

THE
ELYDEN
DIRECTORY

CONTAINING ABRIGED MATERIAL
FROM THE FIVE VOLUMES OF THE
ENCYCLOPAEDIA ELYDEN
AND OTHER SOURCES

THE ELYDEN DIRECTORY

*Being a collection of histories and knowledge collected from
the lands around the Inner Sea, pertaining to the world
of Elyden and, in particular, the lands of
Llachatul and Sammaea.*

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FROM THE FIVE VOLUMES OF THE
ENCYCLOPAEDIA ELYDEN
AND OTHER SOURCES

COMPILED and REVISED
By the SCHOLAR ABZAR MILOVAK
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*At the Archpotentate Malichar's express command
(as proxied by the High Consulite of Khadon)*

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INTRODUCTION

Elyden is a dying world that exists in the waning shadow of gods that have long-since abandoned her. Her domains are slowly crumbling, succumbing to pollution and decay. Though in many places this decay is not as readily apparent, in others the natural order seems to be unravelling as the nightmares of maddened gods further unravel the world. In other regions the decay has become so commonplace that people know little different and treat it as normal. For it is normal. It is Elyden.

Seemingly ensnared by her own decadence and decay, Elyden has become a world far removed from the grandiose beauty she once evoked. Seas have begun to retreat over the past millennia, destroying harbours and sea life alike. Deserts expand, taking with them what life has managed to cling this far along Elyden's descent into madness. With this unravelling of the natural world comes the waxing of the two elemental forces known as the Firmament and the Atramenta – the two halves of creation better known as the Materia Omnia.

Her wardens, the 22 god-like Demiurges are in the twilight of their reign. Most people have forgotten who the worker-gods were and those who remember them worship them in corrupted forms. Once fortified by their subjects, the Demiurges have dwindled from memory and are weak and hidden. Many of the mortal tribes have disappeared in the wake of their guardians' languor. Without followers, the Demiurges have fallen dormant and now slumber, their dreams and nightmares transformed into tangible blights that are felt across the world as their once-followers continue in their path to oblivion, where their self-indulgences and other material pursuits blind them to the horror that befalls them. Elyden is now a place corrupted by these nightmares, where demesnes and realms unravel like rotten dreamscapes.

Those of the Demiurges who yet live do so at the whim of their followers. Bitter at their own fall, shackled by the adulations of mortal followers, they survive in a greatly diminished form to their once-divine-selves, decrepit and rotting. Those Demiurges granted the luxury of sentience and strength-enough to manipulate the world, withhold what knowledge they possess that has not become corrupted by insanity, leaving the mortal races to their own devices.

Bitter in the knowledge that the mortals were granted luxuries that they themselves squandered, most have come to detest their children the mortals, grudgingly seeking them out due to the restorative effects of their deference. Some Demiurges secretly reward those noble and hard-working mortals with minor secrets of their knowledge, though such secrets have caused more than a few men to grow insane.

Above them all, unchallenged throughout the latter millennia of the Fifth-Age has reigned a single Demiurge, sundering his siblings beneath his reign; Rachanael the Hungry, Seventh of the Demiurges, and so-called Undying Machine of Korachan. Under his dark reign was Elyden allowed to rot, the cities of the Korachani Empire spreading like a disease around the region known as the Inner Sea, raping the land, leaving it in ruins, hastening Elyden's decay. Farther abroad, distant empires and nations cling to a semblance of culture, though they too are in decline.

And amid this corruption do the remnants and descendants of the 22 mortal races struggle to survive. Some seek solace in ignorance, wanting only to survive their short stay in the world. Others however seek answers to questions unasked, searching cyclopean ruins of distant ages revealed by the rot of the world, hoping to find in their catacombs and foundations hints as to where they came from, what their purpose is. Perhaps in such ruins might they find the answer to their survival...

This is the world of Elyden, a tomb in the making, its entropic end within sight yet still, out of reach.

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THE WORLD OF ELYDEN

This is the world of Elyden. She exists in the shadow of gods that have long-since abandoned her. Her domains are slowly crumbling, succumbing to pollution and decay. The natural order unravels, though few truly know why. Seemingly ensnared by her own decadence, Elyden has become a world far removed from the beautiful realm that once was. Deserts slowly expand, pushing the boundaries of life ever farther. Seas dwindle. The sun grows dimmer in the sky. With this unravelling of the natural world comes the waxing of the two elemental forces known as the Firmament and the Atramenta – the two halves of creation.

Her wardens, the Two-and-Twenty Demiurges, are forgotten. Once sustained by mortal worship, the Demiurges have mostly fallen dormant and are weak and hidden, forgotten by most. Those who slumber are blights upon both the material landscape and the thoughts of mortals across Elyden. The bodies of these Demiurges are gigantic and fossil-like, though they are far from dead. Though their bodies may appear lifeless, thoughts yet trickle through their minds. The dreams and nightmares of these maddened gods are felt across the world as the mortals continue in their paths to oblivion and self-indulgence. Elyden is now a place corrupted by these nightmares, where small yet steadily growing demesnes fluctuate like rotten dreamscapes of impossible design.

Those Demiurges who still live do so through their own artifice or the whims of those who yet follow them. Bitter at their own fall from grace, they survive in diminished form, decrepit and feeble. They withhold the secrets that madness has not yet consumed, leaving the mortal races to reel in their ignorance. Most have come to detest the mortals, only grudgingly seeking them out due to the restorative effects of their deference. Some Demiurges secretly reward those noble and hard-working mortals who yet worship them with minor secrets in the hopes of increasing their own power.

Above them all, unchallenged throughout the latter millennia of the Fifth-Age, has reigned a single Demiurge: Rachanael the Hungry, the so-called Undying Machine. Under his selfish reign has Elyden been allowed to rot. The cities of the Korachani Empire spread like a disease around the Inner Sea, propagating his church and creating more blind followers to sustain him. Farther abroad, distant empires and nations cling to a semblance of culture, though they too are in decline.

Elyden is a land of idiosyncrasies. The art of technarcana offers marvels previously unthinkable even as the Korachani Empire fractures to corruption, making such discoveries untenable. Explorers restore contact with descendants of ancient colonies even as the seas slowly retreat, rendering old harbours and ports unusable. Natural resources dwindle, pushing the value of all objects ever higher. Ancient bloodlines - patrician families, merchant houses and royal dynasties – blind themselves to the truth and lose themselves in their last days of decadence before the world or lesser people claim them.

Amid this corruption do the remnants of the Two-and-Twenty mortal races struggle to survive. Some seek solace in ignorance. Others however seek answers to questions unasked, searching cyclopean ruins of distant ages revealed by the rot of the world, hoping to find in catacombs and foundations hints as to where they came from, what their purpose is. Perhaps in such ruins might they find the answer to their survival... or madness.

This is the world of Elyden: a tomb in the making, its end within sight, yet still out of reach.

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AN UNREMEMBERED HISTORY

Our home, our prison, our sanctuary, our cradle, our tomb. She is all these things and more, this plane we call Elyden. How can one volume hope to bring together the accumulated knowledge and learning of an entire world and five ages? Indeed, it is a thankless, endless task that not even armies of historians based in the great cities of all the known world could hope to finish.

The truth is one *cannot* hope to know even a fraction of the truth that lies buried beneath millennia of history. What you are privy to in the following pages is knowledge that even the most accomplished of loremasters cannot completely know. The wisdom in these pages comes from decades of collating the knowledge from the eldest otherborn, the most accomplished of oneiromancers and the most well-travelled of scholars. Secrets both mundane and esoteric await you.

But read carefully, for mortal minds do not easily comprehend the tragedies of the distant past. Many who have learnt such things argue that much of what is forgotten to us is best left that way. Yet our insatiable search for truth and answers drives us inexorably from our home at the death of the world to our origins following its misguided birth.

This is the unremembered history of Elyden.

THE DEMIURGES & THE CREATION OF ELYDEN

Once there were Two-and-Twenty worker gods, themselves created to shape the Material Realm into something befitting the arrival of the immortal races – the sole rightful inheritors of the Material Realm. From the Matter that congealed where the Shadow below met the Helix above, the Demiurges crafted the world of Elyden, her beauteous coastlines, fertile oceans and fecund forests. Though the Two-and-Twenty were all master artificers and shapers of worlds, each had his or her own strength or character – 22 different reflections of the same whole.

THE GREAT SHAPING

And so the Demiurges used their emotions and thoughts in shaping the Material, creating (amongst others, it is believed) the Orb of Elyden. Their creator saw what the Demiurges made and was pleased, yet its dream of Life was not yet complete. Indeed, it had only begun. There could not be life until the Material was perfected to carry such a burden. But so wondrous was the Demiurge's work that their creator sowed seven times Two-and-Twenty seeds within the skin of the newly created Elyden. These seeds would one day hatch into the immortal races – the true inheritors of Elyden.

Two-and-Twenty pods were sown, each bearing seven seeds. Each pod was a facsimile of both the creator and a

single Demiurge, in whose honour each pod was created. Thus the seeds would be the Demiurges' children; the grandchildren of the creator: the Immortals.

Yet the Demiurges did not agree on what perfection was – each had his or her vision of beauty and each had his or her own passion, not all of which sat harmlessly besides those of their siblings. And so, united in their task, yet disparate in their methods, the Demiurges continued to toil, fashioning Elyden with thoughts and dreams. And somehow, perfection was achieved.

Their task complete, the Demiurges saw what they had shaped and were pleased. And they spoke as one, 'It is done. Perfection is come to the Material. Now we wait for the Great Shaper to bring life to our love.'

And so they ceased their work, but empowered by the beauty of what they had wrought upon Elyden, the Demiurges saw not the heart to abandon their artifice. As is the manner with all works of art, the Demiurges looked upon the Material and saw imperfections. Like an artist who tinkers with a finished masterpiece for too long, the Demiurges could not let go.

Each toiled to shape Elyden into a place of personal perfection and together they spoilt what they had already achieved. This created a discord within the Material that would forevermore mar the face of Elyden. This new Elyden became a discordant place, a dichotomous land where

beauty might bring pain, where life may come from death, where despair may lead to love.

So it was that Elyden was created, world of Light and Darkness and in that light and darkness, spurred on by the discord, the Seeds of Dawn hatched before their time, bringing Fourth premature creatures into a world unready for them.

Elyden was then not as she is now – the mountains, oceans and skies of today are merely the desiccated fossils of what the Demiurges originally wrought. In her nascent imperfect form Elyden was a place of chaos that the immortals' embryonic senses could not hope to comprehend. It would take aeons for her beauty to distil into a form appreciable to the senses of those poor beings forced into life prematurely.

BY HUBRIS BORN

The immortals, though sown by greater hands, were given life through the hubris of the Demiurges, who were themselves not entirely divine. But like a babe ejected prematurely from its mother's womb, unable to comprehend the world it was brought into, the immortals could not understand the world around them, nor could they understand themselves. Despairing, their minds aflame with sensations that should never be felt, the immortals became hollow shells next to the perfect forms they should have been.

And thus the immortals were created, through the unthinking actions of the Demiurges. They were immortal in nought but name, indeed they were mortal.

The Demiurges were punished for their hubris and were sent down to Elyden to continue shaping the Material Realm into something more habitable to the poor mortals, who became their wards. Consigned to the Material Realm they found their greatest powers of shaping dwindled, though their dreams and emotions yet held the power to shape the world. Unwillingly they became the leaders of the mortal tribes and slowly led their charges along the path that suited each the best. Some Demiurges learnt to adapt to this new life better than others. Still some revelled in the glow of true life and the joys of experiencing things as mortals. Most, however, were greatly pained by what had come to pass. A few were consumed by despair. Yet all mourned their sundering from their creator.

Many amongst them came to be worshipped as living gods, and it was there, in the false glow of their followers, that they felt their strength return. Slowly the Demiurges abandoned the memory of their creator. In their punishment they had been martyred, with the mortals mistakenly looking upon them as their true creators.

The Demiurges were still driven by their creator's command to shape the Material, and they continued in

their work while leading their tribes. Though their powers of craft were greatly diminished with their fall, they were still Demiurges and it was no wonder the mortals looked upon them as gods, for their abilities were still great. Their tribes grew to reflect the Demiurge's individual emotions and grew disparate from one another as their beliefs grew more dissimilar.

And so, the Demiurges grew separately and differently from one another, each coming to embody his own feelings, his own tribe mirroring his attitude and demeanour. The secrets of the Atramenta and Firmament were carefully disseminated amongst the mortals. This restored some of their strength, but they were still weak simulacra of their former selves. Now that they lived in Elyden, the Demiurges learnt quickly that their power waxed and waned with that of their followers and the years following the Demiurges' banishment were characterised by an incessant growth.

The Demiurges shaped their tribal lands to better suit the needs of their charges and promoted growth and aggression. Centuries of trade and expansion, of religious wars and conversion, of conflict and alliances followed and the Demiurges themselves waxed and waned alongside their children.

THE GREAT SUNDERING

Millennia passed and the Demiurges ignored their creator, and the mortal races remained ignorant as to fact the beings they worshipped as gods were the reason for their tragic creation and imperfections. The creator slowly waned and eventually disappeared altogether.

The Demiurges felt this withdrawal like a man sundered from his loved one. From that moment on, the divine spark that had created them was extinguished forever. They remained Demiurges, and yet they were not.

Immediately, they felt shamed by what they had done, weak and foolish at the selfishness of their inaction. Some of the Demiurges became wholly insular, falling prey to dark thoughts their own actions begot; while others strove to rekindle the rotted link with their father. This created a great schism between the siblings, who had otherwise lived together without great quarrel. Some realised that in order to survive, the tribes needed to unite, while others, bitter at their fate, forgot the world and their duties and began plotting against the rest of Elyden and creating cruel incantations and hexes to secure yet more strength. Others fell into the deepest of despondency at their abandonment.

This propagated a long waning of the Demiurges. Generations of mortals came and went, dynasties rose and fell, empires flourished, struggled and died. In these epochs the mortals grew distant from their despairing parents who only continued to grow weak. Though in many regions they

continued to be worshipped as deities, most cults were weak corruptions of the original faiths and the fervour with which they were once revered had lessened.

Over the years individual Demiurges or short-lived alliances amongst the siblings might have gained superiority but it was never to last, and ever victory was followed by millennia of waning.

A DIVINITY IN DECLINE

Time passed and as the Demiurges continued to live in the shadow of their divinity, they came to realise that they were truly mortal.

With discovery of their mortality, most Demiurges lost interest in their charges and abandoned them before death done the same. Of course, the Demiurges still drew strength from what worshippers remained, misguided as they were.

The Demiurges and mortals may have abandoned each other, but the Legacy of the Two-and-Twenty was not gone. In their mortal forms the Demiurges had unions with their worshippers, creating powerful scions whose blood teemed with the power of the Demiurges. This blood thinned with each passing generation, but the signs remained – not in physical disparity, but the power of Shaping. Though the Demiurges had been stripped of their powers to shape, their progeny was not in such a way cursed.

In the absence of the Demiurges these scions became leaders and spiritual figures, holding together what they could of their tribes. But in time the tribes fragmented. The memory of their divine leaders was great and as their adulation of them simmered down into little more than memory, the tribes no longer remained Two-and-Twenty.

The golden age of mortals came to an end with the abandonment of the Demiurges. Nations merged, others separated and the memory of the Two-and-Twenty tribes of mortals left myth and fable, remaining only in the minds of the wisest of sages and those Demiurges still alive who cared to remember such things.

Like the tribes, memory of the Demiurges passed from memory into myth, and myth into obscurity. And as the number and size of tribes continued to warp, the Demiurges were truly forgotten. The scions of their bloodline became no more than petty kings and lords. Knowledge of the Firmament and the Atramenta corrupted over time, and people came to revere the spirits of the fallen. Others maintained half-true memories of the Demiurges and came to worship them as a pantheon of distant deities, similar in little but effect, with different names and guises in different nations. Others forsook all notion of a higher power and worshipped little more than life itself. Still others, voracious to discover the hidden truths that lay buried in soil and

time, became servants to lore and uncovered scattered details of the Demiurges and the tribes of old.

ANCIENT MONUMENTS

During their ascendancy the Demiurges shaped not only the natural landscape of Elyden, but they also constructed great edifices and monuments to their own glory. Even now, so many millennia after their erection, many of these cyclopean monuments survive. Overgrown and weathered, yet still glorious and echoing the true strength and majesty the Demiurges once evoked.

Those who come across such wondrous structures cannot help but marvel at the raw scale of their construction. Towers miles high constructed of a singular block of glass-like substance none can identify. Temples carved into the sides of entire mountain-ranges. Archaic machines, mostly now fossilised or calcified beyond repair.

Perhaps most renowned of these feats of the Demiurge's will made manifest is the Prison Carceri, a vast network of caverns and dungeons that is believed to span the entire world. The vast mountain of the Varrachon is said to have been created from the waste debris of Carceri's construction. The region is baneful, with the air above the few openings into the world above fetid. Those few who have visited its depths have returned with their minds twisted, babbling about never-ending rooms, the glow of Elyden's heart illuminating every chamber, nonsensical architecture and grotesque characters.

A LIFE IN DREAMS

Though the names of the Demiurges remain in the roots and etymologies of hundreds of false gods and geographical features, few are those who can name them and their exploits. Most are now dead and forgotten and the few who millennia of mistaken transcriptions have not fully corrupted survive only as languid shells, and they are only capable of shaping the world through their dreams, willing or otherwise. The places close to the tombs of these ancient fossilised Demiurges are unholy places, mutable as a dream and inimically dangerous to mortals – the fabled Dreamscapes.

And it is through dreams that the greatest of the Demiurges' powers are made manifest. Their dreams disseminate what remains of their powers of shaping and it is through dreams that they communicate with mortals. To be touched by a Demiurge's dreams is no honour, and few who are so-chosen remain fully sane. Worst are those whose dreams become so embroiled in those of the Demiurges that their bodies become inert and they survive only in the nightmarish visions of the Demiurges' own dreamscapes. Some think that the physical dreamscapes

surrounding the Demiurges tombs can act as gateways into the dreams of mortals around Elyden, though few forays through those somnambular gates end well.

Though the age of the Demiurges has long since passed, echoes of their reign remain and some can still be heard whispering their names and exploits. Resurrected cults of long-forsaken Demiurges may yet return in the catacombs beneath cities, where devotees whisper prayers to unknown

entities they cannot hope to understand. The descendants of the Demiurges may yet be seen across the length and breadth of Elyden in the form of Scions though few may know the true horrors of their genealogy.

To those whose roots lie around the Inner Sea there is always the Undying Machine – that ever-present facet of the Demiurge Rachanael, whose reminds the wise that it is only circumstance that keeps a god dead or alive in Elyden.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE MORTAL RACES

The truth behind the mortal races lies in a distant time that none now can recall. No written records date back to such times and the only recourse we have is to the uncertainties that the supranatural arts may glean from the otherworld and other clues that science can never verify. Different regions have their own creation myths that people follow without thought, though even disparate cultures divided by a thousand years and miles often share similar stories. It is through these similar stories that we may find a source closest to the truth, though be warned for the truth is so rarely a comforting tale.

What follows is a recounting rarely seen in so unadorned a format. Count your blessings and never regret that you amongst so few other luminaries and polymaths are privy to such secrets.

The Demiurges, upon shaping the Material Realm into something of perfection and beauty, were each gifted a pod containing seven seeds. From each seed would, in due course, emerge the immortals – four female and three male to each pod. The immortal were designed to inherit the perfect world. But their time had not yet arrived. It would take millennia for the seeds to germinate into perfection as the world around them settled into its final perfect form.

Yet in their vanity the Demiurges destroyed all they had worked for. They had achieved perfection yet grew restless in the wake of their great work. They continued to shape the world, doing only that which they had been created to. They added beasts and features that twisted the beauty of what was into something imperfect.

And thus was the perfect world of Elyden warped into something imperfect. The immortal pods hatched before their time amid the cacophony of the new imperfect world. Born in mockery of what should have been: the immortal tribes became instead the mortal tribes. Embryonic, unwanted things granted sentience in a raw realm that was unready for and unwanting of them, they had little choice but to endure.

The creator knew that what had happened had happened and could not be reversed. But the Mortals were

innocent in their birth and the creator knew that any suffering they sustained was through no fault of their own. To make the cacophony of the Mortal Realm more bearable each mortal was given the smallest mote of divinity. Tiny it might have been but it was enough to serve as a cocoon against the raw world to which they were now inevitably bound. That tiny mote became lens through which they could interact with their world without the trauma under which they had been born. This mote became known as the spirit and it was the creator's only gift to the mortals.

With a spirit and senses capable of observing and experiencing the world around them, the mortals were strengthened, but they could not escape the death and disorder that their birth had subjected them to – forevermore the mortals would be plagued by the shadow of death and cursed by the weight of disorder.

Each pod became the root of a tribe of mortals; their minds and bodies shaped in the manner of the Demiurge in whose image they were ultimately fashioned. Under the aegis of their unwanted sires the Demiurges, the mortals grew. Slowly they inherited their sire's traits, coming to follow and resemble them in matters of body and mind.

THE UNWANTED SCIONS

And so, the Mortals came to be in a world that was not ready for them, to parents that did not want or care for them. They were the untimely spawn of deplorable compulsion.

As a result, it can be considered that all mortal races were ultimately born of the Demiurges' vanity, and that it was that same vanity that denied them the immortality and perfection that was theirs by right.

It is difficult to explain the true impact of this, for the mortals have, for unnumbered generations, lived in ignorance of this fact, accepting everything that is around them as natural. The truth could not be farther removed from that assumption: everything that is negative in Elyden – pain, death, corruption, disfigurement, loss, famine, toil –

exists ultimately due to the actions of the Demiurges. Were it not for the Demiurges' hubris, the Two-and-Twenty mortals would have been born as they should have – fully-formed and immortal, inheritors of the perfect realm.

Those who learn this truth and truly understand its significance may find themselves distraught or bitter, in the very least. Some have gone insane trying to digest the facts and one cannot blame such sensitive individuals. There exist those in scholarly circles who, having learnt this grim prehistory of the mortal races, sees no fault in the Demiurges' actions, but rather a tragic purpose. Demiurges were born with a specific task in mind – to create and shape, and that is what they did.

These apologists are in the minority in a community of illuminated individuals that is already miniscule. The fact that such knowledge is printed in this volume may lessen the divide between ignorance and fact and it is something that is done with no-small intent.

A LESSENING OF BLOODLINES

As ancient epochs came and went and the Demiurges machinations done little to restore their divinity, the mortals slowly spread across the world of Elyden. Some abandoned their homes, while others remained close with their Demiurge parents, learning from them. Others turned to the natural scions of the Demiurges – spawn of their misbegotten union with mortals and other Demiurges – following them instead.

The Demiurges themselves cared little for the mortals but what sustenance they could offer them, for it was the adulation of loving mortals that gave Demiurges the strength needed to endure. Many Demiurges had already created sentient life before the tragic birth of the mortal races and it was in these races that were truly created in the image of their parents that many demiurges devoted their attentions, despite the value of the mortals. Some Demiurges grew greedy and subjugated unwilling populaces, with others abandoning their original children entirely if the opportunity arose for more worshippers elsewhere. Yet what few learnt in this time was that similarly to how the Demiurges drew strength from their worshippers, the mortals also drew something from their divine parents – their identity. Without the compass of their divine parent to guide them many tribes found themselves diluted by the world, their idiosyncrasies buried beneath the void of abandonment. That and increasing contact with other tribes led to the slow death of the mortal races.

Where once each tribe was disparate, of physiognomy and psychology unique to itself, their slow spread to secular lives and false religions, as well as their spread and mingling across the world saw their heritage diluted. That, coupled with the actions of Demiurges that were at times genocidal

in their effect, and many of the original races are now lost to history or despair, their only remnant corrupted bloodlines and half-human descendants. In some far-flung regions pockets of such tribes may remain, but they are invariably wretched things born in a world without guidance or reassurance.

FIRST AMONGST EQUALS

Of all the mortal races, humans are by far the most numerous. It is not their intelligence or an aptitude for survival that has propagated the vermin-like spread of their race across Elyden, but merely a coincidence that none of the other mortal races enjoyed. Humans were alone amongst the Two-and-Twenty mortal races to breed true with the other races. This alone has ensured the survival of humans above any other race. And that explains why half-breed races are so common – mulls and halfbloods, to name but two.

Other races to remain are the independent creations of the Demiurges – those sentient beasts crafted by the Demiurges before the coming of the mortals, but they are primal beings, without spirits or the pathos that plagues all of the Two-and-Twenty mortal races.

OF SOULSTONES AND THE OTHERBORN

Mortal spirits (the more of consciousness granted to the mortal races in wake of the premature births so long ago) migrate to the Otherworld upon expiry of their bodies, where they gestate in that timeless realm before perhaps being reborn as Otherworlders.

That was not always the case, however. For countless millennia there was no transmigration of the spirit to the Otherworld. Upon death the spirit would remain attached to the body like parasite, slowly growing, as a mote of dust grows within an oyster. As the body slowly dried and fossilised, this soul pearl would continue to grow, often becoming the only thing to remain of a dead mortal. These soulstones as they are sometimes known contain that minute divine mote that every trueborn mortal possessed in life, and they are valued by shapers and others alike for their properties.

Though it was once rare for a mortal to leave behind a soulstone once spirits started to migrate to the Otherworld upon mortal death. A few instances have been noted, though overall it was an incredibly rare and sad event. That has changed recently as the instances of mortal corpses giving rise to soulstones has begun to increase over the past century. Though the numbers remain small, there is no doubt that they are on the increase. Scholars still struggle to understand why.

No discussion about soulstones can be complete without mention of the otherworlders, for though their numbers may be few, their influence upon the fate of mortal life is great indeed. The otherworlders are the spirits of deceased mortals reincarnated in corporeal form upon the Material Realm. Legend claims their role is akin to that of the psychopomp, guiding the spirits of the living, though we cannot be sure, for they are utterly alien in nature – both physically and psychologically – and rarely do they communicate in simple terms.

Strangely, one of the most common ways they communicate with mortals is through sex, as the amount of

halfblooded descendants that exist. Each otherworlder passes on particular traits to its offspring, and some believe that their purpose is to spread those traits amongst the mortal races, through which they can then influence fate.

Their offspring, commonly known as halfbloods, are far more numerous than their otherworldly sires, for their traits can be passed down for many generations before being diluted. Though not as alien as their otherworlder parents, halfbloods remain enigmatic creatures plagued by their dichotomous ancestry. They know they play a role in some greater purpose, though what that role is they can never know.

THE MATERIA OMNA

The Materia Omna is the centre of the universe. It exists within the smallest object imaginable and surrounds the totality of creation. It is the primordial element from which all else was created – the Firmament, the Atramenta, the Material Realm and everything that exists within them. It is the ‘clay’ that the Demiurges shaped into Material Realm, and it is from this ‘clay’ that most life was crafted. This is likely how the Materia Omna permeates everything – it was the original blueprint from which all else was created.

It is seen by many as a mystical element because of this, something likely to be found at the centre of philosophical movements. It cannot be seen or felt and it is very difficult to gain empirical evidence of its being, which is a cause of consternation for more pragmatic scientists.

It is likely that mortals know a lot less about the Materia Omna today than we did under the leadership of the Demiurges. Many secrets were lost following the Demiurges’ fall and subsequent descent into languor.

The Materia Omna was probably rediscovered early days of the Fifth Age of life, over five millennia past. Yet despite in intervening centuries and untold hours of devoted study few are those who claim to understand its secrets.

Sometimes described as the Æther by ancient scholars, the Materia Omna was, at various points throughout history, thought to be the source of and secret to life in Elyden, a fabled panacea, as well as being the dwelling place of false gods. Ancient alchemists believed that should the Materia Omna be observed in solid form, its manipulation could produce any substance conceivable – for within it was the power of creation. And given that the dichotomous elements of the Firmament and the Atramenta both lie within its roots, that is not difficult to believe, though none have so far manage to distil the essence of the Materia Omna in physical form.

THE SHADOW AND THE HELIX.

Though little is known about their united primordial form, much more is known of the Firmament and the Atramenta themselves. The paired elements through which the Material Realm was constructed have been known to mortals for millennia and even in the wake of the Demiurges’ decline we have held on to the basics of these two elements.

The Firmament and Atramenta emerged from the roiling chaos that was the Materia Omna. How this happened is unknown though common origin myths state that a now-forgotten creator deity awoke, and the movements of its awakening caused the Materia Omna to churn, causing its constituent parts to separate like oil and water. The truth will likely never be known.

Whatever the reason for the Materia Omna’s eventual separation, where the two elements (the Firmament and the Atramenta) touched they created a film that would later be shaped by the Demiurges into the Material Realm – a region where Elyden is located.

Though the Materia Omna is a largely unseen force, the Firmament and the Atramenta (or the Helix and the Shadow, as they are more commonly known in the twin Empires) are very much on our doorstep and are relatively easily manipulated by those who know how.

Even to those without the knowledge of shaping, the Firmament and the Atramenta are known and their influence can be felt everywhere – lodestones, duststone, Atramental corruption, petrifying deserts, electricity, the list goes on.

THE SHAPING OF CREATION

Most cultures understand the principles of the Materia Omna and though some may distrust its twin elements (citing detrimental experiences), others have accepted the

Firmament and the Atramenta as elements to be used (and abused), like any other.

Both pose their dangers, however. The Atramenta is highly mutable and prolonged exposure can lead to debilitating effects upon body and mind, and as well as inorganic matter. The Firmament promotes stagnancy that can lead to petrification. Both can be highly inimical to life (as evidenced by the growing numbers of Atramental or Firmamental wastelands that exist throughout Elyden) yet disciplined empirical study of their properties has led to many advancements that would have been otherwise impossible. This is all possible thanks to those who have studied the Firmament and the Atramenta, as well as those who are capable of shaping those disparate elements – Onésimus and Set, respectively, or more commonly known simply as shapers.

Shapers are allowed to do what they do through the inherent malleability of the elements of creation. It is thought that the Demiurge's shaping of the Materia Omnia, as well as the Firmament and the Atramenta, left the elements far more malleable to manipulation than they otherwise might have been. Some believe that by shaping the Materia Omnia the Demiurges imparted part of their creative essence in the elements, making them malleable to mortals.

There are four types of Shapers. The most common by far are those who tap into either the Firmament or the Atramenta, manipulating their constituent parts to achieve various results. The third, type is the rare shaper who has equal control over the Atramenta and the Firmament. The fourth far rarer type of shaper, is one who interferes directly with the Materia Omnia. The results are often similar but the potential for variety is near-infinite.

When shaping the Firmament or the Atramenta a shaper is limited by what the respective element touches, or its sphere of influence. It is near-impossible to directly create light through the Atramenta, for instance. Those rare individuals who can shape the Materia Omnia have no such limitations, as their patron element permeates everything in this world and others.

Even amongst fellow shapers, there exists differing spheres of influence. An individual shapers' abilities will typically only affect a small part of the Atramenta or Firmament (depending on his element of proficiency). This is known as his sphere of influence, of which there are a many. This is why not all Atramentists can accomplish the same things. Some may be adept at weaving flesh, where others might be experts of ferromancy. Still others might be able to dabble in various spheres, while never being able to achieve the heights of those who specialise. No two shapers will ever display the same exact affinities, though there are institutions that attempt to standardise their use, labelling certain acts of shaping as falling within particular spheres.

These categorisations are largely arbitrary though the institutions that utilise them swear by them. A case in point is the various Atramental Minasteria of the High Empire.

THE WONDER OF TECHNARCANA

Through our understanding of the Atramenta and the Firmament modern man has been able to accomplish great feats of artifice and engineering that have not been seen since the days of the Demiurges. We have developed cures and vaccines for diseases that would have slain millions. We have developed treatments to make metals stronger, lighter or more resistant to corrosion. We have refined the Atramenta raw state (known as umbriska) into fuels and other substances through which we can power engines and machines. We can bend the magnetic properties of the Firmament to our will, creating batteries that store energy.

It is solely through our knowledge and manipulation of the Materia Omnia that the scientific discipline of technarcana has become possible. Finally we can step out of the shadow of our ancient ancestors and claim the future for our own. Where once shamen and arcanists ruled tribes of men, now we place our trust in technologists and technarcanists who maintain the great engines that sustain the great metropolises of our time – Almagest, Teigris, Hetepheropolis and Makhara, to name a few – are possible. Siphon engines that draw otherwise baleful properties of the Atramenta keep these populated lands safe; dross manufactories produce the edible slurry that keeps dense populations of millions alive; and it is in technarcane ateliers that beast engineered to serve us are created. Not least of all are the servant castes, such as the haemonculi or steel legionnaires that owe their very existence to the technarcane arts.

THE PRIMAL DISCIPLINES

Though we praise the technarcanists whose efforts allow our modern technarcane engines to work, their link to the Materia Omnia has dwindled to a prosaic fragment of what it once was. There is no mysticism or spirituality inherent in the works of a machinist or mechanic. These are no true shapers of the material of creation.

Though diminished in urbane lands, there remain those who look upon the Materia Omnia with wonder and marvel. These are the modern shamen and arcanists – urban occultists and dabblers in the primal arts. In less advanced cultures (or on the fringes of our own lands, where technarcana remains rare or too expensive to reliably maintain) we can still find those who fill out the roles of more traditional sorcerers and warlocks. These individuals eschew the trappings of their modern counterparts – the technarcana and machines – take a more direct approach to the act of shaping.

Such individuals are dangerous for they wrestle with great powers without any degree of training. It is not uncommon for such an untrained individual to consume himself through overexertion, killing themselves and those around them in blasts of raw Atramental or Firmamental energies.

THE OTHERWORLD

The Realm Beyond. The Æther. The Otherworld. It has many names, though few truly understand it. It is the realm outside of time and space, where the dead and unborn dwell. Like the Material Realm, the Otherworld is a part of the Materia Omnia, though it is its own entity.

Some shapers can transport themselves to the Otherworld or call upon its denizens (otherworlders not yet reborn to the Material Realm) to aid them in their studies, though such travel is dangerous and taxing on the senses. As a timeless realm many have sojourned in the Otherworld for seemingly months to fond mere days or hours to have passed in the Material Realm. Even worse, an otherwise short sojourn may result in decades or centuries having passed in the Material Realm, leading to the shaper returning to a world that cannot recall his presence.

It is through the otherworld that other forms of mystical travel – dream walking and planar projections, for instance – are rendered possible, though the otherworld is a fickle element and it is unwise to venture into such mutable realms unprepared.

ANCIENT EMPIRES AND BURIED GLORIES

Elyden is an ancient place. Modern thinking has the sphere of Elyden as being around 1 billion (1,000,000,000) years old, with the Demiurge's acts of shaping and the birth and spread of the mortal races following that.

It is an almost immeasurable time that few outside the intelligentsia of the most learned scholarly circles may even hope to comprehend. It is time enough for the original creations of the Demiurges to naturally change and branch into forms unthought of by their creators. It is time enough for Elyden's coastlines and continents to slowly change. It is time enough for the memory of vast empires and their descendants to be forgotten to all but the most esoteric of otherworlders and arcane researchers.

Memory of the mortal tribes is fragmented at best and few are those who can name the Two-and-Twenty races on more than one hand. Even their descendants and their descendants are unknown to most. Little wonder then that so much of our prehistory lies buried, turned to dust by the passage of time.

Cities are often built on the site of past cities, so long as the geography hasn't changed to the point of the location being uninhabited. As a result, many cities are built atop the ruins of previous incarnations, sometimes dating back tens of thousands of years, though few may know this. Under the Demiurge's aegis many metropolises and other edifices were built to last eternities and some millennia-old ruins may yet be explored in the Elyden's wildernesses.

The Demiurges and their Scions, consigned to oblivion for so long are only remembered through the Archpotentate Malichar and his actions in resurrecting the languid Rachanael to life. Ironically, it was his obsession with ensuring the other Demiurges remain buried that has

even brought their memory to light in the lands around the Inner Sea. Though even so, dead gods do not remain so for ever.

A WORLD IN WANING

We know through the meticulous records of cartographers throughout the Fifth Age that Elyden's oceans are retreating. Great harbours constructed along the coastlines of 5 millennia past are now located miles inland, surrounded by salt flats and the memory of more abundant times.

Seas that were once fertile have been overfished by starving nations to barrenness, where elsewhere lakes and rivers have been corrupted by the presence of the Atramenta and manufactories, their colours changed from crystal-clear waters to garish chemical-tainted hues.

It is the belief of many that the Demiurges' absence has had an adverse effect on the natural world. Without their aegis the laws of nature have slowly begun to unravel, leaving the world in the beginning of a chaos that many fear can only grow worse. Increasingly women give birth to misshapen shapes, and in the wild beasts often become tainted into unnatural shapes with even strange abilities.

Detractors of this theory need only look to the dreamscapes that surround the Demiurges' tombs for proof of their ability to warp reality. Were they awake and strong they could target their thoughts to those lands that need maintaining, but alas such is not the case.

Unless the status quo that has reigned for millennia is broken and the Demiurges are raised from their polluted slumber, it is unlikely that Elyden will recover. Though most are blind to this decay, those who have studied the

past know that a great Dark Age beckons unless the Demiurges can be stirred.

And what if they are? It is impossible to see what a newly arisen Demiurge might be capable of. Would it even care for the fate of the world? It is disturbing then to know that many demiurge cults have arisen with the sole intent of waking the slumbering gods and their scions.

BLIND RITUAL AND REFLEX SACRAMENTS

Elyden is an old world, with present cities built on the ruin of their forebears. Those ruins hark to city-states that inherited traditions and cultures from nations that came millennia before, who in turn developed customs in the wake of the original mortal tribe's passing.

This blind dissemination of past rituals is something that proliferates the extant world, with people observing sacraments – be they religious, cultural, political or industrial – without truly understanding why. The bureaucracy of the Korachani Empire dates back four millennia, and there exist halls of records where censuses and records that have no bearing on the present age are kept, just because that is the way it has always been. The Tethysian funerary tradition of burying the dead with a blue gem has existed since before the birth of their nation, though few are those who remember its origins or indeed its purpose. Yet people still do it.

Such rituals proliferate in this waning world, perhaps providing comfort or a sense of purpose to those who live in these twilight days.

TWILIGHT EMPIRES

As the natural world itself begins to unravel, so to do the ancient empires that have governed civilised life for millennia. The Korachani Empire, a monolithic entity that has surrounded the Inner Sea for over four millennia has fractured and struggled to find resources to maintain its sprawling cities and institutions.

To the south, in the great desert-continent of Sammaea, there exist countless city-states, each descended from great empires that failed in their pursuit of longevity. These states are ruled by grotesque and often unique characters whose tyranny urges their people to struggle and scavenge amid the rotten remnants of past empires

Though elsewhere nations may yet endure that reflect the paragon of civilisation, one only need sift through the deception of appearance for the corruption that lies beneath...

DESPAIR AND DECAY

It is to this world of growing despair and decay that we invite you to travel. Whether you seek the decrepit streets and alleys of millennia-old cities that collapse under the weight of their own infrastructure, or the wasteland city-states that cling to survival amid the collapse of the natural world, there is much to be seen.

Elyden is a world made for opportunists. The Fifth Age, likely drawing now to a close, was born of the survivors of the wane of the Fourth Age. It was through their intrepid actions that empires were allowed to rise and fall and the same will only be possible through the actions of their descendants.

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