

Median Darkthorne

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Titles:	The Scourge
Gender:	Male
Races:	Tuatha De Dannan
Age:	133
Occupation:	Psychic Warrior
Faction/Kingdom:	Darkthorne/Belathian
Alignment:	Chaotic Evil
Status:	Unknown
Relatives:	Cebrese (father,erased), Adrian(uncle)
Height:	8ft
Weight:	424
Eyes:	Crystal Green
Hair:	White

The March of Destiny

“What happened here?!” Carver pondered as the group of hunters emerged from the forest to what was left of their town. “The whole town has been burned or trampled down like dead grass.” The night air was heavy with the smell of nature, smoke, and death. It was quiet except for the mutterings of a few of the hunters looking for loved ones. The only other sound was the crickets and cicadas and the dying embers of fires. The hunters became shadows moving in the moonlight, sometimes crying out as they touched a still hot piece of debris or stumbled into a depression.

“There are footprints everywhere, the earth has been trampled down. Here! War machines dragged leaving ruts in the soft soil. What army would march through here?” Demi asked as she pointed out the signs. Both of the hunters had once served in the military and had seen a few battles in their time. Carver shrugged as he removed his worn tweed hat. “Hard to say, not many

kingdoms close by and the direction the tracks lead make it more puzzling. The only thing this way is mountains and ocean, nothing to be proud of claiming or worth defending." The two looked in the direction of the footprints and nodded.

"Let's see what we find" they looked at the other hunters. Some decided to tag along moving with stealth through the tall grass towards the forest. The moons were crowded by clouds in the sky, but beyond those clouds, it was a blanket of stars. The whole world was bathed in their glow. For hours they followed the tracks keeping quiet. Finally, they could hear the sound of trees being chopped, they could see distant camp fires and hear the sound of voices. There was a hill nearby that the hunters made their way towards. They crouched down and looked over, their eyes growing wide. Thousands of warriors male and female worked busily cutting down the forest, they seem to be building the hulls of ships. A few of the villagers were there being used as slave labor.

One of the hunters spied his wife down there and despite Carver and Demi's protest began to make his way down. The other hunters looked at one another knowing full well it was suicide to wade into such a heavily numbered camp. It didn't take long before the hunter was caught unawares by a sentry. The sentry lashed a whip about the hunter's neck and yanked taking the man off his feet and throwing him back into some crates of ammunition. The hunter tried to fight back, but the sentry quickly rendered the man impotent. The rogue hunter was dragged away to join the other slaves in their work. The sentry ordered other soldiers to spread out and search the camp and surrounding area for more.

"Great, that ass just made things harder for us" Carver shook his head dismayed. Demi grinned, "what exactly did you think we were going to do anyway? Take out an entire army? The best we could do is inform someone of this force, but there is no one to inform that would really care." Carver nodded in agreement. The invaders in the camp were at least two heads taller than any man Carver had ever seen. They were built like killing machines, all muscle, not a single one had even an ounce of fat he could see. These were not farmers, hunters, or fisherman, they were not tradesmen. No these people lived for one reason and only one reason alone, battle. It was best they stay as far away from them.

"Have you looked them over? They look more like marble sculpted statues in one of the cities rather than living breathing people. Even when we had a few hard hunts or bad harvests we never looked like that. These are not people, they are machines born and bred for battle and killing. If we stay here any longer chances are we might simply be poking a stick into a bee hive. I'd rather not be stung by these bastards thank ye." Carver began to slide his way slowly and quietly back down the hill to head back for the cover of the forest. Demi's hand upon his shoulder halted him.

"Is that it? We just go back to our ruined village and pretend like nothing happened?" She looked him dead in the eyes. Carver shrugged, " What else

do ye want? Only other choice as slavery or death. As you said we could go tell some lord or king back the way the army came on in a direction they are not headed, but still ain't no one going to care. They are building ships so they will be gone soon. It's best to go underground and hide till they are gone. We can't help them or ourselves by staying here any longer."

Demi sighed knowing Carver was right, but she still felt bad about abandoning everyone. There was a loud boom like the sound of thunder striking the earth. The hill behind them exploded sending earth and fire into the night sky. The hunters were thrown forward, one was very unlucky and had a rock bash in his head. A silence fell upon them only broken by the hideous laughter of a man wearing a strange mask resembling a crow and wearing a strange black suit.

Carver looked up seeing Demi laying nearby him. He grabbed her hand in his and told her, " we stayed too long, we have to run now or never!" He pulled them both up and hobbled off with her into the cover of the night and forest. He turned seeing the others following his example, but he also saw a figure jump over the crater left by the explosion. The figure played guitar and sang a song that seemed to paralyze some of the hunters. They could not move, becoming like statues petrified where they stood. The soldiers came up and cut the hunters down where they stood. Carver saw the terrified gaze of one hunter before his head was separated from his shoulders.

It was all he needed to see to spur him on faster. They made the cover of the forest with barely a handful of their companions. Something screamed inside Carver to not look back, to just keep going forward. He didn't have to be told by his own instincts. Even in his younger days, he doubted he was a match for those muscle bound death dealers. They either lost the rest of their numbers or worse. Carver and Demi stood alone at the foot of a cliff over looking the river Karan. "Curse our luck! I should off remember that the river splits this forest up" The two drew their weapons and kept their back to the cliff. They face the forest awaiting what they knew was coming. It seemed like hours before they heard even the slightest sound. From the darkness, a huge figure emerges wielding a broadsword.

The figure wore a horned helmet which covered his face. He roared like some wild beast and came charging at the two. Demi grabbed her bolas and threw it wrapping the soldier's arm to a nearby tree. His momentum suddenly stopped and his helmet flew forward rolling past the duo to fall down towards the river below. They never heard the sound of the helmet hitting the river. The soldier drew a dagger and quickly cut some of the rope attached to the bolas, enough that his own strength was able to tear the rope. He came at them again and Carver raised his sword as the soldier came bearing his sword in a downward strike.

His sword broke and the broadsword bit down into his shoulder stopping in the middle of his torso. Demi tried to fatally stab the soldier, but he brought up his forearm. Her blade sank into his arm and his hands took hold of her jerkin. The weight of Carver's corpse pulled the trio over the edge and they all fell towards the river below. It was nearly morning when Demi awoke on the river's bank. Bright scarlet cascaded down her face and her mind was

fuzzy. She could hear only the roaring rapids of the river. She pulled herself up on the silty bank and braced herself against a rock.

She barely had time to react when she heard the roar of the soldier. His left leg wiggled broken and useless as he threw himself at her. She felt backward her head ached even more. She grabbed up some of the sand and thrust it in the soldier's face. He reared back and fell off of her. She rolled over and began to try to pull herself up. The soldier was on her before she had a second. She fell forward and her hands found a stick with a pointed end. She jabbed over her shoulder and felt the stick stab into something. As the soldier fell off her once more she managed to get back to her feet. The ululating cry of the soldier echoed off the walls of the steep sandstone cliffs. She now faced her attacker and she realized he was no mere mortal. On the crown of his head were two stubs that had once been horns. His ears were pointed. She had stabbed him in the eye, but she knew that wouldn't matter, he was a tuatha. His kind could regenerate certain wounds unless caused by certain magic or iron.

Already his leg was beginning to heal, he pulled the stick from his eye and moved towards her. She saw her dagger still protruding from his forearm, the skin around it was black and bloody. She had never cared until now that her dagger was made from iron. She reached and grasped it around the hilt and pulled it free. He grabbed her by the wrist and with a violent twist and a loud snap, broke her right wrist. She screamed as pain shot up her arm like electricity. The dagger fell with a thud onto the sandy shore. She fell to her knees and reached with her left hand. The soldier rewarded her effort with a boot to her face. Her hand managed to grab the dagger before she fell onto her back. Her right eye swollen shut and throbbing with pain.

He fell upon her like a hungry beast but stopped in his attack as her dagger pierced into his heart. His weight fell atop her and she was pinned beneath him. The fight now concluded her adrenaline began to abate. Her eyes closed and she fainted. When she awoke she was bound to a wooden stake, her wounds had been healed. She regretted opening her eyes, however, being surrounded by the very army she sought to escape from. Standing in front of her was a tuatha wearing scintillating jewelry, scantily clad in thin silks, his skin a dark tanned color with hair and horns ivory white.

Median: "Ahh she awakens. You killed one of my soldiers. This is no mere feat, I personally hand picked them. They are worth twenty skilled fighters. Yet somehow by sheer luck, you have managed to kill one."

Demi: "If you are going to kill me, then please just kill me."

Median: "Hah! You have no idea whom you are addressing. Even among Darkthornes, I am considered the cruelest and cunning. The king of our clan Manece has tried to kill me many times, but I have laid the broken bodies of his assassins at his throne to show him that they are the toys of a child compared to my power."

Roman: "So what are you are you going to do with her?"

Median: "I am destined to be more than just a king over a pathetic dying scrap of land. My destiny came to me in a dream. I am to be the god-king of the West. I have to replace that soldier she killed and what better replacement than her?"

Demi: "I won't fight for your army or your cause! That bastard killed my friend Carver and had I a chance I'd plunge that dagger into your chest."

Median: "You see she is very spirited. Cut her ropes and give her dagger back to her Roman."

Roman: " What?!"

Median: "You heard me do not make me repeat myself."

Roman moved behind the stake and took her dagger from his belt and cut the rope that bound her. He tossed it in the air and caught it by the tip and thrust the hilt towards her. Demi rubbed her wrists and cautiously took the dagger. She knew there was some trick being played on her. She turned to Median and tried to gauge her opponent. He seemed powerful built and towered over her, he was at least 8ft tall. If she was going to die, then she would at least try to die fighting. She twirled the dagger around in her hand and waited for him to make a move. Median looked at her and suddenly she felt her body betray her. It would no longer respond to her commands and a presence pushed its way into her mind.

She twitched as she tried to fight back against the mental intruder, but seemed to be unable to. Her mind and sight became muzzy and her head was wracked with a painful migraine. Her eyes became watery and tears streamed down her face. A stream of blood trailed down from her right nostril. She became wracked with convulsions and foamed at the mouth. Suddenly it was over. Roman watched as Demi went prostrate before Median.

Demi: "I shall serve you Lord Median as long as I draw breath."

Roman was surprised.

Median: "You see Roman. My enemies will either serve me or shall tremble in abject fear. "

They watched as Demi arose and went to join the other soldiers by a campfire. She stared abstractly into the fire and her face was an emotionless mask.

Dragon's Peak

The ship creaked as it rocked back and forth upon the thrashing waves. Median stood at the prow of the ship. No matter the intensity of the ocean, he never moved. It was as if he were part of the ship. Over head, the sky was a turbulent mix of clouds and powerful lightning. Some thought the gods

were trying to strike down Median or sink his ships. It only furthered the myth of his destiny to be a god-king. Roman clung to the railing and every time a wave bombarded him with salty ocean water he felt a chill to his bones.

Median: "Dragon's peak!" he shouted to Roman and pointed towards the distant mountain that was illuminated by a lightning strike. It resembled the head of a dragon. The mountain around it all had peaks that ended in sharp jagged spines all clustered together. Roman could not imagine anyone living in such a place. It seemed impossible to even fathom how they were going to make it to Dragon's peak. Morgan was on one of the other ships doing her best to guide them safely to the Black Scale Coast. Western Ayenee was surrounded by a massive wall that over looked the flat green plains of Central Ayenee. It was also surrounded by these jutting spined peaks. The coast of Western Ayenee was caught in a constant storm and was full of jagged rocks and shallow reefs. Aside from all these dangers, there were the ocean monsters and the inland natives that made it impossible for an army to even contemplate an invasion of the West.

Many had thought Median insane when he suggested his destiny being god-king of the West. A god-king seemed reasonable to reach, but invading the West, now that was madness.

In the morning the storm continued, but the ships had managed to find a cove where they were sheltered from the worse of the storm. The coast was a collection of small round stones ranging from black to gray. The water was a dull gray and the beach was covered in a light white foam from the churning waters. The grayish clouds over head continued to move and turn, rain pattering down in none stop deluges. Roman was worried the boats would simply fill with water and sink from the rain. The coast line was nothing, but steep cliffs of black rock that had a volcanic consistency. The rocky spines jutted up all along the cliffs some had broken off and was deposited in pieces on the rocky beach.

A thick moss covered some of the worn rocks that protruded from the steep incline of the cliffs. Pieces of shipwrecks and a few pieces of ocean eroded bone and seaweed lined the shore as well. It made Roman feel an ill feeling in the pit of his stomach. Morgan stepped off a row boat and seemed to clutch the rocks of the beach in appreciation. Roman was glad that he was not the only one that had come to hate this trip. They hadn't even hit the maelstrom that protected much of the Western coast. He dreaded the thought of encountering the phenomenon.

They joined up behind Median and some of the soldiers. Median's footfalls rattled the rocks as he stomped up an incline to where a cliff parted into a worn sheltered path. His silks drifted in the breeze of the ocean and he seemed as those he knew exactly where he was going. He walked as though in a dream. Roman didn't like the path it was too thin and the perfect place for an ambush.

They had to turn side ways and move in single file through some sections of the path. The path was littered with tiny volcanic rocks that sometimes rolled from beneath Roman's feet. Behind him, Demi now in the regalia of one of Median's soldiers followed still wearing an expressionless face. He had watched her for weeks now, but she seemed more loyal to Median than most of his hand picked soldiers. The fact Median could make his enemies into allies was something that made him stand out amongst the current generation of Darkthornes. He was charismatic, cruel, powerful, and had a purpose. Roman was a casteless one, ever since his father died in a duel. Being a casteless one meant you had your horns cut and wore the brand of the casteless on your back. You could and would never rise to nobility. It was basically a death sentence for most. The casteless lived outside walls and made up most of the labor force and military aside from slaves and mercenaries.

Darkthornes were designated by the houses they belonged to and their ancestor's glory. Roman came from a long line of sword masters some of the best. His father had been challenged by a rival as is Darkthorne custom he accepted. Every Darkthorne had the right to challenge another of equal or higher standing to a duel to the death in order to claim their position or settle differences. The casteless did not have this ability, which meant you could never rise above being casteless. Morgan had been exiled as well when Roman met her. She was one of many that had displeased Manece and had no following to prevent him from throwing her to the casteless. Median had been too big of a deal for Manece to even exile. Had he tried to exile Median, he would have risked being challenged to a duel. Manece was no fool which is why he ruled as the king of the Darkthornes currently. He had, after all, killed the previous king as the previous king had done before him.

Many thought Median would replace Manece as king, but Median perceived the throne of Belanthia as a grain of sand compared to the destiny that awaited him in the West. The wedge shaped path opened up to a sloping, rocky, hillside covered in thick green grass damp from the rain. The jagged spines were broken up by a mixture of rocky hillsides, deep valleys, and waterfalls. The smoke of fires rose up over a distant gathering of thatched huts. Median made his way towards the village which seemed a few miles away. Roman was ready to test his sword against these barbarians. Median strode across the soggy hill scapes. The reverberating sound of a horn could be heard in the small valley. Men and women grouped up together dressed in armor that was a mixture of metal and leather. They wore red face paint and smoking twigs in their reddish brown hair.

They marched out to meet Median and his small group. Roman was impressed by the barbarians they were taller than most humans and much more stocky.

Chieftain: " You outsider trespass on clan Storm Merkevare lands!"

The Chieftain and his fellow tribesman strode across the soft soil as though it were no hindrance. Median simply continued to walk towards the unruly mob. The Chieftain stopped in his track and dropped his sword as he met Median's gaze. This caused those behind him to halt in their approach.

Median: "We shall decide who leads this clan by the time honored challenge duel. You and two of your champions against me."

Median spread his arms wide and walked back and forth. The barbarians seemed dumbfounded by their leader's sudden pause. The chieftain slowly nodded and made motions to a male and female in the group to come along with him.

Chieftain: "You are a fool outsider! Three to the one you shall not last a second against the might of Storm Merkevare. Come! Hrothgar and Hogarth, let us show these outsiders the strength of our clan and make them regret washing up on our shores!"

Hrothgar was a burly man wielding a double bladed battleaxe. He leaped into the air and raised the axe behind him ready to bring down a blow that would cleave Median in half. Median moved like a mountain cat. He quickly moved to the side and landed four blows into Hrothgar's side within mere seconds. Hrothgar flew back and crashed into the ground tearing up the top layer of grass. He lay motionless with multiple fractured ribs that had splintered out like shrapnel into his internal organs. His lungs, heart, liver, and much more had all been punctured.

Hogarth came at him with the Chieftain. Median avoided Hogarth's mace and the Chieftain's broadsword. Hogarth brought up her shield to push in against Median's defenses. He merely punched her shield warping the metal back as though it were thin copper. His fist connected with her jaw shattering it. Her jaw became like a sack of water and flopped limply beneath her upper jaw. She staggered back and fell to the ground. Median caught the Chieftain's sword with his two fingers and snapped the blade between his fingers. He then kicked the Chieftain in the stomach causing him to projectile vomit the contents within. The man fell to his hands and knees coughing up blood and gasping.

Median: " You see my power! You see how your leader and his champions have fallen so easily for me. You have, but two choices. Join my army and fight for me, or pray to your gods and be crushed beneath my feet."

The crowd looked at one another and then to the three dead bodies now laying on the ground. Median floated off the ground and reached up to the heavens. A bolt of lightning came down and struck the three corpses. This incited whispers through out the crowd. They began to kneel and offer up their weapons as a sign that they would join. Median smiled and Roman was a bit dismayed that he didn't even get to draw his sword. The next few weeks were filled with much the same event. Median challenged the different clans and subdued them under his rule uniting them. Median learned about a myth through the various tribes. They all spoke of an armored god that rode on the back of a dragon. That God had landed at Dragon's peak and never rose to the sky again. After the god landed the storms that have forever guarded the coast came to be.

Median hoped that there might be some truth to this tale. If so then perhaps there was something on the peak that could stop the storms. The way to the peak was not an easy one.

Death's Champion

Morgan reached up and gripped the rocky ledge. Roman pulled her up over the ledge. She lay there on the ground looking up past Roman. Median continued to climb up the sheer mountain side, an unstoppable force. They had been using a rope and hook system that the barbarians had shown them. Median, however, free climbed through the torrential down pour that battered this mountain like the armies of some angry nation. The rock was slick and there was very little light.

Morgan: "He has to be completely mad to be climbing so calmly in this nightmare. How does he make it look so easy?"

Roman: " He has embraced his destiny and it guides him. I have seen him perform feats I only wish I could accomplish. If he isn't destined to be a god-king, he sure is destined to make a mark in this world. I'm sure there will be many swords in his path. Even though he may be able to simply bat them aside or turn them against themselves, I just hope to get to test my own skills against a few of them. I defeated the man that killed my father, but it lacked honor. Now my sword shall guide me like Median's dream guides him."

Morgan: " You are just as crazy as he is. Enough of this!" She began to weave her hands about her and shouted out words of power. The rain was disturbed by the invisible power she summoned. The invisible power twirled about them and the group was slowly lifted off the ledge. Morgan's hair flew up as she held her hands out at her sides, her face contorted in an almost anger filled expression. The night seemed to coalesce about them and lifted them up. Roman was very unsure about the sudden change. He looked down over the cliff at the jagged rocky spines and the mountain side as it disappeared below. The rain shot down past him and he focused on a drop watching it disappear beneath them.

Roman: " You didn't have to pick us up, I was just happy with climbing."

Morgan: " Oh stop being a coward and just enjoy the ride!"

They began to ascend quickly. Morgan figured they would catch up to Median in no time, but as they climbed higher and higher they didn't see him. Only after they crested the peak of the mountain did they see him standing before a cave. The wind whipped his silks about him. He simply stood looking at the mouth of the cave. Morgan guided them all down nearby and as she approached he felt a wave of dark energy. It came from somewhere deep within the cave. Whatever it was, reeked of death. She had some practice in controlling and summoning the dead. She reached out with her magical senses. She delved into the cave, into its darkness. She saw nothing, but then suddenly she felt a sense of unease. She turned and beheld the glowing eyes. She was broken from her concentration.

Morgan: " Whatever is in this cave has killed thousands and is saturated in the energy of death itself. I have never encountered anything like it."

Roman: " Are you being a coward? " he said smiling as he drew his sword and propped it on his shoulder.

Morgan hesitantly strode forward as Median began to walk into the cave.

Some force reverberated through the cave. It shook all the group to their very bones, all except Median. Morgan summoned forth lights that followed the group like blue floating lanterns. Something in the depths of the cave struggled to break ancient chains that bound it to this place. In the darkness of ages, death awoke. It could see through stone and it watched them as they climbed deeper into its prison. The cave walls were slick with water, they shone in the magical light. They could barely hear the raging storm outside now. Morgan could feel something watching them. It watched like a hungry predator waiting to strike.

She didn't like it. Median strode ahead of them never slipping, never reaching to brace himself, he simply walked and the cave seemed to accommodate him. The others had to move at a snail's pace, stepping in just the right place, bracing themselves against walls. Morgan began to see Median in a different light. He seemed like a force of nature, the world seemed to just bow to his power. The cave began to open up. The lanterns drifted up to the ceiling of the cave and began to shine brighter. Before the group was mountains of coins, artifacts, jewelry, weapons, and chests. At the center of this large horde was a black pool that at first Morgan assumed was water. After approaching it closer she could tell it had the look of crude oil. Morgan picked up a coin and looked it over. It was minted from a kingdom she did not recognize. She tossed the coin into the black pool and watched it lay on the surface for seconds before it slowly sank into the black surface.

Bubbles began to come up where the coin had been. Something stirred beneath the dark liquid. A form arose wearing a tattered red hood, gold gleaming armor, beneath the armor and tattered red clothing was revealed the skeletal remains of a humanoid. A shadowy smoke clung to the figure's bones and from its back drifted a cloak made of the same smoky shadows interspersed with a fire that resembled the dying embers of burning parchment or leaves. It wore a scabbard at its bony hip which held a sword. The figure sat on the neck of a skeletal dragon that also rose from the black depths. The figure dismounted and the skeletal dragon moved a pile of treasure and laid down.

Figure: "Who walks in death's realm?"

Median: "I am called Median Darkthorne. I have come guided by my destiny."

Figure: "Destiny? It is fate that all shall kneel before death's eternal reign. You seek to try and unseat death? You can not wear the crown. I have

watched you, looked into your souls. I have seen all your deaths. Even yours." The figure pointed a bony figure at Median. Morgan watched and could have sworn she had seen Median flinch at the comment.

Median: "I am destined to become a god-king and rule the West in its entirety. Death has no place for me."

Figure: "You can not escape the inevitable and internal rule of death. I have watched empires rise and fall, my hands have slain thousands, and my actions drew the attention of death itself. I am the champion of death and the only destiny you shall find in these hallowed halls is your own demise." The figure gripped the handle of the sword and drew it from its sheath. And began to stalk towards Median.

Median grimaced and took a defensive stance. As the figure seemed to fade in and out, blinking its way towards Median. Median threw a punch at the figure and sent it flying back, but it simply vanished before striking the wall. Its voice echoed through the cave taunting Median.

Figure: " Such strength and yet even it can not save you in the end."

Median: " Show yourself specter!"

Morgan began to weave her hands about in the air tracing arcane symbols, her lips murmuring words of power. A green light shrouded in black smoke coated her hand in a miasma. She could see the specter there in the realm between. It floated in the swirling mist of the other realm. The ghosts of thousands of dead were tied to this figure. It drew upon their eternal souls like a parasite.

Morgan: " I'm going try to bind him, but I will need time!"

Figure: "Hahaha. Would you bind death foolish girl? Truly you are blind if you think such a feat will not end badly for you."

The temperature of the cave suddenly dropped. Morgan's breath came out her mouth as fog. Darkness surrounded each of them.

Figure: " Many fools have tried.."

The mounds of gold suddenly transformed into mounds of bones. Some of the bones had been there so long that they were more dust than bone.

Morgan could see her toddler sister laying in a pool of blood near her. Her younger brother's corpse twirled about hanging from a noose in a tree with iron tipped arrows sticking out of his chest. She had witnessed all this before, hell every time she closed her eyes. This time, however, she could feel them. These were not the haunting nightmares of her own mind or the illusions of a mage. No. This was real, he had somehow plucked their souls out of whatever afterlife there was and brought them here to torment her.

Median let out a shout that shattered the wall of the cavern. He paced around like a stalking jungle cat looking for his tormentor. Roman was at his

back sword drawn and raised as his eyes darted about the room. Morgan seemed fixed in a trance. Demi came at Roman suddenly her daggers leaving strawberry gashes where ever they touched. Roman had no clue why she was suddenly attacking until he saw the emotion on her face. Something had jarred her from whatever Median had done to her.

All it took was the vision of Carver's death to awaken her enough to pull herself free. Roman was surprised at how skilled she was with the dagger. He swung his sword and she somersaulted back and then came slashing at him again. His sword was heavier than her blades and it made him move just slightly slower than her. She was adept at moving in and out with her attacks. She never looked at where she attacked, she instead simply watched his weapon. Every time he moved to attack she responded and then attacked at a different angle.

The others lay dead their throats cut from Demi's daggers. As she came at him this time Roman moved aside and kicked her in the abdomen. She fell back her head hitting a jagged rock. Roman fell to his knees bleeding from a hundred different cuts. Demi lay there unconscious, blood pooling behind her head.

Roman: " Shit! I've never seen someone so fast with whittling blades. Had she been using swords I'd be in pieces. As it is I might die from bleeding out."

He was light headed and the cavern seemed to slightly spin. Median turned and knelt down lifting Roman up.

Median: " Only the weak die, the strong survive."

Median was suddenly grasped by a large skeletal hand and thrown to the cavern wall. He fell landing in the black pool where he slowly sank like some prehistoric beast in a tar pit. The more he fought the quicker he began to sink. Roman barely able to walk stumbled forward trying to get to him. The skeletal dragon gave a wave of its taloned paw and bashed Roman. He slid across the stone floor and lay on his side against a wall.

Figure: " You shall all die here this day! All empires fade to dust. Kings and Queens even bow their noble heads to death. The netherworld welcomes you!"

Morgan was alone in a world of darkness. The dead danced all around her, shadowy spirits, translucent images in a world so cold.

Sister: " You should have saved me. I was alone. I died alone."

Brother: " I was alone. So scared. Now I am alone and in pain forever because of you sister."

Sister: " It should have been you. Now I suffer eternally."

Siblings: "Join us in death dear sister!"

Morgan tears streaming down her face shook her head trying to push out their voices. The skin about her eyes cracked as green energy shone from within her. She had suffered every day since their deaths. That anger welled up in her and now became fuel. She drew in the energy of the dead souls.

Figure: "NO! No, they are mine!"

Morgan continued to draw in the dark necrotic energy of the cavern. It saturated her being, her body began to crack from the rising power. She quickly worked her hands weaving together the energies for her binding spell. The figure came flying towards her but was suddenly encased in a green net of energy that drew it down to the cave floor. The dragon sensing its master in trouble now lunged at her with its massive jaws opened.

Within the black pool, Median was drowning in his own self-loathing. The world had never given him a chance. He had been the victim of fate. Could he change his destiny? Did he really believe in his dream? Something inside of him was still weak. It screamed within him. It perverted his strength nibbling away at his will. He willed himself, digging deep inside himself. He imagined his hands around the neck of that weak part, choking it away.

He came rising up out of the black pool like a phoenix from the flames. He was different. The weakness was now a fading memory within his mind. The dragon didn't see Median emerge from the pool. He stepped in front of Morgan and threw himself into the Draco-lich's mouth. His hands and feet prying them apart and causing the dragon to no longer focus on Morgan.

Morgan drew the energy tighter about the figure as she began to sow it together. The spell held and the figure screamed in agony as it fought against the chains that now bound it. It appeared at Morgan's feet and she commanded it to tell its pet to put Median down. The dragon skeleton did so. Morgan then went over and began to use her magic on Roman. She pulled the iron residue from his blood and then did her best to mend his wounds with her magic. She drew her power from her patron, the dark goddess Tilatalia. Her magic was not known for its healing properties, but if one knew how to make wounds, one could mend them as best as possible.

Roman still lay unconscious, but he would pull through.

Median stood before the figure and demanded from it.

Median: "Show me what was so special. That death itself would guard it all these years."

The figure waved its hands about before it and an ornate wooden chest appeared. It opened and within were numerous pieces of jewelry. Median took out a ring that looked as though it had been carved from ivory.

Median: "What is this?"

Figure: "It is the ring of heaven. Carved from the bone of a dead god. It was

granted to the general of the light pantheon's armies, an archangel. The ring was stolen in the battle between the angels and demons that destroyed the veil around Ayenee. It bestowed an invisible shield to its wearer that protects them from all manner of harm.

Median put the ring on and selected another ring. This one was black and resembled some sort of stone.

Figure: "That was once a piece of the dark titan himself, Scion. It can give you an edge against gods that no mortal should ever have. It can also enhance whatever abilities you already have.

Median put it on and felt a surge of strength. It was addicting and consuming. Median jumped and threw his fist into the cave ceiling. The mountain cracked and shattered. He let out a shout and the pieces vibrated and shattered into dust. The raging storm fell upon the crater of the mountain peak. Now he felt like a true god.

He walked out and stood on the jagged cliff of the peak. Rain pelted his chiseled form as he stared down at the earth below.

Median: " A taste of what my destiny. It is only a taste of the greatness that awaits me!"

He stepped off the cliff and began to slowly float down to the earth below. The United barbarian tribes looked up at the stormy sky and between strikes of lightning, they could see the outline of Median slowly floating down from the heavens. He landed before them the epitome of a god.

The wind howled like a banshee as Median's feet touched the earth. He stood there with outstretched arms basking in the adoration of the barbarians. The deathly figure that once ruled the mountain came down on the back of his skeletal dragon frightening the tribes. As the dragon landed with a thud the figure dismounted. It walked towards Median and took a knee before him to the astonishment of all. Morgan, Roman, and the unconscious Demi came floating down in an orb of shadowy energy.

Median: " I have conquered death and have been bestowed the armament of heaven. You all have witnessed the birth of the god-king Median. Follow me and bear witness to my unfolding destiny, my greatness! The West shall be mine and then so shall the world. Those who stand against me, the infidels, they shall be the dust my feet kick up as I ascend to the realm of heaven, a god-king!"

The barbarians had been worked up into a fervor, they shouted and roared.

Median turned to his companions and smiled.

Median: "We have an army now let us put it to use."

The Blood Thirst

Long ago the gates to the Western Great Wall were opened by a curious Emperor. Armies of men and women poured through seeking to tear the land apart for its bountiful riches and mystic secrets. The gates shut and trapped the outsiders within. The Westerners had thought the outsiders were the worst of their problems. Then they met the immortal Barnabas Pope and his children the “sete di sangue” also known as the “bloodthirsty”. Barnabas had once sought immortality and found a wasting disease. He died thinking he had failed and awoke a monster the world would never forget.

Together with his children, they drank the Topaz kingdom of the West dry. The streets were filled with the dry husks left behind after their feeding frenzies. Barnabas viewed the world as his playground, and mortals as nothing more than fruit to be picked and devoured. In the West, he became such a threat that the invaders and natives put aside their differences and united to defeat him. Barnabas was injured by a powerful spell. His children carried him deep into the Dragon Peak mountains.

Today Median and his followers marched through the valley of the darkness. The valley that Barnabas and his clan had fled to. The valley was filled with caves so numerous that it looked more like a giant prairie dog dwelling. The barbarians refused to cross the threshold of the valley, their superstitious fears paralyzed them.

Median: “ I have defeated death, do you think I am afraid of some legend about people disappearing in this valley, about beasts feeding on unsuspecting travelers?”

Roman: “ We shall show you that the god-king fears nothing. We will enter the valley and slay whatever beast that lurks there and show you that you follow an unstoppable force.”

Morgan: “ Should I summon death's champion?”

Median: “No. I'll go alone this time. I shall show these fools that nothing is to be feared except me.”

Median stalked forward in the rain. He walked until he was in the center of the valley. He yelled for whatever called the Valley its home to show itself.

He waited and as he waited he could see the numerous red eyes peering at him from the darkness of the caves. They whispered and hissed from the darkness. Finally from one of the higher caves emerged a pale skinned figure with ashen flaxen hair. The pale man wore black plate armor and a red cape. At his belt were two scimitars with jewels in the pommels.

Barnabas: “Forgive my children. It has been some time since we have welcomed strangers in our valley. I see you have representatives from many of the barbarian tribes with you as well as the shadow rider. Impressive feat. I applaud your skills. Now, what exactly is it that you want?”

Median: “ I want to show these superstitious mongrels that the only thing

they need fear is me.”

Barnabas laughed.

Barnabas: “ They are right to fear this valley. I would say that you would be advised to do the same, but I can see your list of accomplishments and I assume you are not one to be picking a fight with.”

Median chuckled

Median: “ It would appear so. I am at an impasse then. You are far too smart to simply fight me and I am far too bored to sit in this valley waiting for these barbarians to over come to their senses.”

Barnabas: “A vexing situation indeed. Might I offer another option?”

Median yawned.

Median: “ By all means since we are being civilized about things. I will hear this proposal of yours.”

Barnabas smiled and bowed.

Barnabas: “ I think you will like it since it serves both of our desires. You seem to be amassing an army, by the deeds you have accomplished and the ships and camps by the shore. I have grown bored of residing here in this valley like a hermit. My children brought me here so that I could recover. It has been ages. I ask that you allow me and my brood to travel with you. We shall fight along your side as long as we are allowed to freely feed as we see fit.”

Median: “ Why should I agree, as you have stated I have ships and an army, my deeds speak for themselves. What do a bunch of pasty face hermits have to offer that the mountain tribes and the dark tuatha not?”

The pale man broke apart becoming bats that flittered down to the field where Median waited. They coalesced back into his form and he barred his pointy fangs.

Barnabas: “We hunger. The world was once ours. We left dead towns behind us on our daily feedings. We are much more powerful than mortal mountain tribes. We have lived for thousands of years. I personally have lived longer than the name Ayenee itself. We are an asset that for the time being we are willing to share a makeshift alliance to strengthen your efforts and to ensure our own survival. I care not what you do with the world. I care not whether you achieve your goals, but I know that there shall be warm blood pooling on the battlefields. I came to the West as an invader, much like you.

I had never seen defeat, but the Westerners are not like the rest of Ayenee. They have ancient secrets that they guard. Secrets that were able to harm even me. I nearly died. I learned from that defeat and I would lend my

knowledge to you.”

Median waved his hand dismissively.

Median: “Why would I want the help of someone who failed? What advice would you offer me? How to be defeated and tuck my tail and hide in the mountains? You are a rabid dog who bit the wrong hand. You would sooner see me fail than to serve me. You are a vampire.”

Barnabas hissed.

Barnabas: “ I hate that word. We are not vampires! We are the chosen. We walk this earth as immortals feeding on the lives that dwell on it. The mortals, your kind included, they live such brief lives. They spend their whole lives trying to reach their potential and die defeated. The hands of time erode their accomplishments. They become forgotten. We are eternal. We are the true inheritors of this world!”

Median: “You believe whatever you want to believe, but the only one who is destined to rule this world, is me.”

Median threw a punch at the ground before Barnabas. The earth erupted leaving a sizable crater.

Median: “ Either submit or I shall be known as your extinction.”

Barnabas looked to the cave cliffs where his children still lingered waiting for his command. He begrudgingly knelt before Median, swearing that he would one day feed on Median's blood and make him kneel.

Median sighed and looked at Barnabas.

Median: “ You see that was not so hard. Now we move out. Tell your fellows that. There will be no feeding on my army. There shall be plenty blood for you all where I tread.”

Barnabas returned to his kindred and joined Median's march.

At the Heart of the Storm

As his fleet sailed towards Pacifika a mage by the name of Corvan Reinhart appeared aboard Median's flagship. The mage offered his services to Median. He swore to help Median take the small kingdom of Pacifika if he would allow him to join Median's army. Median agreed and the next night they attacked.

The Blood Waves

Sorra looked out over the moonlit waves as dark clouds appeared shrouding the sky pearl. Many in her village had retired for the night, some still celebrated on the beach around campfires. Tonight marked the beginning of summer. It was strange for such a storm to be brewing so suddenly this time of year. They had destroyed Pacifika's finest fleet with the help of the mage

that had joined their ranks. The few ships that remained were caught in a storm, like the one that normally surrounds Pacifika. It usually works for the defenses of the kingdom, commanded so by another mage. Now it was turned against the ships that protected Pacifika.

The ocean became miles of liquid darkness as the moon's light was finally devoured. The village seemed to become cloaked in an unnatural darkness. The villagers sensed something amiss, many of those sitting began to stand, straining their eyes against the darkness. Then lightning cut like a knife through the darkness. All along the horizon could be seen the masts of ships, one massive ship at the center of them.

Sorra felt a chill in her bones and ran from the village to some nearby bushes. As if at some ungodly speed, the boats came landing upon the shore. Forms in armor disembarked from the small vessels and stomped through the waves. Everyone they came across was slain without hesitation. The village set ablaze, strange creatures came ashore in larger boats. They followed the armored men eating the bodies of the dead.

The ocean breeze became thick with smoke and blood. Sorra scurried from the bushes heading to the worn road that leads to the next village. She turned and saw a massive demonic figure sitting upon a throne built into a ship. Chained men fell flat in the shallow surf as the figure stepped out upon their backs striding to the shore. The figure was scantily clad and adorned with excessive amounts of jewelry. Atop its head two horns shot up, his hair was white, and his form handsome although terrifying.

Median and his army moved across the island kingdom like a plague of locusts. They left in their wake burning villages, forests either burned or chopped down. They polluted the rivers and lakes with the bodies of the dead. Those who surrendered became slaves pulling the siege machines crafted from the lumber they had acquired. When they reached the village near the capital city, Median halted his army.

Median's Demands

Median planned to conquer all of Ayenee. His first step towards this goal was to become the ruler of the West. Morgan Mindwhisper and Roman Bloodwing, the two most loyal Darkthorne supporters that Median had acquired chose to confront the royal liege.

"M'lord the army that has been marching across our lands! They are at the capital city gates!"

"What?! Already? Prepare the troops, reinforce the capital gates as best as we can. Call my war council immediately!"

"Sire, there are two rather strange looking individuals from the enemy army inside the capital city. They wish a word with you. I think they want to dictate demands on behalf of their leader."

"How did they get through the gates?"

"I don't know your majesty."

"Well find out! Hmmm, have them escorted to the castle courtyard. I'll address them from the royal balcony. Also, have our best archers on the parapets around the castle. Order them to fire if they so much as scratch their asses or break wind."

The King stepped out on the balcony.

Below stood at first glance a very beautiful woman, but after she spoke, he realized she was a he. She wore an outlandish outfit, part traveling attire, part battle armor. She had long raven black hair that curled at the ends. Next to her was a man with spiky hair, an eyepatch covered his left eye and a scar followed his hairline down past his jawline. He had a cat sitting on his shoulder like a pirate would have a parrot. The cat was black and simply sat watching with feigned interest.

"What bizarre people..." the King mumbled to himself.

The eyepatched man wore a long black leather coat and some form of light mail armor, leather trousers, and boots as black as the cat on his shoulder. His hair was a strange pink color.

"Ah, there is the little ruler of this island!" Exclaimed the man in drag.

"Bout time", grumbled Roman.

"His royal highness, King Edward Celtric the Third." The royal page bellowed out over the courtyard below.

The king came into view and the two visitors simply stood there. The archers lined the walls ready to fire at the first sign of hostility. The tintinnabulation of silver bells on Roman's shoes stirred the archers to pull back their bowstrings. He looked up and smiled as if amused, he waved his hands to calm them.

"I wear the bells on my shoes so my enemies hear me coming. I would feel bad if I felt that I caught someone by surprise after all."

The king's eyes widen, the idea that this man was so sure of his fighting skills that he would alert his enemies of his presence. The boisterous nature of that concept. He wondered if this man truly was so capable, if so then maybe he should consider surrender. No, he corrected his inner voice. He would not kneel to any invading army.

These two ostentatious guests were just that. He would show them that they could not just come into his kingdom and make demands of him.

"Guards seize these two, we shall send their heads back to their leader as a sign of our hospitality."

The man in the eye patch smiled and the cat on his shoulder jumped down. It was shrouded in a purple miasma and enlarged into a horse sized black cat-like creature with two curved fangs jutting down from its upper jaw. A white mane like framed it's fearsome head and extended down its back.

"Well, Kage looks like you were right. They won't kneel to Median so easily!" Roman tossed off his leather jacket, revealing bandoliers of throwing knives crisscrossing his chest. He began to toss them with such speed and ease, each toss a killing or crippling blow.

"Ha! Too easy!" He jabbed at the guards filing into the courtyard.

Kage the cat-like creature had already taken down a handful of guards. While Morgan hands raised in the air repelled the arrows that shot down at them.

"I tire of these gnats." She sighed as her eyes glowed a brilliant yellow. The arrows halted in the air and then turned around and shot back at those who had fired them. The arrows on the ground rose up and followed suit.

The guards no longer filed into the courtyard and many of the archers lay wounded, or behind cover with no intention of rising out.

"Boring!" Roman yelled picking up his jacket and putting it back on.

"I told you I should have brought my sword, Morgan. It would have been much more fun that way."

She sighed and looked up where the king had been standing. He now hid on the balcony.

"You have three days..no. You now have one day. You and your queen shall exit the capital city. You shall kneel before Median and submit to his rule and become his slaves. Otherwise, your city will fall, the might of your army shall be broken by ours. You shall still kneel before Median, but he will break even more for your defiance than he will for your surrender. His rule is destined, it is inevitable for he is a god."

Kage transformed back into a black cat and climbed up Roman, perching back on his shoulder.

"I really hope they try to fight," Roman said as the two of them walked towards the courtyard exit. Morgan thrust her hand in front of her and the locked door of the courtyard exploded into splinters.

"They always fight dear Roman. They never do anything resembling a smart decision."

And with that, the two messengers were gone. The king called his council, trying to get the people back behind him. The people were already angry with him before this army marched in. However they loved the queen, she

was always championing some cause to better the lives of her subjects. She was also the sister of the king of Atlantica and if he could get them to send ships of reinforcements then they might just beat this force.

The royal mage of Pacifika, Creed Halcyon entered the council chambers late as usual. The white haired human had a presence about him that always commanded the attention of those who saw him. He pulled back his hood and stroked his white goatee, his blue eyes looking to the king.

"We can win this war. Ask for reinforcements from Atlantica they will grant them of course. As for the people's resolve. We shall have the queen appear on the city gates. She shall tell this army of Pacifika's defiance to the commands of tyranny. The people shall rally, reinforcements shall flank this army and we will squeeze them in a vise. There is nowhere for them to flee, we know the island better than they do."

The king raised a hand. "You did not see the skill with which his men fight. I...don't know if those two are the only ones like that. If his whole force is made up of such individuals, well we can't stand against that."

Creed raised a hand and smiled. "Of course his whole force is not like that. It was just a display to scare you into kotowing to his demands. I will deal with the two power characters, I have something that should make them inert." Creed continued to smiled and poured himself some wine.

Pacifika's Defiance

The Great Western Wall of Ayenee. A wall built by the border kingdoms of Western Ayenee along the mountain range, creating an impenetrable wall. They had never considered a threat from the sea. Pacifika the gate to the West had always pushed back any naval force that had thought it could invade from the sea. In the many years since the building of the wall, only one force had ever tried. The ocean floor was littered with their ships and remains. This new threat had somehow avoided the deadly reefs, and under the cover of a magical storm arrived unhindered upon their shores.

Pacifika was and had never been prepared for a land invasion. The queen stood atop the city gates. The sun beamed down rays of warmth and golden light. The light reflected off her crown and the many jewels adorning the many pieces of jewelry she wore. She stood proudly, head raised in defiance. Her light blonde hair blowing in the sea breeze.

"If something should have to the queen it shall spur the people to back you and give their lives in vengeance for their beloved queen. It shall ensure that aid comes from her beloved brother the king of Atlantica." Creed smiled at the king who slowly nodded his head. He had been seeking a younger queen.

"Creed you are a devious person, but you are right. Elaine could not give me any heirs, should she die. I could then find a queen that is fertile and not barren."

"The kingdom of Pacifika has heard your demands Median Darkthorne. We

defiantly inform you that we shall not kneel before any tyrant. We instead inform you that you have one day to vacate our island. Return to your ships, and sail back whence you came!"

The crowd behind the gate cheered. Suddenly the gate cracked and the queen fell forward. She flew down towards Median's armies. The guards were called back from trying to retrieve her. It was too risky to open the gates.

Median's army passed the Queen through their ranks until she fell before a large golden staircase. Seated on a gold throne, sat Median, wearing mere silks and jewelry. The sun casts a shadow over his form. She was urged at spear point to move up the stairs. As she got closer she could see him more clearly.

"You were given a chance to avoid hostilities. Why would so foolishly choose to defy me?" Median said in a very deep voice that sounded as though he were truly confused by their defiance.

The Queen looked up and raised her head. "You think we shall kowtow to your demands? You are invading our kingdom, we hold the keys to the West. You will not pass, this is as far as your dreams of conquest go."

Median stood with such speed that Elaine had little time to even notice he was standing. He towered overhead, a giant, his hand came at her with such force and speed. She flew back falling down the steps. She looked up and already he had descended down to stand next to her. His foot came speeding into her abdomen lifting her up three feet in the air. She must have laid there on the dry dusty earth for hours. The sun scorched her skin and Median still stood above her.

"You see those miserable groveling dogs!?" He pointed up the steps to a group of men and women in chained collars that all knelt on hands and knees. Their eyes held something in them she had never seen, absolute terror, mixed with a broken soul. "You shall be broken and your people shall see what awaits them if they defy the will of a god!"

His massive hand came down gripping her by the jaw. Her eyes met his and she felt every fear she had ever known come to life. The world around her burned, vermin crawled over her. The rotten corpses of her family hung from makeshift gallows. She felt herself being crushed by a massive weight.

This agony seemed to go on for hours, when suddenly from the sky. She could see a pair of golden eyes looking down, casting rays of warm light. Median's voice spoke to her, "Do you see? I have the power to end all of this. All you have to do is call out for me, bow to me, worship me!"

She didn't want to. Suddenly her body creaked as she felt her arms being twisted, snapping, muscle, tendon, and vein ripping. She screamed, tears falling down her cheeks. She felt darkness consume her. In the dark, eyes watched her. Wolves came from the shadows, their fangs tearing her flesh and ripping her guts from her as she simply lay there unable to scream, to

blink, to move.

The pain was real, she thought that soon she would die, but they continue to eat her. She continues to feel every chunk of flesh they tear, every bone they broke. She began to pray for death, her mind on the verge of madness.

"I can make it end. Worship me! Call out to me, beg for me to end your pain! Beg for me to take your freedom, to make you mine!"

She felt her voice rise up from the depths of her torn throat. "Please make it stop! I will do whatever you want!"

She could see his smile. She quickly took part of herself and secreted it away. She buried it in a part of her subconscious where he could never find it. She felt him now searching her mind, an invading presence picking through her thoughts.

She awoke, his hand still gripped her jaw. A second had not even passed since she looked into his eyes. The torment she had felt was held in the blink of an eye. She felt herself kneel at bare feet, kissing them, her hands stroking the gold chains and jewelry that adorned his feet and calves.

"My king! My God! I am yours!" somewhere a part of her looked away ashamed. As if sensing this, she felt his mind push into her's once more. An intense migraine shot through her head. Her body trembled as she feared the visions returning.

The soldiers stood atop the gate and watched as a giant of a figure strode through the army. They could see their queen beside him. She stood before him and removed the silk loin cloth. She took his manhood in her hands and began to put it in her mouth.

One of the soldiers looked back at the crowd with shock on his face. A civilian called up, "What is it?! What's going on?!" The soldiers looked to the other soldier on the gate. The other soldier shook his head.

"The Queen is sucking his co-" the soldier didn't finish his sentence as the other soldier punched him hard in the face.

The people below could hear the queen's moans echoing up to the city. Disgust filled their faces, they began to feel free creep in.

"The Queen has betrayed us?" "The Queen is a whore!" "What do we do?" "We're doomed!" The soldier raised his arms. "Silence you all. This is surely dark sorcery. The queen must have been brainwashed with magic!" Suddenly the soldier was hit with an orb of black and purple churning energy. He fell from the gate his armor melting from his body.

"Tell your King we await his surrender!" yelled the queen's voice.

The Song of Destruction

Median stood upon the golden staircase the Queen of Pacifika sitting

beneath his throne her hands on the floor. Before him, a battle raged. Siegfried Van Lorean the skyknight and red dragon rider scorched Median's forces with fire from the sky. Siegfried had a handful of dragon riders at his commander.

Morgan and Roman led the charge against Pacifika's forces. The two of them were cutting a swath through the ranks of the defenders. Median was preparing something for the dragon rider. He sent out his psychic tendrils urging the skyknight to come out him. Siegfried unknowingly complied. The undead dragon knight that served Median came down from the clouds above Siegfried.

"You reign of terror ends here!" Siegfried cried out flying straight at Median. He was snatched off his dragon then tossed through the air, falling to his death on the battlefield. His dragon soon fell with him. Median called out and large ballistas were brought out. They fired onto the dragons that came in to avenge the fallen skyknight leader.

Morgan and Roman were suddenly engulfed in an orb with a mirror like reflective surface.

Morgan raised her hands to dispell the orb. Nothing happened. She realized the orb somehow cut her off from her patron's link. She tried to call upon her magical powers but found little mana to draw on in the orb.

"I can't do anything! This orb is sapping me of my powers!"

"Hmm maybe I can break it?", said, Roman.

Morgan began to think and realized perhaps he was right.

"If I can't find enough mana inside the orb, maybe instead I should simply use the magic of the orb. I'll drain an area of the orb of its magic and then you use your sword on it."

Roman laughed and stood ready.

"So I do get to break it!"

Creed stood there looking at the orb he had trapped the two most powerful combatants in.

"They will eventually die from lack of air. I doubt the witch will be smart enough to figure out a way out."

The king stood there in his battle armor. "Can't you just kill them now?"

Creed sighed and said, "Fine ruin all my fun." He raised his hands to cast a spell to drain the air from the orb. Suddenly he sensed a magical attack heading towards the king. He turned and quickly raised a magical shield, deflecting the lightning bolt.

"What was that?!" Shouted the king. Creed and the King both stared as the smoke of the battlefield cleared and Reinhart emerged.

"Always glad to see one of my failed pupils are still able to find work." Said Creed to Reinhart.

"I found more than work old man. I found someone with as much ambition as I do. "

Creed chuckled, "All that ambition wasted on a fool."

"You are the only fool. You think I am not good enough to be your pupil. I'm here to show you that you are wrong. Dead wrong."

"You have only dreamed of the mysteries of the universe. I have seen them with my own eyes. It's not too late Reinhart, you can still be my pupil."

"Save your self-righteous and narcissistic attitude for someone who cares. You and your magic can kiss the mole on my left testicle!"

Creed frowned and shook his head, "Oddly specific. As you wish, don't think I am going to take it easy on you boy!"

A stone fist shot from the ground and grasped Creed in its fingers. Creed smiled and the magic began to build around him. Reinhart summoned more mana from the people and land around him. He formed the physics of his spell and then uttered the words. The spell shot from his hands, black bolts of lightning ripped the land and darted towards the stone fist that held Creed.

Creed was covered in a blue miasma and he winked at Reinhart vanishing from the fist and appearing behind Reinhart.

He threw out his hand sending an explosive blast at Reinhart's back. Reinhart, however, jumped aside and the blast hit the ground sending chunks of earth flying about.

The stone fist shattered as the lightning hit it. The blast caused the king to fall, sending him rolling down the ridge they had been standing on.

Creed turned and headed in the direction where the King once stood.

Reinhart sent a bolt of frozen ice at Creed. A magical shield appeared on his arm. The ice shattered on the magical runes.

"I haven't the time for your little emo temper tantrum! I'm trying to win a battle here."

Creed began to summon vast amounts of magic from everything around him very fast. Reinhart could sense the depletion and the growing aura about Creed made it very transparent. Reinhart had been working on a new spell, now was the time to try it.

Waves of blue tinted energy shot forth towards Reinhart. "What don't take some time to think about how you've been a very bad boy?", said Creed.

Reinhart cast his spell creating an invisible wave of energy that acted like a wave heading towards a beach. It met with Creed's magic causing it to fold back in on itself. Reinhart had to put all his energy into matching Creeds. Creed sensed what was going on and began to pull more energy from around him trying to force the spell through.

The mirrored orb shattered and Roman's feet slid across the ground. He stood there looking back at the orb and Morgan. Morgan had drained the magic from one side of the orb, but she had felt the caster reapplying energy to keep it stable. She had been draining with all her might when suddenly the reinforcing energy stopped.

She could see the bastard that trapped them up on the hill. He was locked in combat with someone else. She summoned a bolt of green necrotic energy and sent it flying at the mage.

"Hey, you! Wizard in the blue robes!" Roman called out charging up the hill trying to get the mage's attention.

Creed turned and sent bolts of lightning shooting forth from his eyes. Roman stabbed his sword down into the ground and fell behind it. The lightning hit his sword going into the ground shocking Roman still, but not as badly as it would have been.

Creed took one of his hands away from his battle of will with Reinhart and put up a shield dispersing the necrotic energy aimed at him.

Kage came charging in and was quickly hit with an explosion of concussive force, sending the cat flying back into the air.

Morgan sent out black tendrils of shadows towards Creed. He simply brought down a wall of light behind himself shredding the shadow tendrils as they got close.

Unfortunately, he had been putting his energy into these new attackers. His push on Reinhart's counterspell was breaking. Before he could regain control the wave of energy came washing back over him. Creed found himself moving and thinking as such a slow speed that the world around him seemed to disappear. A dagger stuck into his chest and Creed died.

Reinhart stood over the corpse of his former teacher. He was angry the others had aided him in defeating Creed. He was happy though that his spell worked.

Morgan and Roman threw the king down before Median.

"You have halted my divine progress for too long. You will get no mercy."

Median placed the king into his own worse nightmare and sealed it within the king's mind. The King would live a thousand lifetimes of torture in every breath.

"Now we march on the West." Median said watching his armies dispatch the remaining Pafician troops.

Lana and the Light

Lana Firebloom awoke aboard the airship "Skycutter" shaken from her pleasant slumber by a nightmare. She had seen her entire kingdom, her family, her people, all of them were burning. It had been the same dream since the first full moon. Her father had stated that women of the Firebloom family were prone to visions and awareness.

She walked out onto the deck of the ship and looked out over the night-shrouded world. The bright moon illuminated the deck in a white glow. There on the horizon was the kingdom of Atlantica. The ancient empire of the west, the lands all around were called Eden. She looked to the South and saw the sails of ships, a terrible specter descended from the dark clouds. It rode atop a skeletal dragon, shadowy smoke clung to its shape and tendriled behind in its wake.

The crew of the ship had gathered at the prow, looking at the army coming towards Atlantica. Across the sea in Pacifika fires burned lighting up the horizon like a glimpse of the abyss itself.

"It's spotted, gods be damned! Shite its coming, boys to your stations, sorry princess, but this is no place for a lady. You can go down to your cabin below deck, will take care of the big nasty.", said the captain, a burly fellow with a thin beard clinging to his bulbous face.

The princess did as instructed, not because she was a lady. She had been trained in various different weapons and was skilled at using light magic. She went down below decks so that she would not distract them crew from protecting the ship. Their worry over here would only endanger and distract. She hoped that they knew what they were doing.

An hour later she clung to the railing on the ship as it descended like a falling star. The deck was wreathed in fire and the bodies of the crew that had to fell in battle slid about the deck like dolls. Those who still lived screamed or prayed to whatever god they believed in. The ship began to list, now caught in a spin rolling. The world became a blur to her as her stomach begged to release its contents. She watched as one by one those that clung to the ship were peeled off and flung from it. She felt her own grip loosening and above the mad specter of death watched.

She went flying into the air, the world suddenly seems to move in slow motion as she drifted down. She could see the shining surface of Lake Calahend below. It was touched by the moonlight glittering waves like jewels. Suddenly her body was shocked as it crashed into the watery surface. She felt needles of pain all through her body. Suddenly a hand

grasped her pulling her head above the water.

"Lucky we are, eh princess?", came to the voice of the captain pulling her along with him as he swam to the shore. She awoke from her stupor, her eyes going to the sky where the ship finished its plummet. The village of Green Meadow was its final destination, power in the ship's hold ignited and an explosion ripped through the darkness of night. Screams rose up like a cacophony of some hellish pipe organ.

They reached the shore and lay there on the beach, the captain catching his breath.

"They name's Haile, George Haile your highness...", he said between breaths. His clothes saturated clung to his portly form.

"I am sure glad I did not go on that diet, the extra weight kept us a bit buoyant eh!?", he said laughing as he slapped his belly. "Ooh ooh that hurts.." he lifted his hand up and spied the blood, black as oil in the night.

She quickly got up in a kneeling position next to the captain and put her hands over his wound. A bright light emanated from her hands, going out to shine over the wound. The torn flesh began to move, reattaching after a few moments the wound was healed.

"Thank goodness you can do that. I think I would have died. Well I guess we're even.", he said with a wink turning over and standing up. He extended a hand to her, helping her up.

"We should go help the village out." She said to the captain.

"My mission was to make sure you arrived home safe, not going to give up on that now that fate gave me a second chance." He started walking in the direction of Atlantica.

"No! These are my people I will not just walk away!"

"I am very appreciated of your help with my wounds, but we're going back to your parents and the capital."

She had already started walking towards the village.

"Daft girl!" he said trying to catch up with her.

She stood in the village, a fire raged all around. A storehouse exploded sending flaming oil about the surrounding buildings.

She ran into the center of the town and helped a woman and her child up.

"Run and don't look back!"

"Iiiii Wiiiiiiii Kkiiiiiii Yooouuuu!" The voice seemed to drift on the wind all around her.

The flapping of leathery wings echoed and suddenly a thunderous crash of a massive form landing on the ground causing her to turn. The undead dragon knight and his steed crashed down into the village crushing a building beneath them. The dragon reared back and let loose a bellow of dark flame.

"I can kill, but I will never die!" the dragon knight said dismounting.

"Varmosnyxx kill everyone in the village, leave only ash!"

"C'mon Princess nothing we can do now."

The dragon knight strode through the fire, it seemed to part allowing him to pass. The horned helmet hid his face, but the tattered armor and visible bones spoke of its death like visage. The fire's light was not strong enough to tear away death's shadowy mask. The dragon knight extended a hand towards the princess and said, "join me in death. Together with me child of the Titan blood, we can rule over all of Ayenee."

"No! I will never join you monster!" She yelled back pushing Captain Haile away.

"Not in this life will I ever give into the darkness that surrounds."

The shadowy specter seemed offended by her stern refusal.

"Median will see your kingdom and all kingdoms turned to dust. I was once of the Firebloom line. I fought to help forge this entire kingdom. I gave my life for this land and in my last breath, I was cursed. The ghost of all the families I killed in forging this kingdom and defeating its enemies. They came for me in my last moment of life. I have seen death, delivered death, and been denied the solemn comfort of its everlasting embrace."

"It's not too late to change your ways! You can save these people and end the cycle of death that has imprisoned you."

The princess understood why the knight could not find peace, he had dealt death and become death in return. In order for him to rest, he had to protect life not deliver death. She had studied curses in Vanguard.

The knight looked at her and shook his head.

"Median controls me. I can do only his will."

The dragon knight began to move towards her and she raised her hands up. A golden light shot from her hands, wrapping about the knight. He fought and struggled to continue towards her, his momentum slowing.

"You can't stop me!"

She drew upon the good memories of her childhood, the moments of laughter and how the sun felt on her skin in fields of sunflowers. The miasma of light surrounding her hands grew and now the light began to enter the knight's armor. It found what remained of his soul and caressed it with the

purity of the light she summoned. The knight cried at as though he were mourning a dead lover or a beloved child.

"What are you doing to me!?"

"I am showing you what it means to be alive. I am showing you what you should be protecting, what you took from those you killed."

The knight fell to his knees and his eyes looked to the light surrounding him. He tried to turn his eyes away from it, but the brilliance held within it memories. Memories of everything that made life so precious.

He bellowed out another cry.

"Stop! I can't take anymore! IT HURTS!"

She felt her legs buckle as the strain began to takes its toll. Captain Haile placed his arm around her waist and steadied her. He looked at her with assurance in his eyes.

"You've got this princess! Make him remember."

She felt the hand of the woman and her child against her other side. A tear of pride and happiness fell from the Princess's eyes as she saw more coming to lend their strength.

The light now moved through the knight and shot out towards the lumbering form of his dragon, paralyzing the undead creature.

"Every life you took had a destiny, had a reason for being! Even that reason was small compared to others. They all were threads in the weave of destiny."

The knight felt the loss, the agony, the sadness, he relived the memories of the lives he took. He watched as the person he loved died hundreds of time, experienced the loss of his children, again and again, he clung hopelessly to the final strands of life. He begged for life, he cried for loss, he wished that none of them had to die.

An explosion of light and everyone were knocked off their feet. The fires died out and the knight and his dragon seemed to vanish in the blink of an eye. Haile looked down at the princess and she smiled, "I did it."

"Yes, you did." He smiled and watched as she drifted into sleep.

The Grave Brothers vs. General Thane

The hills were covered with tall green grass swaying in the mountain breeze. Rice terraces dotted the landscape as well as other farms and livestock corrals. There looming over it all like a watchful parent was the capital city and above that the royal castle. There were gates seven each representing a

tenant in the teaching of the golden path. Each gate was an element that one had to master in order to bring harmony to the soul and find inner peace. Maples, Cherry, and Oak trees made a thick forest around all this. In the distance, the Great Western Wall of Ayenee rose up amongst the mountains towards the heavens. Two pillars on each side of the gate one with a jade serpent coiled about it and the other with an ivory one.

King Kang stood looking through a lens that hung over one of the castle windows. He could see the vast armies pouring from the ships onto the beaches of Atlantica. His ancestors had come to this land as would-be conquerors as well. They had fought the natives long and hard, but over time they came to learn the secrets of this land. They became protectors, building the Great Wall to protect the Valley of the Ancients. His brother-in-law had grown too complacent. Pacifika had come to depend on the magic storms and fog that shrouded the Western Island and coast. The reefs had taken many explorers to their doom, many armies. The wall had prevented any land threat. Somehow an army had arrived and now the secrets of this land were in peril.

“Have the citizens take refuge in the city or flee to the caves in the north to hide. Have our infantry divisions and their commanders on the field. Let us give them a fight.”

The infantry moved out of the capital gates forming row upon row of armored force barring entrance.

Median lounged atop his golden dais as Morgan and Roman looked on the mounting defense of Atlantica.

“M'lord they are taking the field, they are intending to fight,” Morgan said dispelling the spell that allowed her to scry from a distance.

Median plucked another grape and tossed it into his mouth.

“Have the Grave brothers prove their worth. Let us see if science has any place in this new world I am destined to rule.” Median snapped his fingers ordering one of the pages to go and fetch the two strange siblings. The former queen of Pacifika knelt in submission beside Median's throne listening.

Grand Artificer Mortis Grave and Grand Alchemist Rigor Grave wore black robes and skull-like masks. Their race was unknown, their faces had never been seen. They kept to themselves and held everything they made as secrets only for their eyes and the slaves that served them.

“God-king Median we shall prove to you that science has its place in your new kingdom. I shall show you how my alchemy can visit death upon all your foes.” Rigor said giving a deep bow.

“And my artifacts shall grind your enemies kingdoms to dust.” Added Mortis giving an equally deep bow.

“Stop wasting words then and go. Prove your theories on the field and we

shall applaud the spectacle. Fail me and we shall witness your deaths.”
Median waved a hand ushering them to go.

“1st through 4th divisions stand with me!” shouted General Ko as the four groups of soldiers moved in behind. They began to march down the hill towards the encamped invading army.

“Let us show these invaders the way back to their ships!” A cheer rose up as they sounded off. Shields and armor glinted in the sun, swords reflected the light in bright bursts of white light.

A green fog suddenly came in from the east. The army halted as General Ko raised a hand. The fog crept closer shrouding the ground and the invaders camp from view. Ko and his men marched into the fog thinking it merely a diversion. “Stay close together, watch each other's backs!”

As the fog moved in around them the air was filled with a strange smell. Ko reached up and grabbed his throat, his mouth, eyes, throat, and nose all burned. He fell to his knees as he began to choke. Those behind him fell as well. As he lay grasping his throat the general looked up seeing a black shrouded figure moving in, its face the visage of death. It began to toss shuriken and taunted his army. Those that were outside the fog began to back up, heading back up the hill.

“Load the tubes and put them on the belts! Now! Behold my greatest creation! The Gatling cannon!” Mortis sat on a seat that was attached to a giant barrel, at the center of which was a large cog shaped piece that had a conveyor belt of tubes. Behind the devices, slaves manned a crank that turned the gear and pulled in the tubes. To the side of this slaved took up brass tubes stuffing a black powder and oddly sized cannon balls. They then placed them onto the rigged belt to be conveyed up to the device. Where a hammer like part controlled by some internal machinations then slammed into them igniting the powder and sending the ball down the tube.

Cannon fire rained down on the retreating army as Rigor laughed gleefully. The ground exploded and bodies flew into the air, along with gore and debris. The entire 1st through 4th division were annihilated. General Thane watched in horror. “5th through 9th divisions forward!” he cried. They reluctantly complied. Thane marched with his men down to the same green fog as the artillery fire ceased.

He raised his guan dao and began to spin it calling upon the air creating the wind that parted the fog. Shuriken suddenly came flying at him. The front line of troops ran and crouched down in front of him, their shields raised blocking the projectiles. A vial came flying through the air towards the crouching troops. Thane turned his guan doa and hit the vial with the end of the wooden hilt sending it flying back the way it came.

“You can't stand there all day!” came a voice from the concealment of the remaining fog. A metal orb was tossed from the fog, smoke trailing behind it.

It landed amongst them and exploded. The soldiers shielding Thane were slain, Thane felt shrapnel lodged in his right leg.

Soldiers rushed in. "Make sure to scatter when you see one of those damn things! Help me up!" The soldiers pressed on. Thane hit back another vial and as it broke on the ground the green fog rose up from it. There was a strange hissing noise from the right. "Shields up!" Thane shouted as a liquid splashed on the shields causing their surface to hiss and melt. One soldier did not raise his shield quick enough and now lay dead his face bubbling and melting.

Thane knew he just had to get sight of this assassin and he would be able to deal with him. Thane watched as another metal orb came hissing from the fog. He vaulted with his weapon and kicked it sending it back towards where it came. It exploded and there was a shriek from the fog. Thane created another wind and as the fog blew back the crawling form of a black robed figure was seen on the ground. He wore a mask that allowed him to breathe and see in the fog, he wore some sort of covering beneath his robes that protected his skin.

The grenade had barely caught him, a large jagged piece of metal jutted from his ankle. Thane gave an order and three of his soldiers ran over and thrust their swords down into the man's body. A small sliver of smoke rose up and Thane was about to shout, but it was too late. An explosion flared brightly and his soldiers were nothing more than slag, gore, and bone.

He awoke on the ground, the commander of the 6th Division slapped him. She yelled, but his ears rang. Behind her, the ground exploded and shouts rose up. He shook his head and stood. The cannon on the hill across the valley was once more firing on them. "Charge!" he raised his weapon up. The soldiers followed his orders moving in behind him.

He watched as the cannon slowly began to swivel towards their direction. It moved very slowly he realized, that might be their only saving grace. "To the left!" the order was cried back and the army moved to the left. The figure atop the cannon shook his fist and started yelling at the slaves below. He fired a few shots taking a few of Thane's men, but he had to stop firing for the cannon to be turned.

Thane waited for the right moment and gave the order "To the right!" They moved as one, but the figure atop the cannon was smart. "Halt!" he yelled to the slave below and began to fire as the army was in the middle of transitioning.

"Divide! Divide!" Thane yelled as the army split into two charging sections. There were a lot of casualties. A lot more than Thane would have liked. They were nearly to the hill. That's when Thane realized something else. In order for the cannon to fire down, it required another group of slaves to move another crank to lower the weapon. This also required the weapon to be still otherwise the crank would take out the slaves trying to turn it.

Thane asked for a dagger and tossed it towards the seated figure. The figure

ducked down as the army reached the hill. They were met by a small force of the enemies forces. Thane took out a special torch lighting it up and tossing it on the field behind him. Red smoke began rising up to the sky. General Kain watched and signaled for the 10th and 13th divisions to move forward behind them were the archers and mounted units as well as siege units.

They began to cross the field while the cannon was distracted. Thane climbed up the cannon as his men fought off its defenders. He thrust his gaun dao at a figure that was garbed similarly to the assassin below. The figure drew something from his robe and aimed it at Thane. There was a loud boom and Thane felt something tear through his shoulder. He flew back off the cannon and hit the ground in pain. The figure stood on the steps of the ladder leading up to the seat.

“You fool! I shall avenge my brother's death! You will pay for this embarrassment and then I shall level your city walls!” He fumbled with the strange weapon and pointed it back at Thane. Thane knew this was it. There was a click and the weapon did nothing. The figure turned it over in his hands and suddenly it exploded in his hands. The figure tumbled smoking onto the grass near Thane. Thane rolled over and grabbed the figure. He fought, but Thane managed to get his hands around the figure's neck and snapped it.

He stood and helped his soldiers fight the last of the group of defenders. He orders them to pull the cannon back to the capital. They would be able to use it in the defense of the kingdom. As they did this they were pursued by more soldiers from the invaders. Kane and his troops moved in covering their flank and giving them the time to pull it across the field. Thane explained to Kane how to operate the device, having watched it be fired and loaded as he crossed the field. He hoped it was good enough for him to be able to use it.

Thane turned and continued to fight, falling there on the battlefield.

The Mountain Honru vs. General Dance

“I want every scrap of parchment those two had in their tents, every device, every scrap, every powder, and any diagram! They may have failed, but they have single handily halved the amount of infantry. They walk now in the eternal light of my holy kingdom! Honru! Finish what they started!”

A shadow covered the soldiers and Median. Something crashed down on the ground and then suddenly another loud crash. The earth shook with each sound. Soldiers poured after the shadow to join the battle in the valley.

“Do you understand it?” General Kane looked to General Dance who studied the strange device that had cost so many lives.

“From what you explained I think I can get this thing working for us. This black powder is dangerous. It is not unlike that used with a regular cannon,

but I think it is much more volatile. Be careful with it. We already have over four hundred casualties and wounded. We don't need to add to that total." Dance looked out over the battlefield that already looked bad. The wounded were being pulled from the field, bodies of the dead or dying had to be left behind. They feared another attack by the invaders may occur any second now.

The remaining infantry had retreated after pushing back the first wave of attackers after the two cloaked figures had died.

"So many died by this and for this. I hope it proves useful." Dance said to himself looking at the Gatling cannon. From over the hill came a roar as new invaders charged down into the valley.

Over the ledge, something else came. It lumbered towering over the soldiers into the sky. It was a giant, its exposed chest was covered in scars. It wore a dragon skull for a helmet and carried a large club with swords pinned into it. It wore crude wooden armor with a few pieces of crude metal attached by ropes and chain mail here and there.

"What the hell is that!?" Dance shouted as it took the ridge. Carts of boulders were drawn up beside it and it didn't take long for it to toss one in the air and bat it with its club. The boulder soared over the battlefield crashing into the city wall. Defenders flew from the parapets and crowds screamed as a cabbage and turnip vendor's stall was crushed by the boulder. Some would say it was no great loss, but others said it was too close for comfort.

"Damn it all! We have to stop that bastard!"

"Archers would do little, they'd have to get across the field. Infantry and mounted would be pulp from the club. Our siege engines have to be moved to even be used and they are too inaccurate. Shit! I really wanted more time to study this damn device before using it." Dance ran over to the cannon and climbed up the ladder, jumping into the seat he yelled, "Man the cranks! Man the ammunition belt! I need it adjusted to these coordinates!" He scribbled onto a piece of parchment and looked down the barrel at the circle mounted in the middle serving as a way of aiming. He handed the scrap to one of his soldiers and turned to General Kane.

"You're going to have to take the field again. Take my archers with you widdle down their numbers as best you can. I'll take care of the big guy!"

General Kane nodded and the troops began to move onto the field. A handful of boulders came flying towards the capital. They tore into the siege engines and city walls. Dance began to wish they had moved the cannon behind the city gates. He could only imagine a few of these mounted on some towers over the gates. If he survived this battle he would have to propose the plans to build such mounted turrets.

"Okay almost in positi-" he was cut off as a hail of boulders came crashing down on the cannon's location. The cannon lost its stability and lurched to

the right on its side. This caused the belt to bunch up and made it where Dance would only get a few shots off before it jammed permanently.

"I need it realigned he yelled." He cursed that nothing could simply work easy without a hitch. More boulders came down on the gun causing it to move. Dance looked through the aiming circle and saw that it had moved to be under the ridge that the giant stood on. Dance had an idea. "Alright stand back!" he whirled a crank in front of him and the hammer came back and fired. Just then the field was hit with a barrel of burning oil. It exploded amongst the archers and sent volumes of burning fluid out onto the masses. The ridge was hit and the giant lurched as he threw something else.

"Okay...okay..." he looked down the barrel, but plumes of smoke clouded his vision. He just needed a few more shots. A sea breeze hit the smoke and moved it enough that he could see the giant had slid down the ridge. "Smile bastard!" he whirled the crank and fired a shot that hit the dragon helm cracking it in the center. He fires three more shots before the gun jammed one of the cannon balls was embedded in the giant's forehead blood trickling down its now visible face.

"Yeah!" He raised his hands and looked around at the chaos around him. There was a strange man with an eyepatch and a cat amongst a pile of bodies. The man hefted a sword onto his shoulder and smiled tossing a lit cigar amid the barrels of black powder. "Been a blast! Got to go!"

The cannon and the ridge which it was upon, exploded. Dance's form was consumed by the explosion and never recovered. Roman jumped in the air coming down in front of the gate. Defenders closed in around him, he laughed the sound of steel meeting steel, quickly followed by the sound of bodies hitting the dry, hard, rock packed earth.

"Halt!"

Roman looked up as a figure in light mail and white cloth jumped down landing near him. The figure had black hair and had cloth wrapped around his face. He brandished a strange sword that Roman had never seen before.

"No one enters the gate of storms except through me!"

"Fine by me, I was getting bored anyway." Roman scratched the stubble on his face and shrugged lowering his sword. "Keep things even Kage."

The cat leaped down and began to enlarge into a sabertooth tiger like form. "I'll make sure no one bothers you, but be quick."

Roman vs. The Seven Swords of Destiny; Pacifika is not done yet

"I have fought many swordmasters. None of them have been able to defeat me. What makes you think that you can?" Roman asked the stranger.

Six other forms descended down from the wall. One of them a woman with tanned skin and black hair stepped forward and said.

"Because we have no other choice unless you would be so kind as to abstain from trying to enter the city and turn away."

Roman laughed and then looked at those gathered before him.

"Look at you all. Different races and backgrounds gathered in a fellowship of the sword, sworn to the defense of this city. What are you the league of ethnic justice in Atlantica?"

Gabriel stepped up and said, "No we are the seven swords, defenders of the seven gates and guardians to this city."

"This bores me, I'm not much into talking." Roman removed his sword from its sheath. The sword sang as it slides from its confinement as if calling for blood. He performs a feint and then quickly moves into a moulinet. Gabriel caught off guard nearly gets cut but quickly recovers.

"So how is this going to play out? All of you at once? Or do we dance one by one?"

"Stand back, I will defeat him!" Gabriel stepped forward performing a flourish in an avant-garde stance. Roman seemed amused by the young man's eagerness and orderly style. He stepped back and side stepped Gabriel as the young sword master turned, Roman brought his own sword in a downward slash. It clashed with Gabriel's with a loud clang and Gabriel's sword broke. Roman's bit down into Gabriel's shoulder sliding to the right as it grated against his collar bone.

The other sword masters no longer stand idly by. They each rushed forward. Roman deflected a thrust and parried two others as he was pushed back onto the bridge entering the city. Gabriel lay in a pool of his own blood, Aashish and Sabah two of the seven swords knelt by his side and tried to stanch the flow of blood.

Meanwhile, Pachu'a, Jace, Icnoyotl, and Ula pushed their attacks against Roman. Roman summoned forth his kinetic abilities sending a slash of energy from his sword. It caused the group to part and tore through the city gate. Roman smiled and jumped over the group and landed on the other side of the gate. "One gate down, six more to go."

Median sat and watched the clash of armies from his dais. He gave an order to send in the vampires that were now loyal to him. As the horn blew another sound suddenly tore through the din of battle. The ground a few feet behind Median's throne exploded in debris. Median's fleet came under attack. On the sea, two large ships guided an armada of various different vessels.

One of the scouts for Atlantica called out, "Pacifika still fights, and it seems they are back by....no it can't be? They have brought with them the pirate captain Donhal Ashbane and his pirate armada!"

Two Pacifika vessels still sailed the Queen's Mercy and the Sword of the West. These two vessels were 72 gunships and behind them was Donhal's own flagship the Ebonwind which supported 62 cannons. These cannons however fired magical spells rather than cannon balls. Ashbane's flagship suddenly lifted up off the sea along with a few other pirate ships. They sailed through the air and out over the battlefield firing down on Median's army.

The sun was slowly sinking beneath the waves and soon night would shroud landscape in the night. Donhal's ship came down in the seventh city square before the castle.

"Lovely, lovely people, do not fear! It is I! Donhal Ashbane, the immortal pirate and scourge of sea and sky. Thanks to the expenditure of Pacifika's coffers, I'm giving my aid to Atlantica. Do not fear, we shall win this battle. Yes, come touch the Ebonwind, marvel at its beauty and craftsmanship. " Donhal called out as he reached down snatching a rose thrown to the ship in adoration of their assistance.

"Must you be so boisterous and vain?" came the musical voice of an elf from the metallic body of an automation.

"Look at their faces, they are scared. I was hired to help and so I am selling them hope. Hope wins battles, fear and despair do not", he replied.

"Shouldn't we be in the sky helping the others then? Why are we here in the city?" Lilorean began to follow Donhal as he strode to the exit ramp being lowered from the vessel.

"I am negotiating a deal with Atlantica, my dear! Do you think I have forgotten the expensive components needed to restore you to flesh and blood? We are so close."

Lilorean reached out grabbing his arm halting him in his stride. "How about we overlook charging both kingdoms? Must you live up to the pirate title you so adore?"

"I must keep up appearances. I intended to test out a new weapon today, one that I think might win us this fight. Ah a royal escort." Lilorean sighed. "Oh Dr. Healgood please lend your aid to the local medics in attending to the wounded", called out Donhal.

A grey-skinned dwarf came walking up to the ramp. "THE NAME IS GONGRIM!" the dwarf yelled.

Donhal shook his head, "Nope. Dr. Gongrim sounds lacking in bedside manner, you are still Dr. Healgood."

"Asinine human!" the dwarf hissed back and exited the ship to do as he was asked.

Donhal and Lilorean along with two crewmen Cylex (a draconic) and Valla

(an avariel) along with Garric (a goblin) were escorted to meet with the king. The rest of the crew were welcomed by the citizens of Atlantica.

Roman pulled his sword from Jace's chest and dislodged himself from Jace's sword. Ula, Icnoyotl, Aashish, and Sabah remained of the swords of destiny. Their fight was now at the third gate and Roman and Kage had both suffered numerous wounds. Roman was covered in blood, cuts all over his face, his left arm badly cut.

"So just four more", he said, as he lit a cigar and took a huge puff off it.

"He is barely hanging on we should finish him together", said Aashish.

Roman laughed and shook his head, he took a new stance.

"Well, I guess I should be fighting with all my strength" a wave of air and spirit energy shot out from him. His hair rose in an updraft and he looked refreshed. Waves of the same energy continued to pulse from him. "My swordsman spirit as they call it. I normally just fight without it, but you guys have really given me a good showing, so I will do the same for you."

The four of them shielded their eyes and surprise.

"He has only been toying with us! What kind of people are they?!" Ula said while shielding her eyes, the bodies of their comrades could be seen through the gates laying upon the king's road. The bodies of other city defenders lay about, taken down by Roman's companion Kage.

"Ula and Aashish kill his pet. Icnoyotl and I shall try to put an end to him."

"I have only been distracting you guys while my friends infiltrated your beautiful city." Roman smiled.

"What!? Why would you tell us this?" Sabah asked hearing fighting coming from the remaining city walls.

"Because I want you to stop playing around, show me what you really got or you will lose before I clear these final few city gates. Stare into my eyes, these are the eyes of a fighter. I came here to prove myself against this city's strongest defenders. If you are not them, then step aside and show who."

"Unbelievable. No. We will not step aside!" Aashish drew his swords, Ula stepped beside him pointing her thin rapier at Roman, Icnoyotl with his serrated sword stood beside her and Sabah with her hooked swords nodded in agreement.

"That's more like it!" Roman came running towards them still puffing on his cigar. The clash of the sword fighters sent a burst of light up at the fourth gate, a vortex caught one of the airships sending it hurtling down to the ground with a crash.

Median had moved his forces to get out of range from the firing ships at sea.

The remaining soldiers of Atlantica were forced to push back into the city. At the head of his army, the 8 feet tall Median casually strode towards the city without any care. His heavy footfalls kicking up clouds of dust, leaving deep footprints in the bloody mud. At one point a defender feigning death rose up and charged him and he simply raised a hand as if waving the man away. The defender halted in his attack and exploded into tiny parts.

Janyru, The Duke of Darkthorne, Olec vs. Kyrren, Donhal Ashbane, and Lilorean Silverleaf

"What do you mean they took the second mana engine?!" Donhal paced the deck of his ship. The crewman he spoke to Ceveri fiddled with his hands. "The royal guard boarded the ship with some noble looking fellow and went below decks. When they came up they were lugging off our spare mana engine. I tried to tell them that the device was dangerous and that they couldn't just take it."

Donhal looked off in the distance and scratched at his ear. "If they tamper with that device they could level this whole city. This is the second time we've had our mana engine stolen, hence the need for the spare!"

Ceveri: "Perhaps they intend on making the mana engine into a mana bomb like those Darkthornes tried?"

Donhal: "Those royal monkeys if they think they can turn one of my devices into a weapon of mass destruction without my authorization or input, well they can sod off. I don't trust them to be able to make such a complex machine. The Darkthornes only were able because they had that god of chaos Xavier working with them...." Donhal began to question something and ran to his cabin.

He dug through a chest tossing about various items. "Where is it?"

He searched through a trunk at the foot of his bed and found what he was looking for. A crystal inside pulsed blue light within the chest.

"Damn it he's here!"

"Who's here my love?"

"That crazy God Xavier, I should have known the prince of chaos was behind all this."

"I thought Morie defeated him with the wishing-rod?"

"Aye, but he must not have shown his full hand. He is back or he has an agent working his magic here."

"Then this city is in grave danger. Xavier may be a god of chaos, but he enjoys destruction."

"You take the ship of Lil and I will go and try to reason with those royal idiots before they kill us all." Donhal helped raise the exit ramp and watched as the ship soared up and went to join the battle. He turned to cross the courtyard when suddenly a calamity drew his attention towards the gate. Atop the seventh gate, someone shouted, "It's a monster!"

Donhal drew his two scimitars and passed through the gate. It closed behind him. He watched a blurry figure moved from one place and seemed to just appear in another. The figure split into two and attacked a group of guardsmen.

"I have come here to show you all the error of defying my lord! Median shall seize this pathetic city, and if you continue to stand in defiance against him. All that will be left shall be pebbles and broken bones. He marches on this city even now!"

"Who are you?" Donhal said derisively as he drew the attention of the blurry figures. "Are you his page? Oh, wait maybe just a groupie? You sound like a groupie."

"Enough!" the figure shot forward and hit Donhal with such force that he flew back into the city wall. The wall cracked and became splattered with blood. Donhal's corpse fell to the ground in a heap. The gathered crowds screamed in horror. The blurry figured laughed and coalesced walking to the center of the square.

"The fate of all who oppose Median!"

"Now hold on pal! I am not done talking to you, so don't just go turning your back." Donhal said as his body rapidly healed. He stood up and dusted himself off and shook his head. "I've been hit by gods and honestly you punch like a starved fairy."

"Fool!" The figure shot forward again and punched through Donhal's chest. Donhal's corpse fell to the ground and in three blinks his body was nearly whole again. "What are you?" the blurry figure asked of Donhal.

"I'm cursed, how are you?" he said, standing back up and looking to his sword. "So what are you?"

"I am Janyru, to some in this time I am the god of speed. In reality, I am from a time in the future, when this world lies in ruin because of a disaster. There are others from my time here. We sought refuge in the city of the time, then someone opened the door and we followed them to this era. My body is enhanced by technology, but to you it is magic. Median will rule this world and in the ruling, he shall abate the catastrophe that kills it in the future." Janyru's form stopped blurring and coalesced. He was a bald, muscular, ebony skinned man with eyes that glowed blue, he wore a strange black armor.

"How is it that Median saves the world? From the looks of it, he intends to bring it to ruin." Donhal dusted off his clothes and pretended to be concerned about his attire.

"The future is always changing, the simplest alteration in the past can send waves of across time. Median is just one of many catalysts."

"I had wondered why there was such an influx of time travelers of late. You see I know a thing or two about time travel." Donhal touched the buckle of his belt. "Though you could have got to be the dumbest one I have met. Don't you know that if you change things in the past you can screw things up worse than they currently are?"

"Enough prattle, I shall smash your body into a thousand pieces! Then we'll see if you can come back from that!" He shot forward, but Donhal suddenly vanished. Janyru turned and saw Donhal sidestep his punch and wave smiling at him. He turned to throw another punch and was surprised when Donhal caught his wrist and deflected him.

The two came falling to the ground from thin air.

"How did you do that?!" Janyru stated.

"Oh, I may or may not be a self-appointed guardian of time and owner of something called the time orb. Though that is all speculation to some scholars. Others simply believe that over the years the name Donhal Ashbane and the vocation of pirate have simply been passed down, like some strange eternal job posting."

"You moved really fast!?"

"No. I simply made a small portion of the world around me move slower. I determined you move at some accelerated fashion. That's why you form was so blurry because you were moving faster than my eyes could see."

"Hmph. I see this will be a challenge. How about we take it up a notch?"

Janyru extended his hands and the left wall of the square began to ripple like the surface of a small pond. From it emerged a figure standing 7 ft tall covered in armor from head to toe and wielding a 6ft long sword that weighed at least 550 lbs. From the right, the wall did the same thing, but this time a man covered in armor and brown and white feathers emerged. He had wings rising up from his back and taloned feet like a hawk. Instead of hair, he had a mat of feathers that curled up giving him an owl-like appearance.

"Temporal portals, ok I admit that is definitely taking it somewhere I did not expect to go. Shit!" Donhal ducked under the swing of armored giant's sword.

"The armored fellow is called the Duke of Darkthorne, he doesn't talk much and shares a curse much like your own. The other is Olec the wing terror of Darkthorne, the Tuatha have this unique affiliation with magic. Olec was a druid once, perhaps still is, but now he more than just a Tuatha, he is part of nature itself."

Olec took to the skies and gave a screech, above the square dark clouds began to circle and bolts of lightning struck down at Donhal.

Donhal turned and brought his two enchanted blades down on the arm of the Duke. He cut through the armor and flesh and bone. As the arm slumped to the ground, the Duke turned again, swinging his sword. Donhal was struck by a bolt of lightning and unable to dodge, he was sliced in two pieces just beneath the belly button. He watched as the Duke's armor lifted up into the air and began to float towards his shoulder and reattach. Donhal's two halves did much the same. He sighed, "This is going to suck."

He stood and was about to touch his ornamented belt buckle, but from the corner of his eyes, he caught Janyru coming at him. Suddenly there was a loud crash and standing there in front of Donhal was a strange bald monk looking fellow, with a beaded necklace of green jade, the beads of which were the size of fists.

"I am the unmoving mountain, the heart of the jade serpent." Janyru's fist was pressed knuckles to the monk's chest. He pulled his hand back and shook it moaning a few obscenities.

A spear of ice came flying down from the sky above. It cracked into pieces on the monk's back. "I am as hard as granite, I am the skin of the jade serpent."

"Great! Mr. Jade Serpent you showed up at the right time." Donhal turned and put his back to the monk keeping his eyes on the Duke.

"I am not the Jade Serpent. I am a monk who follows the path of Jade. Who seeks serenity from the Jade Dragon that guards the way to the west beside his sister the Opal Dragon. I am Kyrren."

"Ok, so could we speak in shorter sentences?" Donhal ducked as the blade clanged against Kyrren's back as though striking a stone wall. Olec came landing on the ground and summoned up giant roots that shot from the ground. They wrapped around Kyrren and began to squeeze. The monk continues to be the picture of calm as he was disappeared in the mass of writing roots.

Suddenly blasts of fire shot down on the cracked and disturbed cobblestones around the root ball. The roots burned as Kyrren shrugged off the roots and emerged. The combatants looked up seeing the Ebonwind with Lilorean at the helm.

"I hope I didn't hurt you!" Lilorean called out over a device that amplified her voice.

"I am unmarred, my body a temple of jade, my spirit the pyre lighting its halls."

"He likes to spout words of wisdom dear. He says he's fine!" Donhal rolled under the blade of the Duke and was suddenly punched so hard by Janyru that he again flew into the wall.

Lilorean reached up and communed with nature, calming the storm overhead.

"A fellow druid eh?" Olec screeched out. "Let us see which of us rules the skies?" He took off flying up towards the Ebonwind. Lilorean steered the vessel away and sent bolts of lightning out at Olec who maneuvered around them and threw back bolts of his own. One bolt hit Lilorean and harmlessly dispersed over her titan metal form.

"I've never seen a metal druid before."

"I am simply hardcore like that." Lilorean suddenly dove off the ship and managed to wrap her arms around Olec. They fell instantly like a heavy stone hitting the ground. Lilorean stood up the broken form of Olec beneath her. "I guess you were really like a bird, hollow bones and all." She knelt down and took his pulse feeling the light beating of his heart. She cast a spell of confinement about him and one that would stave off death. She would return to heal him after she helped Donhal.

"Hey, honey! Well, two unmoving walls now we are talking."

Donhal touched his belt buckle and he vanished. She watched at he and Janyru fought one another. She turned and began helping Kyrren in dealing with the armored figure that was tearing through a marketplace.

Knives flew through the air, Roman ducked under a sword and finished off another seven swords. He struck the sixth gate and sent an explosion of timber through the square on the other side. He saw that a battle was already taking place on the other side. Ula the last of the seven stood just as bloody as Roman. Kage slowly patted up beside Roman.

"I'm sorry, brother, but my time has come. This is where I die."

"What?! No! Nonsense!" Roman looked past Ula to the two figures battling the Duke.

Bells rang and the sound of armored feet on stone could be heard echoing off the walls.

Roman turned and looked as he was surrounded. A figure wearing a crown strode tall through the crowd.

"Surrender!" yelled a voice.

Roman looked to Kage who suddenly headbutted him straight into Ula, knocking the two through the destroyed gate. The large cat creature swiped at the gathered soldiers and was swarmed by them. Roman turned to aid Kage, but Ula stepped in his way. There was something different about the girl. A wind rose around her, a vortex of spiritual energy. Her eyes held rage, loss, and determination.

“NO! You shall pay for the deaths of my friends! You shall die this day!”

Kage turned and crossed the threshold of the gate and brought it down on the pursuing soldiers. Ula moving as quick as lightning turned and drove her sword into Kage's heart. She then turned and slung the blood off her blade and resheathed her sword, taking up a stance. “Now you know a fraction of the pain and anger that I do, thanks to you. Fight me! I shall join my friends or I shall avenge their deaths!”

“Kage!” Roman watched Kage's body fall limp to the ground and was prevented from moving to his friend by Ula. She was a storm of chaotic emotions, her spiritual force was different. Roman could see beside her the ghosts of her fallen friends. She had become a focal point for them, they channeled their energy into her. Roman had been able to defeat them each separately, but now they combined their styles, their energy, and they unlocked in Ula her latent energy.

Roman charged her, but she drew her sword so fast, lightning arced off her blade and the air between them seemed to pull at Roman. He nearly lost his grip on his sword as her sword deflected his.

“You have so many emotions boiling over. If you tempered them as I do mine, you could be as great as me. This may be my last battle. I guess the reaper has finally caught up to me. What do you say, girl? Shall we give death one last dance?” Roman smiled and swung his sword about and the sound of metal clanging echoed off the walls.

Donhal stood there panting his left shoulder shifting back into the socket.

“You know that fire you shot at me, really hurt. I really really hate fire.”

Janyru laughed and was about to retort when he noticed something odd about Donhal. At first, he couldn't place it, then he realized the man had no shadow.

A blade pierced his back and he looked behind himself seeing a shadowy form wielding two scimitars.

“Oh my shadow, yes well I was taught shadow magic by this traveling gypsy queen once and well its a boring story, but I don't think you have the time for it.”

Janyru fell to the ground dead. Donhal saw the king and some of his men moving along the parapets to the western gates. He wondered what was going on? He also saw a commotion between two sword wielding individuals that made him realize the sixth gate had fallen. He saw a figure standing eight feet tall at least marching through the distant gates.

Donhal ran past the fighters and through the gate to get a better look. The figure had horns and was draped in jewelry and gossamer thin silks. The man entered the square across from Donhal.

“The name is Donhal Ashbane, and I-” before Donhal could finish his

sentence the figure appeared before Donhal. The tall figure's fist was surrounded by a miasma of white translucent light. His fist hit Donhal in the chest and the pirate captain exploded into tiny bits. Lilorean turned from her fight with the Duke and ran towards where Donhal once was. Whatever was left of him rained down? There was barely anything left.

"No!" The figure that had just disintegrated her husband punched her in the chest sending her flying up in the air over the walls she soared. Into the clouds and then she drifted into the cold silence of space. She looked down in horror at the power she just encountered.

Midean lowered his fist and stepped onto the broken shards of the wooden gate that represented the sixth barrier.

He looked up at the castle in the distance.

Morgan vs. Priestess Summer and Autumn Miram, and King Kang

The King ran up and took his daughter Lana up in his arms, he hugged her tight.

"We got word that your transport crashed. I feared you lost to me, child. My sweet little girl, you have returned."

"Father!" it was the voice of the prince as joined his father and sister.

"The sixth gate has fallen to the south. We should flee the city together! I...I saw him hit someone they disappeared into the clouds." The prince seemed dazed as though he were drunk.

"Take your sister to the secret tunnels. Flee the city, I shall buy you time to escape."

"No father! I want to stay and fight beside you" stated Prince Lucas.

"Ha, any other day, any other enemy and I would be proud to have you fight beside me. This foe is like nothing Atlantica has ever faced. I fear it is led by the dark one that the old prophecies spoke of."

"You should really bury your dead outside the city walls. A catacomb full of dead bodies is the perfect place for someone with necromantic powers to summon an army." The voice came from Morgan who has infiltrated the city with the others. She knelt down and touched the cobbled stones, a pulse of black and purple energy rippled across the ground.

One of the knights with the king shot a crossbow bolt at Morgan, it halted in the air before her. She stood up and smiled as rings of purple energy circled her eyes.

A guitar chord echoed across the walls. A figure stood atop a parapet behind

Morgan, a black guitar with a skull painted on it was in his hands. The figure was dressed in a black outfit with a flat brimmed hat that had tiny cloth balls dangling around its edges. He too had a skull painted on his face and eyes as cold and lifeless as stone.

He began to play his guitar and sang with a voice deep and troubled.

"There is a darkness that has a power. It pierces, blood dripping, blooming like a flower. Your demons they claw and climb. When you hear my song, know that it's your time. The sands they fall one by one. Death by my hands can never be undone."

A wave of sound energy shot out at the king and his knights. They fell back, their armor clattering on the stones.

"When my ballad is done. You shall all be gone."

A group of crossbowmen fired from another parapet and the mysterious bard was caught off guard. He fell from the parapet pincushioned with crossbow bolts.

One of the crossbowmen yelled, "Shut yer trap. No one likes mimes!"

A calamity arose at the nearby temple. Summer and Autumn Miram came running out of the temple with a few acolytes and citizens. Behind them came the former king of Atlantica, Mordred as the citizens came to call him.

The large black skeletal figure of the dead king looked over seeing the current king and shouted, "Usurper!"

"You have ruined this city!" Mordred said as he walked towards the king and his knights. Skeletons and zombies poured out of the temple from the crypts below.

"You were leading pogroms in the streets in the name of your god. I had to stop you or there would have been no one left! They were calling you the mad king!" shouted back King Kang.

Mordred: "I was saving their souls! You and your pagan beliefs were corrupting this land. You think you are the king, but a king can not rule without the will and the grace of God!"

Kang: "A king should kneel before only the will of the people. And even then only if the purpose is great and just. It should improve the life of the kingdom and its people."

Mordred laughs

Mordred: "Such noble platitudes, I'm sure the philosophers enjoy your rule. The people, however, are agents of chaos. They need the light of God to guide them. Godless they are nothing more than buffoonish, degenerates, and damned souls!"

Kang: "No. You're wrong. You underestimate what the people are capable of. They know right and wrong. You, however, hid behind the pretense of righteous in order to murder."

Mordred: "Enough! I have come back to reclaim my kingdom. This time you shall be the one lying dead in the crypts."

The two groups clashed as Morgan bombarded a group of knights with necrotic bolts. They held up their shields and moved slowly towards her.

Roman's spirit aura encased him, it flowed over him basking him in its glow. It cascaded down his body and turned to white fog as it touched the ground. The dust of the cobbled streets twirled about caught in the vortex created by his aura. Ula was much the same, expect her aura arced lightning, it touched the ground and continued to flow as though it were anchoring her in place. Bolts of electricity shot from her sword and caressed the ground leaving black smudges where it touched.

The two of them flew at one another and seemed to repulse each other as their weapons clashed. They parted and flew back landing on the cobbled stones, staring each other down. Median walked past them, giving them no attention.

Kyrren threw a punch at the Duke sending the armored figure back into a building that then crumbled atop him. The rubble moved, but armored Tuatha was trapped for the time being. Kyrren turned to see Median approaching. He charged him and threw another punch that seemed to meet with some form of resistance. Median swatted Kyrren with the back of his hand, sending the monk flying into a cart that broke beneath him.

Kyrren stood up and then doubled over as cracks spread across his chest. "I..I am as...hard as the jade...mountain" he coughed up small rivulets of blood that splattered onto the dusty, cobbled stones of the street. He looked up at the lemon yellow sky and the orange clouds that drifted in it. "I am...unmovable.."

He stood and blocked Median's path. This caused Median to turn his head to the side with curious interest at the monk. Median walked up and threw his own punch at Kyrren. The monk caught the punch, his finger creaking, his palm dripping blood. Median simply looked at his fist being held in Kyrren's palm. He looked at Kyrren and arched an eyebrow.

Median: "Very well then, you have brought this suffering upon yourself."

Kyrren felt a presence enter his mind. Median vanished as did the entire city around him. He stood before the gate of the West and watched as the twin pillars that sat opposite each other at the gate between them. The pillars toppled crashing down onto the two monasteries that were beneath them. The jade mountain crumbled and the opal lake splashed and was buried beneath the rubble.

He saw the bodies of his fellow monks crucified along the road entering Western Ayenee. They had been badly beaten, even the children that lived at the monasteries were there. He fell to his knees and the world around him grew dark, the only thing lighting it was flames from the burning forests and villages. The only sounds were the screams of the dying. Ash rained down from the sky and an overwhelming sense of sorrow and anger gripped Kyrren's heart. The children he had sworn to protect were dead. His fellow monks were dead. Meila was dead.

He shouted at the top of his lungs until his throat was shredded and soar. His eyes let loose tears that fell as heavy as rain from the darkening sky.

Median walked past the monk that knelt down on the cobbled street punching his bloody fist into the stones, lost in his own worse nightmare.

He continued towards the castle.

Roman ran towards Ula, their sword met, sparks shot off them the two began fighting with every last ounce of energy left. The swords clanged so loud that many Atlanticans thought they were the sounds of bells. Every attack Roman threw at Ula she was able to parry or deflect. Since her spiritual warrior spirit had awakened she was able to move as swiftly at Roman, strike just as hard and withstand just as much. Roman's sword chipped and he shot back sliding across the cobblestone. Ula was already on him again, unrelenting in her attacks now. Every attack had the pure undying flame of rage behind it.

Roman struck with all his might, his sword broke in two. The broken half he still gripped stabbed into Ula's chest, while the other piece lodged into her neck. Ula's sword cut down breaking Roman's collar bone. The two slumped down to their knees, locked in an embrace of death as their forms fell together, each other's head resting on the other's shoulder.

Roman looked off into the distance, a tear falling from his eye leaving a trail on his dust-covered face. He could see his father sitting by the babbling stream near their home.

Father: "You have to be the best son, strive every day to be that."

Roman: "What if I can't be the best father? What if I try my best and it fails?"

Father: "Then someone better than you will win. You can't think like that or you have already lost."

Roman: "I want to be the best like you father!"

His father laughed and in that smile Roman felt safe, he felt loved. He remembered that same face that held his father's smile. The face now covered in blood and staring blankly at his son, still wearing that warm smile. His father had finally been defeated by a challenger to his title of the greatest swordsman.

Roman had run to his father's side, tugged on his tunic trying to wake him from death's eternal slumber. He could barely make out his father's face

through the blurry salinity that clouded his eyes.

Years later on a stormy night, he had kicked open the door of a tavern and challenged the man that slew his father. He had killed the man in one single blow. Roman had been the strongest, fueled by his tragedy, he pushed himself harder every time he fought. Now he was taking his last breathes here in the dusty streets of Atlantica. Beside an opponent that had been equally driven by loss, a loss that was his fault. He gave one last chuckled and said, "Karma's a bitch..." he slumped over and the two combatants now lay dead in the street.

Morgan felt a pang in her heart at the death of her friend Roman.

"Go be with your family Roman. I'll light a candle for you." She wiped away a single tear and shook her head clearing the momentary emotion.

"I'll raise a legion of death to drown this city!" She knelt down and touched the ground sending out her energy deep down to the necropolis below. The streets began to pulse and give birth to the dead.

A huge mass grave that had been created during a long-forgotten plague came to life. The bones binding together in a giant humanoid form that crashed through the layers of the crypts. A sinkhole appeared near the temple, a giant bone golem rising up from the ground like a demon from the pits of the abyss.

Morgan felt a bit light headed as she looked on the Knights. She sent out a bolt of black lightning that rusted their shields as it touched them. The Knights now exposed were easy targets for her spell. Their blood boiled and their skin blistered and peeled, red steam poured from their wounds.

She was hit by a whip of holy energy sending waves of pain down the left side of her body. She looked up and saw Summer casting a spell of protection on her paladin sister Autumn. Autumn held a whip of holy energy manifested by her faith.

Morgan howled like a banshee as she brought her hands up sending out a shower of dark energy at the two sisters. She commanded the undead turning the giant and a group of skeletal archers on them.

"I hate priests and paladins!" Morgan brought her hands down and touched the ground. An onyx fist broke through the ground beneath the two and sent them flying in separate directions.

"I'll peel the flesh from your bones!" Morgan's next spell lashed out at Summer. It left rents in the fallen sister's dress and bleeding gashes along her back. She screamed out as tears fell down her face.

Autumn faired better in her paladin issued armor. She picked herself up off the cobblestones and tried to come to the aid of her sister. Before she could get completely to her feet a massive hand consisting a consolidation of

bones gripped her up like a doll lifting her up into the sky.

Her sword began to glow with holy fire, she thrust it up into the collection of bones. One by one they began to disintegrate into ash. The giant seemed to let loose a groan of agony as it opened its hand and dropped her. She fell a good fourteen feet down onto the hard stone, her body ached, her head rang. She crawled on the ground.

Autumn: " Oooh why did I do that? Should have thought that through a bit better."

She turned in time to see the monstrosity raise its hand. She knew what was about to come, she reached for her sword. Suddenly a loud boom echoed in the sky above. She looked up and a star seemed to descend down from the evening sky. Something came crashing down through the head of the bone giant. It shot through the creature, exiting somewhere below the ground. The thing knitted itself back together and emerged from the catacombs. It stood at least 30ft tall. Its foot quickly came forward kicking Autumn back, she skidded across the stones, her armor sparking against them.

A metal female jumped from the pits below and landed on the back of the giant. She began climbing the network of bones, but the giant felt her on its back. It reached back and tore her off and then tossed her somewhere into the town districts. Autumn had enough time to recover and run over to her sword. She brought it up and holy flame veiled the sword. The creature's hand came down but reared back as it was pierced by her sword's fire.

The King was battling off Mordred and a group of skeletal knights. Her sister had a barrier up trying to shield another attack from Morgan. She had to hurry if she wasted time fighting with this giant, one of them might die before she could help them.

Morgan: " Oh you think your little shield gives you protection?"

Morgan's next spell hit the ground beneath Summer and the stones sizzled, then began to melt into burning red liquid. As Summer's feet hissed in the molten rock she jumped and screamed. She fell back and was sending her holy energy out to heal her feet when Morgan finished another spell.

A metal female came down in front of Summer, the spell simply broke up over the titan metal.

"Oh sorry am I interrupting?" Lilorean walked towards Morgan. Morgan threw two spells at Lilorean, but they merely washed over her metal skin and did absolutely nothing.

Lilorean was about punch Morgan when she was swatted away by the gone giant. Skeletal archers fired arrows at Summer who raised another magical shield up, but as she blocked the arrows she was vulnerable to Morgan's spells. One spell hit her and every wound she had ever endured occurred once more. She bled from various small cuts and sores, bones that were broken as a child were again broken. She felt she were near faint as her system went into shock.

Morgan was getting ready to cast another spell when she heard a strange noise. Something sliding across the ground knocked her feet out from under her. She fell back, her head hitting the ground. Lights flashed before her vision.

Autumn ran over to her sister and a golden light shone from her hands as she knelt by her side. It glowed brightly over her, everywhere it touched her wounds mended.

The Ebonwind landed in Atlantica, Lilorean boarded it and took over the helm. The ship flew towards the giant and let loose a volley of ice, fire, and lightning at it. It seemed to howl in anger as the ship turned to attack once more. The giant threw something up at the ship, but the flying craft easily avoided it. Another barrage came down and the giant's head exploded, but again began to rebuild.

The ship came low and a rope ladder fell down to the two sisters. They grabbed hold and were hoisted up onto the ship.

"That fire you covered your sword in? Can you do that again?" Lilorean asked.

"Yes", she replied preparing to channel her faith in the light into her weapon.

"Okay good, can you do that while jumping off the ship?"

Her faith faltered for a moment, "Uhm...what?!"

"Good enough get ready on three jump from the prow of the ship and try to aim downward...1.....2.....3"

Autumn jumped from the prow and could see the writing mass of bones beneath her. She suddenly understood now. Her sword blazed brightly she became a spear of light in the growing darkness. The bone giant opened what could be considered its mouth, she slid down its gullet, burning away the evil that animated it.

The creature exploded in a cloud of ash and dust. She kneeled on the street as the cloud circled about her. She was suddenly hit by a blast of dark energy sending her onto her back as her life force felt drained. She was too weak to lift her head, she looked up at the dark sky, the bright stars. A voice brought her back to the here and now.

"Well miss paladin. You defeated my bone giant, but you haven't defeated my army of the dead, or me! I will delight in draining the life from you. Paladins always taste so sweet."

Something flew towards her, but she couldn't see it. Autumn summoned the remaining light within her and created a shield. The dark energy dispersed against the shield as Autumn began to bring herself up.

"I may be down, but I am not defeated. Now, witch, you are going to feel the light kicking your ass!"

Morgan laughed and then pointed to the king who had been impaled on Mordred's sword. "It's me or him"

Autumn cursed and ran towards the king and Mordred. Skeletal archers fired, two black quarrels jutted from Autumn's back. She ignored the pain and brought her sword down on Mordred's arm cutting it off. She then pushed her gauntleted hand into the skeleton king's rib cage and recited the light's chant.

"Blessed be the light. Bathe my enemies in its warmth. Wash away their anger, their pain, and their sadness. Ease their troubled minds and hearts. Let them behold the light! Behold salvation!"

Mordred turned and saw rays of light filtering down in the darkness of night. The golden light shone down on the armored paladin. Her armor reflected its brilliance. Suddenly a vortex of light particles circled about her arm and Mordred's form was blasted by the light. As the light faded the skeleton king was no more. More arrows shot into Autumn, one in her leg and another into the side of her right hip.

Morgan stood amongst the skeletal archers laughing.

The airships overhead blasted beams of light down incinerating the vampires in Median's armies. The scene was surreal, many of Atlantica's citizens questioned if they would survive this?

Morgan could see Summer was up and moving again. "I'll send your sister to the grave before you paladin. I imagine you will want some company."

She began to summon mana to her preparing a very powerful.

"There will be nothing left of you after this!" She waved her hands before herself weaving them and then releasing the energy at Summer. A metal form fell from the sky in front of Summer with a bright metal shield. Morgan's spell hit the shield and seemed to be held by it before being sent back to her. She let out a scream as her flesh was torn from her. She lifted up in the air, black shadowy wings emerging from her back. Her skinless form was carried by the shadow wings into the distance, never to be seen again.

Median vs. The Prince of Atlantica Lucas and The Princess of Atlantica Lana

Median strode past the scattered bones and looked at the blood covered streets, bodies and debris littered the inner sanctum of Atlantica's capital. He walked past a massive hole in the center of a city square, the cobblestone streets bent towards the bottomless pit. He walked past the king who lay grasping his bleeding side. He knelt and picked up the crown and continued to walk towards the castle. Those gathered either were too

busy healing the wounded or had seen Median's strength and had no wish to die.

Lucas: "This way! The hidden tunnels are within the castle. Father wanted us to escape and we will honor his wish."

Lana: "You talk of him as though he were already dead. Have you already consigned all of us to defeat?"

Lucas: "No one has assaulted our kingdom like this ever! I personally have never seen such powerful foes ever in my life."

Lana: "I have. I also defeated that foe and saved a village. I didn't think I could. I simply knew that if I didn't fight, if I didn't try then those people would die."

Lucas: "What kind of nonsense are you talking about sister?"

Lana: "I have powers. I have had them for years, but they never really...well they were never like this before. It's as if they have increased in power and my body has accessed hidden knowledge on how to use them. I can't fully explain it."

Lucas looked at the rows of trees and the well-kept garden that lined the way to the castle. He furled his brows and turned to his sister.

Lucas: " I don't pretend to understand what you are talking about. I mean I know you had something about it. I can't see how it affects us and why we should not continue to the hidden tunnels? I don't want to sound like I doubt you, but even so, I don't think you alone can stand against what is coming."

As if on cue, the gate behind shattered into thousands of tiny pieces. Through the falling wooden pieces strode a tall figure, a giant, horns atop his head, flowing silk barely covering his body. He was adorned in jewels, in his left hand he held their father's crown.

Shouts came from the castle staff as they peered from the windows down at the courtyard. A rain of arrows came from the air like falling rain. They were like leaves upon a statue of this figure. Median's eyes turned to the archers atop the castle parapets and balconies. They one by one began to fling themselves down. Many died due to the height or angle at which they fell. The others simply broke bones and received internal injuries and either laid unconscious or groaned in pain.

A fireball came down like a comet from a tower of the castle. It hit Median directly, the force of the blast sent the deposited arrows flying outward from where Median stood. The ground, arrows, and walls around Median were scorched. When the fire died down, the imposing form of Median still stood, arms crossed before him. He slowly lowered his arms and brought up his right hand and shook his finger and head admonishing the mage's foolishness. A portal opened behind Median. A vortex pulled at him, trying to

wrench him from where he stood. He slowly leaned forward and began to walk against the magical pull, while various debris flew past or bounced off his form and disappeared in the portal. The royal siblings had their arms wrapped around a tree and still struggled against the pull.

Soldier: "I prince and princess are in the courtyard! Stop your spell before you kill them both!"

Median overheard the soldier shouting at the mage. His head slowly turned towards the pair as if only just noticing their presence. The portal behind Median began to shrink until it vanished completely.

Lucas drew his sword and said, "Run Lana! I'll try my best to distract him long enough for you to escape. One of us has to live." Lucas took up an avant-garde stance.

Median exhaled stultify and walked towards the prince, tossing the crown to the side.

Median: " You think a sword will triumph where arrows and magic failed? You are a jester, not a prince. If you are attempting to kill me with boredom however then, I applaud your effort and I stand amazed at how you effortlessly carry out such a plan. You are an insect standing before a god!" Median sent out a mental wave of force and caused the prince to fly back on the dark green grass.

Lana: "Lucas!"

Her shout drew Median's attention, he laughed.

Lucas stood up and looked to Median. It was in this moment he knew that he would not walk away from this battle. He looked at the crown that lay on the grass. The moonlight fell on the courtyard in such a way that it glinted off the crown. He then looked to his sister and everything seemed to suddenly move in slow motion, even him. Lana's shouts sounded as though they were from a great distance. He reached down and picked up his sword and rose up, charging at Median. Their eyes met and he watched as Median's head slowly turned to focus on the prince. The sword pressed against Median's chest but did not pierce the skin. Median looked down and his eyes seemed to look through Lucas. Lucas felt his mind grow cloudy as something pressed into his thoughts, he could barely think.

Median smiled.

Median: "Kill your sister" he stated plainly.

Lucas felt himself turn as he looked to his sister, her face seemed confused. He approached her, even though he did not tell him legs to move. He realized he was no longer in control of his body. A voice in his head repeated Median's command. Fear struck Lucas as he realized that voice was his own. He felt another presence in his head, one familiar, but different. It was him, but not him.

Lana: " Lucas? Lucas, what are you doing?"

The mage that had fired the two spells at Median suddenly appeared in the courtyard.

Mage: " Princess your brother is now under the control of this monster! Take my hand and we shall leave this place! Hurry!"

Lana: " No! I won't leave my brother like this! Lucas snap out of it! I know you don't want to do this so just fight it!"

Lucas: " Why would I fight it? I want to kill you. Median has told me to kill you and I want to obey his command."

She raised her hands up and tried to command the light energy she had used to defeat the dragon knight. She willed it to stop her brother, but not harm him, to undo whatever had been done. Golden energy shot from her hands and hit Lucas in the chest and sent him flying back. He hit the wall and fell slumping.

Median: " Lucas rise, you have not done as I have told you! Now kill your sister, or I shall make her suffer a thousand deaths while you watch!"

Lucas's head bobbed and he began to wobbly rise back to his feet. He came running at Lana his sword raised. The mage stepped in front of her and put up a shield blocked Lucas's blow. Lucas beat against the mage's magical shield. Median walked over to a bench and wiped it off with his hand, he sat down and crossed his legs and arms as he watched the spectacle playing out before him.

Median: " Kill the mage as well, I am bored of his meddling."

Lucas moved around the barrier causing the mage to have to turn with him. Lucas threw himself against the barrier again.

Mage: " You know you can't kill me right Lucas? I mean I can keep this barrier up all day, you have no way of getting through it. Seriously princess let us leave this place while we still can!"

Lucas pressed against the barrier, he could feel himself giving everything he could. In his head, he knew he wanted nothing more than to get beyond the barrier to the mage and his sister.

Median yawned and waved his hand. The mage flew to the wall and fell in a heap at its base.

Lucas looked to Lana and smiled.

Lana threw up her hands and her brother froze in place. He struggled against seemingly invisible bonds. "What is happening I can't move?"

Median tilted his head.

Lucas continued to try and resist whatever his sister had done. Median now stood and walked over where the siblings were.

Median: "Fine, I will kill you both myself"

Median looked down at the princess, she felt something trying to enter her thoughts. She pushed back against it, not knowing how, but knowing that whatever it did not belong. Median furled his brows and looked more intensely. Her mind was again assaulted by the strange presence. She watched as the scene around her faded into the nightmare that had plagued her nights recently.

Lucas watched as his sister's face became worried and fearful. He fought against the darkness awakened in him and like two snakes they coiled about one another. Lucas fought with all his being, he would not let his sister die like this. He had to save her.

From the seventh gate district, Lilorean finished healing the king, when a noise came from the sixth gate. Donhal stood naked as a babe and moving sluggishly.

Donhal: " I don't want to ever, ever, have that happen to me again!"

Lilorean raced over to Donhal and wrapped her arms around him. He groaned and reminded her that she was made of metal and that she might have broken a few of his recently mended bones.

Lilorean: "I thought you were dead! Like for real dead."

Donhal smiled and waved a hand dismissing the idea.

Donhal: " I'm cursed, and I could really use some clothes." He didn't want to tell her that he was dead for a longer period of time than he had ever been dead before. He had reached the shores of the realm of the dead and had stood among all the dead of Atlantica as they moved along to their resting places. His body slowly rebuilding itself as what was left of him globbed together bit by bit. He saw so many dead, all because of Median. He had talked with one of Median's soldiers, a man named Roman. He had told Donhal about at ring that prevented Median from being damaged. Donhal turned the time egg over in his hand and formulated a plan.

The group was suddenly disrupted again by another arrival. The queen of Pacifika, looking haggard. She noticed her brother upon the ground and hobbled over to him. The king stood and they met in an embrace.

King: "My dear sister, I had thought you dead."

Elaine: "Death might have been a better fate than what I have suffered. Watching my people die, my kingdom fall, and being compelled to do things..." She pushed the thoughts from her head.

Donhal having taken some clothes from a nearby by laundry now strode over to the king, Elaine, Summer, and Autumn alongside Lilorean.

Donhal: " I have a plan to defeat this demon that has set its eyes on your kingdom. Before I suggest it, I would like you, if you can, call off whatever it is you are doing with my spare mana generator."

The king looked at him confused, "What is a mana generator?"

Donhal explained it to him and how his soldiers had come aboard his ship and took it. The king had no knowledge of this, however.

Donhal: "Damn, it could be anywhere. Anyway, I have a plan, I just need you all to distract Median while I make him vulnerable."

He began to explain his plan even further as those gathered tried to explain how impossible it would be to distract someone that can kill them with a single hit or control them from a single look. Donhal explained to him as he snapped his fingers in the air, that they have an airship. The Ebonwind having been summoned by the snap of Donhal's finger came gracefully gliding down. It hovered in the air over Donhal who smiled contently.

Lilorean: " I'll pilot the ship and give Median a good show to look at."

Donhal: "That's my girl! The rest of you stay hidden but close. Once his invulnerability is gone, he will have to focus on protecting himself. That's when we all hit him with everything we got."

Donhal used the time egg to slow the flow of time around him. He then used his shadow magic to move through the shadows to come directly out of Median's own shadow. Median was suddenly bombarded by an array of spells fired from the cannons of the Ebonwind.

Median turned and looked up at the night sky. He raised his right hand at the ship, he channeled his anger.

Donhal made his move grabbing the ring with his own shadow from Median's left hand. The shadowy hand dropped the ring into Donhal's hand and he smiled. The smile fell as he watched his ship explode in a blast so powerful that the clouds were pushed back in the sky around it. A silvery shape fell from the wreckage towards the earth below.

Donhal put on the ring and just in time. Median turned noticing the pirate captain.

Median: "Amusing. I thought I already killed you. No matter, I will enjoy killing you again." He bent slightly and hit Donhal with an uppercut that sent the captain soaring through the air. Donhal was surprised that he was still alive and unharmed. Still, he soared through the air before falling from the sky.

The king's crossbow men fired sending bolts through the air at Median. He was pelted with the quarrels this time they punctured his form. Median was shocked by the fact he could be touched. He picked the bolts from his flesh

angrily, the wounds healing as they foreign object was removed from the wound. Summer sent a flash of light that blinded Median, while Autumn summoned for a hammer made of holy light the size of a cart. It swung at Median and hit him sending him falling to the grass. Elaine ran out and began stabbing Median with an iron dagger, which caused him to scream in pain. He lifted a hand and sent her flying back just as the king stabbed Median in the hip with an iron sword. The tip of the sword broke off as Median turned and backhanded the king, killing him and flinging his body aside like his sister's.

Lucas smothered the last remaining bits of the darkness Median had left within him. He was freed from his sister's spell and stood beside her telling her he was right there with her.

In her nightmare she could hear his voice, she knew now this was an illusion. She could still feel Median in her mind and now she reached out. She did not only push back against him but invaded his own mind. Median was once again a child, his father stood like a giant before him.

"You will forever live in my shadow Median! I have a great destiny and I can't be held back by you and your mother. I leave now to take my destiny. I leave you to take care of your mother. People will know you because you are my son."

Median: " I don't want to be known as your son. I want to be your son, I want you to be my father, here."

"I am not cut out for this father crap. You stay here with your mother. " As his father finished those words he turned and walked out the door shutting it behind him.

Median now stood beside his mother. She lay dying coughing and wheezing. She whispered to him, "Don't be anything like your father. He was blinded by destiny and couldn't see that he had one here with us. Don't follow in his shadow."

Median felt the pain he had as a child, the pain he had bottled up and hid away. He had long ago forgotten his mother's words. Median staggered back through the seventh gate. Tears streaming down his face, the soldiers and townspeople began to laugh at him now. As he was now, he was a sobbing fool, his aura of power and the commanding presence he once had seemed to shrink away.

Lana followed him. She threw her hands at him and sent her powers out. Median flew back and fell, he continued to fall down, down into the depths of the catacombs. He could only see his father's shadow, opening its mouth and devouring his soul.

Weapons, Relics, and Weakness

Ring of the Heavens:

Ring of Scion:

Abilities

Energy Manipulation:

Limitless Stamina:

Regeneration

Telepathy:

Psychokinesis:

Photographic Memory:

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