

# Legend of the Circle: The Mercury Saga

## Volume 1: Ex Obscurum

### Chapter One

*"A new God... a new world... a new reckoning."*

Gog and Magog had long walked the surface of Mercury, both in its cold shadows and in its scorching heat. They had gathered the lifeblood of the Old Creator from all corners of a world by the order of the Sor, and had grown disillusioned with the mission of the Holy Order. They grew tired of following orders from the clergy of a dead god and decided to follow their own path... a path leading to power and vengeance.

Using the ancient knowledge of the Sor, Gog and Magog drew out a Circle on top of the world with the Blood of God... but knew the Circle was not complete. The Summoning would require Four Elements: Unrelenting Power, Ancient Wisdom, Forbidden Knowledge, and Binding Magic. It was their fate to wander across Mercury in search of these elements, gathering all of the Old Creator's blood on their way. For Power, they but one being with the might to complete the rite whose will could be bent to match theirs, a great Balrog residing in the city of Dis.

Dis, located in the region of Mercury farthest from the Sun, was a city of demons and outcasts filled to the brim with those who defied the Old God and those unworthy of divine favor. Whilst war was upon Mercury, the forces of Dis remained idle as the war-god Raggioth crushed the forces of the Sor and the Centric Order, being enemies of all that is Holy and lavishing in the Death of God. However, when Raggioth pulled his sword from the heart of God and turned to claim Mercury as his own, the Lord Beael, Warden of Endless Sleep, rose out of Dis with his hordes and legions to drive back Raggioth and his armies, who had been weakened from battle. Returning to Dis triumphant, Beael crowned himself the new God of Mercury and there was much revel among demons in the Deep Shadow.

It was this Deep Shadow which Gog and Magog sought out, for therein was Balrog General Scios, a hero among demons and a scourge among all else. Scios was one of two second in command to Lord Beael, the other being Supreme Wizard Golgoth; Scios was bound by the Magic of Golgoth, but Golgoth knew that the Balrog General could crush him on a whim. This was the balance of the High Court in Dis, and at the throne was Beael. Scios had the Unrelenting Power necessary to perform the Summoning, but as long as the magic of Golgoth held him, his will was bound. In order for Gog and Magog to utilize the Balrog General, it would be their task to not only undo the spell cast by the Supreme Wizard, but also to bind the will of Scios to their own. For such a task, they would require the Wisdom of the Fallen.

Once the highest ranking officer in the Centric Order and Right Hand of God, the Fallen was now a Black Knight who lurked in the Deep Shadow among demons and their ilk. His Ancient Wisdom was handed down from the Old Creator and it governed his mighty axe, Kazamammut; even those who were more powerful than the Fallen knew his name and regarded him with great caution and respect. With his help, the Centric Order could have driven back the forces of Raggioth and protected the Throne of God, as was

their charge. Alas, the Centric Order was dead and the Fallen regretted nothing after their betrayal in the time before the war.

Initially, when Gog and Magog sought the Fallen on a black mountain outside of Dis, he was upon them with great haste. He raised the edge of Kazamammut to Gog's throat, seizing Magog's robe in his obsidian gauntlet and lifting him above the ground. "Assassins, sent by the Sor," he said, noting the markings on their garb.

Gog retorted in a dry tone, ignoring the cold bite of the blackened axe: "We are not slaves to a dead god, and were we assassins, you would already be dead." The Fallen laughed, throwing Magog to the ground but holding his axe steadily against the throat of Gog, "Were you assassins, you would have killed yourselves upon receiving your charge, knowing you could not kill what is already Fallen. Speak quickly, and do not waste my time." As Magog gathered himself, Gog began to explain the Summoning, growing impatient with the sharp steel of Kazamammut against his throat but keeping his composure.

Under the shade of his helmet, the Fallen's eyes narrowed, "Speak no more, Summoner. I know the ritual well... I was one of the first Summoned to Life by the Old Creator, and I was there for the Summoning of many ancient beings... most of which have already come to perish. I do not know if your plan is more or less foolish than that of the Sor; Raggoth is strong and so is Beael. How can you hope to defeat both?"

Magog smiled, "It won't be long until they have defeated each other."

The Fallen laughed, finally lowering his axe. "You are reckless, Summoners, and your plan lacks strategy. However, I am also reckless, and I am an excellent strategist. No living Mercurian would dare to bind Scios with magic; wizards of the Deep Shadow are loyal to Beael and the only ones powerful enough among the Sor were killed in war. This will require the Binding Magic of a Sun Spirit, and there is but one who knows the Solar Tongue... seek you Blind, wanderer of the Scorched Sands and Seer of What Should Not Be Seen. His Forbidden Knowledge will help complete the Circle and call upon the magic needed to bind the Power of the Balrog General Scios..."

The Fallen looks off, gazing into the eternal night sky above Dis. "I will join you, Summoners; my Ancient Wisdom is yours. Betray me, and you will be destroyed."

And so the Summoners began their journey to the Scorched Sands on the other side of the world, leaving the cold grasp of starlight for the cruel weight of the Sun.

## Chapter 2

*"...and so behold the bane of all creation, that which has no place in this world or any other."*

The Fallen never needed to clean his axe; its steel was so smooth that blood could not stick to it long enough to dry. He held it toward the horizon, watching the blood of two paladins from the Sor drip from its edge, "Kazamammut, I have not stood under the sun in a millennium. What strange path has led me once again 'neath its cruel gaze?"

Gog and Magog were performing a ritual to seal the soul of a priestess into her body; her ghost would not be kind to them on their journey and they could not afford any setbacks: "*Herrah, harome, lichar, atmos.*" Their chant held a mournful tone, as this was the first time they had shed the blood of a former comrade.

"She was as kind to me within the ranks of the Sor as she was merciless to me here," Magog reminisced. The Fallen laughed, "She, like her comrades, sought only the blood of apostates. Without the Sor, you are nothing to her, and now here they lie." The fight was short; The Fallen effortlessly beheaded the sword bearing paladins while Gog and Magog overpowered the priestess, whose name was forever forgotten after her soul was sealed.

The Summoners had crossed from the Deep Shadow into the Scorched Sands, and while each of them had waded through these sands before, one could never get used to the heat or the blinding light. Wards of shade were cast, but they only gave enough to survive the arid waste. Even the Fallen felt the weight of Sun's Magic, but he would not allow it to slow him in his stride. "Keep your heads up and do not falter; we will not find Blind if he does not wish us to, and he has no interest in those who cannot bear the wrath of Isa."

Gog's face was wrought with grief: "It is not the Sun King's wrath I am weary of, but the very sight of the sand itself. I could eat every grain of scorched sand if just to remove from my view forever." Magog laughed, "You may make light of Isa's wrath now, but you would be quite weary of it were he to descend and feed you the sand you so crave."

At that moment, the ground shook. The Summoners steadied themselves through the tremor, but were all noticeably shaken. "There's the Solar King now, Gog!" Magog's joke fell flat against the sand as his comrades searched for the source of the quake as another one began. "Such power... it slides beneath our feet... could it be?" the Fallen gasped, holding out his axe en garde, "It couldn't be... that which writhes below..."

Gog and Magog were confused by the fearful murmurings of the Black Knight; what could cause one of such Power to act so strangely?

A cylindrical form of incredible girth erupted from the sand, throwing the Summoners to the ground as they watched in awe. The colossal form slowly bent toward them as it rose, sand cascading around it to reveal a great, brown, annelid worm with a gaping maw large enough to consume all three Summoners whole many times over. Its head was shaped like a massive drill that rotated around its mouth, where it came to a point; a deafening roar escaped this cavernous hole, revealing thousands of hooked fangs lining the bottomless pit of its esophagus before closing like a vile, leathery sphincter. On the segments of its body were thousands of yellow eyes with pupils the size of one's head, squelching as they opened and shut, staring out into the oblivion of the desert.

Gog and Magog were struck with shock and awe, crawling backwards away from the worm, unable to avert their gaze from such a gargantuan and repulsive spectacle. The Fallen had already returned to his feet, his panic having left him with the affirmation of his worst fear: "There is no escape now, Summoners. Risen up from the depths of a dying world, behold... the Parasite."

A second bone-rattling roar resounded over the desert as the Great Worm tipped its maw further toward the three, dead flesh blowing out over them with the putrid wind of its breath.

## Chapter 3

*"...all has been foreseen."*

The maw of the Parasite was closing in on the Summoners, and there was no time for escape. Gog and Magog desperately whispered incantations of protection, hoping they could find their way out of the Great Worm once ingested by it. The Fallen braced himself and readied Kazamammut, letting out a battle cry barely piercing the roar of the Parasite, knowing Death was upon him but refusing to yield to its beckoning.

Suddenly there was shriek piercing the thunderous wall of sound; the worm halted its descent and went silent, its mouth closing slowly as it turned its head to that which had called out its True Name. All of its eyes were pointed in one direction...

A pale figure in a tattered cloak approached from the distance, accompanied by a tall staff. His hair was long and grey, as was his beard. His eyes were covered by a bandage wrapped around his head, and blood ran out from them in small trails onto his withering face. A symbol was on his cloak, an ancient rune from a kingdom long forgotten. He was blind, and yet the Summoners could feel his gaze upon them as if it were coming from all directions at once.

Forgetting the presence of the Parasite, their mind was filled with one word, and his name was known to them as if it were a memory.

Continuing to approach, the figure let out a second shriek, this time seeming to articulate something in an unknown tongue. The Parasite responded, letting out strange shrieks in the same tongue, turning to the Summoners, letting out one final roar, and retracting into the ground as if it were being pulled by something deep below.

The Summoners stood in awe, stepping back from the edge of oblivion thanks to this mysterious stranger with such sway over the ancient worm. Gog and Magog raised to their feet; the Fallen remained tense and held tightly to Kazamammut, having not shaken his anticipation of violent death. Gog's eyes narrowed as he examined the figure approaching them, his awe slowly turning to determined resolve as he uttered the old man's name: "Blind."

"Yes, yes. I have been waiting a millennium and a half for this day, Gog and Magog. You have sought me out for my Forbidden Knowledge, so that I can summon the Spirit from the Sun with the Solar Tongue and complete the Circle. I know, and have known. You may rest your axe, Black Knight." Blind pointed his staff at Kazamammut, and in lowering the end of his staff, the Fallen's body seemed to relax and lower Kazamammut with it. The Black Knight let out a deep sigh: "What could have possibly brought the Parasite to the surface? How could it not find what it craved in our planet's core?" "Have you forgotten that God is dead and Mercury is dying, Black Knight? There is little life left in this godless world; only on

its surface walks the living essence it requires," Blind cackled, "and you all are the first outlanders to traverse these sands without being devoured."

Blind then turned to Gog and Magog, "Time is short, let us go."

The Summoners followed Blind further into the gaze of the Sun, becoming more and more weary but pressing on without a word. The Fallen held tightly to his axe, keeping tense and alert, anticipating the return of the Parasite. They walked and walked at a slow but consistent pace behind the Old Seer until reaching the ancient ruin of an ivory pyramid, one with a plateaued apex able to fit one standing body. The pyramid was towering and immense, and there were no stairs leading to the top. "You all must wait here. Be wary; you will be susceptible until this rite is through. I cannot be interrupted." Blind then turned and effortlessly ascended to the apex of the pyramid as if gravity meant nothing at all.

Gog, Magog, and the Fallen stood cautiously and patiently at the base of the bleached ruin, watching as Blind reached its zenith. With arms outstretched, Blind let out a strange drone, articulating in what they could only assume to be the Solar Tongue. Vibrations surged from the pinnacle of the pyramid to the face of the Sun, carrying Blind's call with them; Blind lifted his staff, pointing it toward the Sun and repeating his indiscernible chant.

Suddenly, the ground shook.

Gog and Magog looked to each other with fear, then looked to the Fallen. The Black Knight grinned, holding out Kazamammut toward the Scorched Sands, "Fear not, Summoners; for this time, we will be ready."

## Chapter 4

*"Blood on sand... fire on steel..."*

The ground quaked and the Summoners felt the Parasite moving deep beneath their feet. The humming of Blind's ritual became more resonant, as if to overpower the sounds of what lurked below, and a ring of light began to form between the Sun and Blind at the apex of the ivory pyramid.

"Summoners, begin the incantations necessary to clothe me in fire; Kazamammut and I will begin incantations of our own." The Fallen held out his Black Axe horizontally in both hands, and began droning a chant in a deep, throaty voice: *Ka za mam mut*. At first his rhythm was brisk, and his voice was low, but with every repetition it became slower and more intense. An aura began to form around him.

Gog and Magog, confused at first, immediately began reciting ancient incantations. Keeping their balance as the sands continued to shift beneath their feet, they faced each other, holding their hands to the sky, collapsing to their knees; the ritual was begun. *Agni... inferi... spiros... atmos...*

Blind's call continued to intensify, as if he stood completely unaware, unconcerned, or indifferent to the presence of the Parasite. The Fallen's axe had begun to glow with a deep, ethereal aura, and a great and terrible might flowed from it into him, causing his entire being to glow with the same aura. The spell of Gog and Magog began to take its course, rings of fire conjuring up in the air surrounding the Fallen. As the fire began to wrap around him, his form burgeoned, drawing more and more power from Kazamammut and intensifying his chant: *Ka Za Mam Mut*. The two apostates watched in awe as the

Fallen's armor began to gnarl and twist into a black metal form covered in barbs, spikes, and sharp edges. Gnarled horns sprouted from his helmet as the fire from the apostates' spell began to consume his entire being. The sand beneath their feet was shifting; the Summoners knew their enemy drew near and all but Blind on his precipice were tense with anticipation...

And yet, in this moment, fear was not with them.

The moment was brief; the sand beneath their feet began pulling them under, capsizing into a sinking pit. Finally reaching his full potential in power and cloaked in flame, the Fallen stood as a giant above the Summoners. His trance broken and his strength at maximum, he threw the Summoners out of the sinking pit and against the pyramid with a simple wave of his Black Axe, then stepping back from the sinking pit as the Parasite emerged from it slowly, swallowing up the place where the three once stood. The great worm was yet much larger than the Black Knight, but the Fallen's size was now enough that he could not so easily be swallowed up in its cavernous maw. Looming over him, the beast let out its bone-rattling roar. The Fallen stood unshaken, catching the reflection of his infernal form in each of the yellow eyes that followed him. He called out to the Summoners: "Keep the Spell Strong!" as he stood ready for the oncoming battle. Scrambling to their feet and falling again to their knees, Gog and Magog continued their haunting chant: *Agni... inferi...*

The Parasite descended upon the Fallen with unimaginable force; the Fallen moved as if he were lighter than air, floating out of the way of the worm's strike and cutting across the eyes that lined the shaft of its body with Kazamammut's unforgiving blade. The creature recoiled, striking again and again and meeting the edge of the Black Axe. Black blood spewed out from its deeper wounds, splashing against the white walls of the pyramid and turning sand to foul morass. The battle intensified as the length of the worm continued to pour out of the same dreadful pit of sand, as if it never ended. It surrounded the Fallen with itself, striking from all directions with its impossibly massive form. As it came closer and closer to catching the Black Knight under its blows, its eyes were burned by fire and gauged out by gnarled armor. The Fallen leapt from the Parasite's thick coils, jumping from one length to another until he could find his way out of the serpentine nightmare of its unholy being.

Watching the wild melee before them, the Summoners did not waver in maintaining their powerful incantation. They watched as the Fallen braced himself for the Parasite's next move; seeing he had escaped its labyrinth of obsidian blood, segmented flesh, and piss colored eyes, the great annelid straightened out and rose high above even the ivory pyramid upon which Blind continued his ominous call in the Solar Tongue. It looked down upon the Fallen, again micrified under its colossal form, and disgust could be seen in every black vein in every yellow eye. The creature then retracted into the ground with incredible haste, returning to its original length upon its initial breach of the surface.

This time, not waiting for the creature to strategize or regroup, the Fallen charged upon it in a ball of fire and wrath. His feet left the ground as he flew toward the beast, his power surpassing what he had ever thought possible with the reinforcement of Gog and Magog's magic. He let out a deafening cry as he closed in on the beast, unaware of the doom awaiting him as the worm lowered its head to meet him with an even greater roar...

The Parasite's head opened up, splitting into four segments lined with teeth just as those within its vast throat. Suddenly realizing he could now easily be swallowed by this wretched thing, the Fallen did not yet slow his charge, feeling he could destroy it from within. However, this new gleam of hope was

stamped out, as what seemed like a thousand annelid forms came writing from the depths of the wretched thing known only as the Parasite.

Each tendril that erupted from the now gaping maw of the worm was like a smaller version of the worm itself; each had a segmented form lined with smaller yellow eyes and a teething oral cavity identical to that of the Parasite. It was like they were the spawn of this filthy creature, and yet they seemed to move in a fashion that implied they were both rooted in the thing's throat and of one mind. Now having gathered too much momentum to retreat, the Fallen resolved to cut through these thousand wicked things... if he could without being torn apart. He could not avert his gaze, but for a brief second he prayed to a dead God that Blind had contacted a Sun Spirit.

He prayed his death would not be in vain.

## Chapter 5

*"Torn asunder..."*

The tendrils reaching from the mouth of the Parasite caught the Fallen as if he had gained no momentum in his charge against his foe. Though he was able to cut through several with a swing of the mighty Kazammut, a thousand more took hold of him from all directions, burned by his cloak of fire but not relinquishing hold of him... until the gaze of a thousand repulsive eyes found the source of this troublesome inferno.

Before Gog and Magog had time to react, the Parasite whipped its head toward them, releasing the Fallen like a burning stone from a slippery sling. His massive form would have crushed the Summoners on impact were it not for a telekinetic barrier cast by Magog, which the Black Knight still came crashing through. Knocked to the ground and for a small moment unconscious, the Gog and Magog's incant of fire was broken, and the Fallen was now more vulnerable than ever to the now vitriolic onslaught of the Parasite. He stood up, covered in the blood and saliva of his enemy, taking hold of his powerful axe and looking into the eyes of that which had no place on this world or any other. It reared back and again opened its segmented maw, its tendrils writhing wildly without direction or purpose.

Blind remained atop the pyramid, unaware or apathetic to the battle transpiring behind him. His call had finished and he patiently awaited response from one of the Sun's many magic spirits. Blind worried of nothing; all had been foreseen. He knew who would live and who would die, who served a purpose and who did not. Most importantly, he knew he cared not for the ultimate uncertainty that came with knowledge of the future; either things happen how they ought or they don't. He continued to wait for the Sun spirit whose coming he had foreseen thousands of years ago, anxious that the universe had succumbed to chaos and no spirit would come at all.

Suddenly, a blinding light: the Sun seemed to open up, forming a bridge that touched the apex of the white pyramid; Blind's concrete resolve quickly returned, reassured that the universe followed strict order and could be known by those who stare longingly into the Sun. He beheld the spirit manifesting before him, knowing it would be both mighty and wise, and an essential element in the completion of the Summoning he had anticipated for many millennia.

“Bastards! Awaken, You Bastards!” Gog opened his eyes, waking from a dream of a deep void that seemed to have no end. His memories fell slowly back into place as he cleared his eyes and raised up to see his comrade Magog on the ground before him. “The Spell! Cast The Spell!” He suddenly remembered where he was and what he was doing, looking to his right and rising to his feet. The Fallen was high in the air, tumbling about in the coils of a thousand wormlike protrusions coming out of the mouth of swaying sandworm; Kazamammut lay in the sand below. Black blood dripped from the beast’s mouth as the Fallen ripped apart its tendrils, fighting for his life against a foe that existed even before the creation of Mercury itself.

“What Are You Doing? Cast It!” His thoughts in a perfect hexagonal pattern, Gog snapped into action, scrambling to grab Kazamammut and hoping he could throw the Knight’s weapon or at least draw blood from the unholy annelid. He immediately found he could not lift the great axe by his own strength and attempted to move it telekinetically to the hands of the Fallen. Once again, he was met with incredible resistance, crying out in anguish as he pushed with every ounce of his magic.

Suddenly, his weight was greatly relieved; looking to his left, he found Magog casting the same levitation spell on the mighty axe. As the axe rose from the ground, the Fallen looked down at the Summoners in panic, his armor becoming weak under the tearing tendrils and digestive enzymes of the Parasite’s maw. “Forget the axe! Give me fi-“ before he could finish voicing his desperate plea, his cry was smothered by the gaping maw of a large tendril attempting to swallow him headfirst.

Just in time, Kazamammut made its way into the grasp of the Black Knight’s gauntlet, which ripped itself out of the grasp of several tendrils to decapitate the one which had begun to ingest his helmet and head along with it. He freed his other arm just as several grabbed at the one bearing the Black Axe and ripped the annelid head off of his own, crying out: “Fire! Give Me Fire!”

Before the Summoners could correct their mistake and clothe their comrade in conflagration, their eyes became blinded by a beam of white light that struck the segmented body of the Parasite, tearing through its repulsive flesh and rending into two parts. One part fell onto the sand, relinquishing its hold on the Fallen, hissing and writhing about in a desperate, sickly manner. The other part, still rooted, quickly retracted underground with a hissing sound until it disappeared under cascades of sand. The long, thick, severed worm seemed to squeal and squelch simultaneously as it died under the Sun, its thick body seemingly deflating as its black blood flooded from its maw, covering the Summoners and pooling around the ivory pyramid upon which Blind stood proudly next to a mysterious, indiscernible figure of brilliant, burning light.

This being their final sight, thousands of veined yellow eyes closed or rolled back on the segments of the annelid corpse.

## Chapter 6

*“Bathed in light, darkness rears its ugly head...”*

Gog rose from a mire of black blood and sordid mud, breathing deeply and staring at the repulsive corpse of the Parasite. He watched as the Fallen’s excess armor turned to ash on the sand as he returned to his common form, no longer a giant but still daunting. The Black Knight approached the massive carcass and shoved his fist into one of its lifeless eyes; blood and discharge spurted out onto him and he fell back onto the sand, exhausted from his battle with the creature.

Magog approached Gog from behind, laying his hand on his shoulder and urging him to turn about. Gog turned to see his blood-soaked comrade pointing at the apex of the ivory pyramid, where stood Blind and the mysterious figure of light that could only be the Sun Spirit. Blind, however, seemed to be scolding the Spirit that had vanquished their impossible adversary. As Blind and the Spirit began to float toward the foot of the pyramid, Gog and Magog walked to meet them. The Fallen continued to lay in the blistering sand, one of his hands fumbling about to find the handle of Kazamammut laying just out of reach.

Blind rambled on in a crotchety manner: “A child! I beckon the Sun for magic, an ancient spirit; Isa sends me his youngest child!”

“A powerful child, so it seems,” said Gog, “powerful enough to defeat what we could not.”

Blind cackled, “Defeated? You think the worm conquered? Fool, you are! You shall see, soon enough...”

The Fallen’s wandering hand mistakenly took hold of one of the tendrils ripped from the maw of the Parasite. Intrigued, he took the vile thing in hand and came to a knee to examine it closely. Looking at its head, identical to that of its host, he noticed even smaller tendrils protruding from its maw, segmented and covered in yellow eyes, from which even smaller ones protruded in what seemed to be an infinite regress. He began to consider the worm; when did we see its other end? Where went its other half when it retracted into the sand? Did it dig its way there or was it... pulled?

The truth struck the Black Knight quickly, as if he had known it all along: “It was too easy. We are yet doomed...”

Without even a shaking of the ground, hundreds of great cylindrical forms erupted from the sand in front of the ivory pyramid, all the same gargantuan size as the corpse bleeding black before them. All were studded with thousands yellow eyes; hundreds of thousands of yellow eyes all stared with wrath and hatred at the Summoners. Each head opened up in four segments to reveal a gaping, roaring maw; from each maw writhed a thousand tendrils identical to their source. Undoubtedly, each tendril had its own tendrils, and so on and so forth into microscopic oblivion.

As these cylindrical forms towered above the Summoners, they curled in toward their center point, where the sand began to sink into an unseen cavity deep below. The sand began to shift under the feet of the Summoners, pulling them toward the maw of the Parasite as it rose to the surface.

“To the pyramid! It runs too deep to be consumed!” The Fallen cried out to Gog and Magog, who had already begun to scramble for the pale stone of the pyramid. Struggled as they might, there was no footing on the shifting sand.

Blind laughed, raving madly at the Fallen. “What then, Black Knight? Where will you go once you’ve

clambered onto this ancient altar? Will you stand and fight a hundred times what has already defeated you? Look not to this Sun Spirit for more severing blasts; he hasn't the Power to fight the full form of the Parasite! None of you do. I could have called it by name, I could have sent it weeping into the depths, but now it comes with both desperate hunger and vengeful wrath! You are doomed! You are all doomed!"

Gog stopped struggling against the flow of the sand, and turned to face the maw of the worm, which was now becoming visible as it swallowed up the sand. Its sheer mass was inconceivable; as if the tendrils they had once thought to be the worm itself were not colossal enough, this teething pit was wide enough to swallow mountains. He looked up at the tendrils reaching out of it, swaying above with amber eyes fixated on the Summoners, waiting for the satisfaction of victory over such insects.

Gog then looked to the Fallen who had also abandoned any attempt to clamber out of the creature's maw; he stood poised with the mighty Kazamammut, ready to fight to a most certain death. Gog slowly turned to face his comrade Magog, who looked at him with somber resolve. Gog's stern gaze turned finally to the maddened old man who'd led them to this place, the dark prophet who they'd sought out in this God damned wasteland. Blind continued to rave at the foot of the pyramid, waving his staff about in lunacy. The Sun Spirit stood beside him, still and without expression. Gog fell deep into the chasms of thought...

"We have suffered the cruel weight of the sun and the bitter bite of battle, and we have followed our path without stray. I have seen my destiny in the stars; I have written it on the walls of my mind like a solitary prisoner in a black cell... but I have not even pressed my stone to the crest of the hill before watching it roll back to the bottom. Here now we die; have we failed in fulfilling destiny, or were we destined to fail? These things I will ponder in the innards of a worm."

As the Summoners slid closer toward the cascade of sand falling into the annelid's esophagus, there was a blinding flash of white light – then darkness.

# Volume 2: Further Into Dis

## Chapter 1

*“The voice of a dead god echoes still...”*

The Cult of the Sor came into being at the behest of God, a hierarchal Clergy designed to preserve Forbidden Knowledge and worship the God of Mercury, whose Name is Igna. Only the highest echelons of the Clergy knew the Name of God, and the only being on Mercury who called Him by Name is the Demon King Beael, Warden of Endless Sleep, as an act of defiance. The Name of God became well known in the Deep Shadow, but even the most fowl demons of Dis kept it from their tongues long after the Death of God.

As one ascended through the ranks of the Sor, the practices and teachings became more esoteric. Forbidden Knowledge of how and why Mercury exists, how and why it was Created by God, and even how God himself was brought into being were only accessible to the most Ancient and Noble among the Sor. At the head of the Clergy was its Pontifex Maximus: the Metatron, Voice of God and Deliverer of His Word, Keeper of Order on Mercury. She stood at the Left Hand of God when He still ruled from his Throne of Lies, and before the betrayal of the Centric Order, the Fallen stood at His Right Hand. She now sat upon the Throne herself, ruling in God’s stead, acting as His Voice even after His violent undoing by the Wrath of Raggioth.

Her reign was cunning and ruthless both by nature and necessity. Once the most beautiful creature to walk the surface of Mercury, she was disfigured by an unforgiving scar across the whole of her face, one rumored to be self-inflicted, and there was no welcome in her presence. After the Death of God, she became more ruthless than ever, keeping every creature in the Clergy fearful of the torment and labor awaiting blasphemers in the Infernal Construct. When Raggioth’s Legions defeated and flayed the Centric Order, she ordered the retreat of the Sor’s remaining priests and paladins, leaving God to face Raggioth’s Judgement. Had she not, the Sor would be defenseless and their remaining temples, settlements, and even the Infernal Construct itself would have fallen to the Legions of Dis when Beael drove Raggioth and his Legions from Mercury.

Still yet, the Legions of the Sor were few and their Faith was shaken horribly by the Death of God. Seizing the Throne of Lies, the Metatron devised a scheme to revitalize the Clergy with a sense of purpose, tasking them with gathering the Remains of God: Flesh, Blood, and Bone, as they’d been scattered across Mercury by Raggioth. She deceived the Sor into believing God could be resurrected if His remains were gathered and proper rituals were performed, but the Truth of her cunning was that only His Blood was necessary for the Ritual she’d planned. She knew of the ancient Cosmic Rite performed by God to Create Mercury: the Summoning, and intended to use His Blood and His Unholy Blade to perform it herself and become what God could never be.

Thwarted, she was, as Gog and Magog were tasked with the gathering of dead god’s Blood and somehow knew of the Summoning ritual themselves. The Metatron was furious, but knew these apostates lacked the necessary Elements to perform the ritual and could be killed with ease by the

proper paladins, therefor seizing the Blood gathered. She sent two paladins and priestess to hunt them down and take the Blood of God from them, but they had yet to return.

“Where is the Blood of God, why have they not returned?” she bellowed at her court, wherein the bishops trembled. One stepped forward, lowering the hood of his cloak, keeping his eyes to the floor for fear of meeting those of the Metatron: “Deliverer of the Word, our intelligence informs us that not only were their assassins lost upon the Scorched Sands, but the apostates were last seen with the Black Knight himself... the Fallen One. We believe it was by his Black Axe these brave souls fell.” The Metatron shrieked with rage, her Voice echoing through the vast chambers of the Holy Court. Containing her anger, she addressed the bishops with false air of patience, “Do any of you know where these pests and their bodyguard have wandered off to since reaching the Scorched Sands?” Another arch-bishop stepped forward, “Keeper of Order, their destination appeared to be the ancient white pyramid that points to the Sun, but we sent no further assassins into the Sands for fear of losing them to the Parasite.”

The Metatron laughed, “Fools you are. You think any number of priestess or paladin is worth more than fulfilling my decree?” “Oh no, dear Voice, we’d never dare, no...” before the arch-bishop could reach the floor to grovel, the Metatron had already appeared behind him, whispering unintelligible horrors into his ear. The other bishops watched in fear and awe as he began to age and decay with a swiftness, screaming madly as his skin shriveled away, his flesh decomposed, and his bones turned to dust, till dust was all that remained of him.

The Voice of God walked boldly before the remaining bishops, all whimpering and trembling together, terrified of the Power that remained in her Voice alone. She spoke in a whisper both tender and deafening, “You worms will find these filthy apostates, you will destroy them and you will destroy the Black Knight who travels with them. You will know my Wrath just as he did if you do not... and you will never, never call me ‘dear Voice.’” She gracefully returned to the Throne of Lies and as her lessers scrambled to escape the Holy Court, she called to them once more:

“And if the Parasite has already consumed them, along with the Blood of God they carry, you’ll all spend the rest of your lives in the Fires of the Infernal Construct.”

## Chapter 2

*“...the Tree of Life, held by the Bringer of Death.”*

Awakening again from dreams of endless void, Gog thought for sure the strange labyrinth surrounding him was some sort of purgatory his Soul had met with after his Death within the Parasite. He remembered a white light before descending into the maw, but knew not what came of it. Hearing Magog call to him, he rose and sought his voice, turning several corners before finding his comrade. “Where are we and what came of the others?” “The same question befalls me, fellow Summoner.” Hearing footsteps behind them, they saw the Fallen approaching, carrying Blind in his arms. Blind appeared lifeless, but upon further inspection they found he was in a deep sleep and unable to wake.

They also found the Fallen deeply fatigued, so much so that he could barely speak. There was no sign of the Sun Spirit anywhere.

The four began to navigate the labyrinth as best they could, hearing howling and screams as they did. Many of the walls had eyes and teething maws that opened as they passed. Some even had hands that reached out for them from above and below. It was clear that wherever they were, it was a place of terror that few escaped from; bones of those who'd tried were strewn about the ground. There was no sign of the Sun, placing them within the Deep Shadow if they even remained upon Mercury at all. They wandered and wandered, Blind carried by the weakened and disoriented Fallen. As they proceeded, they began to hear roaring in place of howling and thunderous footfall in place of screams.

"I know where we are," Gog said, coming to a stop. Magog urged him to go further, fearful of whatever approached them, "Whatever beast is upon us, we are in no condition to face it. We must press onward." "The further we go, the closer we become to the Beast," Gog said, turning to the Fallen who nodded in agreement. "We are in the Leviathan, the labyrinthine construct surrounding and protecting the city of Dis. It is sentient and it guides us to its abominable sentinel, the ageless beast that massacred the Druids in the Ancient Time, brought here by Beael to ward off invaders... to crush them with the Tree of Life."

"The Tree of Life? What is this madness, Gog? Have you gone mad?" Unlike Gog, Magog had never exposed himself to the secrets of the Sor they were tasked with delivering among the bishops. His curiosity was always curtailed by his self-preservation, never wanting to be caught knowing what he should not. Gog knew more of the ancient world than most Mercurians, and yet still he knew so very little. "He wields the Tree of Life, the very womb from which he was born." Gog sat down, meditating, considering what they could possibly do to escape or defeat the Minotaur. "These things were written in the Sor's plans to infiltrate Dis. They never succeeded..." Magog began to panic, confused and urgent, screaming "Gog, we cannot stay here!"

As he said this, a roar like an entire horde of demons came from the far corridor. A fire's glow could be seen, growing brighter with each falling hoof in the Minotaur's approach. "Fallen One, can you fight?" The Black Knight shook his head, knowing in his stupor he'd be no match for the beast. "Then retreat with Blind, stay far behind us... we will do everything in our Power to hold off this terrible beast." Gog and Magog began to chant a spell that would increase the gravity surrounding the Minotaur, slowing his dreadful march, even bringing him to a halt if their Magic were strong enough. "*Uthium, tectarum, otares... Uthium, tectarum, otares...*" Before their incantation could come to fruition, the ancient Minotaur's blackened face could be seen at the end of the corridor. It was massive, larger even than the Fallen at full strength, and fire flew from its eyes and nostrils. Its horns and teeth were stained with blood, and its hooves cracked the ground. In its hand it held a dead tree, the Tree of Life, with which it sought to crush the Summoners into Oblivion.

Gog and Magog bravely continued their chant, knowing not if they could hold back the rage of the Minotaur, as the Fallen knelt behind them, lowering Blind to the ground, unable to stand any longer.

"Even if the Beast is held back by the gravity of their spell, where will we go to escape him?"

*"Uthium, tectarum, otares..."*

## Chapter 3

*“Cast adrift, lead to ruin...”*

The Minotaur approached slowly, held by the gravity cast upon it by the spell of the Summoners. Gog and Magog stood steadfast as the Fallen knelt behind them, unable to gather his senses, with Blind sleeping next to him. Their Magic alone would not be enough to save them, as they would still be trapped within the Leviathan and inevitably caught again in the Minotaur's wake. The Fallen stood up, drowsily rocking from side to side, holding out his Black Axe and attempting to chant its name. Blind began to snore. The Fallen laughed within himself, “For the sins I have committed, this helplessness is true penance.”

The fire from the Minotaur's nostrils and eyes began to spread across its body as its muscles began to expand, its fury becoming Power as it struggled against gravity's pull. Magog began to sweat, briefly looking to Gog for assurance, only to see his friend stoic in the face of certain death, just as he expected. The Summoners began to slowly step backwards, their hands forward as conduits of Magic, distancing themselves from the sheer infernal warmth of the Minotaur's burning form. The Fallen, unable to call upon Kazamammut's might, began to drag Blind by his feet away from the beast before them.

The Summoners could retreat no further; the passage behind them had closed and the barrier in its place began pushing them towards the Minotaur. The Fallen did his best to grasp Kazamammut, placing himself precariously ahead of the apostates who continued their gravitational spell. The Minotaur moved slower than ever, but its Power had increased exponentially to compensate for the Summoner's spell, and hellfire covered every inch of its body. Even against the strengthening pull of gravity it continued to push while the walls of the Leviathan continued to draw the Summoners ever closer. Becoming weak, Gog and Magog knew not how long they could continue their spell, and the Minotaur was only a few sluggish steps away from bringing the Tree of Life down upon them.

Suddenly a flash of white light appeared before them, and the spell cast by Gog and Magog was broken. Free of gravity's chains, the Minotaur lunged, but found itself unable to propel forward. Instead, it was rapidly encased in a strange ethereal aura and slowly rising from the ground, flailing about and roaring in fury and fear. Behind the floating beast, the Sun Spirit appeared, walking casually underneath it to stand with the Summoners. Confused, the Summoners again began to step back, unsure of what the Solarian might do. The Spirit then turned swiftly to the Minotaur, laughing at its futile struggle to become grounded. Without a word, the Solarian blew a gentle gust of wind from their mouth, carrying the Minotaur aimlessly adrift toward the stars until it was out of sight. The Summoners, in shock, looked down from the stars to find the Sun Spirit had vanished.

Gog and Magog collapsed from fatigue, resting momentarily in this far, abandoned corner of the Leviathan. The Fallen again knelt, even more exhausted and disoriented than before. The Summoners began to converse, discussing what could possibly be their next maneuver. “We'll inevitably have to navigate this labyrinth in order to bind the Balrog General Scios to our will, but in this condition? We won't survive much longer,” Gog pondered. With a deep sigh, Magog replied, “How will we even navigate this labyrinth if only to escape and lick our wounds? Where could we go when we do in the Deep Shadow? Where the Sor does not hunt us, the Legions of Dis surely will.”

A raspy voice fell upon their ears with air of menace, "I believe I can answer both of those questions, Summoners." Alarmed, Gog and Magog leapt to their feet; a dark, ragged, horned figure in decrepit armor and tattered garb stood hunched over before them, withering with age, wheezing softly and gazing madly. His gnarled fingers clenched tightly at a mysterious pitch black dagger that he seemed to halfheartedly conceal. The figure spoke again, "I know the Leviathan like a mother knows her child; I helped design her. I know a place where the Summoners can hide from the spell that consumes the Dark Prophet and the Black Knight. I can help you..." Gog and Magog were suspicious of this frail, demonic creature, and frightened that it knew them. "What creature would be so foolish or so deceitful to offer us help in the Deep Shadow, being enemies of Beael?" Gog asked, "How can we trust you?"

The figure laughed and a strange glow lit up his eyes, "I am Mayhem, the Invoker of Chaos, and you have no other choice."

## Chapter 4

*"Solitude found in a fortress forgotten..."*

In the beginning, there were three races upon the face of Mercury: the Sor, the Druids, and the Chukar. The Cult of the Sor was Created by God to worship Him and carry His Forbidden Knowledge across the generations. The Druids were given Ancient Wisdom, and were tasked with the cultivation of flora and animals across Mercury, where there was once paradise instead of the wastelands that came to cover it. Binding Magic was given to the Chukar, scientists who were tasked with the cultivation of new Knowledge and development of technology on Mercury. To bring mortality to all Mercurians, God Created Beael, Warden of Endless Sleep, as His Prodigy of Oblivion. It was Beael's task to keep the Souls of the Dead on Mercury, and God granted him Unrelenting Power to do so. All of this was to be done in the Name of God.

God's inescapable weakness led Mercury to ruin. The Sor was plagued with heresy and apostasy, which eventually lead to blasphemy and the rise of demonic entities lurking in the Deep Shadow. These demons made their way to the city of Dis, where they were welcomed by Beael; the Warden of Endless Sleep had become a Demon King and Created there a Court of Hell in defiance of God. After the Parasite burrowed its way from the Void into the core of Mercury, it began to leech off of the living essence of the Planet, the Blood of God, from behind His Throne in the planet's core. This caused the surface of the planet to dry up and crack, and the flora to begin dying. In response, the Druids used their Ancient Wisdom to plant a Tree that could preserve the living essence of Mercury and save the flora: the Tree of Life. For a Time, the Tree of Life revitalized Mercury and there was rejoicing among the Druids. However, the corruption of God's own essence reached the roots of the Sacred Tree, causing to give birth to an abomination... a calf.

As for the Chukar, their Magic gave them means to surpass the Forbidden Knowledge and Ancient Wisdom of God with a quickness. They built the Workshop of Telescopes, an invisible fortress protected

by a field of Magic from all outsiders... especially their dreaded enemy, Mayhem. The Invoker of Chaos was known to thwart their experiments with his Magic and meddle in their politics, eventually aiding the Legions of Dis, as Supreme Wizard in the Court of Hell, in a war waged against the Chukar. Being scientists and not warmongers, the cities of the Chukar could not withstand the onslaught of the demon horde, and what remained of them vanished from Mercury altogether, leaving behind the legendary Workshop of Telescopes invisible and untouched as all other traces of their society fell to ruin.

After leading them out of the Leviathan and into the outer reaches of the Deep Shadow, Mayhem promised the Summoners a place where they could find sanctuary. Taken by a spell of sedation, Blind was trapped in a deep sleep while the Fallen desperately fought the same Magic, cast by Beael, Warden of Endless Sleep, to stall the Summoners. "I know of but one place in the Deep Shadow Beael's Magic cannot touch," croaked Mayhem, "it is an Ancient place untouched for thousands of years." Mayhem had stalked the Summoners in the Leviathan, watching and waiting for an opportunity to reveal himself, becoming far more interested upon seeing the mysterious ring on Magog's finger.

"Where does one come by a ring so strange?" Mayhem asked Magog as the party crossed the wastes, following Mayhem to their supposed sanctum. "It was found with me by the Sor; None have been able to remove it from my finger," Magog replied, "and None of the bishops who examined it recognized its runic carvings." Mayhem laughed, "The Sor *found* you? How curious." He cackled and kept moving forward across the cold, cracked surface of the Deep Shadow, his skeletal fingers clenched 'round his cursed dagger. Magog looked skeptically from their guide, the ragged Invoker of Chaos, to Gog, looking for reassurance. Gog's equally skeptical expression gave nothing of the sort. The Fallen grew ever weary, but insisted on continuing to carry Blind on his back. There was no sign of the Solarian...

"Aha! We are upon it!" Mayhem exclaimed, bringing the Summoners to a halt. "Behold, the Workshop of Telescopes!" he said, motioning toward the barren wastes of the Deep Shadow as the sprawled out before them, no sanctum to be seen.

Gog sighed, "It has been my ponderance whether or not you are deceitful or mad, and I have decided with some relief it is the latter. We must move on." "Do not be deceived, Gog of the Summoner's Circle!" Mayhem bellowed, "You have been tricked by an Ancient Magic cast by the Chukar to protect the last remnants of their once magnificent society! A fortress and observatory, a place of science and solitude. Step forth, Magog! Your birthright, your mysterious ring, will prove quite useful here."

Confused, Magog looked again at Gog for reassurance. Gog nodded his head, still unconvinced of Mayhem's sanity but curious of the direction his lack thereof would take. Magog stepped forward, holding out his Left Hand, the one bearing the unremovable ring, and suddenly an invisible door with a firey aura appeared from nowhere before him. Stunned, the Summoners looked in awe to the guide, who laughed and motioned from them to step through. One by one the Summoners entered the door, only to find an immense structure before them. Towering turrets, insurmountable walls, telescopes gazing infinitely into the stars above, all invisible to the outside world by some Ancient Magic of the Chukar.

As the Fallen stepped through the door carrying Blind, Magog motioned for Mayhem to go ahead of him being the last of their party to enter. Mayhem cackled and rubbed his hands together, eagerly approaching the gateway as if he were sneaking into an enemy camp... for he was. As he passed

through the door, fire and lightning struck him from all sides, causing him to shriek in pain as he was thrown against the cracked ground. Writhing in pain, he looked deep into Magog's fearful eyes, again cracking a smile, wheezing a whisper, "I am not welcome here, Summoner. Go forth and meet your destiny in the Workshop of Telescopes. Go forth and learn the Truth of who you are."

Magog, bewildered but ever curious, stepped through the doorway which vanished quickly behind him. All that was left was Mayhem, Invoker of Chaos, broken, burned, and sniggering wickedly upon the Wastes of Mercury.

## Chapter 5

*"...we are not alone."*

Blind laughed in the Fallen's arms, finally awake from his slumber: "That old fool tried to enter? For being the Invoker of Chaos, Mayhem is so very predictable." The Fallen, his wits finally about him, set Blind gently on his feet as they approached the Enchanted Gates of the Workshop of Telescopes. Gog and Magog were thrilled to see their comrades finally free from Beael's Magic, and began asking questions about the Minotaur, Mayhem, the invisible fortress they were approaching, and most adamantly the whereabouts of the Sun Spirit. Blind became annoyed quickly at their inquisitions and began shouting: "Enough questions! We have little Time and the Solarian, the fool, is already here."

The Summoners looked forward to the Enchanted Gates only to find the Sun Spirit sitting atop them, materialized in a form less shapeless than before, the same smile recognizable upon their face. "I will grow weary of your repeated absences, Sun Spirit," said the Fallen, "since you've joined our cause, there has been twice you've waited till death was certain to intervene on our behalf." "Three times, Black Knight," said Blind, "how else do you explain your miraculous escape from the maw of the Parasite? It is, however, of no consequence. Be useful, star child: open up the Enchanted Gates."

The Solarian floated gracefully from atop the Enchanted Gates and levitated facing them, arms outstretched, and their Magic flowed forward like a river of dancing starlight into the massive entrance of the Workshop of Telescopes. With strangely soothing hum, the Sun Spirit's Magic urged the two monolithic doors outward, revealing the crystal interior of the structure. Turning to the Summoner's, the Solarian poured out the last of their Magic and floated backward through the Gates and into the fortress, beckoning them to follow. Follow they did, entering the most magnificent room any living Mercurian had ever witnessed.

The inside of the Workshop of Telescopes was entirely made of crystal, walls either transparent or reflective. It was labyrinthine but somehow impossibly easy to navigate; with any one destination in mind, one could be there in a small matter of corridors. Upon entering the Great Hall, the Summoners were greeted by a trio of the living dead, wretched ghouls wrapped in bloody rags: one without legs and one faceless except for a single eye. "Greetings, ritualists," hissed the only one among them with all its limbs and face, "I am Gnarl, and we are the Wretched, slaves of the departed Chukar left behind on Mercury to await your coming. It is our most Holy task to do whatever is necessary to make you comfortable in this sanctum and make ready whatever resources the Chukar have here for you..."

beginning with these weapons for the first among you: Gog and Magog.” The other two ghouls crept forward, the legless one dragging itself, and with a snap of Gnarl’s finger a weapon materialized in each of their hands: a sword and a bow with a quiver full of arrows. Celestial light cascaded from the ceiling of the Crystal Hall unto each relic.

“For Gog: Soul Keeper.” Gnarl took the sword from the hands of the faceless ghoul, handing it Gog. “Forged by necromancers for the Unrepenting Apostate, this blade snatches away the Soul of whoever it cuts down, becoming stronger with each one Bound to its essence. Upon wielding it, the Power, Wisdom, Knowledge, and Magic of your enemies will become yours... if you can destroy them with it.” A smirk crossed Gnarl’s face with his last word as Gog unsheathed Soul Keeper, testing its weight and observing the runic carvings on its hilt. As he held the ancient saber, the blade began to shimmer with a deathly aura. Gnarl walked then to the legless ghoul who held the bow and quiver, “And for Magog: Farsoar.” Gnarl handed them both to Magog, who accepted them cautiously and eagerly all at once, gazing down in awe at his destined prize. “Crafted by druids for the Artful Seeker, this bow was created for hunting but has known the blood of both demon and paladin in battle. Not only does its quiver never empty, but the bow will never miss its mark as long as the Eye of the archer is upon it.” Magog cracked a smile, always wishing himself a marksman instead of a messenger. Gnarl laughed, “Soon you will know exactly why this weapon is your chosen companion, Child of the Chukar.” The blow had the green glow of the forest, long unseen to Mercurian eyes.

As Gog and Magog accepted the armaments long prophesied to arrive in their grasp, they became shrouded in celestial light.

Magog looked at his ring and then quickly to Gnarl, suddenly angry: “Child of the Chukar? Who are the Chukar? Is this who placed a ring on my finger and left me to die in the Wastes? If I am their Child why did they abandon me!” Blind laid his hand upon the Summoner’s shoulder: “Patience, Magog. These answers will come with Time. For now, we must bear witness to what no living Mercurian could fathom through the Telescopes. Lead us to the one of which I speak, Gnarl.” Gnarl bowed and complied. Gog and Magog sheathed their relics and followed Gnarl with their comrades to one of the Chukar’s many observatories. As they entered the room, Gnarl stepped out and closed the door behind him, murmuring to himself as he did.

Blind used his staff to activate a monitor connected to the massive telescope before them. Onscreen there was a tranquil planet floating among the stars, blue and green and beautiful as Mercury once was. He then turned to address the four before him, “Summoners, lest we forget: our most powerful enemy is the God of War and Creator of Mars: Raggoth, Son of Jupiter and the Raging Fire who seeks to destroy and conquer all of the Planets.” Among the Summoners, Gog and Magog were the only ones unaware of the existence of other Planets, even though Gog had seen mention of such in messages between Bishops of the Sor. Blind continued: “Before you, the planet Gaia. Many of the observatories in the Workshop of Telescopes are devoted to watching this planet and recording data regarding the Life dwelling upon it. There are countless archives of what has come and gone, all Created by the Planet’s Mother: Umata, the Goddess of Life. It is She who the Chukar came to worship in the stead of Igna, God of Deceit and Creator of Mercury.”

At the Name of God, Gog and Magog both shuddered. The Fallen, who had never heard the Name himself but feared it not, was unmoved. The Solarian was barely paying attention, fascinated by Gaia’s

beauty and running their fingers through what appeared to be their newly materialized hair of fire and gold.

Blind continued to lecture, "After a millennia of prayers, finally there was correspondence between the Chukar and Umata, but many of it was lost when their cities were laid to ruin by the Legions of Dis. All that is left on Mercury of the Chukar is this fortress, and all that can be learned of the planet Gaia is here in their archives. This planet and the Life it bears is our only hope in defeating Raggoth." As Blind said this, a dreadful comet came into view, striking the planet's surface and blasting through it like a cosmic juggernaut. The molten interior of the planet exploded and began to consume what remained of its crust in hellfire, blue and green becoming black and red. The Summoners watched in horror as the fractured pieces of Gaia began to drift apart and crumble into dust, leaving nothing behind but a cloud of rubble as the fires of its undoing slowly burned out. Gog and Magog were aghast; the Fallen dropped his Black Axe as his Heart left his body. The Solarian began to weep.

"And that, Summoners, was the Purifying Light of Apophis."

## Chapter 6

*"A dreadful opportunity..."*

The Metatron waited impatiently upon the Throne of Lies for news of the so-called "Summoners" as they'd come to be known across Mercury, growing famous for their exploits as reported by silent eyes constantly surrounding them. It only took a report or rumor in one faction for information to spread like a virus across the remaining populations of the wasteland planet; spies ran amok in both the Sor and Dis, reporting back to their masters eagerly through tight knit networks of messengers much like Gog and Magog once were. There were so many spies and cutthroats lurking about that many speculated whether or not the allegiance of any Mercurian could be trusted. Regardless, every aligned Mercurian was compelled by fear of their Master, be it Beael or the Metatron, to obey without question until their enemy gave them a better offer.

Entering the Court of the Holy One, a hooded messenger of the Sor approached the Throne and knelt before the Metatron, bearing news she'd long anticipated: "Pontifex Maximus, I have news from our most trusted spy within the Court of Hell. He also tells us that Beael is leaving Mercury for a Time, and that the Court will be in the hands of the Supreme Wizard, Golgoth. He asks if in this Time we should finally move forward with our plan to abduct and enlist the Balrog General Scios for our own purposes." "How interesting," the Voice of God remarked, "how strange and foolish for the Warden of Endless Sleep to abandon his dark kingdom in a time of turmoil... this wrecks of a trap." She stood up and approached the messenger, beckoning him to his feet. "It would be all too convenient for Beael if we were to show our hand prematurely and eliminate one of our few chances at victory over Dis. How do I know your message is not a lie, creature?"

She took the messenger by the throat and lifted him off the floor, staring into his fearful eyes as he squirmed in her grip. "Your eyes cannot deceive me, the Left Hand of God, and I see no deceit therein." She gently returned him to the ground and returned to her beloved Throne as he gasped for breath.

"Even though you can be trusted I find this turn of events... too convenient," she said, "we've had this spy waiting in the Court of Hell for the right moment even long before the Death of God to Bind Scios to the Will of the Sor, and while it is truly tempting I believe our Time is to wait and scheme while the Demon King frolics about in the stars." She then smirked, "However, it also inevitable that our dear Apostates will have to Bind the Balrog General themselves, if they truly wish to become Summoners. Let our spy keep lurking in the Court of the Demon King, for news of Beael's travels will surely reach the Apostates and surely they will seize this opportunity."

The Metatron looked the messenger directly in the eye, a gaze few could withstand. "You will tell this spy that the Summoners are coming, and before he initiates our plot, he is to use the Balrog General to destroy them."

Meanwhile, the Summoners were becoming familiar with the many resources offered by the Workshop of Telescopes, from the Forbidden Knowledge in its vast archives to the incredible perspectives on the universe outside of Mercury watched closely through the highly advanced Telescopes of the Chukar. The planets and their respective moons became of deep familiarity to the Summoners, becoming knowledgeable in particular of both Mars and the recently destroyed Gaia. They also learned all they could of Apophis, the comet that undid Gaia, an undoing foretold thousands of years ago by the Chukar. They learned that Apophis was a wicked weapon of War controlled by Raggoth, and that Mercury was the next planet it was charted to annihilate.

The Fallen gathered the Summoners in a small room devoted to strategy by the Chukar; he lovingly named this place the War Room. It had a map of Mercury on it and small tokens the Fallen used to represent the Summoner's and their Enemies. "Here we are," he said, motioning to the six tokens placed in the northwest corner of the Deep Shadow, "and here is Dis, south of us, surrounded of course by the Leviathan. Mayhem," he said, pointing to a rusted token in the Leviathan, "has agreed to guide us in and out of the labyrinth, but is forbidden from entering Dis by Beael's Magic, so when we enter the city, we will be on our own. In the Court of Hell, there is of course not only Beael himself but the Supreme Wizard, Golgoth." The Fallen placed three tokens in the Demon City. "Assuming we successfully sneak past the demon hordes residing in Dis, we will inevitably face not one insurmountable foe, but his court magician as well." The Black Knight sighed, looking up at his comrades: "This is ignoring, of course, that the magician controls the Balrog General, who we may have to face as well if our friend here decides to abandon us again."

His accusatory words fell heavy upon the Solarian, who still had yet to speak in anything except the Solar Tongue but understood the Fallen's sentiment clearly. "I think remaining materialized is becoming easier and easier for him," said Gog, placing his hand on the shoulder of the Sun Spirit, who responded with a low hum and a smile. "I also think we need a name for our friend here, since none but Blind can speak the Solar Tongue and therefor pronounce his real one." Magog readily suggested a simple abbreviation for Solarian; this pleased the Sun Spirit, who managed to say their new name in the Mercurian tongue: Sol.

The Fallen grew frustrated, "Even if Sol's Magic is there to meet that of Golgoth's in Binding the Balrog, who among us is going to face the Warden of Endless Sleep?" "You won't have to," croaked Blind, who had entered the room unnoticed. He alerted them to a visitor outside the sanctum's cloak, the Invoker of Chaos bearing news. Looking out from atop the Enchanted Gates, they watched as Mayhem leapt about screaming and ranting, trying to get the attention of the Summoners within. "Shall I vaporize him, Masters?" Gnarl begged, tugging at Blind's sleeve like a child. Blind was annoyed by both Gnarl and Mayhem: "Begone, wretched. Go and see what the old fool wants. Return ye the rest of you to the War Room."

The Summoners waited patiently for Gnarl to return with word from Mayhem, ever confused by the cryptic revelations of Blind even as they came to fruition. Gnarl crept into the War Room, disappointed and excited all at once: "I suppose the Creature Calling Itself Mayhem has brought us some interesting news: Beael is leaving Mercury for a Time, leaving the Court of Hell in the care of Golgoth alone." Gnarl then sighed and said to himself, "I suppose vaporizing him is out of the question..." The Fallen laughed, removing Beael's token from the map, remarking at the perfect timing of such a maneuver: "It wrecks of being a trap, but what choice do we have? There is little time before Apophis sends us all screaming into Oblivion. We will keep our wits and our strength about us so if the Demon King wants to ambush us, we will be ready. If not, we will be more than ready."

The Black Knight raised his Black Axe Kazamammut to rally the Summoners, "Let us go and meet Mayhem, and then, let us go and meet our doom!"

## Chapter 7

*"...further into Dis."*

Revisiting the Leviathan wasn't something Magog ever wanted to do, but considering he had to, he felt much safer with the Fallen wide awake, Gog and he armed, and Sol's Magic concealing them with invisibility. Blind remained in meditation at the Workshop of Telescopes, impatiently awaiting triumphant return with the Balrog General Scios. Magog didn't know how to feel about Mayhem guiding them through the Leviathan, but considering he'd lead them to the Workshop of Telescopes which also lead him to the secrets of his birth and ancestry, he'd come to somewhat admire the raving, horned lunatic as a sort of comrade but remained quite far from trusting him. He had bonded with the other Summoners in the time they'd spent cultivating a new knowledge of Ancient Times and the other Planets surrounding them. He longed to travel these planets in search of his people, but stayed focused on the Path of the Summoner, knowing he was a part of something that could save the Planets from certain destruction at the hands of Raggioth. He had to save his own Planet from the Purifying Light of Apophis first...

As they neared the Gates of Dis, Mayhem vanished, fearing the Demon King's Magic. The Fallen pondered for a moment, realizing that in Beael's absence his Magic held no Power, but before he could inquire this with Mayhem, the old man had already vanished. Undeterred, the Summoners pressed forward in their stealth, meandering through the Demon City invisible to its denizens. Dis, despite being a dark and horrifying place, was full of love and rejoicing. The demons drank and laughed and spoke of

glory, celebrating their existence in defiance of the Dead God and their King's new reign over this dead planet. The Fallen thought to himself, even without this Magic we could pass unseen here; not a Soul would notice us walking down the middle of the road for all this intoxication and ruckus.

As its burning spires came into view, the Summoners knew they were approaching the Demon King's impenetrable castle: Wraithverge, the Citadel of Defiance, erected by Beael to host his Court of Hell, Named for being the convergence of the Dead and Damned Souls of Mercury. The formidable fortress was constructed of brimstone and adorned with crimson and gold, and was host to Five of the Seven Lords of the Damned, direct subordinates of the Balrog General and feudal masters in the City of Dis. From the center of the structure, hellfire erupted into obsidian sky. Continuing under the cloak of Sol's Magic and the utter obliviousness of demons, the four Summoners approached the castle gates, strangely guarded by None.

The Fallen became wary: "Summoners, this does not bode well. We are walking into a trap." "We are past the point of no return; we must simply redirect..." Gog replied before interrupted by the toll of a bell ringing out from within the castle, its vibration passing through the Summoners like a wave of pure dread as it undid the Sun Spirit's invisibility spell. To their horror, the bell also revealed them surrounded by a savage horde of demons who'd followed the four silently beneath an invisibility spell all their own. Gnashing jagged teeth with swords drawn and spears keen, the demons forced the Summoners back to back, weapons at the ready and prepared for death. Initially confused by the undoing of their Magic, Sol collected himself and began to incant: the Sun Spirit began to levitate above the demon horde and unleash Light itself upon them. The Solarian's radiance caused the surrounding horde to panic, some of which began to retreat while others became blinded or paralyzed with fear. The Light of the Sun never touched the Deep Shadow; its exposure was painful and alien to those dwelling in darkness.

Suddenly a bolt of blood red lightning from above struck the Solarian to the ground, causing them to fade and dematerialize. The three remaining Summoners searched the sky for the source of the blow, finding a dark figure descending and laughing sinister, adorned in crimson and gold just as the fortress before them. This was none other than Gologth, He of Forked Tongue, the Great Betrayer and Supreme Wizard in the Court of Hell. The sight of their king regent, the many devils and goblins rejoiced, and those who'd begun to retreat from the Light of the Sun were executed on sight by their comrades. The three Summoners, surrounded and outmatched without so much as the Magic of Sol to contend with Golgoth, were no strangers to despair and therefor did not cower.

"Like insects into the spiders snare you have come to me, Summoners," Golgoth hissed, his infamous forked tongue flicking between his fangs. "The Summoners Circle, drawn on top of the world in the Divine Blood of the Dead God, will be of great use to my Master. Many thanks. I reward you with... this."

With that, the Supreme Wizard vanished, revealing that the Legion of the Damned surrounding the Summoners had parted behind him, leaving what appeared to be an open path. For a moment, the Summoners thought they were being released, but the battles cries of demons and the gnashing of teeth continued to echo from the horde. Then came a something they'd heard before: thunderous footfall, a boom that shook the stone beneath their feet. As the beast approached, the horde became silent, continuing to part, making way for whatever terrible thing was sure to come. In their silence, the dreadful hum of a thousand wings layered upon the rumble of hastening footfall. Again laughing sinister, Golgoth dissipated. The Fallen smiled, stepping forward from between Gog and Magog, holding out his Black Axe and beginning his incant: *Ka za mam mut...*

Gog wondered if the coming terror was one they'd already encountered in the Leviathan, but this demon shook the ground far more than the cloven feet of the Minotaur. It was then the Summoners saw the unholy beast itself, barreling toward them with a quickness and a terrible, guttural roar. It was a cyclops, repulsive and rotund, a sickly green color with tumorous growths scattered upon its diseased body. Its single eye was bloodshot and yellow, much like those of the Parasite, and it wielded a gigantic stone mace that it swung wildly above its head as it charged forth. It was gargantuan, larger even than the Minotaur, and was followed by what appeared to be a rust-colored cloud... a swarm of locusts.

The abomination approached rapidly, gaining momentum and preparing to strike all three Summoners down with a single blow from its stone mace. Magog aimed Farsoar carefully at the eye of the beast, trembling in fear; his arrow was deflected with ease by the creature, for his heart was not with it. Gog and Magog then searched desperately for a means of retreat, met on all sides by spears and jeering from the Legion of Hell. The Fallen stood undeterred, continuing his chant and drawing Power from Kazamammut, ready to die in combat with this abhorrent beast. As the cyclops was finally upon them, its rupturous battle cry pierced their ears. The Fallen had not completed his transformation, but stood at the ready for the beast's attack, knowing not whether he'd be able to avoid or withstand it. Gog stood with Soul Keeper pointed and Magog aimed Farsoar again at the beast. As the stone mace began its descent, the three saw its massive head was enough to crush them all in one blow.

All of a sudden there was a flash of white light and the Summoners vanished just as the cyclops brought down its bludgeon with untethered fury and hatred. The sheer impact of the stone mace against the Mercurian surface caused the entire planet to quake.

## Chapter 8

*"Lake of fire, cries of madness..."*

The Summoners awakened to the smell of shit, burning flesh, and molten steel. Before even opening his eyes, the Fallen knew where they were: the Chromlech. The endless rivers of liquid metal and excrement were the sewers beneath the City of Dis, and the birthplace of the Balrog General Scios.

"Yet again our lives are saved by the Sun Spirit, and yet again, he is nowhere to be found," scoffed the Fallen, rising to his feet. Gog and Magog looked around themselves, relieved to be alive but repulsed by their surroundings. They appeared to be on a sort of stone bridge crossing over a river of magma and waste. The caverns of the Chromlech were nearly impossible to navigate and there was no telling how deep beneath the Planet's surface they'd been sent. However, given they were alone, it was of some recompense their whereabouts were also unknown to Legions of Hell. The putrid heat was unbearable, akin to the cruel weight of the sun in the Scorched Sands; being grateful for their lives, None complained. "The Balrog General was... more grotesque and titanic than I'd ever imagined," Magog said, reflecting on their narrow survival. "What Balrog General?" the Fallen laughed, "You've yet to see the Balrog General Scios, Summoner. What you witnessed was One of the Seven Lords of the Damned: Abaddon the Destroyer, King of Locusts and Chief of Abominations. The Balrog General is thrice in size and tenfold in Power." This simultaneously ignited both fear and intrigue in the heart of Magog; what could possibly prepare him to face Scios, considering the terror he felt facing an inferior?

Magog was frustrated with himself. He could have destroyed the cyclops with a single arrow to its eye if he had aimed without fear. Gog put his hand on Magog's shoulder, reassuring him: "Even if you'd met your mark, you may have only blinded the beast. Even if you'd slain it, we were still yet surrounded." Magog took his comrade's words to heart, clearing his mind of doubts and self-flagellation. He then began to ponder their situation, wondering how they would find their way out of the Chromlech to either escape Dis or face Golgoth once and for all.

It was then that Magog was met with a vision: suddenly he could see both the Court of Hell and the path to reach it, imparted to him by a providence he'd found within himself. He was uncertain of where this vision came from, but knew with absolutely certainty he could lead Gog and the Fallen from out of the Chromlech. "Summoners, I cannot explain how or why, but I know the way," he said, "I know how we can reach the Court of Hell." The Fallen laughed: "And when we reach the Court of Hell, what shall we do? Will your Magic and Gog's be enough to Bind the Balrog General? Will my Black Axe be enough to defeat the Supreme Wizard of Dis? We should return to the Workshop of Telescopes and regroup, Summoners. Now is not the Time to be rash or reckless." "Time, Fallen One, is also what we have little of," Gog said, "soon the Purifying Light of Apophis will claim Mercury just as it claimed Gaia." Frustrated, Magog stood his ground: "My vision shows the way to the Court of Hell, and no other path is clear to us. Whether this is because there is no other path we can take or because this is the one we must, it is what providence has imparted upon me. We can either stand here and argue or we can act." Gog and the Fallen, moved their comrade's resolve, agreed to follow. "Still yet, the burning question remains: where is Sol?" Gog looked towards the surface, briefly pondering this query: "In my heart I'm certain the starchild will not fail us."

The way through the Chromlech was precarious. Fire and brimstone was on all sides, the footing was ever unstable, and the stench was wrenching. The further they advanced through its hollows and fissures, the louder became the howling and moaning from the cesspools about them, Souls of the Damned who defied the rule of Beael. They pressed onward without fear, Magog at the head and the Fallen watchful at the rear; Gog between them, contemplating their predicament. What shall we do whence reaching the Court of Hell? We cannot take the Balrog General without Sol, nor can we survive battle with Golgoth and the Legions of Hell. Where is the Solarian? Is he even strong enough to bind one of the most formidable beings on Mercury, second only to his father, the Warden of Endless Sleep?

Gog's contemplation was interrupted by a shrieking cackle that echoed through the great chamber through which they passed over yet another bridge, crooked and narrow and high above a particularly repugnant pool of molten steel and filth. The Summoners looked above to find a scraggly, horrific creature with spines down its back, skeletal and white with eyes like wounds and jaws full of serrated teeth. The Fallen, full of hatred for the vile thing, shouted its name: "Kromoly! Come down from your perch and meet my Axe, coward!" "Nay, Fallen One," it screeched, "I wouldn't dare! I'll allow my lovely pets such an honor in my stead." Laughing, the cretin crawled away like an insect across the cavern wall. From out of passages on either side of the bridge came dreadful horrors, amorphous amalgamations of flesh with gaping, teething mouths and ghastly, gazing eyes and reaching appendages. The most hideous and horrifying of all ascended from beneath the bridge: an oozing, pulsating mass of epithelium and eyes. At its center was a grisly maw lined with gnarled tusks, and it rose from the depths with hundreds of veiny, elongated tentacles.

The Fallen watched its ascent with disgust: "Ah, the Orlick: oldest and most repulsive among abominations. Fight well Summoners, lest we rid Mercury of Creation's foulest failures."

The Fallen took one side of the bridge and Gog took the other, Kazamammut and Soul Keeper slicing wildly at the tendrils and arms that attempted to strangle and ensnare. Suddenly without fear, Magog stood steadfast between them, finally unleashing the full power of Farsoar as he pierced each evil eye of the Orlick with an arrow, knocking and releasing with fluidity and quickness. The horrors were screaming and writhing in pain, but their depraved tenacity wavered not as they closed in on the Summoners. Gog began to incant, sword in one hand with the other as a conduit, turning the appendages surrounding him to ice and shattering them with his blade. Magog enchanted his arrows with gravity, their weight becoming unbearable in the body of the Orlick. The Fallen felt no need to rely on Magic, his hatred for these foul things giving him Power to tear them apart with ease.

Having slaughtered the atrocities before them, Gog and the Fallen turned to the depths where the suffering of the Orlick at the hands of Magog was visible and profound. Arrows enchanted with gravity slowly passed through its body, piercing its internal organs. Arrows enchanted with poison caused it to fester and swell, making its already vile form more bloated and obscene. None of its eyes remained intact, but still yet the creature continued to rise from the depths, screaming with pain and malice. Gog and Magog stood shoulder to shoulder, aiming their proximate arms toward the Orlick, and began to incant: *Desimum... necratos... nihilit...*

A white orb formed before their open palms, bolts of Pure Magic flashing within and without it, and with each reiteration it became more radiant and potent. The Orlick was growing ever closer, unaware of its impending doom, searching desperately for the Summoners with its tentacles as it reached the bridge, finding instead the edge of the Fallen's Black Axe. Finally, Gog and Magog released the spell into the screaming maw of the Orlick, plunging the ancient horror back into the profane abyss from whence it came, destroying it once and for all as a violent burst of white light immolated its rancid flesh from within.

The Summoners pressed forward in triumph.

Finally reaching the surface, the Summoners rose up from a trapdoor in what they could only assume to be the dungeons of Wraithverge. They could only assume that they'd been pronounced dead by the Kromoly, else the demon horde would await them upon reaching the castle. They moved silently and swiftly through the corridors of the citadel, Magog sniping any demon they encountered from the obscurity of shadow. Finding the doors to the Court of Hell, the Summoners began to strategize: "Gog and Magog, you must combine your Magic and attempt to bind Scios while I charge at the Supreme Wizard. His Magic is strong, but I believe I can withstand and possibly overcome it as long as you hold the Balrog General at bay." "This is a foolish plan! Our Magic is nothing compared to Golgoth's, we cannot best..." Before Magog could finish, the Fallen grabbed him by the chest of his cloak and pulled him near: "Chukarian, you brought us here. It is by your guidance we set foot in the Court of Hell instead of escaping the City of the Dis. If you set foot in this Great Hall with an inkling of fear in your heart, you will die." The Fallen released Magog and turned to Gog, "It is Time."

The Fallen opened the doors to the Court of Hell as though he were a triumphant king returning to his throne room. His arrogance in the face of Death was enough to inspire Magog and irritate Gog; both followed with haste. Upon entering the Court, they found Sol standing face to face with Golgoth. Behind

Golgoth and in front of the throne was a colossal, insurmountable demon with enormous, leathery wings, bloodstained horns, cloven hooves, and immense, muscular arms bound by golden chains to pillars of brimstone. Its roar filled the Court of Hell like a flood of thunder, neither words nor thoughts could be heard within it. Hellfire radiated from its vicious heart and consumed its entire form, its Unrelenting Power erupting through the open ceiling of the Great Hall into the skies above. Magog shuddered once at the sight of it, and fear left him with a quickness. So this is he, the Great Commander of Chaos, the Beast of Unholy Destruction, Unrelenting Power Incarnate: the Balrog General Scios.

## Chapter 9

*“Unchain the heart of doom...”*

The doors of the throne room burst open as the Legion of Hell entered to obliterate the Summoners, keeping their distance from the dreaded Balrog General. Out of their reach was the Fallen, struggling against the telekinetic might of Golgoth’s Magic and pressing forward with all the Power within him, striking at the Supreme Wizard with Kazamammut again and again. Golgoth fended off the Fallen with his Left Hand and continued to Bind the Balrog General with his Right, forcing out the Magic of Sol who hovered closer and closer to Scios, staring deep into the blaze of the demon’s infernal eyes. The demon horde watched in awe as Golgoth waged this War of Magic against two dreaded combatants simultaneously. Suddenly, the Horde was flanked from Left and Right by Gog and Magog; the Unrepenting Apostate cut them down with Soul Keeper and Black Magic, while the Artful Seeker picked off demon after demon from the shadows with Farsoar. Blood flowed dark in the Court of the Demon King.

Despite the incredible strength of Golgoth’s Magic, the strength of the Fallen would not fade; as the Black Knight pressed forward, he silently drew Power from his Black Axe, whispering its Name in an incant. As this happened, Sol began to explore the Soul of Scios, reaching deep into the Demon’s memories and feelings to find trust or faithfulness. Within the Balrog General, they found betrayal and heartache, neglect and abuse; the incredible creature felt abandoned by his father and his master, becoming the captive of Golgoth in the Court of Hell. Before Golgoth came, he was wild and free with his master, a conqueror of many lands and commander of many Legions in the Unholy Name of Beel. Now his Master is gone, Golgoth restrains him, and Beel cares nothing for him. The heartache of Scios evoked pity in Sol, but the Unrelenting Power and Wrath evoked admiration and fear.

“Be gone from its mind, you petulant Solarian Child!” hissed Golgoth, continuing to combat the Sun Spirit’s Magic with his own. He then turned to the demon horde within the court, wondering why they would not slay the Fallen One, only to find them being slaughtered by Gog and Magog as they entered the Court. “Fools!” the Supreme Wizard hissed, “Where is Longinus?”

Magog sensed death from above and maneuvered with a quickness from his hiding place. The second he moved, a dragoon in shimmering gold armor descended at a frightening speed, striking where Magog once stood with golden spear, a fatal blow had she met her mark. The dragoon then became airborne again, this time aiming her descent towards Gog, golden spear at the ready. Magog swiftly knocked and released an arrow to intercept the dragoon’s descent, throwing her off balance and forcing her to crash

beside Gog. This brief distraction gave just enough time for seven demons to charge upon Magog, who quickly dispatched them by firing seven arrows at once. Gog, alreadywhelmed by fighting the demon horde, used his Magic to capture the mysterious golden dragoon ice before she could regain her stance and strike again. All this much to the fury of Golgoth.

It was then the Fallen's turn to defend himself; from above came winged demons, fallen angels, led by their Archangel, Apollyon. Apollyon was deeply upset by this charge, as the betrayal of the Fallen by God and the Centric Order broke his faith and led to his own rebellion as Archangel of the Sor. Still, his duty was to uphold the Unholy Rule of Beael, and so the Fallen had to die at his angelic hand. He unsheathed his sword of flame, Asatra, and descended upon the Fallen with pain in his eyes. The fallen angels following him were being bombarded with arrows, piercing their wings and hearts and throats, crashing to the floor in the Court of Hell. Apollyon was undeterred; Life was pain, Death would bring release.

Golgoth did his best to hold the Fallen steady with his telekinetic Magic so Apollyon could decapitate him from above, but the strength of the Fallen was too much. In an display of Power, the Fallen broke through Golgoth's Magic just quickly enough and just for long enough to deflect Apollyon's flaming blow with Kazamammut. The collision of these weapons was like a collision of Souls, each warrior seeing deeply into the other's heart. The Fallen looked to Apollyon with a deep respect and painful frustration before returning to his assault on the one forcing them to fight: He of Forked Tongue, Golgoth. Apollyon, looking back on the Legion he led, saw how said Legion was being slaughtered with Magog's arrows, and elected to retreat, relief filling his heart as he did.

The golden dragoon, Longinus, struggled to break free of Gog's glacial spell, watching as the Unrepenting Apostate deflected blow after blow from many skilled enemies at once, alternating fluidly between offense and defense, sword and Magic. She watched in deep admiration of him and his comrade Magog, lowly messengers within the Sor able to incapacitate one who used to be part of the Centric Order. Her strength failing her in escaping the ice, she used her golden armor as a conduit of Magic and began to conjure fire. Finally breaking free, she thrust her spear into the side of Gog, taking him off guard and wounding him deeply. "You are mine now, apostate." Immediately after she caught an arrow in her hand from Magog, who was struggling to slay the devils and goblins before they could reach him with their swords and spears and daggers. Seeing her opportunity, Longinus leapt high into the air, aiming her descent carefully at Magog before she was struck down with a bolt of lightning out of Gog's hand, knocking her unconscious.

Gog was bleeding severely from his side, but kept fighting as best he could, ignoring the pain and knowing only ambition in his unrepentant heart. His vision and strength were fading, but not his resolve. Magog was becoming weary and overwhelmed, but remembered the Fallen's words and kept fear from his heart, nocking and releasing several arrows at once with every other shot just to fend off the seemingly endless river of demons pouring into the court, now having to clamber over the growing heap of carrion that lay before the doors. Demon's blood was scarlet and thick, and Gog and Magog were drenched in it along with their own.

Magog managed to fight his way over to Gog, who was beginning to fall to the floor. "Fallen One, the demon horde will soon overtake us!" Magog cried. "Sol, can you withstand the full Magic of Golgoth?" the Fallen called out to the Sun Spirit, who nodded their head. The Fallen One pulled back, watching Golgoth as he did, and just as he turned to face the Legion of Hell, the Supreme Wizard threw a bolt of blood red lightning at the Black Knight's back. Expecting this, the Fallen rotated to deflect the bolt with

Kazamammut just in Time. Frustrated but finally able to focus on annihilating the Solarian, Golgoth focused all his Magic on exorcising Sol's presence from the Soul of Scios and destroying the Sun Spirit once and for all while the Fallen proceeded to singlehandedly slaughter the demon horde as it entered the Great Hall.

Magog began to heal Gog's wound with a spell: *Allae, utwa, isthma...* Given how deep it was, there was no telling how long this Magic would take to prevent Gog from dying. The Fallen had no issue dispatching the demons, but when it was seen that the barrage of arrows had ended, Apollyon and his fallen angels descended again from above, this time to attack Gog and Magog instead of the Fallen. Golgoth's Magic tormented Sol, and the Solarian used every bit of their strength to maintain connection with the Balrog General while withstanding the onslaught of Golgoth's blood red lightning. As Apollyon descended upon Gog and Magog, the Fallen began to fight his way towards the Summoners in hopes of intercepting the fallen Archangel's attack. Upon realizing he could not reach them, he made eye contact with Gog, whose face was without fear as he turned and aimed his hand at the coming angels.

Just as Apollyon began to deliver his master stroke with the flaming sword Asatra, the Fallen disarmed the Archangel by throwing his Black Axe at the Archangel's hand. Asatra and Kazamammut were thrown to the floor as a disoriented Apollyon crash landed beside Gog and Magog; Gog cast a gravity spell upon the first fallen angel to follow, forcing them from the air and pinning them to the ground. The third angel was killed with an arrow from Magog, who then immediately continued his healing spell: *Allae, utwa, isthma...* Gog then killed the fourth by throwing Soul Keeper into their heart. The fifth and sixth angel seized Apollyon and flew away with him while another went to retrieve Asatra. Before any of the fallen angels could steal Kazamammut, Magog used a beckoning spell to claim it, then passing the Axe to the Fallen who had continued to annihilate the ever persisting demon horde with his bare hands. Thunderous footfall could be felt in the floor and heard in the distance...

The two remaining angels were hovering on either side of Sol, using their Magic to supplement the torment of the Sun Spirit by Golgoth. Within the Soul of Scios, a war was being waged, only antagonizing the Beast's Wrath and further flooding the Court with his deafening roar and the sky with hellfire. Despite the agonizing torture, Sol grew ever closer to the Balrog General, staring deeper into his pained eyes of fire, soothing the Beast as best they could, given the sheer hurt of being torn apart by Magic. Golgoth laughed, slurring Sol with a sadistic hiss: "Tell me, Sun Spirit: when you left your Father's side, had you known pain? Did a spoiled Solarian runt ever suffer the way we poor mortals do from the moment we're cast into this world? How long can you bear it, Seventh Son of the Sun King?"

Out from the shadows behind Golgoth appeared Mayhem, drawing out his obsidian dagger and thrusting it into Golgoth's back with all his strength. Upon being impaled, Golgoth shrieked in agony and fear. His entire body became visibly consumed by a vampiric aura drawing out every last drop of his Power and Magic, passing it violently out of his essence into Mayhem. Golgoth's skin peeled and eyes melted; his cloak became tattered and torn and his bones began to break. In the end, He of Forked Tongue was naught but cloth and bones in a heap upon the floor, and Mayhem, the Invoker of Chaos, stood proudly before the Court of Hell: his robes made new, his black and crimson cape restored, his armor glimmering, his body strong, his aura Full of Hell, and vengeance finally his. Laughing sinister, he shot lightning and flame from his fingertips in a display of his newly regained Power and flew off in a madness, hollering "Chaos! There Shall Be Chaos!" into the void of the Deep Shadow.

With the Death of Golgoth, Sol turned their two angelic tormentors to stone, taking great satisfaction in hearing their bodies shatter upon the floor. The Solarian then turned to the Balrog General, who roared into their face as they again stared profoundly into the Soul of Scios. The demon horde had stopped in its tracks, in utter shock from the Death of Golgoth and watching in fear as Sol attempted to Bind the Balrog General. Even the Fallen ceased to fight and watched intently as this happened. Magog continued to use his Magic to heal Gog, but both were transfixed.

Seeing such pain deep within the Soul of Scios, the Sun Spirit used their Magic to fill each wound in the Heart of the Beast with tenderness and affection, soothing the Demon where'd known only suffering. The roar of the Balrog General became hushed, and the Beast stared back into the Soul of the Solarian. The Court of Hell was silent, every demon and every Summoner holding their breath, waiting to see if the Balrog General would be bound or unleashed. Sol hovered closer than ever, reaching out gently to caress the face of the infernal creature, as a mother would a child. Sol then turned soundlessly to face the Court, descending to the floor, standing with confidence with their back to the Beast of Unholy Destruction, his arms still chained to pillars of brimstone.

The Balrog General Scios then let out a roar the likes of which had not been heard in a thousand years: a roar not of anger or hatred, but a roar of triumph and tenacity, a roar freedom. The arms of the Balrog heaved at the golden chains binding them, causing the pillars of brimstone to collapse and the Court of Hell with it. The chains then burst into flame and disappeared as the Balrog General stepped forward, every Soul present but Sol wincing, cowering, or retreating as he did. Sol then turned to Scios and held out their hand; the Balrog General knelt, allowing Sol to float softly to his shoulder and find perch. The Balrog General Scios then stood tall and proud in the ruined Court, let out a final victorious roar, and with a wave of Sol's hand, rose up from the wreckage of Wraithverge to fly swiftly to the Summoner's Circle drawn at the top of the world by Gog and Magog.

The Metatron was furious. Not only had she lost her most trusted spy in Beael's Court, she had been long deceived by him: "How could Golgoth neglect to tell me the Summoners had already drawn the Circle with the Blood of God? Could it be he hoped to perform the ritual himself, that Fool of Forked Tongue? The Great Betrayer indeed... no matter. There is little time." She beckoned forth her most trusted messenger:

"You will have the bishops command a Legion of the Sor to surround the Summoner's Circle. They are not to attack the Solarian or the Balrog General; if the Binding of Scios is interrupted, he could destroy the Planet and all of us with it before Beael could return to stop him. No, they are to keep anyone and anything from entering the Circle, whether it be demon, Summoner, or even one of the clergy. You will have the bishops issue this command and you will send them to me. I have something quite cadaverous to show them: a new sort of Power found in the Flesh and Bone of God.

"War is upon us... the Beginning of the End."

# Volume 3: Armageddon

## Chapter 1

*“Where only gods can tread...”*

Venus, once a paradise Created by the Goddess of Peace, now an eternal hellscape consumed entirely by tempest, its perpetual storms of such Power that their duress can only be endured by Gods and godlike entities. For this reason, Raggioth chose Venus as a neutral territory whereupon the Fate of Mercury could be negotiated with Beael, Warden of Endless Sleep, for neither could ambush the other with their Legions.

Raggioth had long contemplated how to advance in the conquest of Mercury. His vengeance had been wrought without mercy upon Igna, Creator of Mercury, and the feared Centric Order, but the Demon King Beael and his Legion of the Damned took the War God’s invading force by storm. Never before had Raggioth been forced to retreat, but as God of War He was not so foolish as to die for pride alone. Yet the Pride of Raggioth, God of War and Creator of Mars, remained wounded and demanded recompense in the Blood of the Demon King. His to choose was One of Three: He could invade Mercury with the Legions of Mars in their full fury, calling even upon Absalon, King of the Mountain and his War Monks of the Olympus Mons to unleash Hell upon the Planet’s surface, or He could use his Weapon of War, the Purifying Light of Apophis, the dreaded comet capable of destroying entire Planets. His choice was the third possibility, which He sought from audience with Beael in the damned winds of Venus.

Raggioth stood stoic as a temple guardian as He awaited Beael’s coming. His form was formidable; His armor of the Red and the Black was forged from metals unknown to mortals and His Unholy Blade, a claymore called Godslayer, was crafted carefully by the Hand of Gamat, God of Power and Creator of Jupiter, strongest among the Elder Gods. His form radiated with bloodlust, eyes glowing white behind the visor of His horned helmet. His was a form depicted in the statues adorning His most Holy Temples, built upon the conquered Moons of Jupiter in the Name of His Glory. He was Raggioth, the Raging Fire, Scourge of the Planets, Adversary of Peace, Destroyer of Worlds; the Name of the War God was forbidden among the subjects of His Holy Empire, wherein He known only as God.

He grew impatient; His Martian messengers had returned with Word from Beael, accepting His summons to leave Mercury and negotiate its defense, conquest, or undoing. The War God knew little of the Demon King except the scar left by his black bolt, a wound unlike anything He’d sustained in a lifetime of bloodshed and suffering. He had underestimated the Warden of Endless Sleep, thinking him a coward when he did not appear to defend his God, learning only after that Igna had lost the Grey King’s Faith long ago. So the Grey King became Demon King and turned his back on the God of Deceit, waiting until Raggioth had wasted much Power scattering the Blood, Flesh, and Bone of Igna across the surface of Mercury in a violent, vulgar display of vengeance before unleashing his Legions and striking the War God down with his Black Magic.

Restless and unwilling to wait much longer, the War God began to growl; for even the most feared among the Gods, the lightning and winds and crushing weight of the air itself upon Venus were nearly

unbearable. It was at the brink of Raggioth's intolerance Beael appeared before Him, like a shadow cast by a spectre. This was the second time Raggioth's eyes met that of the Demon King, and still He was in awe and disbelief. The form of Beael was entirely grey in hue: unassuming, unclothed, and plain. His features were well carved and handsome, most of all his eyes of a pale blue, always filled with ennui and grief. This dreary figure, a Prodigy of Oblivion, was so unremarkable in the eyes of Raggioth, deceptive as it contained such incredible Knowledge, Wisdom, Power and Magic, the likes of which had only been observed in the Gods. Beael stood stoic in facing the War God, almost seeming underwhelmed by His presence. Undeterred by this insolence and arrogance, Raggioth began the negotiation:

"Beael, Warden of Endless Sleep, Prodigy of Oblivion and Demon King of Mercury: I have called thee here with a Divine Proposition, a compromise to bring an end to War between our worlds. It is not by the Nature of the God of War to offer such a caveat, but thou hast established thyself as a worthy adversary I cannot overlook. Thou art of such Power and Magic, Raggioth Himself desires single combat with thee, a test of might between thee and the God of War: the Godslayer against thine own Black Magic." Raggioth paused, eager to gauge the Demon King's reaction, be it fear or fervor, becoming frustrated by Beael's continued statuesque demeanor and cold silence. The War God continued: "Hear ye, Warden of Endless Sleep: I generously offer thee this challenge, This Privilege, a fated duel, in place of the complete and utter destruction of Mercury by the Purifying Light of Apophis. Even if thou art Powerful enough to destroy Apophis, thou cannot hope to survive the invasion soon after by the Most Holy Legions of Mars in full fury, a ruthless genocide of Mercurians in the Divine Name of Raggioth. What say you, Grey King?"

Beael leered at the War God's use of his old Name, the only break in his apathetic disposition. Raggioth snorted, feeling both satisfied and goaded by this slight expression from the otherwise stone form of His nemesis. He was certain the Demon King would take this offer, and was prepared to die for His honor to know whether or not this Child of Igna could fall by His hand in single combat on the surface of Venus.

"No." The Word fell upon Raggioth like a frigid cold, tensing every muscle in His tyrannical form, defying every careful calculation in His immortal mind, further wounding His Sacred Pride and slowly filling His Heart with Wrath. He looked the Demon King up and down, processing his declination ad nauseum, unable to accept such impertinence. What foolishness possessed this being to leave his Planet defenseless just to further provoke the Harbinger of his Undoing? What Heresy has left him without fear of Divine Judgement? The Wrath of Raggioth was at such capacity that He was unable to speak, unable to break His rigid stance as He watched Beael begin to dissipate. The Demon King continued to leer at Raggioth as he vanished slowly from the Planet's surface, fading into the winds of Venus like a statue crumbling into dust.

The War God's form emanated hellfire as he raged into the violent storms surrounding Him: "Fool! Bastard! Thou shalt know Pain! Thou shalt be undone by the Purifying Light of Apophis! Thou shalt be broken by the Hand of Raggioth! I will feast upon your flesh, Warden of Endless Sleep! Thou Art Doomed!"