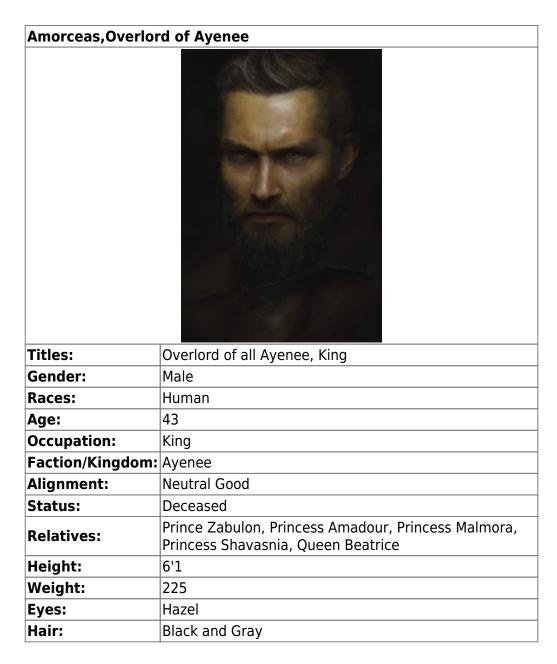
Amorceas Le Pontiantae, Former Overlord of Ayenee



Dark Days

Amorceas stood on the battlefield, rain pelting his armor, washing away the blood, gore, and mud. The tears of the sky father could not wash away what he had done here. The king, his best friend, and brother-in-law lay dead at his feet. His form lying bloody and broken. The two of them had once seen eye to eye on everything. Over the past two years, a rift had torn their friendship apart. He questioned if it were softly spoken whispers, like poison from the lips of vipers that had turned his friend against him? Maybe it had been him, maybe he had slighted him so badly that this was the only recourse for recovery?

Someone ran up and hoisted Amorceas's hand in the air and shouted, "The King is dead! Let his evil reign forever end!" Amorceas pulled his hand away and the noise of the battlefield seemed to drift away as the rain continued to fall. He stood there staring down at his friend's corpse. This was no

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victory, the only tales that would be told of this day were of the murder of a once good man. Amorceas couldn't tear his eyes away. Moments the two had shared, like brothers, passed before his stoic face.

The days passed by like a dream. He was supposed to abdicate the throne to house Sands. Instead, he didn't, the throne of Ayenee was his. He didn't trust the noble houses. He held the belief that the nobles had inspired this whole affair to further some plan of their own. Amorceas moved his wife and children from their lands in the West, to Central Ayenee with him. Today through a drunken haze he was sat atop a dais like some pagan effigy and lead through the streets in a parade. The world moved sluggishly around him, voices distorted. The sky was a deep gray and the air cold. Music played and black rose petals rained down from the buildings.

He had been called the black king, partly due to his black hair and partly due to the standard of his house, a black bear. The crowd cheered. He wore a sullen face, with dark circles under his troubled eyes. He could only think back in the past months that had lead to this moment. The comfort his family tried to offer him was in vain. It was as though he were frozen in a deep winter, while everyone else around him enjoyed the warmth of summer. Nothing could rouse him from his sorrows.

Today he sat upon the ornately carved throne of Ayenee. It was embellished with portrayals of mythical creatures, heroes, villains, gods, angels, and demons. The dark wood that it was carved from was as hard as stone. The carvings themselves were made by a master hand. His fingers glided over the depressions and curves, marveling in their smooth perfection. He has presented the sword of Ayenee. The high priest anointed him and then asked him to kneel. The priest touched each of Amorceas's shoulders with the sword and then presented it to him. He then turned and retrieved the crown then reverently placed the crown of Ayenee a top Amorceas's head.

The crown weighed heavy upon him. This piece of metal was once on his friend's head. Had it transferred some dark madness upon him? Would this crown do the same to him? The crown was a typical five pointed star crown, adorned with jewels representing the different colors of each section of Ayenee. A diamond for central, topaz for the west, onyx for the east, emerald for the south, and sapphire for the north. The sword of Ayenee was just as embellished at the everything else. The firey earth serpent ragnon coiled about the handle, the three headed hound of the underworld fenbrus's three heads represented the pommel, and the storm mother gaiden the phoenix had her wings outstretched on the guard.

The three represented the fairy tales of the old world. In the days when Ayenee was a dark place filled with superstition. The pagan trinity as they were commonly known. The first king of Ayenee had them represented in this sword to unify the people behind him. There were no cities then, only a ramshackle village and warring tribes. The first king was called the unifier, every king after that was given a moniker of some variety. The last king was known as the stern, he wondered what he would be? The throne room was domed with frescos of various celestial bodies representing the Ayenee sky. The 13 months were associated with the stellar land marks.

There was the phoenix, the leviathan, the warrior, the world turtle, the skull, the archer, the spider, the winged snake, the mage, the three headed wolf, the earth lizard, the bard, and the flame. At the edges of the domed ceiling was a ledge where angelic and demonic gargoyles were perched starring down on the earthly realm. The Seven demons and angels that once fought over this realm. The domed ceiling was supported by pillars at the base of each were dragons on one side and vampires on the other. The room on either side of these pillars was supported by half arches.

The whole castle had been built out of an onyx colored stone that when enchanted, alchemical altered, and inscribed created an effect called the sphere of nullification, the effect prevented magic

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from being used in the castle. This included psionics and much more. It was said once that this same stone was used in capturing gods because it would render them powerless. Amorceas looked upon all of these things as legends. No one had seen a dragon in their lifetime, or an angel, demon, or fairy for that matter. This place was the seat of legends as they called the throne room.

He was broken from his thoughts over ancient kings and master craftsmanship by a shouting outside. Behind the throne, there was a balcony that opened up to a view of the fountain square where the four roads of Ayenee met. The fountain in the square had statues pointing to each of the four corners. The statues were of famous heroes in Ayenee's history. The four roads formed a circle about the fountain before going their separate ways. It made the center of the city into a cross, their red cobble stones unique to them alone. The rest of the city streets were made with white cobblestones and were contained to the city itself. It was an idea by an engineer to have all roads lead to Ayenee Capital.

In the West, the roads ended at the Great Western Wall which weaved through the mountains to create a barrier. In the East rumors of dark lands, vampires, and witches prevented the road from being finished. It was the same in the North only it was the weather and tales of fearsome creatures that hindered the work. In the South, the roads went as far to the coastal kingdom of Velusia, nestled beneath the great world tree. Amorceas wondered if the great roads would ever truly be finished? Should he attempt it? The clamor of the city streets again broken him from his thoughts.

"You rotten dirty mongrel! The king is a murdering pig, a back stabbing bastard who lays with other men's women!" Amorceas had heard the rumors all too often these past months. The king always drunk and away in battle or hunts, the lonely queen, a bastard child. These rumors poisoned his friend, they made him grow to hate him. Amorceas had comforted the queen, yes. He had never had any illicit affair with her and though she did have a child that was not the king's, it was not his. Leo was someone else's bastard. Amorceas had simply been used as a scapegoat by the nobles. He had been a pawn and so had the king.

"You there! Stop spreading slander about your king! Guards! Guards!" Amorceas halted the chancellor's demands and spoke towards the man in the crowd. "If you believe such things then perhaps you would like to apply to be my court jester because you sir are a fool." The man laughed, "the only fool is the king lying dead in the crypts for believing you were his friend!" Amorceas flinched, he could smell the stench of Ayenee's noble houses behind this. "How much did they pay you?" he yelled back at the man. "How much did who pay me? What are you an egg short of a dozen?" Amorceas waved his hand dismissing the man and began to turn around.

"I see how it is. You pretend to be a friend then plow his wife and now you plow his kingdom, sod off you degenerate!" Amorceas frowned and turned around. He was hit in the face by a rotten tomato. The royal guard moved in shielding the king as individuals in the crowd began to throw items at the balcony. "Have that man arrested!" Amorceas wiped the tomato from his face and stormed off. If these nobles wanted to cause him grief then he would do the same for them. There were three houses behind all this. Sands, Luskan, and Whitehall. Each would pay for turning friend against friend.

Amorceas dipped his hands into the basin and cupped his hands bringing the cool water up to his face. His hand rubbed his face feeling the stubble. He reached over to the bedside table in his chamber and brought up a mirror. He looked over the haggard appearance that had become his face. "What has become of you?"

The door to his chambers squeaked and an answer came, "Why you have acquired the burden that is being the king." It was his wife Beatrice, sister of the former king. Amorceas groaned and walked over to his wife as she wrapped her arms around him. He rested his head against her shoulder. "I am sorry

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that I brought you here. I know it must bring you hurtful memories." He said the words in a whisper, almost as if to himself.

"It is alright dear. You are not at fault for what happened to my brother. You are a good man and he was once a good man. I fear that whatever dark treachery that was at work here took what was good in both of you and tainted it. I hope you can overcome this weariness that I have seen in your eyes the past couple of days." She told him this as she smoothed out his hair. "You should get a nice hot bath and maybe shave, sleep would be good also."

She smiled and the two shared a laugh as he nodded in agreement with her remedy for his troubles. "I will see to it they pay for what they did my love", he said. The words were full of bitterness and hatred, but simply saying them seemed to lift a bit of the weight on his shoulders. She smiled and asked him, "Do you remember when we first met?"

"How could I forget? It was after King Reginald sent your brother and me off to aid in the clan wars. Those wars...they left a mark on all of us, no one was the same." She nodded and said, "I had waited all day hoping to see my brother return. I saw the two of you walking up the road, the sun at your back. The two of you were covered in scars, and not a day later I was sitting by both your bedsides as you were both sick with fevers. We didn't know if you would pull through, rumors had told of a disease that struck those in the war claiming as many lives as the war itself." Amorceas looked at the four poster bed and his mind drifted back to those days.

Beatrice continued, "I fell in love with you while I took care of you. I could see the strength in you and the vulnerableness you tried to hide. You talked in your sleep." Amorceas sighed, "I probably said all sorts of embarrassing things." She laughed and shook her head, "no at one point you awoke and asked me if I were a goddess, you said you had never laid eyes on a mortal woman as beautiful as me." Amorceas nodded, "it was true then as it is now" she looked at him and moved closer. The two kissed and then she patted his shoulder.

"You should go bath, you smell like a tavern, a very cheap, very old, very used tavern." Amorceas raised a hand, "I-I get the hint alright, ok I'm going." She watched him towards the door, "I'll be waiting for your return." He turned at those words and arched an eyebrow. She had already slid out of her gown.

He walked briskly through the castle to the royal baths. They were fed by hot springs deep beneath the earth. Some said the minerals in the bath could erase injury and age from those who bathed in its waters. Another myth he supposed, like all the others. The only thing he had seen was the vampires. After seeing them he knew it was humanity's job to remove their taint from this world. The vampires were nothing more than a disease, a mutation.

He disrobed and stood in a chamber with four steaming pools, a pillar dominated the center of the room. He slid into the left pool closest to him. Each pool had a mural that over looked it. They showed the ancient landing of the human ships in these lands. The elves and other elder races as seen welcoming the human race. In the next panel, the humans are killing the various races, dwarves, Tuatha, elves, and goblins.

There is the next the kings and queens of the other races are seated at a table with a human king at its head. This was the great treaty that ended the war of races. The fourth mural was worn but seemed to depict a human king standing over all the nations of Ayenee. The murals had been collected from ancient elven ruins. They were older than this entire castle dating back over 300,000 years. They did spark Amorceas's imagination. Ayenee was a fractured realm consisting of five great parts. They had never been ruled by one king, but he would see to it after his revenge that he was

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Amorceas the uniter.

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