The History of the Realms

> ***The History of the Realms has been posted in several parts, and will continue to be added to as the story unfolds. A significant amount of time has transpired between each chapter of the history.***

The Beginning

In the beginning, there was Void. From Void were born two brothers, **Aalynor** and **Tilnar**, unique and alone in Void. While their own companionship and love for each other was great, the brothers grew bored of Void, and so, began to create.

The brothers forged the world from Void, populating it with bird and animal, fish and flower, until the world teemed with life. The brothers then created creatures in their own image. The Daer'lin, were beings much like the brothers themselves, able to reason, and to create. For a millennium, the Daer'lin thrived, and there was want for nothing. The Daer'lin built a great society with poetry, artwork and literature beyond any seen since. However, as the first thousand years passed, the Daer'lin began to stagnate. No new artwork were created, their society was frozen in place. The oldest of the Daer'lin grew bored with their pointless existence, there was no need for them to improve themselves as the gods provided them with all they needed, no need to do anything today when it could be done the next day.

The brothers were saddened to see what had become of their beloved creations, and pondered the situation greatly. They assembled a council of thirteen, the greatest minds of the Daer'lin, one from each region, to discuss what could be done. Each member of the council discussed the issue with their fellows in the area, and then went to meet the Great Council. The Council decided that things would need to change for the Daer'lin, although each had their own idea for what would improve their people. However, all agreed that immortality was one of the greatest problems. And so, as the brothers created life, Tilnar sadly accepted the responsibility to end it. Each of the Daer'lin's solutions to improve their race were used upon the Daer'lin in that area, and so were born the races of Human, Elf, Dwarf, Hobbit, Gnome, Troll, Orc, Giant, Goblin, Dragon, Gnoll, Ogre and Renis. The Council members were each assigned a task to watch over, and given the power to do so.

For five centuries, the world flourished once more. Tilnar would only Touch those who had led full and complete lives, or who suffered greatly. The diversity and new challenges met by the races caused them to once more grow and better themselves. Tilnar married Dilanis, one of the ascended Daer'lin. The remaining Daer'lin handled their responsibilities well, although their powers and influences began to define them.

- **Malakai** became Lord of Justice.
- **Pandora** became Mistress of Hope.
- **Dilanis** became Mistress of Love.

- **Vrackon** became Lord of Hardship.
- **Twilia** became Mistress of Night and Darkness.
- **Enchantress** became the Mistress of Greed, Lust and Desire.
- **Novind** became Lord of Chaos.
- **Plekto** became Lord of Theft.
- **Erisar** became Lord of Hunt and Battle.
- **Maana** became Mistress of Magic.
- **Rudestyle** became Lord of Wine and Revelry.
- **Arskol** became Lord of Knowledge.
- **Andaras** became Mistress of Arts and Beauty.

And so, the world knew fifteen gods.

The cooperation between the races was great, and the thirteen races combined to build the Nexus, City of All Races. Each of the races built a settlement in the area around the city, and trade between them and the Nexus flowed freely. The spirit of harmony was such that interracial marriages became a common thing, to the point of Half-elves and Half-Orcs nearly being considered races in their own right.

But the power corrupted some of the Daer'lin, and so, they began to scheme amongst themselves. Enchantress, Novind, Twilia, Plekto, Vrackon developed a scheme that they thought would keep the other gods busy... She set the races to war. Enchantress seduced Erisar, that his battle skills would be used for Darkness.

So ended the golden age.

The War of the Races was bloody and horrible. The pacifistic Renis were completely destroyed, while the Dragons removed themselves from the affairs of the 'lesser' races. During this war, the elven people were divided, as they are now, between the sylvan elves of Light, and the drow elves of Darkness. The gods of Darkness waited for the others to enter the conflict, to attempt to stop the battles and bloodshed. Tilnar cried as he was forced to Touch multitudes wounded cruelly in battle and his realm filled with the souls of innocents, killed before their appointed times. His tears formed a sea on the world, its water bitter, yet full of life. As Aalynor and Malakai led the gods of Light in fighting the gods of Darkness, Tilnar retreated to his realm.

The gods fought each other, a battle across the skies that devastated the world, killing over half of those who dwelled upon it. Energies of battle spilled over into the world, creating strange and deadly creatures. The land was ravaged, new seas filling over grassland, and old fertile land being blighted. The battle was fierce, with many of the gods of Light, unused to battle, perishing at the hands of the gods of Darkness. Andaras was the first to fall, followed by Arskol. The gods of Light managed to fell Erisar, using Maanaa's magic. Plekto fled the battle, and the tide seemed to be turning. The gods of Darkness had lost their strategist and warrior, and were being forced back. Victory seemed assured for the Light.

Plekto, who had not fled, but hidden, emerged from his hiding place to strike down Dilanis. As Dilanis' soul appeared in Tilnar's realm, Tilnar's scream could be heard across all the planes of

existence. His beloved wife was now a shade of what she once was. Tilnar's eyes began to burn with a black fire, and he tore a hole across the realms to emerge at the battle.

Tilnar appeared, and Aalynor drew the gods of Light away from him, sensing the madness and sorrow that had overtaken him. The gods of Darkness surrounded Tilnar, attempting to strike down the newly arrived god. Tilnar screamed with pain from their attacks, feeling his life-force flowing out from him. Tilnar's gods-powers were fading, and his fevered mind demanded vengeance. Tilnar, now consumed by the black fire, Touched Plekto. A horrible wail ensued, and Plekto's form and spirit both fell to pieces, then to ash. Plekto's power began to flow into Tilnar, black and violet streams of pure energy. The gods of Darkness attempted to flee, but Tilnar, strengthened by Plekto's energies, Touched them each in turn. As the powers of the gods of Darkness flowed into Tilnar, Maanaa approached him, to try to heal the wounds of his form. Tilnar, reveling in power, Touched her. Maanaa died, as horribly as had the others, her power flowing into Tilnar.

Tilnar began to approach his fellow gods, those of the Light, when Aalynor stood before him. Aalynor said nothing, and stared into his brothers eyes. Tilnar's blood lust was broken, the madness faded from his eyes. Tilnar fired a bolt of black fire from himself, scorching the earth, and opening a great chasm. However, the influences of the Dark powers that flowed into him, and of the sadness and hatred he felt would not allow Tilnar to join the Light. Tilnar returned to his realm, and asked Aalynor to remove the souls of the truly innocent. Tilnar's realm became a place of pain, madness and torture.

And so, the world knew five gods, with Tilnar fallen into Darkness.

The war of the races ended soon afterwards, without the divine aid, the goblins were small match to the assembled races. While the gods-battle seemed to only take a few hours, it had spanned several centuries on the world, and most of the races grew weary of battle.

The elves sealed themselves in the forests, the dwarves in their mountains, and one by one, the races were divided. Humans remained in Nexus, as Pandora visited them, maintaining the spirit of Hope within them. As the centuries went by, humanity made contact once more with its former allies. Favourable relations were forged, based on Pandora's hope, with nearly all of the original races. However, magic spilled over from the gods-battle had changed many of the races. The Giants, once a proud and noble race, had been divided based upon the magic that struck them. Many had degenerated becoming the unintelligent and brutish Stone and Hill Giants; others maintained some of their intellect, but the influences of the dark gods had made them evil and crafty, thus creating the Frost and Fire Giants. The few who were not changed in mind absorbed some of the magic released with the death of the gods, becoming the Storm Giants. In an attempt to 'save' their brothers, the Storm Giants magically combined the essence of the Stone Giants with the essence of humanity, creating the Half-Giants known today. But, the worst effected of all the races were the kobolds and goblins.

Once a beautiful race, the goblins, who had freely embraced the shadow, were given forms to meet their black hearts. They viewed this as unfair punishment, and sought to regain their lost beauty, or to inflict a similar punishment upon the other races. While their new physical forms were in no way dangerous, the goblins too had absorbed some of the magic from the gods-battle, giving them

each a unique magical ability. With each goblin having what they call "Tilnar's Gift", they had become a force to be reckoned with. They were quick to enslave the kobolds, who like the goblins, had lost their beauty and intellect during the wars, and had so become a cowardly race, wanting to walk in darkness, without the courage to do so.

While the races rebuilt, each free to choose their own destiny, to walk in Aalynor's Light or in Tilnar's Darkness, and the bonds of unity slowly grew between them, the goblins gained garnered their strength, adding the physical might of the Hill and Stone Giants to their own. The goblins found the Dragons, and saw that they had suffered a similar fate to the giants, made worse, no doubt, by their natural affinity for magic. The Dragons, unheard from in a millennium, had become a people divided, who's power and ethos were now based upon the colour of scale. The goblins sought out the Dragons of Darkness, and promised them power and wealth, if they were to join in the army. So were born the goblin hoardes.

The peoples of Nexus enjoyed another age of peace, their rebuilding complete, and their fellowships restored. This age came to an end, however, with the flowing tide of the goblin hoardes. The goblins struck quickly, and from all sides, sealing off the racial settlements around the Nexus. The Goblins then laid siege to the City of All Races, and only the magical barriers in the City Walls, and the powers of the assembled adventurers has kept them at bay.

The Time of Darkness

And so came the eighth sign of Void. A month of perfect darkness - blackness so deep that not even the infra-vision of the elves, orcs and dwarves could penetrate it. Nothingness so heavy that even the power of the gods themselves could not pierce it... The flickering flames of candles were all but invisible against the 30 days of unnatural night, with even the light of torches and lanterns barely piercing the blanket of gloom, shedding little more than enough light to cover those who held them..... Yet, still, Nexus prepared for war - what choice did it have?

The mages, clerics and bards were spread thin, using their magic to try to combat the eternal, starless night, their spells keeping the training fields lit as the fighters, barbarians, paladins and rangers tried to impart their skills to those that were once farmers around the city, now part of the Nexus Militia. Adventurers, Nexus' greatest strength, have been integrated into the War Machine, training these new troops, obtaining new equipment for them, planning strategies for the inevitable attack, and holding the town against the unleashed hoardes of demons....

Aalynor and Tilnar called together their children, the gods, to plan as well. Unable to put an end to the eternal night, powerless in the face of Void's power, so much greater than their own, they were to use the time to plan and prepare, to garner their strength, for even as Nexus prepared war with the stronger goblins, so did the gods have to face Void. Trista, Pandora, Novind, Kyorl, Erisar, Andaras gathered with the Brothers.... All of the gods, save one, heeded the call. He who had left the world and refused to perform his tasks months ago, turned his back on the Tribunal - forsaking the World which he was to watch over. Tilnar demanded Malakai join the Tribunal, screaming that only the allied power of all the gods could stand before Void, and fight to ensure that there was still

a world over which to watch. Malakai was unswayed by the words, stating that Void had come to destroy creation, and not the gods - and that only creation had refused Justice - and so it would be without it. As Malakai spoke, the black fire burst from Tilnar's eyes, dropping the Lord of Death to his knees.... mortals were dying by the thousands due to Void, each death sparking a new flame within Tilnar's soul. Malakai approached, to attempt to ease Tilnar's pain, for in his mind he had not forsaken the gods, only the mortals, and Tilnar repeated that only the allied powers of all the gods would be sufficient, and reached out his dark hand, Touching Malakai. As Malakai's soul withered into nothingness, the powers of the Lord of Justice flooded into Tilnar. The black flames escaped, exploding around him, destroying Malakai's realm in their dark fury. Aalynor appeared, demanding to know why Tilnar had broken his word about killing another god, and Tilnar spoke through clenched fangs, the pain within him still raging as he fought to bring it under control. "*All of the Powers of the Gods must be present when we face Void...*" he gasped, as the Black Flames around him attempted to consume Aalynor even through the aura of Light he wore. "*... now, we know that the Lord of Justice's powers will be present, even if somewhat twisted by my Darkness.*" Tilnar rose, pulling the flames into himself again. The new Lord of Justice and Vengeance turned to his brother, as the Light around Aalynor seemed to pull away as he approached. Aalynor looked into his brother's eyes, and wrapped him in the Light "*It was the only way, my brother.*" he whispered gently. As he did, Novind faded into nothingness, as Tilnar's madness broke. The true Novind had been slain long ago, his powers part of Tilnar - this "new" Novind was merely a persona of Tilnar, projecting itself out with a new form... with the madness broken the persona faded into nothingness.... And so, while the mortals toiled, so did the gods...

Losses were heavy in the realms with members of all races falling on all corners of the world to Void's forces. No race, no age, no living thing was safe from the attacks, Ancient Dragons and young sprites alike fell to the 666 Storm Dragons and their demon forces. And then, suddenly as it began, the stars reappeared, their alignment having shifted. The Night ended, and the Storm Dragons vanished, leaving behind the demons, the scars, and the painful memories.

The Rejoining

The mortals reveled below. He could hear each cry of joy, each drunken voice, each moan of pleasure as the mortals flung themselves at each other with wild abandon. Each one cut his soul, a reminder that he did not want. He stretched dead flesh over the sockets of his eyes, and reached out with his mind. The red and black flames, warm and cold, both surged throughout the Realm, and the horrible wailing of the False who burned within grew louder. Even with the additional noise, however, the joy from the mortal plane echoed... Memories of past joys flooded him. He dug his daemonic claws into his dead palms, hoping that the physical pain would drive away the other. Even as thought began to return in the crystalline clarity of physical pain, other sounds came to him... more merriment, this time of an Immortal origin, as the gods and immortals gathered together to partake of the Nectar of the Gods. Black fire began to blaze from his eyes as the pain and anguish took him, even as he pulled his gore-covered claws from his hands. He added his tormented scream to those of the False in his Realm, his single voice drowning out the punished. The numerous Daemons in the Realm threw themselves into their work, or portals to elsewhere, their fear obvious. Even the Thirteen Daemonspawn who were his honor guard showed fear,

waiting for him to lash out. Instead, he screamed again, his divine energies crackling through him, blasting pieces of flesh from the corpse he wore.

The scent of flowers was the first thing that he noticed, the first thought he had as his near-infinite mind dwelled only in its pain. He was aware of another presence, and his mind leapt on that awareness, that rational thought, in an attempt to quell the rage. There, standing before him in her remembered armor stood Paelina, the first Daemonspawn, the Fallen Angel, Tilnar's first Mortal Avatar, now serving as one of his Thirteen Guards. Concern was etched upon her face, contrasting with the cruel and evil daemonic features the she wore. As Tilnar looked at Paelina, a shiver went through him as something cold and ethereal touched him. The touch brought with in a cold pain, and he knew its source at once. He turned to see Dilanis' shade, having come from Tilnar's Paradise into the darkest heart of his Hell. Each touch soothed him, even as the ethereal hands cut through his dead flesh, and tore at his heart with every stroke. He sighed, the rage fading from him, and his powers once more trapped within his body.

He stood again, noting as he did Paelina's wounds even as her daemonic flesh worked to repair the damage. Understanding dawned on him, and he saw confirmation in her sad eyes. She had crossed the Wall of Realms, a daemon breaking through the barrier between the Paradise of Twilight and the Hell of Night. He conjured a new set of gloves for his hands, and reached out to touch Paelina's shoulder. As he did, a microscopic part of his attention cataloged the damage of her body, even as another tried to grasp at how much worse it had been - how much lost flesh and energy had been regenerated. He looked into her eyes again, and smiled directing the tiniest fragment of his power out to erase the damage. The smile seemed to do more for her than the healing, however, bringing a smile to her face, one which did not contain the cruelty that all daemonic smiles had.

"*I should never have allowed you to come with me.*" he thought at her, her denial and insistances in his mind before she even responded.

"*I pledged all that I was to you, my Lord, and so I shall serve.*"

"*It is but another eternal that I have ruined, for where I should be rewarding my Chosen, instead I torment you.*" Seeing the expression form upon her face, he waved a hand, "*No, do not answer. Your loyalty is boundless, child. I know what you endure for me, and of all the souls in this Realm, yours is the one that most concerns me. Let me end your suffering.*"

Even as Tilnar reached out, he felt those cold hands lock onto his arm. Flesh froze and fell away, revealing black fire and violet lightning surrounding the yellowed bone. He looked to his wife's shade, the sadness in her eyes even as he heard Paelina's answer.

"*Not until your suffering is at an end, my Lord.*"

His eyes were locked into the pale grey of the shade, and he began to pull his attentions from elsewhere to focus on Dilanis' shade. He studied her Soulpattern - she was Daer'lin, and so the pattern should appear as intricate and as detailed as Andaras' finest works of stained glass. Instead, however, the pattern was but a single color, and more confused than the magical weave itself. He brought the Shade's hand to his breast, feeling it freeze away the flesh over his heart, relishing the pain as an interruption from his despair.

"*I created this beauty so long ago, Paelina. Then, I used my powers to elevate her, making her as near my equal as could be. When she was elevated, when she was her own being, she created her own beauty, her own patterns, and I was powerless against her. She made my heart sing, she brought me more joy than I thought I could ever know. Then, with the power of one god within me, I felt as though I could do more than now, when I am so filled with power that it sometimes surges through me, killing the corpse I wear...*"

Paelina listened as her Lord spoke, watching as the Shade's hand froze the bones of the ribcage, slowly working toward the heart. She wondered if Tilnar planned to allow the Shade to kill his shell, and him within it - to escape the pain. Tilnar seemed oblivious to the damage being done to the form, simply looking into Dilanis' eyes.

"*I have learned so much since her death. So much since that day, long ago. I have seen all the other god-shades ressurected, "catching" the powers of other gods as they are slain. Even now, I know that I could have saved her, had I known how, as I saved Malakai when he faced Arskol in combat. I could have re-created her, by using Malakai's godsaura and energies at the time of his death at my hands to recreate her pattern....*"

Paelina began to lean forward, seeing the ribs fall away and the hand cutting through the lungs. She could see, clearly, Tilnar's black and violet heart, crackling with the powers that maintained him. The Shade drew her hand away, even as Tilnar's bone fingers pulled it closer. The phantasmal hand gripped the heart, and it burst... The whole body crumbled away, even as black and violet energies snaked around Dilanis' form. Slowly, a corpse rose from the red stone below, and the powers flowed into it. Tilnar's eyes were still locked on Dilanis even as the corpse went through the wracking changes to accomodate his power.

"*But I did not. There was no premeditation to his death, denying me the chance to gain from it. And now, I cannot even have her kill me to draw some of my power to her.*"

"*She cannot kill you. She lacks a Godsaura. Besides, it is not even certain that you can be killed, or what would happen to the Realms if you were, as you are still half of the Lifeforce of the Realms.*"

Paelina turned to face the new voice, noting as she did that she was the only daemon near her Lord, even the other twelve bodyguards having vanished as she watched Tilnar. Standing before her was one of the most beautiful beings that she had ever seen. In form, he was the quintessential Angel, the paragon of that beautiful, near-pefect race... One of the two templates from which the Angel's form was shaped. She cried at the beauty, and for the first time since her descent into a daemon's skin, allowed herself to long for all that she had lost. She accepted the Light's infernal touch, burning her away, knowing well that Recorpilation - or worse, even Oblivion, was a worthy price to pay to stand by her Lord... and to watch the beauty before her.

Suddenly, the pain ended, and she felt the cold chill of black flames burning around her, taking away the Light's warmth. Her Lord had not forgotten her, and yet, part of her wished that he had. Even as she pulled her gaze away from the Luminescant Being before her, she heard Tilnar speaking.

"*If I can, my brother, it must be by an outside hand. I have learned that for all my power, I cannot end my tormented existance.*"

Suddenly, she understood. Her Lord had been attempting to commit suicide before her very eyes. The realization was terrifying to her. She wrapped her wings around her, expecting Aalynor's reaction to be as strong as her own, if not worse.

"*I would not say that, Brother. For while you cannot end your own life, and that you have tried distrurbs me, what stops you from ending your torment?*"

Tilnar laughed, a hollow sound as the vocal cords of this new body shifted to match his normal voice. "*And which of your children would you have me slay, Brother? And do not think that I have not been tempted.*"

"*You need not slay a god to restore life to another. Did you not ressurect Arskol?*"

Tilnar laughed again, the sound ringing with madness. "*Aye, and he was madder than I. He tried to 'liberate' the Shades from Paradise, claiming that they suffered. He had to be put out of his misery.. And ours.*"

Paelina remembered that, the second time that the NetherRealms had been invaded. She herself had slain several of Arskol's Astral Messengers, however the whole attack was merely a diversion as Arskol stole away the shades of Erisar, Andaras and Dilanis.

Tilnar looked into his brother's eyes, "*I could never do that to Dilanis, Brother. It would pain me more than this has.*" Paelina saw Tilnar's face, his weariness obvious.

"*You poor fool.*" It was Aalynor's turn to laugh, this time. "*All this time you thought that your method was wrong, and that is why you did not recreate Dilanis? I thought you were merely preparing yourself for it, and instead you were trying to end your own life? Can you not see the truth?*"

Tilnar's aura surged, violet bolts crackling around him even as the blackflame burst from his eyes. There was a dangerous edge to his voice as he spoke. "*Do not mock me, Brother.*"

Aalynor sighed, and stood, passive before his brother, locking him in a stare. Paelina stood nervously as time passed, what appeared to be eons. Then, suddenly, Tilnar released the power he would have used to strike down his brother. As the flames and bolts faded, Tilnar fell to his knees, crying. Aalynor spoke again, his voice a gentle rebuke. "*There is why you failed, my Brother. It is the Light, it is Goodness that creates. The Evil in you can only destroy, or create things which will destroy.*"

Again Tilnar's flames built up, his rage cutting through his sadness. "*Then you have had the power to restore her all this time?*" *he demanded.*

Again, Aalynor merely stood there, looking at his Brother. "*Of course not.*" he answered gently. "*I did not know how, nor did you. If one of your Daemonspawn had not spoken with one of my Astral*

Messengers, I would still not know. But the Evil in you is the cause of your failure, and the reason that you cannot see it. And besides, the souls of the dead are your portfolio - your power over them is greater than mine."

Paelina began to panic, hoping that her conversation with one of Aalynor's servants would have gone unmentionned. However, she thought as she calmed herself, she knew the risks of what she had done when she did it. Better to die in an attempt to save her Lord, or to suffer for all time in the attempt, then to allow him to continue suffering.

Tilnar looked up, and Paelina feared that his eyes saught her, but instead, he looked to Aalynor. His voice was strong, and he said simply "*Show me.*" With that, Paelina's world went white. Aalynor's radience was brighter than that of all the stars combined. Tilnar's shield held, for she had not been obliterated, though her head ached from the Light. It was over in an instant, though it was long before her eyes adjusted.

Tilnar stood before Aalynor, glowing, not with dark fires, but with a beautiful light, flickering as it danced with every color of the prism... The Light of Twilight. She looked to him, awestruck, for the look on his face, for the first time in centuries, was one of faith, and of peace. Aalynor seemed exhausted, his own glow dimming as he infused as much of the Light as he could into his Brother. Tilnar, too, was lost in concentration, and Paelina wondered if this sight was like that of Creation, the Brothers combining their powers to forge the Realms. She could see with her daemonsight, the magics Tilnar wove, each one a gentle thread as he poured the Lifeforce - the Light into Dilanis, trying to reignite her own spark of life... Paelina tasted blood, and realized that her fangs had sunk deep into her lower lip, and she watched anxiously. Slowly, the grey and blue shade began to find color - so slowly that Paelina didn't believe it was truly happening, dismissing it as her own imagination.

She closed her eyes to confirm that it was, in fact, happening, and as she did, she heard the beautiful harmony... Two voices, one Tenor, the other Bass, singing as one... The Bass faltered from time to time, but even as it did, the Tenor's seemed to correct for it. The song was imperfection made perfect. She wept at its beauty, her tears growing warmer and more frequent as the Bass voice voice seemed to find itself, its hesitation faded, and it shifted to a Barritone, and the mistakes ceased. The Tenor voice stopped singing then, and a Soprano joined the Barritone. The knowledge of what had happened shook through Paelina and she was overcome by her emotions. She had done it. She had succeeded. When she felt the powers reshaping her, she accepted it as her due punishment, not caring what happened to her now that her Lord's suffering had ended. The Barritone voice slowly faded away, its exhaustion clear.

The shifting ended, and she felt the warmth of the Light against her flesh. There was no burning pain, no sensation of the flesh being pulled from her. She unfurled her wings from around her, to bathe in the glow of Light, as she did long before, and felt the feathers of her wings tickle the flesh they touched. Slowly, she opened her eyes, no longer seeing with the daemonsight, instead, an angel's vision graced her. Before her stood Aalynor and Dilanis, both smiling warmly at her.

A gentle touch on her shoulder caused her to spin around. Her mind barely had time to absorb the sight before her as she was pulled into an embrace. Tilnar set her down with a smile, and she saw

that her eyes had not decieved her. Tilnar stood before her, no longer wrapped in the dead flesh of others, but in his own body. Paelina wept again, the joy of the sight was not lost to her. Tilnar spoke, his voice musical for the first time in centuries, as enchanting as an Incubus.

"*You, Paelina are the most loyal of all beings in these Realms. I cannot think of any way to reward you for what you have done, for the love that you have shown me. No reward would be enough.*"

His features, once angelic, still bore a daemonic tinge, yet to her mind it only served to make the strength more apparent, his compassion to stand out. He was the Angel of Death, beautiful, compassionate, yet made harsh by a reality that refused to understand his compassion.

"*Simply seeing you happy, my Lord, is reward enough.*"

Tilnar laughed, and again, for the first time in centuries, the sound carried in it joy.

"*Then you shall see that reward in great measures, Faithul One, and more.*" as he spoke, Tilnar looked to Aalynor, their thoughts carried in their eyes, and Aalynor gave a brief nod. Tilnar smiled warmly, and a warmth cut through Paelina, starting at Tilnar's hand, and with it came a wave of pleasure that was far stronger than any she had ever experienced, as mortal or immortal... It was even greater than that of feeding as a Succubus. She felt as though she would collapse, yet even as the pleasure overwhelmed her, did she find a newfound strength within her.

Deep within the Pits of the False, Kyorl laughed. This was his Realm, now. And every scream of pain and terror that one of the daemons drew from the Tortured would feed him. Tilnar was careful as he released his grip on the powers of Evil, preventing any god from simply seizing the power as it was "loosed". However, he was not any god. When he realized that he could not seize the powers, he instead reached out and began to feed on them, as if they were negative emotions themselves. And so, again, the powers of the gods were warped, and in so doing, these new powers began to warp Kyorl.

His laughter grew louder, as if he was joining the merriment. Paelina stood back for she knew the source at once... He had once been her lover, but he had taken the evil, the darkness to heart. He was once trusted as the Regent of the Hells, to rule above the daemons in Tilnar's abscence - his former authority was as great as her own. Now it was far greater.

"*Thank you both, O Creators.*" Kyorl said with a sneer and mocking tone. "*I've never fed so well.*" His laughter faded as he disappeared.

Paelina looked to the gods before her, and they both sighed, lowering their heads. "*He is daemonic. He feeds on evils, and so grows stronger all the time.*" she said, her tone one of concern.

"*Aye.*" *Tilnar said, "He is, and he will. But he is the price of Free Will. With Free Will came Evil, and it cannot be destroyed so long as beings other than we can choose their own paths...*"

"*What we can do,*" Aalynor suggested, "*is have our churches ensure that, at least amongst the Allied Races, there is little for him to feed on.*"

Tilnar sounded grave, "*Kyorl will find the power twist his mind, and turn him from what he was into something truly frightening. Whereas he fed on and enjyed evil, now, he will need it, demand it, cause it... He is Evil now, its embodiment. He is Eternal, and on a level now with Aalynor or I, not like yourself or the other Daer'lin.*"

Paelina realized that he was looking at her when he said that, and for the first time, she felt the Godsaura, and her new powers. Tilnar's eyes smiled, though his expression was still most serious, and he continued. "*Yet, taking the Godspower from me bound him more closely with the other Gods. He will find new limits, new twists, that I tied into those powers as I released them.*"

"*You knew he was there?*" Dilanis asked, looking surprised.

"*I would have been when I was in that state.*" Tilnar answered, no trace of a smile remaining.

* * *

That night, the various powers unleashed, and their influence on the Mortal Plane was obvious. Kyorl's banner was removed from Nexus, as he lashed out at those followers who were merely greedy. His truly faithful followed him to his true "children": The races of the Goblin Hoardes. His Golden Cathedral lay in flames, unknown by who's hand, though it is believed it was the act of his departing followers, taking Kyorl's glory with them as they left.

In Tilnar's Vein, there was death amongst the Drow as civil war shook them. Many swore allegiance to Kyorl, while others clung to their faith in Tilnar, going so far as to quote their catechisms which spoke of their eventual return to the Light. Both sides warred, Clerical Powers surging, until Kyorl's sect seized control of Sifnalk, driving Tilnar's faithful, the "Grey" Elves, deeper into the Vein.

The reappearance of the Mistress of Love and the emergeance of the Mistress of Faithfulness and Duty in the realms was noted quickly by the mortals, with whispered prayers to Dilanis to have someone fall in love with them, or to bless a love, while Paelina's banner was quickly taken up by the Nexus Guard, and Army.

Things seemed eerily calm in the wake of all that had been happening, and even the Order of the Holy Light sought to reconcile with the Cathedral of Death. However, on the second day of these talks, the Order attacked the Ivory Tower, forcing many young magi and apprentices onto flaming pyres on which to be purified. Battle raged, as the Order attacked, gaining ground even as the Churches of Twilight and Dawn hit the Order's flanks, coming to the aid of the magi. The tide of battle turned quickly when Thelia appeared, raw mana crackling around her in her outrage, as she threw Soulfire at the invaders. Those watching could see Thelia growing weaker with each blast, as she held back nothing of herself to strike at the Whiterobes. She raged, teleporting from point to point in the tower, obliterating all of the foes that she could in each place. Finally, as she was firing from an upper balcony onto the Whiterobes below, she stiffened, and fell, a dagger driven deeply into her back. Behind her, stepping from the shadows, was a violet-robed figure, another such dagger in his violet hand.

"*Like them, mistress?*" he sneered, bringing the second dagger downward, "*I made them myself, research based on the legends of Iron disrupting the souls of the Faerie.*" The second dagger he

drove into her neck, severing the spine beneath the skull. "*I've wanted to do that for a while.*" he said with a laugh.

From below, a Knight Templar shouted, "*Hold, traitor!*"

"*Traitor? Your laws mean nothing to me.*" he laughed, and chanted softly, raising his hand at the Templar. Dragonsfire burst from the paladin's flesh, as the Inferno consumed him from within. Turning back to his helpless victim, he drew a third dagger, continuing as if nothing had interrupted. "*Granted, you are no faerie, but the concept is the same.*" He began to drive the dagger into Thelia's skull when a bolt of lightning and struck his arm, even as his arm was pierced by a gore-covered blade of ice. Scorpio stood below, chanting for a second lightningbolt while Astaroth wondered at the source of the iceblade. Chanting quickly, he waved his good hand, covering the balcony with an unnatural mist, obsuring the sight of his attackers. Drawing an Alchemical Creme from his belt, he applied it to his wounds, even as he saw the outline of an all-too familiar Half-giant in his mists.

Wicked held the massive axe in his hands, deciding that imprisonning Astaroth would do no good, and that Justice could only be served by his death. He blinked repeatedly as the mistcloud stung his eyes. He began swinging the massive pole blindly, knowing that Thelia was down, hoping to connect with Astaroth, or at least make enough wind to be rid of the mist. Wicked's muscles strained as he took a Full-Giant's grip on the axe, holding only the end of the grip while swinging the blade right to left. He began another swing, and saw movement - the outline of a figure to his right, raising his hand to point at him. He cursed, as he tried to reverse the swing of his axe even as Astaroth finished his spell, and the Dragonfire burnt him from within. Wicked was thankful for the resistance spell that protected him, even as he smelled cooking flesh from himself. He stopped the swing even as he heard Astaroth begin to chant again. Focussing past the pain, Wicked leapt toward the mage, bringing his axe down with all of his strength, swinging it like one who was splitting wood. The axe hit a barrier, knocking it slightly off target, but the magical shell could not stop the Half-Giant's swing. The axe fell, cleaving through the mage's shoulder, the scream of pain and lost arm stopping his spell-casting. Wicked was readying another swing when he felt a blade bite into his back. He turned quickly, catching only the glimpse of a male figure in black leathers. He turned back in time to see Astaroth break a small vial at his feet, and vanish.

Within moments, Scorpio was standing beside Wicked, his elven stride unable to match the half-giant's. He cast a dustgust spell to remove Astaroth's mists, and knelt before his Guildmaster. She had not moved, her mouth open, a small trail of blood from her nose, and both dagger wounds. Despite the knife in her heart, she lived still, although the spark of life within her was frail, and fading. Wicked began a prayer to Tilnar, shaping healing energies, even as Scorpio began to remove the knives from her back. As his hand touched the dagger, he felt the strange materials screaming across his soul. Ignoring it, he closed his hand on the dagger, and as he did, white and blue energy arced around the blade and up his arm, as tendrils of magic attempted to unweave his soulpattern. The energy blasted again, throwing him back, and leaving him stunned. He watched in horror as Wicked's hand closed around the dagger, and wondered what had happened when he removed both knives with no effect - and no blood. He could see the orange-red glow of a sunset around Wicked as he touched Thelia, and the energy flowed down his arms, only to stop when it reached her. Wicked began to repeat his chant while keeping his hands on Thelia, the glow around

his hands growing brighter and brighter, Wicked's voice sounding more and more strained. Finally, a dull red glow began to cover Thelia's body, slowly knitting her wounds. Then, suddenly, Wicked's voice broke, and the aura around him, and the pale one around Thelia was gone. Wicked looked up, and Scorpio said only one word: "*Lucis.*"

Aalynor's Prophet took Thelia into a Communion Chamber, and with faith magics unsurpassed by any mortal, save, perhaps, an Avatar, he attempted to undo the damage that Astaroth had done. Wicked started to hand over the daggers to help Lucis with his work, when Scorpio asked to see one. As soon as the metal touched his flesh, Scorpio fell to his knees, feeling as though someone was reaching deep inside him, and trying to turn him inside out. Watching the reaction, Lucis took the dagger from Scorpio. Again, it seemed that only Scorpio and Thelia were effected by these knives. Lucis ordered them out of the chambers, sealing himself in his Communion Chamber, and prayed over Thelia all night.

When the Dawn came, Thelia awoke, and wished sincerely that she had not. She felt old, and worse, she was old, the daggers having disrupted all of the magics that had for so long kept her young. Lucis saw her stirring, and smiled at her, himself showing his age for the first time she had ever seen.

"*You look like hell, Prophet of the Light.*" she said with a raspy voice that she hated at once.

"*You're no better, Archwizardress. Worse, when one considers that you're an elf.*"

"*What happened to me?*"

"*Astaroth. He seems to have found a substance that disrupts light-elves. Perhaps light-elf mages, I'm not sure yet. It's like wrought iron to the faerie or silver to the lycanthropic.*"

"*Wonderful. I should be happy to be alive, I suppose.*" she said with a sigh. "*Well, come now, Old Man. I'd like to leave this magical shielding and get back to work.*"

The look on Lucis' face as she said those words told her everything in an instant. Astaroth was driving the daggers into the points of power on her body. The last was to disrupt her soul, and fortunately, that one did not happen. The one before that, her spirit and lifeforce, which had done much damage before it was removed. The first one, however, was intented to kill her magic. And it had been in the longest.

"*This room is not shielded.*" he said, his voice the merest whisper.

Thelia felt her heart burst as Lucis confirmed her fear. She reached out to the world, desperately trying to find the magic of the world, of her robes, her ring, her staff, anything.... But the magic was not answering. She began to cry, tears rolling down her cheeks, as the one thing that she had sacrificed so much of her life for, the one thing that had made her special, made her powerful, unique, was taken from her. She cried, and Lucis stood there quietly watching her. She did not know how long she sat there, but finally, the tears ended. She dried her eyes, and stood, silently thanking Lucis for not intervening.

"*We must hold a Council, Lucis. Now. While I still sit at the head of my guild.*"

He simply nodded.

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The Order of the Holy Light fled the city before the Assembled Guilds reached them. Obviously, there was a leak on the council, and it was quite obvious to all of those on the council who that might have been. As they left, they burned the House of Holy Light behind them, as had the Kyorlites. They made one last appeal for members and help from the town, citing that the "Evil Rulers of this town wished to cast out the Order before they were able to see the true evil amongst them." A surprisingly large number of adolescants joined their ranks as they left. Over 10% of the standing Nexus Guard went with the Order as well.

The Council then stripped Garpenlov of his position on the council. Based on the public pressure since the robbery of the jewlery store to punish the Thieves' Guild, and then accented with the attitude of the Master of Thieves, and finally, his warning to the Order of Holy Light. As the Council does not have the right to interfere with internal guild matters, they took the action in the only way that they could. They removed the Official Sanction of the Nexus Thieves' Guild, making it offsimply another Clan or Organization, no more, no less. The Council apologized to the other thieves, stating that they simply could no longer afford to have one who actively sought to undermine their position and any sort of Order that was sought in Nexus, sitting on the Council. The Council stated, however, that should a responsible organization form, it would have the ability to apply for Official Status, for there are no plans to drive away the thieves, some of whom are considered heroes by the common people.

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Auric stood over the table, cursing how uncomfortable a humanoid form was, and smiled. His blond hair was unrruly, and he stood more rigid and noble than any score of paladins could ever dream of being.

"*Assembled Councilmembers, I am pleased to inform you that we have taken your request to our people, and their answer is yes.*"

"*Yes?*" Fenwick asked, looking at the humanoid-dragon, his voice almost incredulous.

Argenaa's eyes sparkled with mischief at Fenwick's incredulous stare, and she began to wonder if she hadn't been in this humanoid form too long, for she seemed to be growing soft on the warrior-general. She, too, leaned over the table, an act that all the Dragons seemed to mimic, likely due to their normally long necks, Fenwick thought. Fenwick followed up that thought with others about Argenaa's neck in her humanoid form. He shook his mind to clear the adolescant thoughts from his mind.

"*Aye, Master Fenwick.*" she said, her musical voice dancing playfully throughout the room. "*Not only may you use part of our island home to train your troops, we have already completed restoring the city that was once there, before the War of the Races.*"

Fenwick, for the first time in weeks, felt some hope returning, and looked at Argenaa as though she were Pandora incarnate, sent to return to hope to Nexus. She was certainly beautiful enough to be a goddess, he thought. His army was being driven back from all sides, with the followers of Kyorl supplying the goblins with more intelligence, better organizations, better insights into the workings of Nexus, and worst of all - clerical magicks. Then, add to that the defection of nearly 10% of his troops to the blasted Whiterobes - mostly veterans at that. He was left with an army that was outmatched and outnumbered, and now, the loss of a great deal of experience was just making things worse. But now, with the permission and protection of the Metallics, there would be a training area, away from goblin attacks, away from hostile dragonflights, where troops and adventurers could learn to fight. And, should the battles continue the way they had, then there was, at least, one place to fall back to - or one last source of warriors to avenge them. A place who's magical defenses were even greater than those of the Nexus.

"*But know this,*" Auric interjeted, cutting off Fenwick's thoughts, "*Falcion is ours. Your trainees, your people, must respect that this is where we live, and raise our families. Parts of the Island are off-limits, they are our private homes.*"

"*However,*" Argenaa spoke in a more gentle tone, "*you are always welcome to come where you are invited to.*" Fenwick thought that she looked at him as she said that, but dismissed it at once. "*And, of course, the Island's defenses are yours to share. First, as goblins generally loathe water, their hoardes do not venture across the Sea often. Second, the island itself is surrounded in a magical mist which confuses those who are not welcome to the island. Third, the island itself moves every full moon, shifting positions as to avoid detection. And last, Mistress Thelia* -" She nodded to Thelia, who looked very tired, and yet, very alert as well, " - *has taught Auric and I to cast your town barrier spell. In fact, she has modified the spell slightly, based on magical explinations of the mist that we provided. This barrier spell will take hold in the mists, and be anchored in a single, central focus. It is, in some ways, stronger than the one around the city, and far better than we could have done.*"

Thelia bowed her head at the obvious compliment, wondering, not for the first time, if the Dragons were not patronizing her. Since her initial awakening, Lucis had spent more time with her, trying to heal her. She could touch the magic again, although she was nowhere near her normal strength, and wondered if she would ever be again. She looked up, and saw that the respect on the Dragon's faces was real, which deepened her sense of honor. She nodded to Argenaa, who turned back to the Council.

"*Then, if there is nothing else*--", she began.

Robyn asked, "*But what of the Thieves?*"

"*There will be a Guild in Falcion.*" Auric replied, "*The Coppers are somewhat fond of thieves, and have offered to house them. In fact, they insist.*"

"*Then, so be it.*" said Fenwick with a smile.

The Ebb and Flow of Time

His fevered mind burned brighter than the dancing faerie fires which lit his room. Shining fingers clenching a stick of limestone flew across the immense slate tablet which made up this desk of his laboratory, making minor adjustments here and there, until with an almost audible click, he knew he had solved the equation, that he had created the right formula.

"*Ah, Mistress Thelia would be so proud of me...after all, it isn't every day that a mortal mage touches the impossible...*" he sneered to himself, as he crossed from his desk to the immense adamantine worktable in the center of the room. He looked down to the lone object that lay there, a simple rod of mithril, etched and engraved with symbols and patterns no mortal artisan could ever think to match.

"*Perhaps mortal magic cannot affect time.... But that is why I have this...*"

His velvet sleeve reached out toward the table, his metallic fingers closed over the mithril staff. A sneer graced his lips once more, as he willed away the shielding in his laboratory to send a telepathic cry of triumph...

"*Immortality is mine...*"

The heroes and people of Nexus shuddered as one, knowing only too well that voice, the voice of their greatest traitor, their greatest enemy. The words, and the triumph in his voice... This was no act of deception, this was all too real, and they knew it.

Banzai cursed aloud, the lines on her once young and vibrant face having deepened with each passing year. With an annoyed grunt, she pulled a large lock of her grey hair from her face and swore again.

"*Tilnar take you, Astaroth, you wretch!*" she exclaimed even as she thought of how she was getting too old to deal with him, too old to avenge the murder of her husband. Though she tried to fight against it, she felt the resentment at her age filling her, and at Wicked for having been gifted with youth by Tilnar.

"*Immortality is mine...*" echoed in her mind, and without thinking, Banzai hurled her Crystal Club at the wall of her home, feeling the red rage which had so long been her ally threatening to take her... She gritted her teeth, and let loose a long string of telepathic curses.

Astaroth's mouth tightened as Banzai's reply echoed to him, and he quickly spoke a word in the language of the Drow and magic flowed through him, through his arm, through the Staff of the Goddess he held, restoring the near-impenetrable bubble-shield which protected the laboratory of his tower.

"*No time to dwell upon you, Banzai. A human fossil like you will be dead soon enough, in any case.*" he pushed telepathically as his shield formed, granting himself the last word.

Astaroth's left hand began tracing strange patterns in the air while he chanted in the tongue of the Ancient Daer'lin, slowly attempting to attune the Staff to himself. Slowly, as he chanted, the mercury of his arm flowed around the staff, wrapping it in metallic bands, slowly and gradually pulling it into place like a new bone for his artificial arm. With every inch it moved, Astaroth's smile increased as he felt what was left of Maana's power flowing into him, joining with him, his mortal essence mixing with the powers of the immortal...

Finally, a loud grinding noise echoed around him, and with a snap, he felt the mithril staff shattering within his arm. His robes and flesh were shredded by the shrapnel, the mithril shards hurling themselves free of his arm, and yet, somehow, the arm managed to hold its shape.... and the power, he cackled triumphantly as he saw the liquid metal darkenning, itself becoming like mithril and darksilver... Solidifying, he thought, annoyed for a moment, dissappointed in the loss of functionality, until he felt the power crackling through him, charging him with magicks beyond any mortal comprehension, beyond any mortal achievement.

He laughed, the power crackling through him an intoxicant. "*I am so far beyond these fools. Inferno, for all his power, for all his years, for all his ego, is but a mite to me now. The Witch, for all her quiet arrogance, is a nothing which can be swept aside... None can stand against me, for I hold within the power of a God!*"

In Nexus, many eyes were facing northwest, looking to the Tower carved into the Crystal Mountains. The tower was outlined clearly now, the Crystal of the tower having been darkened by the magicks within. Ariel looked down from her place in the Ivory Tower, her old eyes straining even through the thick spectacles she wore, attempting to see the dweomers radiating in and around Astaroth's workshop, cursing the strength of the barrier that surrounded him, and her own lack of endurance. More than ninety winters, now, come and gone, in which to gain knowledge and power, and yet in which her body's weakness would cancel out the benefits of her learning. She sighed with a sad smile. Still, she had led a full life, of friends, a husband, and happiness. If only this chill would free itself from her bones. With a smile, she heard Banzai's telepathic cries at Astaroth once again, obviously Astaroth had stopped listening even as Banzai's strain at the effort of telepathy was obvious. With another sad smile she thought of her husband, nearly as old as she, and yet his dwarven blood keeping him young, still in the prime of his life. For a moment, she too felt resentment, if Astaroth's words were true, that an already Pandora-blessed elf would find the means to increase his already ample lifespan... She sighed again, not realizing that her blurred vision was caused by the tears in her eyes and not the strain of looking off to the distance.

They did not have long to look, and all the magi screamed out as one as they felt powerful fingers ripping at the weave as if with claws, as the most powerful shaper of spells cast the cursed flight spell. As they recovered, one of the Tower's walls burst open with the force of a volcano, and a violet and grey missile streaked out toward them, the tattered remains of black robes clinging to him, his flesh pierced in a thousand places, yet none of these wounds either bleeding nor knitting.

His voice blasted louder than that of the Crystaldaemon's taunts in their heads as he hovered over Nexus.

"*There are scores to settle. You have ruined my life, taken my wife and child, taken my arm, taken the life of my double.... Even driven to death my poor lackey.*"

A string of curses followed his words, the female voice obviously straining, and yet too proud to allow herself to appear weak. "*You betrayed us all, you killed my husband, reanimated him... Come, then, coward, and let us settle the score.*"

Banzai tried not to gape at the speed with which Astaroth moved, but it seemed she had but started her telepathic cry when he appeared before her. She gave the red rage which had been boiling within her free rein, the Crystal Club swinging almost of its own will, her attack with the speed of a woman half her age. And yet, somehow, the cursed elf with no combat training sidestepped. His movements were a blur, making even Seoman's hasted speed seem a crawl by comparison... He struck her, physically, his metallic fist striking like a smith's hammer against an anvil. Each strike she could feel grinding her bones beneath his fist, shattering the blood vessels. His attack was a flurry which she could not even begin to dodge, for it was over even before she saw it coming, his metal hand smashing in and out without mercy until she found herself laying upon her back.

"*Was that the best you could do, whore?*" Astaroth sneered. "*It seems that your age has slowed you down.... Pathetic. Maybe I made a mistake to ever think you could threaten my life.... But then, you always were a mistake, weren't you Banzai? Your whole existance was a mistake. And so, I shall undo it.*"

With that, Astaroth's metallic arm began to glow with an intense white, the power building up within it, and within him.

"*So long, bitch!*" he snarled, and waves of white fire struck Banzai were she lay, each one erasing more of her existance, restoring her prime, her youth, her adolescance, her childhood, her infancy, and then, finally she was gone. Astaroth smirked, revelling in what he had just done, how he had erased someone completely, torn them from the Pattern of Life, from the Flows of Time.

The white energy continued to pulse where Banzai once sat, the temporal magicks flickering strangely, as if building up somehow. Suddenly, the ball of white power burst, throwing tendrils out in every direction, erasing the effects of Banzai's life from Flows of Time. Her name was lost from all memory, her house faded into naught, and all of Nexus, all of the history of the last seventy winters began to tear itself apart to right itself. Astaroth screamed as the power he released struck him, attempting to change him as it was everyone, and everything else. With a terrible shriek, and one conscious thought, he willed himself to undo whatever it was he had done - the memory of what it was already gone, the memory of having done anything already fading...

Suddenly, a second burst of white power appeared around him, its blinding intensity exploding, again, into tendrils as it reached out to reweave that which had been, or was being, undone...

There was a terrible backlash of power, strange, flowing over everything, everyone, conflicting with itself, battling itself, as seventy years of history were done and undone and redone and undone again and the very Fabric of Reality woven by the Brothers began to unravel..

Tilnar felt himself scream as his body vanished from him, replaced instead with one of the corpses that he used to contain his essence, even as the Black Fires burst from his eyes and he felt Dilanis' life vanishing, returning, and vanishing again. With a terrible scream he extended his powers, the taint of his Darkness striping his reach, there one moment, gone in the next, as he touched the pattern. His anguished scream echoed through the heavens and across the surface of Altin. With desperate strength, Tilnar gripped at the threads, attempting to stop their unravelling even as the Darkness within him bade him to pull with all his strength, and tear the pattern to naught...

His scream was heard, and a gentle touch was there in a moment, calming Tilnar, reassuring him, steadying him, and assisting him. Together, the Brothers once again wove Reality, gently coaxing the torn threads back together, hoping that the individual threads would heal as the pattern itself was restored....

Banzai opened her eyes, wondering what foolish form of attack Astaroth had used upon her, for she felt better than she had in years, despite the pounding she had taken... one feels no pain in the Red Rage. With a fierce battle-cry, she jumped to her feet, and smashed Astaroth's arm with the club. The Crystal weapon shattered instantly, its shards embedding themselves into his limb, tearing gashes in the arm. Power leaked from these wounds like blood, and Astaroth screamed as white bolts of Temporal Magicks lashed around him, without any control. In a moment, he was ancient, in the next he was young, time flowing and unravelling, the future, the past, infinity and oblivion.... He began to chant in the language of Magic, and with a flash brighter than the twin suns, he was gone.... Banzai stared for a moment, thinking it a trick, and then further thought that perhaps he was finally gone. She could not allow herself to believe either, and so she stood once again, and caught her reflection against her shield. Something strange had happened... She was... young.. Younger, in any case. Time... had.. changed.

Ariel covered her eyes with her hands to shield herself from the bright flash of light, and when she did, she marvelled at her hand. She had changed, somehow. There was more vitality to her, and she removed the thick spectacles which had been obscuring her sight, looking down upon the city unassisted, with her own eyes, for the first time in decades. With a youthful chuckle, she decided that she would seek out her husband...

And all over Altin, the changes flowed, as the Threads of the Fabric of Reality readjusted themselves to the damage that was done, and how it was healed. For some, children vanished, without trace or memory, others' lost fortunes were regained, others' gained fortunes vanished, and the dead once more walked the land, alive, their deaths never having happened....

And so it was that time continued its flow....

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