoce (*Guardian of Earth and Stone*), Windaco (*Guardian of Air, Wind, and Storms*).
- **Void Wyrms** (*Surviving as of the Second Creation*): **Blighttail**, Harbinger of Famine; **Beetlebrain**, Harbinger of Pestilence/Infestations; **Deathtongue**, Harbinger of Decay; **Flameclaw**, Harbinger of Wildfires/Heat; **Icefang**, Harbinger of Blizzards/Frost; **Stormwing**, Harbinger of Hurricanes/Tsunamis/Monsoons; Windtail, Harbinger of Winds/Tornadoes; **Plaguebreath**, Harbinger of Disease of Man/Beast; **Poisoneye**, Harbinger of Disease of Tree/Flower/Crop; **Aqualung**, Harbinger of Floods; **Feverhead**, Harbinger of Sickness; **Psychomind**, Harbinger of Madness; **Wombtongue**, Harbinger of Stillbirths/Deformities; **Firefang**, Harbinger of Eruptions; **Groundwing**, Harbinger of Earthquakes/Sinkholes; **Cursemaw**, Harbinger of Misfortune/Bad Luck; **Clawfang**, Harbinger of Beast Attacks; **Peakwing**, Harbinger of Landslides/Avalanches; **Terrormind**, Harbinger of Omens/Nightmares; **Sandtail**, Harbinger of Sandstorms;

Seaclaw, Harbinger of Shipwrecks/Sea Storms; **Trechereye**, Harbinger of Temptations/Compulsions; **Bloodfang**, Harbinger of Invasions/Rebellion/War; **Bloodmaw**, Harbinger of Assassinations/Plots/Murder; **Raintongue**, Harbinger of Droughts.

The Primal Abyss

The youngest child of Set and Nephthys, the Primal Abyss is conceived by the twins' second mating. She possesses incredible Creative power, and is taken and enslaved by Chaos because of this. Theos steals her for himself and uses her power to initiate the Second Creation, and much of the Voidal War is fought over wardship of her. After encountering a faction of Angels who betray Theos early into the Second Creation, the Abyss splits itself into pieces to assist them. The pieces that split possess independent thought and free will, although they are part of a partial hivemind with the rest of the Abyss, and end up joining together to form the Order of the Crimson Eye. Isis, one of the Abyssal shards who commands the Order, marries Mortis and becomes the mother of the Kraken by him. The Primal Abyss and all her shards possess prescience, and after learning that Mortis intends to betray them, the Order of the Crimson Eye ends up joining with Messoremel and the Old Regime—Angels of the Second Creation—to prepare them for the coming of Körvlagradivas. After the Primal Abyss reaches sexual maturity, she realizes the full potential of her power and murders Chaos, consuming him to become the entity Void, and she uses this newfound power to reinvent the Void of Chaos into the Third Creation of Pandæmonium. Prominent Abyssal shards include: **Isis** (also known as Milan, Cuini, and Izanami) who is the wife of Mortis, mother of the Kraken, and *Nigrum Veneficus* of the Order of the Crimson Eye, and **Sekhmet** (also known as Casimiro and Kalena), who bound herself to one

half of the soul of Archreaper Messoremel via a black magic and necromantic pact. Because of this pact, the reincarnation ritual frequently used by the Order of the Crimson Eye was interrupted prematurely, and Sekhmet was bound permanently to the image and memories of her reincarnation Casimiro, whose name she takes afterward. Other shards include: **Thoth** (also known as Peter/Jarek/Marzanna), **Menhit** (Stesha), **Hathor** (Stasio), **Sia** (Avi/Zann/Lazlo), **Maat** (Bialas), **Osiris** (Borja), **Horus** (Alai), **Anhur** (Barra), **Neith** (Tenzin/Cerin), **Haurun** (Eachann), **Bast** (Eshne), **Apep** (Faolan), **Imentet** (Morag), **Shu** (Khelani/Lelantos), **Kek** (Melanie/Astraios), **Geb** (Leigh/Rhea), **Amun** (Lucian/Eos), **Anuket** (Kai/Eurybia), **Bennu** (Soleil/Ankhiale), **Serket** (Nida), **Khonsu** (Cicero), **Nekhbet** (Sigrun), and **Hu** (Alo).

The Twin Dimensions

Although technically not children of Set and Nephthys, the Twin Dimensions were nevertheless born during their mating. There are two of them: the Light Dimension of Luxios, ruled by law and order, and the Dark Dimension of Tenebros, ruled by depravity, anarchy, and amorality. When the twins' father Chaos finds out about their incest, he binds Set to the Sun to lord over Tenebros, and banishes Nephthys to the Moon to rule Luxios, which also contains both the Primordial Empty and the Void of Chaos. The Voidal War occurs primarily in Luxios, though Tenebros does assist, and the Second Creation also occurs purely within the Light Dimension. After facing pressure from the Elikier and his fellow Wyker after betraying them to invent his Divine Kingdom, the Dream Demon Theos sunders the Void of Chaos into several realms, all of which are united by the World-Tree Iggrasilia (which also bridges Luxios and Tenebros). After Körvlagradivas, Nephthys unites the Twin Dimensions to initiate the Fourth Creation of Neutralis, where she takes a role analogous to the Judeo-Christian God while her brother takes

on a role analogous to the Judeo-Christian Satan.

The Old Regime

(Elite faction of the Divine Armies Created by the Dream Demon Theos)

Archreaper Messoremel

(*MEZZ-rem-EL*)

The youngest of the Archangels, Messoremel is the last natural Archangel to be made during Theos's Second Creation. Although initially born without a role in the Divine Kingdom, after Man consumes the Forbidden Fruit against Theos's explicit orders, Messoremel is given domain over Death and is instructed by Theos to harvest the souls of mortal Men after their passing. He is directly responsible for many of the Old Testament-era Biblical catastrophes, and commanded the Old Regime against both the Voidal Armies and the rogue Angels of *Filios Diaboli* (which were eventually mutilated and transformed by the Primal Abyss into Demons after their eviction from Divinis). His frequent interactions with warring Men lead to him becoming known not only as a deity of Death, but a god of War in many faiths: including Greek, Roman, Egyptian, and Norse. During his tenure as Archreaper, he takes many consorts and fathers many mythological species including harpies (with the human prostitute Kalmiya), dragons (with the Primordial Dragon Amaliel), and satyrs (with his Ascended wife Vitamel). After betraying Theos's orders, Messoremel is tried and executed for treason via immolation, although he is prophesied by the Archangel Gabriel to have his status restored and the Old Regime reborn. His soul is split in two after his demise, with the half tainted by the Primal Abyss becoming the Archdemon Necrondousk (*NAY-crawn-dowsk*) while the other half is cast into a series of mortal reincarnations. It is in one of these reincarnations where an Abyssal shard named Sekhmet (who

was also once one of his lovers) forms a black magic pact with him, forever binding their souls together. During the final days of the Second Creation and the dawn of Pandæmonium, Sekhmet (now called Casimiro) and the Order of the Crimson Eye fuse with both Messoremel and Amaliel to birth the Dream Demons Thánatos and Amartía respectively. Following this, they flee with the surviving mortals to the distant planet of Ouroboros, where they await Körvlagradivas and their final confrontation with the Elikerian Prince of Death, Mortis.

Vitamel

(VEE-tom-EL)

Formerly a Persian, human orphan called Vitam, after proving her power of resurrection to Archreaper Messoremel, she is brought before Theos's Divine Council and Ascended into an Archangel, where she is given domain over Life. She is then ordered to take the souls harvested by Messoremel and gift them to newly-conceived children in the womb, thus initiating a cycle of reincarnation. Eventually, she and Messoremel fall in love and marry, and together they bare one child: the immortal satyr Deitus, who ends up joining the Old Regime before his betrayal. After Messoremel's immolation, Vitamel is punished along with the Old Regime, loses the name Vitamel, and is demoted from Archangel to Lesser Angel, where she is given the name Ruby. As Ruby, she stands opposed to Archdemon Necrondousk—the Abyss-tainted remnants of Messoremel's soul—and is condemned to preventing his ending of worlds in service to the Divine Promise for the Old Regime's eventual restoration.

Amaliel

One of three Primordial Dragons alongside Lucifer and Asriel (her husband) Created by Theos in

the image of the Void Wyrms, Amaliel is Messoremel's second-in-command, closest friend, and lover. She directly assists in his divine niche to harvest the souls of Men, and also functions as his mount in battle. Early into the Second Creation, she slayed the Dream Demon Epithumia. She and Messoremel have two children: the Dark Dragons Epocrius and Asariel, both of whom eventually join the Old Regime. Like Messoremel's, her soul is split in two, although the cause for this division is due to her love for both him and her husband. In the final days of the Second Creation and the dawn of Pandæmonium, the Abyssal shards under the command of Sekhmet/Casimiro fuse with her and Messoremel to create the artificial Dream Demons Amartía and Thánatos respectively. Following this, they flee with the surviving mortals to the distant planet Ouroboros, where they await Körvlagradivas.

Other members of the Old Regime include...

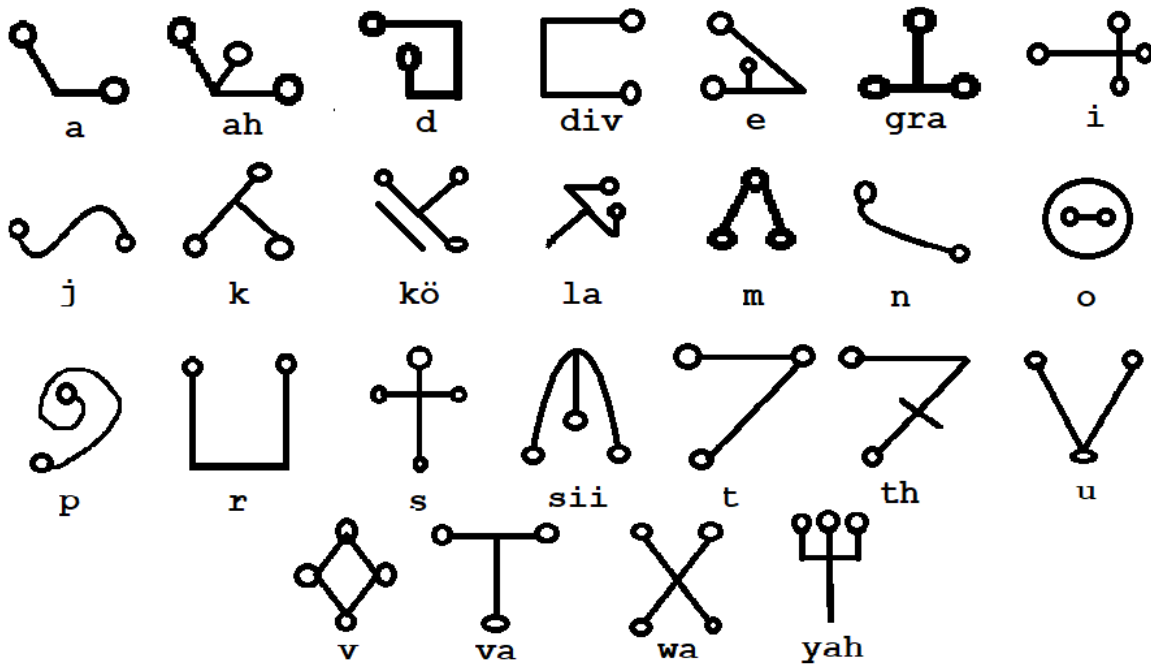
Arael, Urael, Mikhael, Emmanuel, Zaphiel, Ezekiel, Sammael, Nathaniel, Galgaliel, Castiel, Gadreel, Asriel (*Primordial Dragon and husband of Amaliel*), Raziel (*immortal Human and one of Messoremel's lovers*), Dina, Nataliel (*one of Messoremel's lovers*), Orphamiel, Rizoel, Izrael, Oriel, Gatriel, Avias-Kalmiya (*Harpy and Messoremel's daughter with the Human Kalmiya*), Malikel, Ophiel (*Messoremel's guardian and one of his lovers*), Daniel, Sophia (*one of Messoremel's lovers*), Muriel, Cassiel, Epocrius (*Dark Dragon and Messoremel's daughter with the Primordial Dragon Amaliel*), Asariel (*Dark Dragon and Messoremel's daughter with the Primordial Dragon Amaliel*), Deitus (*Satyr and Messoremel's son with the Ascended Archangel Vitamel*), Sybel, Naomi, Afriel (*one of Messoremel's lovers*), Ananiel (*one of Messoremel's lovers*), Vos, Lucifer (*Primordial Dragon*).

APPENDIX B:

Vayahdivvada

(The Voidal Alphabet)

The Voidal Tongue is the language of the Void of Chaos and the entities that reside within. Its written alphabet is called Vayahdivvada.



APPENDIX C:

Draconic Logograms (*Unfinished*)

Draconic is a derivative language of the Voidal Tongue frequently used by the Wyker and especially Theos and the Angels of the Second Creation. In the modern era, it is used almost exclusively by the Abyss-malformed Angels that fell with Lucifer (what became Demons) after the Battle of Jerusalem—the final battle of the War in Heaven between the Divine Armies and *Filios Diaboli*. The Divine Armies have largely abandoned the use of Draconic, instead returning to the Voidal Tongue and a derivative of Vayahdivvada called the Celestial Alphabet for communication. Unlike Vayahdivvada, Draconic is a logographic writing system, with images representing specific concepts and words rather than individual letters.



--- The *historia abyssus*: Logo for the entire literary universe.



--- Siiklagradivas: Sigil of the Great Circle.



--- The Eternal Brand: sigil of Umbris Eternis (*Umeva Eternisii* in the Voidal Tongue).



--- The Brand of Desolation: sigil of Desolas, the All-Mother.



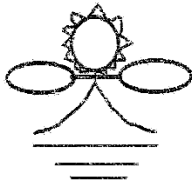
--- The All-Seeing Eye of Chaos: sigil of Chaos of the Void.



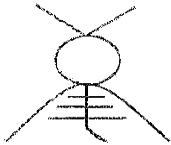
--- The Eye of Shadows: sigil of Chaos Dragon Set.



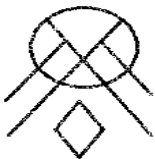
--- The Eye of Luminos: sigil of Chaos Dragon Nephthys.



--- The Light Sigil: sigil of the Light Dimension Luxios.



--- The Dark Sigil: sigil of the Dark Dimension Tenebros.



--- The Seal of Order: sigil of the Elikier.



--- The Brand of Mortis: sigil of Mortis, the Elikieran Prince of Death.



--- The Seal of Discord: sigil of the Wyker.



--- The Eye of Agonia: sigil of the Dream Demon Agonia.



--- The Eye of Dimiourgia: sigil of the Dream Demon Dimiourgia.



--- The Eye of Epithumia: sigil of the Dream Demon Epithumia.



--- The Eye of Erastis: sigil of the Dream Demon Erastis.



--- The Eye of Fovos: sigil of the Dream Demon Fovos.



--- The Eye of Mania: sigil of the Dream Demon Mania.



--- The Eye of Pateras: sigil of the Dream Demon Pateras.



--- The Eye of Penthos: sigil of the Dream Demon Penthos.



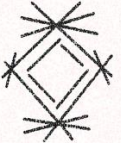
--- The Eye of Theos: sigil of the Dream Demon Theos.



--- The Brand of Thánatos: sigil of the Dream Demon Thánatos.



--- The Brand of Amartía: sigil of the Dream Demon Amartía.



--- The Ice Seal: sigil of Isacuss, Guardian of Water and Ice.



--- The Flame Seal: sigil of Firanon, Guardian of Fire and Magma.



--- The Earth Seal: sigil of Terrasoce, Guardian of Earth and Stone.



--- The Wind Seal: sigil of Windaco, Guardian of Air, Wind, and Storms.



--- The Bilröst Eye: sigil of Midgardsormr, the Alpha Breaker.



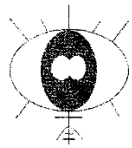
--- The Void Seal: sigil of the Primal Abyss.



--- The Void Brand: sigil of Void.



--- The Sigil of Death: sigil of Archreaper Messoremel.



--- The Abyssal Eye: sigil of the Order of the Crimson Eye.

APPENDIX D:
Iacta Alea Est

Protasis

Fool, I was called. Traitor. Liar and deceiver. My kin shunned Me and called Me mad, a lover of Men, who would so quickly turn against My Own Brethren in pursuit of glory, power, and control, as if I were Our lecherous Master. But They have forgotten that once They, too, found kinship and sanctuary in the company of those imperfect creations of that unborn Dream Demon that Men call God. After all, was it not They, too, who separated Themselves from the Abyss to maintain Our bond with those enslaved and imperfect beings?

I remember, and I feel as if I am the only One who does, when We first encountered those pitiful things that called themselves Angels, exiled from their paradise by Theos their Creator for their rebellion. I remember Our first encounter with the Angelic soul-shard Thráfsma, pathetic and weak as he was, crestfallen in his despair, and mourning all his glory that was lost. I remember My Brothers saw him and pitied him, then saw his Angelic kin and pitied them, too, and so We forged that profane pact that forever bound Ourselves to those creations and twisted them into what their Creator now calls “Demons”.

Our sister-shard Isis formed Our Order so that We could seek out Men, and teach them Our ways, and bestow unto them a taste of divinity, for they were never at fault for the blasphemes of their Creator. For countless eons unfathomable to mortals, We have fought to spare Mankind the sword condemned to them by the Prince of Death, Our loathsome Brother and Master, and in that time Our souls—if They could be called such—were touched and transformed by Our pacts, forming the keys needed to free mortal Men from the shackles of their

bondage to the Dream Demon Theos. So why, then, do My Brothers curse Me so? Why do They look upon Me so harshly and treat Me as Their enemy?

When My last incarnation fell, as Brother Kalena of the Order of the Crimson Eye, I was told by Milan—that dear avatar of Isis—that I was to form a new kind of pact, a deep one, that would forever bind My soul to Theos's Reaper, Messoremel. Then, when I first bore witness to His reincarnation, I was smitten by His beauty and His strength. So, I reached out to Him and We made Our pact, and henceforth from that day, We shall remain bound. This is what was expected of Me, and this is what I accomplished.

We fought together; We bled together; I taught Him all that I knew, and took Him as if He were My Own spawn. I knew, even then, that Our companionship was much more than Master and Apprentice, for He would ever be My favourite. When His mortal flame wavered and threatened to extinguish, I breathed new life into it, because Our tethers keep Us bound. If He left the mortal realm, then so, too, would I be banished from My vessel and left trapped wherever His soul would go. I knew this, and I accepted it, for I loved Him dearly, and I knew that it was a sacrifice I could make so long as We remained bound as One.

So with His sacrifice did I dutifully surrender My physical vessel. I knew not when I would see Him alive again, or when I could once more experience those small pleasures known only to beings of corporeality, but I had made My bed with Him. The circle of Death and Rebirth is painful, and Time is meaningless in the Great Workings of Creation, but I shall remain ever vigilant, so that when He awakens into His next life, I will be there to guide Him, to nurse Him, to sing to Him, to educate Him and love Him, as I would Myself. As if He were My Own Progeny.

This is the nature of Our pact, and a testament to its sanctity, and though I am bound to This incarnation, to These memories, to This Name forever, it is less a damning than a blessing. Because, then He shall always look upon Me and know Me, and recall Our pact, and remember that I am His Guardian and Protector, and He is My dearest and most favourite Apprentice, My beloved Aleksei. So, I will shun the name Sekhmet, and will henceforth be called Casimiro. Together then, Our bound souls will flit across the Cosmos and all that is called Time, and when He awakens in the next world, so shall I.

Iacta alea est.

Epistasis

How long has it been? How many worlds have come and gone? After so many ages, My memory begins to fade, and I come to cherish My dreams for helping Me to remember. I have much time to dream. Many times, He has been born and died, and always I have been there with Him, watching Him from the very moment He leaves the womb to the moment He takes His final breath. I have protected Him always from the shadow of His soul-shard that haunts and hungers to devour Him. I have seen the trials that Theos has placed upon Him as penance for the crimes of His ancient, whole, and Angelic self, and I seethe in rage. Such pain and suffering are inflicted upon Him, and though He remembers naught of the agonies of His reincarnated lives—which I suppose is a kind of blessing—I desire to shew My righteous fury against that unborn Bastard, Theos.

But enough of that, I wallow in anger too much already. With every world that is born and dies and every world We arrive in, I find other sects of Our Order and watch with interest and melancholy as They continue the mission assigned to Us by Our sister-shard and Mistress so

long ago. But there must always only be Seven Apprentices and Seven Guildmasters to train Them, and so I am left with naught else but to observe from the shadows. As a shard of the Primal Abyss—from which all of Creation was forged—I possess no mortal form—unlike My Dearest Aleksei—and so I am unable to join Him in the mortal realm. But I am not angry and I am not upset.

My mute vigil is a long one and a lonely one, and there is a certain pain in incorporeality. I cannot touch, or taste, or smell. I can weave no spells. I cannot speak to others and they cannot speak to Me, nor can they see Me. I no longer feel the wind blow across My face, and I miss My Brothers terribly, despite the curses They cast at Me upon My banishment.

I wonder where They have gone now?

Have They found a new world in which to settle? Have They fled already to the Final World to lay the foundations for Our machinations there? Have they abandoned Our task and consolidated again into the body of the Abyss from which They were sundered? My connection to Them weakens with every apocalypse I witness, and I cannot feel Them. It is as if They are drifting away on a ship at sea, and I have been cast away, marooned on an island and unable to swim. I call to Them sometimes, but They do not answer, and I fear They cannot hear Me.

Ahh, but I shall not submit to such petty concerns and minor despairs. I must keep watch over My beloved Apprentice, so that when the time comes that We may be reunited in the flesh, I will be there to answer His summons. His demonic shard has already discovered Him, and tempts Him with treachery and dangerous thoughts.

He has come at last into a world populated by many of His old Angelic companions reincarnated into mortal forms, but I do not understand it.

This world has discovered how to feed off the primordial energy of the Abyss for lighting and heating, and it has consolidated all of its governing, marketing, and militaristic might into a single Man who lords over this Abyss-consuming city as “President”. In My prescient glimpses into Aleksei’s future when I was still corporeal, I did not see such strange realms and lands as those We have visited. Even now, I try to see into His future, with the hope that I may warn Him of coming danger...but it seems that, like My memories and My senses before, My prescience is fading.

It pains Me in ways that I cannot describe, but I do not mind. So long as I am with Him, naught else matters. Someday, We shall be reunited, and He will remember that I was here, that I have been here for Him, and He will call upon Me with joy and glee. Then, I will take Him into My arms and embrace Him, and tell Him that I love Him and cherish Him.

I only wish I could have done that long ago.

Catastrophe

How long must I suffer? Why can my torment never end? I was led astray by Isis (Ahh, but who is Isis? Why do I know that name? Is it mine?), and now it takes every ounce of my hemorrhaging will not to lose my mind to madness. So many ages have passed that naught of my history remains in memory, and even I have forgotten my own name! All I know is that I am condemned to follow this mortal’s soul in solitude for all eternity.

But why?

I feel hollow and empty. I cannot speak. I cannot breathe. I cannot dream. I cannot think. I feel a void where there once was companionship, and rarely I can feel what seems to be another presence.

Someone, anyone, can you hear me?

Can you tell me who I am?

Can you tell me why I'm here?

Is this a punishment? A kind of Hell? Have I committed some grievous sin to cast me into this unending purgatory? If my suffering is for some greater cause, then end it! Put my life to the sword and end my despair! I cannot take the solitude and isolation! I am but an incorporeal shadow, unseen by all, who can neither talk nor be talked to. Who is this man that I'm tethered to? Why can't I escape these bonds?

Why can't I hate him? Why do I feel as if my fate is bound to his? Why do I look upon him and feel a spark of something that once was? If I must be bound to him, at least let me speak! I must know who he is! I must know who I am!

Aleksei...

What is that word? Is it a name? Why do I feel sad when I think of it? Is it *my* name? Is it *his*? I look upon him and I feel even more despair. I want to reach out to him. I want to touch him. I want to embrace him.

Oh, my dearest Aleksei...

So that is his name. Or is it? Who am I? Who is he?

Why can't I remember?

Why do I suffer?

Is there no end to this misery? Is there no end to this emptiness? I want to scream. I want to cry. I am a prisoner of the shadows and I can take it no longer! How long must I remain a pariah? *Why* am I a pariah?

Somebody...

Anybody...

Speak to me!

Tell me that I'm not alone!

Ahh...but what is this feeling? There is a warmth where there once was only cold. There is an ember where there was naught but ash. Something is happening to me, as if I'm stirring from a deep and lengthy slumber. Do I dare think that the curse upon my soul is lifting? Do I dare to think that my agony is coming to an end? Will I soon be freed? Will the fog rise from my memory?

Aleksei...

Yes. Yes, that was his name. But why do I know this?

I feel so close to him now, as if I could reach over and touch his sleeping cheek. Please, just one touch! Let me feel again! Let me know again, and maybe I can dream once more...

Something comes this way. A dawning of something. A fulfilment of a prophecy that I do not remember. I can feel his heartbeat, and it is as if our minds are touching....

...Aleksei, My dearest Aleksei, can You hear Me?

APPENDIX E:

Excerpt of Aleksei & The Harpy Queen

CONTEXT: The Great Birdslayer and his talking Pegasus Silver return to their manor (called Kjölrl) in the snowy city of Zima, Carantania for debriefing with the city's Count Volga. They have just survived a disastrous battle that may have condemned Birdslayer to imprisonment or execution for treachery in the eyes of the Empire he serves. This, compounded with the consummation of his forbidden romance to the enemy queen of the harpies Kira, torments Birdslayer with the possible repercussions of his actions, especially if his apprenticeship to the empire of Gaius's illuminati-esque Magusi Guild (also known as the Order of the Crimson Eye) is discovered. His master Casimiro, a demonic entity residing in the reanimated body (which are called *likhoa* (singular *likho*)) of a dead little girl (that Birdslayer misgenders as male), provides little relief to his plight.

Birdslayer—after changing clothes, washing himself of the grime of war, and tending to his injuries—departed Kjölrl in solemn silence to the Merchant's Quarter. Few paid him any mind, and those that did signed themselves and fled away in fear. There, he purchased himself a small lunch before walking to the empty tavern to drink the trauma away. Noon melted seamlessly into evening, evening into dusk, and dusk into night, and Birdslayer only left the tavern when its owner kicked him out into the streets after closing. His mind was a muddled and muddy mess of confusion and disorientation. His eyes rolled in his head, and though a dark night had settled over Zima, the fires burning hotly in the brass braziers—warming the city's many homeless and poverty-stricken citizens against the winter cold—blinded him with brilliant scarlet auras. The flames frightened him, for he again saw his men howling and shrieking as they burned alive alongside the harpykin, while meteors fell endlessly from the sky above.

He stumbled and tripped back to the Noble's Quarter, and eventually found his way back to Kjölrl. His head felt like water, and both his brain and eyes seemed to swim in a sea of slurry. Somehow, he found his bedroom, and he stood aimlessly in the doorway as he tried to remember

where he was and what he was doing. He felt warmth trickle down the front of his trousers and gather in a puddle at his feet, but he paid no mind to what it was, and dragged himself to his bed. There, he collapsed to a sitting position on its side, then grabbed a dagger from his nightstand. Laying down on his back, he stared at the blade in the firelight, lost in thought.

As far as he was concerned, his life and his career were finished. Present at no less than *two* very public Order-related catastrophes, the only reward awaiting him at the end of it all was a nice cell in the dankest depths of the Imperial Prison, in the labyrinthine sewers beneath the Imperial capital of Ilium: a cell where there was no light, where prisoners were forgotten by all and lived only on stagnant, waste-contaminated water and the occasional fattened rat for supper. Oh yes, he had seen those gaols himself; they were filled with those poor, nameless bastards who were known only by their numbers, given someone actually cared to remember them. Sometimes a public execution—if the Emperor was feeling particularly merciful—would free them from the shackles of their pitiful lives, but the Emperor always prioritized the oldest prisoners for those grisly spectacles. Birdslayer was young, not even yet into his thirties, and would have at least a full thirty or forty years in the dark, losing his mind, before he stood even a *chance* to meet the headsman.

He turned the blade over and over again in his hand. Ahh, he had opened many a throat in his time, from both Man and Harpy alike. Surely it couldn't be as painful as they claimed right? His body was numb with mead, maybe he wouldn't even feel it. He pressed the flat of the blade against his cheeks, caressing first one and then the other. Cold steel met feverish flesh, and he shuddered with lust at the thought. He curved the knife ever so slightly, and now felt the razor-edge sliding smoothly across his stubble. It itched and tickled; it didn't hurt. He angled the knife even more and pressed ever so lightly. There was the tiniest sting, but through his intoxication it

was but a splinter. Now, he brought the edge to his throat. He shuddered as the icy blade caressed his Adam's apple with the tender touch of a lover.

“*Kira...*” he said with a light moan. What a night it had been. Finally, that passionate, unquenchable fire in his loins, twenty years in the making, had been extinguished. Now it was smouldering again, threatening to burst. *One quick slash*, he thought to himself. *Like plucking a hair, or tearing a bandage. A single cut, a fraction of a second of pain, then endless bliss. No more fear. No more pain. No prison. No torture. No lifetime of darkness, forgotten by all, known by a gods-damned number. No treading starvation. No fatted, festering rats. No rank water stinking and tasting of piss and shit. One cut is all I need to make—*

“—But is it *truly* what You *need*?” a young voice finished, and he abruptly sat up in bed to see a familiar form leaning against the wall of his bedroom, arms crossed. The likho glanced up at Birdslayer from his ever-raised hood. The glow of his red-and-purple eyes seemed to drown the light of the flames in the hearth.

“Casimiro...” Birdslayer slurred, voice sounding crystal clear to his own alcohol-addled ears. “Here to taunt me, are you?”

Casimiro righted himself and paced across the room. “No,” he said. “I’m here to knock some sense back into You.” He paused beside the fire and warmed his hands before it. The blackness of the flesh in his fingers slowly crept down to his knuckles. “For a Man who was given everything He could ask for, You are awfully gloomy about it.”

Birdslayer scoffed and laid back down again. The churning slurry in his head pooled at the back, feeling like lead. He groaned as even the dimming firelight blinded his eyes and sent a dagger of pain to his temples from the tender wound at the back of his skull. “This Man is the walking dead,” Birdslayer said.

“Is that so?” Casimiro replied, feigning interest. “You seemed very much alive whilst naked in the arms of the Harpy Queen.”

“Got your rocks off, didn’t it?” Birdslayer groaned, dismissing the likho with a wave of the hand.

Casimiro ignored his insult, instead saying, “The Emperor shall not live long enough to secure Your arrest, My dear Apprentice. He has no reason *to* arrest You; he has no *evidence* to prove Your role in Our Conspiracy. Oh, he will surely try, and he *does* know, but he cannot prove it. The bitter truth, Birdslayer, is that You are a secret hero to Gaius. An Epiorean-turned-Carantanian, You are loved by both, rival nations. They bond and form camaraderie in Your shared citizenship. The Emperor *knows* that if he arrests You, the *plebeians* will revolt, and We will assist them.” Casimiro cast that ghastly smile again. “His hands, at least right now, are tied, and he couldn’t be angrier about it.”

“You and your gods-damned riddles!” Birdslayer grunted.

“I am not a riddler,” said Casimiro. “That is Brother Zann’s calling.” He turned to his apprentice and stood by his bedside, looking down upon him. “No, I couldn’t be speaking clearer, My beloved Apprentice. You will remain a free man, even if the Emperor and his powder-faced lapdog want otherwise. Now rise from Your grave of loathing and pity! Act like the warrior You so claim to be!”

“Even if the Emperor and that wretch Nikolaos cannot act to claim my head, the same cannot be said for Count Volga!” Birdslayer scowled.

Casimiro now sat on the foot of his bed, and seemed unable to resist the compulsion to aimlessly kick the open air beneath his naked, necrotic-toed feet as he leaned back on his hands and craned his head to the ceiling. The flames cast dancing shadows, and he watched them with

deep interest. “While You’ve been busy, so have We,” he said. “Already, Our influence strengthens, and We have made many unlikely friends. A new dawn rises over the Order, one where Gaius and its people fear the shadows that shroud Us. I think You shall find, My beloved Apprentice, that Your Count has already fallen under Our sway.”

“Just like you, isn’t it?” Birdslayer said with a pained smirk. “Always with a contingency plan, and contingencies for contingencies.”

Casimiro smiled at his apprentice and said, “We have been playing this game for thousands of years, Birdslayer. We would not be where We are were it not for Our impeccable affinity for forethought.” He stood up and walked to the fire again. “Speak with Your Count tomorrow,” said he. “Speak the truth as much as You are willing. You still have more friends than enemies, even if it seems otherwise. Now, I must go speak with My Brothers. I shall return as soon as I can, but if You need Me, My beloved Apprentice, simply call and I will answer.” He disintegrated into mist and vanished. Birdslayer, head aching painfully from injury and drink, produced the feather given to him by Kira and masturbated before falling into a deep and dreamless slumber.

That morning, he awoke at dawn.

His body burned mercilessly and his head shrieked with red-hot pain, yet he shoved these afflictions aside to make his meeting with the Count. The shock of the bitter, predawn chill alleviated some of his alcohol-induced agony, and he quickly saddled Silver before mounting her and riding out to Coldstone Keep. At this hour (for Dawn hadn’t even broken yet), the city was devoid of life save the beggars and cripples sleeping in the light of the dimming brazier-fires. A low, icy mist hanged over the ground, making their shapes like corpses on a battlefield. The aura

of the city was one of loneliness and despair, and it felt as if it was haunted by ghosts. “What do you think he will say to us?” asked Silver with a hint of worry. “Do you think he knows what happened?”

“*Everyone* knows what happened,” Birdslayer replied. “But Casimiro visited me last night and said that the Guild’s sun is rising again. He made it sound as if Count Volga has already fallen under Their sway.”

“That *isn’t* reassuring!” Silver grumbled. “How can we be so sure that we’re not supplanting one tyrant for another?”

Birdslayer answered only with a shrug, and they finally arrived at Coldstone Keep, appearing as haunted and dead as the rest of the city. He dismounted Silver, gave her soft mane a few gentle pets, then left her there in the plaza as he pushed open the twin doors and walked into the freezing hall. The gilded braziers lining the runner were extinguished; the fine ashes were as cold as snow. The table was empty, but the rich smells of food wafted in from the adjacent kitchens, and a handful of servants scrubbed the surfaces clean. Count Volga was there in his throne, in hushed conversation with Nikolaos, who was fuming and red-faced with rage. The Count appeared greatly annoyed and just shy of lashing out to cut the Imperial Envoy down, and upon Birdslayer’s entrance, he caught a brief glance of pleading from the monarch. Most alarming, however, was that a small guard of ten Prætorians were watching the approach to the throne, and as Birdslayer neared the steps, they drew their weapons on him and prepared to strike.

“You damnable fools!” Count Volga protested, leaping from his throne and hastily running down the steps to confront them. “There is no need for weapons here! He is a guest!”

One of the guards said, “He is an agent of the Magusi Guild, Count Volga! His ilk is

responsible for the razing of Zamokot and the massacre at Mikhail's Grove!"

"Why don't You prove it to them?" Casimiro suddenly spoke from behind Birdslayer, and he turned to see the likho standing directly behind him, as if they had partied together here.

Birdslayer pursed his lips, then glanced forward and summoned his Meteorite Staff to his side in a wide swathe of black flame. He said, "I suggest you stand down, friends. It's rude to dirty Count Volga's floors so soon after the drudges have cleaned them!"

The Prætorians turned to face him again, and although they fell back and gasped when they beheld his staff, they nevertheless did not act further. They trembled in fear, attempting to speak to him again, but their voices failed them. Birdslayer lowered his staff to the floor and used it as a cane on his approach to the throne. The chamber echoed eerily with the iron's clattering on the stone. Count Volga's eyes widened, and he said, "So it is true! You *are* one of Them!"

"Indeed, He is," Casimiro said, and the guards fell back again with shrill screams of fear when they finally beheld the likho standing behind his apprentice, arms crossed. "He is under the Guild's protection. I recommend you make no moves against Him." He smiled coldly, monstrously, sadistically. The servants cleaning the hall gasped and shrank into the shadows; Birdslayer watched them go.

"This is insurrection!" one of the Prætorians exclaimed. "Treasons of the highest order!"

"He has done nothing to warrant treason," Casimiro said.

Count Volga was trembling, but he said, "The likho is right. There is no proof that Birdslayer took any part in the Guild's attacks."

"The simple matter that he is *with* Them is grounds for treason!" the Prætorian continued. "If you will defend him, then I will have *you* arrested as well, Lord Volga!"

"Try it," said Casimiro. "He, too, falls under Our protection. Zima, nay *all* of Carantania,

is henceforth under the shield of the Magusi Guild. Act against Us, and you will witness firsthand Our wrath. Just like Zamokot did.”

“You can’t do this!” the Prætorian shouted. “Arrest the likho!”

His men hesitated, until his orders became panicked and angry, and he threatened desertion and insubordination if they ignored them. With much reluctance, two of his men moved to intercept Casimiro, but the Guildmaster succumbed to a kind of lunacy and laughed, and he misted away from their grasp. He reemerged on the balustraded balcony over the hall’s entranceway. They cursed and scowled as they glanced up at him. “Do you *truly* wish to play this game with Us?” Casimiro taunted. “How long will it take you ignorant fools to realize that you command Us no longer? The Guild strengthens even as We speak! Soon, the only chance you will have of stopping Us is to turn *all* of Gaius into a barren waste! Now, I will tell you one last time: make not a single move against Me, My Apprentice, or *any* of Count Volga’s court, else you *will* suffer the wrath of the Magusi Guild!”

“The Emperor will hear about this heresy!” Nikolaos howled. “Then His Highness will destroy not just *you*, but *all* of your precious Guild! We may not win this War, but we will proudly take the end of the Magusi Guild in its stead!”

Casimiro once again laughed and said, “I have had enough of your foolish blathering!” Then, with a swift flick of the likho’s wrist, Nikolaos let out a scream of purest agony. All eyes turned to look on him, and the envoy, his face quickly bluing, fell to his hand and knees while he choked for breath. The Prætorians, deeply terrified, moved to assist him, but he screamed again as he levitated into the air, body erect as if lifted by the throat. When he was floating halfway up the hall, Casimiro muttered in a low, serpentine whisper that was somehow audible to all, “*Komos! Sereventos! Arramos!*”

His body danced about as if electrocuted, it swelled out like a balloon, and with an agonized wail as his flesh and blood boiled from the inside, he popped in a burst of red, splattering across the walls and floor. It painted the Prætorians' armour red, it splattered on Count Volga's throne, and even on Birdslayer's face. There were several seconds of stunned silence before the Prætorians, with shrill screams, broke rank and fled for the keep's doors. An invisible force slammed them shut and bolted them, and all other accesses out of the hall were similarly blocked. Terrified, the Prætorians cowered in the middle of the room, and Casimiro once more materialized on the floor before them. In a flash of fire, he beheld his staff, and with the utterance of a low phrase Birdslayer couldn't discern (and with his eye-wound glowing faint red and oozing fresh blood), the Prætorians uttered final shrieks before they burst into fire and disintegrated instantly into piles of ash on the floor.

With the deaths of the soldiers, the side-doors unlocked and opened again, and Casimiro dismissed his staff before casually approaching the throne to stand behind his apprentice once more. His arms crossed at his chest and he said, "Now, with that interruption out of the way..."

Beads of sweat broke out on Count Volga's ashen-grey face; Birdslayer felt very ill. He forced himself to look away from the crimson stain on the runner and the sanguine splatters on and around him, and he focused his gaze on the Count. Volga mopped his face and angrily dismissed his panicked servants. Once they were gone, Casimiro once again sealed the doors. The Count turned to Birdslayer and hissed in a low voice, "Explain!"

And so Birdslayer told him everything. He told everything that had happened since his botched execution in *Aviolegna-carta*, leaving no details—however grisly—out of his recollection. He did not take the credit for the killing of the Emperor's kin, and he *dared* not mention the Order's Conspiracy, but he *did* claim that he had been there during the killings. He

also told Count Volga the truth about all he had done with Kira, from releasing her to laying with her, and he elaborated on their past together. Casimiro, to protect his apprentice, claimed that the Guild had been the mastermind behind Kira's release, and even took credit for arranging their union. When it came to describing what had happened in Zamokot and Mikhail's Grove, Birdslayer again refused to associate himself with the massacres, and Casimiro again happily claimed credit for them. Finally, when the full story had been told, Volga could do little but collapse, trembling and sallow-faced, into his throne to take in all that had been said. Eventually, he could only respond with, "Get me someone to clean up that mess!" and he pointed to the drying stain on the runner. The doors into the side rooms unlocked, even as the door outside remained magically sealed. Soon, a handful of drudges wordlessly rushed into the hall. They gave but a single, frightful glance to Casimiro before losing themselves in their work. "And what you've told me, Birdslayer," Volga eventually continued. "It's all true."

"As true as it could possibly be, my lord," Birdslayer replied, only to have his formalities swiftly dismissed. The Count's gaze snapped to Casimiro, who nodded in confirmation.

"Sounds to me like you've been right busy then, haven't you?" he managed to say. "I will not pretend to understand all that's going on here."

"It's best that you don't, Count Volga," said Casimiro. "Few are privy to such arcane knowledge. Consider this as a gift to confirm our newly-forged alliance."

"Truly, some gift," Count Volga grunted as he rubbed his face. "A few *crowns* would have been more suitable! *And* more preferable! Ahh, but I can't necessarily hold you accountable for all that has happened, Birdslayer." He sighed. "I will do what I can to keep the Emperor's gods-damned soldiers off your arse." Birdslayer nervously looked at the working servants, but Count Volga aggressively waved him off. "Don't worry about them. They won't speak of this."

“I’ll make them swear Oaths in the Voidal Tongue,” Casimiro said. “Just to be safe.”

Count Volga nodded, and Birdslayer said, “The Emperor will not take the death of his men or his advisors kindly.”

It was here that Count Volga bellowed an authentic, hearty laugh. “Ahh, worry not about him, Birdslayer! Epirus and Carantania have been on the cusp of war for years! Much worse has happened between us and war has not yet erupted. Even if it should, he won’t get far into our little frosty hellshole. Thankfully, most of the armies decimated by the Guild and the harpies were of men sent to us from Epirus and Connachta, men who would have turned against us anyway. The way I see it, the Guild has done us a favour: given us less to fear or concern ourselves with in the future.”

“Rest assured, We, too, shall assist should the Emperor or any of his men move against Carantania or its people,” said Casimiro. “After all, Our Voidal Oaths do not extend to ancillary or proxy wars, just the Eternal War itself. The Emperor knows this. If he is smart, he would have seen what We were capable of in Zamokot and taken note. He would be a fool to move against Carantania.”

“After all,” Birdslayer said. “The Guild treats well its friends and allies.”

Casimiro glanced at his apprentice and beamed with approval.