Historia

Of Magus and Brigands, Cowards and Heroes

Credits

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No badger was dressed in armor to make this volume.
For now.

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"... the revolutionary sometimes is nought more
than the subversive whom was able to win, is this not the truth?
There shall ne'r be objective truth, because it is an iridescent prism,
on which each side shines differently depending on where thou look upon't,
and the light that hits it.
Whoever wants to write about history might not but turn that prism
what be all truth, so that he observes all its faces, captured in each light. "

Carolino the Wise

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Carolino the Wise

I am known as Carolino the Wise. Afterward I bid, whom am I?

Indeed, I hast been many things: a scholar, alchemist, an adviser to the great khan, a pilgrim whom hath long labored, a foreigner from all lands.

I was born in the great empire under Kuhuchin-khan, father of the great Muhur-khan. Mine family was wealthy, because mine father was a silk merchant. Mine sweet mother, whom god hath taken into his glory, passed when I was still an infant due to an incurable disease.

I lived mine years of youth only with servitude, because mine father rarely stayed long in the house where mine mother's ghost tormented him, oft traveling to places that, Methought, I would ne'r hast seen.

I fled the homeland and traveled far and wide through the empire in search of adventure, with the extraordinary strength of youth.

During those years I found a job as a scribe to an alchemist, whom taught me the rudiments of the art of mixing remedies and potions.

I ne'r wanted to be a merchant, to the great disappointment of mine poor father, that I was ne'r paid for silk and contracts; alas, I however found myself selling goods of a diverse nature: mine knowledge, mine quill, mine advice.

The years passed, and the great Kuhuchin-khan returned to his ancestors, among the stars in the great expanse of heaven. His son Muhur-khan succeeded him to the throne.

'twere during those years that I met the emperor. O'er time I became a trusted adviser to him, as well as court alchemist. As an ambassador and reporter, I saw distant places and characters; I knew magnificent and terrible peoples and others still humble and with great heart.

When old age had become a harsh burden, having traveled for a long time, I hoped to retire to private life, in the tranquility of the mountains for the last few years that I hast left, with mine dear friend and companion in adventure Jamyang.

Yet, alas, the shadows of war became long on the horizon, and Muhur-khan asked me to serve yet again as his ears and eyes in the events that were about to unfold in the west, because in the west I am much respected and well known.

Methought of refusing, yet then honesty imposed itself on me, and I understood that not everyone hath the fate of dying in their bed.

Ermello from Buchebuie

The Mining towns of the Green Pit maintain a fragile balance: and are continuously disputed over by alternate parties, because the rich and fertile land make the opulent merchants of the Confederation hungry, as well as the Lords of the fiefdoms to the East.

I am saddened by the thought of the people, people oblivious to the games of power, whom struggle for a piece of bread or whom live in the tunnels where falls yet a pale ray of sunshine but for a few hours a day.

Buchebuie was its archetype. 'twere the largest in the entire pit and e'en more than elsewhere the struggle to emerge from the darkness was savage and merciless.

Ermello was the example of someone whom was self-made, by creating a space 'twixt the rabble. He grew up in the underground streets of Buchebuie, amidst the arrogance of those whom hast naught but violence to help 'em rise above others. What is certain is that he had not the strength or prowess of the bear to excel yet had the agility of movement and the shrewdness of intellect.

For years the town council had played a role only in furthering the internal struggles 'twixt families, exploiting their positions and privileges granted to them by their office to the advantage of their own families.

Ermello as a young man was already respected by the people, because his band brought order back to the community where, ere corruption and subterfuge, had reigned supreme: an order made of arbitrary laws, of reverent fear, but always of order they spoke, and of someone whose authority could not be disputed.

He granted his band the military rigor that distinguishes a handful of soldiers from a bunch of knaves: he bid mercenary masters of arms to school him and his companions in the art of brandishing the sword, archery, and above all, discipline.

The council named him Constable of Buchebuie.

Other resources were needed to support the rise of Ermello and his town. Resources such as the Tanafonda mine. The town council was unable or unwilling to oppose its subjugation.

The conquest succeeded; and all resistance was crushed: Tanafonda was subdued, and there Ermello settled with his men. It is known that war and blood bring riches, because coffins have no pockets and the dead do not claim their possessions. Yet ne'r peace, because the fallen hast family and friends whom shall seek revenge.

Torquato from Tanafonda

The wise man quoth: never wish good nor evil to mercenaries of war and love,
because they neither hate nor love thee.

Torquato from Tanafonda was born during the war, and he built his life on it,
because among terrestrial colonies it is customary to take slaves as booty, and the young helpless pup
that he was, was worth a good bag of gold in the far lands.

kept in a cage, small and ragged, seized by a burning fury, he killed his guard with claws and fangs,
because the fool had the audacity to offend his family, whom were killed in the battle.

The other slaves, dragged along by the ardor of the little rebel, followed with great enthusiasm.
The revolt began and many managed to escape, of the young hero Torquato,
not e'en a shadow was found.

For years he traveled studying foreign warfare, learning what distant lands had to teach him,
and rumors of his travels echoed 'twixt the galleries of the colonies.

Returning home, the legend of his wanderings was well known,
and people are known to want heroes.

He founded the Brotherhood, an army of soldiers whose deeds reached beyond the known lands,
who at his command freed his native land from the foe.

They were known by all however as the brotherhood of the worms, in remembrance of the retaking
of Tanafonda, during which they dug tunnels so deep that they entered the center of the foes garrisons
from below, smashing the invader's troops.

The defeated Ermello from Buchebuie, ere to being hanged he quoth:
"how could we defeat 'em, those that hast the discipline of soldiers, and the honor of worms?"

All that remains of Ermello is a carpet, of pure white fur.

In the coming years Torquato, with the help of Ranieri, his deputy and friend an extraordinary
blacksmith, reconquered Fort Blizzard from the brigands whom had occupied it,ù
restoring its sturdy albeit ancient bastions.

The castle was then renamed by his soldiers "the Worm's Den ",
of which Torquato was recognized as the legitimate lord.

Adelaide from Rossariva

Take care my son, for being born poor is a mistake that the wealthy shall not forgive thou.
Remind 'em that, under the golden leaf, nature remains miserable and deadly.

For this reason, they want to free themselves from it: forgetting and hating the poor man
and the stranger. Whence the illusion that they are special rather than merely lucky.

Rossariva, in the green pit, was a peaceful and florid, albeit small, fishing village on the Ruby River,
a tributary of the Big Aterium.

Adelaide lived there, with her consort Croilo and her children Valerio, Marco, Filoteo and Massimo.
This is the sad story of her tragedy:
"life flowed placidly and calmly in Rossariva, nobody had ever had an interest
in conquering those wild areas of woods and rocky gorges.

At least till the soldiers of the kingdom arrived, whom in exchange for miserable tenders
occupied us in the name of their faith.

They spoke of a prophecy of ancient times, of a sacred place discovered in those lands.
They quoth of the Ossarium. The conflict became brutal: the soldiers responded with violence,
resulting in a bloodbath. Croilo died that day, and only his wedding ring remains for us.

With pretense of good heart, they cleared us out alive, taking us to dilapidated camps
on the outskirts of the border towns.

People hated us, feared revenge, saw us foreigners in their land.

Different, without faith or dignity; trying to earn honestly a piece of bread for mine four children.
None, alas, wanted to grant me a job of any kind, and those whom didst granted me woe.

Mine children got sick, and I was unable to save 'em. The two smaller died shortly after.

I didn't eat to get medicine for at least two of 'em.

'twere of no use, e'en though mine last loves went away leaving me alone.
Adelaide died there with 'em that day.

"So, after all her children died, distraught with fury and pain, she left.

Taking away all reason to live is perilous, because it creates monsters without hesitation or fear.
For most of 'em they are poor wretches, for others they are resources.
They say that the black master took her with him and made her his adept.

After the first meeting, i ne'r saw her again, yet I fear that following Rolando's footsteps can't bring
peace. Not to his soul, at least.

Prince Nestor

In Salso Nero thou can find all types of professions, or better yet, know whom to ask.

Nestor grew up in an orphanage in Salso Nero's slums.

The Rector, a miserable and heartless rat, employed the youngest children in the salt flats to fill bags, and the oldest in the alleys, to empty bags.

None were as well versed in the latter profession as the young Nestor, whom in the merchant district harvested swollen bags full of hard coin from the opulent passing merchants.

From a young age he was well-liked by everyone in the slum, because with the wealth he accumulated over the years he didst so much charity for the people and all the orphans, whom he considered his brothers and whom he ne'r abandoned.

One day, in the refectory of the orphanage, during lunch, the rat died, choking on his meal. Nobody aye knew how: because he was the only one whom exhaled life that day, while eating the like rations as the others. Many didst not mourn him and the people of the slum, and the orphans along with 'em, decided that 'twere Nestor himself to take care of the orphanage.

He accepted willingly, with the sly smile that children and women loved so much. Hence the people bid him "the Prince of Orphans"".

From that instant and over the years Nestor continued to augment his fame, to the point that the mayor of Salso Nero, Paddath, invited him to his mansion.

His name, alas, was not yet known outside of Salso Nero. Not till the theft of the holy amber.

Months after the Ossarium was discovered, the scholars of the Temple, accompanied by the Guardians of Desmònd under the command of Field Marshal Van Rott, found an amber stone, in which a gigantic insect, believed to be from the Age of the Ancestors, had been trapped.

Some quoth that, thanks to the miracles of the blood of the dead, the temple could hast awakened the ancestors themselves, others, that by merely touching the stone, the amber would grant youth and vigor. Nestor didst not care what truth there was to the rumor, yet he knew for certain that Paddath would make whoever brought him the stone wealthy.

He left alone, at night and in secret.

He returned, with a bag full of treasure, and an amber stone.

The name of Prince Nestor also befell Femore III's ear.

Guillermo Dorado

Rodelia, city of master craftsmen, where the world's finest works of art come from.

Built on the shores of the great lake Clausus, the town is rich in commerce, all the craftsmen of the known world, few rival those of Rodelia: goldsmiths, blacksmiths, engineers, tailors, they were the pride and towns most precious merchandise.

The family Dorado founded the Guild of Gold and Jewels more than a century ere mine time.

Although it is said that the art of working gold hath always flowed in the veins of the family, none have equaled Guillermo.

His skill was such that the gold used in his creations seemed fluid, moving and changing in the hands of those whom observed it, and everyone in the town knew it.

The family pushed him to take over the guild, as didst many of his colleagues, whom had nought but admiration and respect for his sublime art.

Unfortunately for the family and for those who put their hope in him representing the guild, Guillermo didst not crave that life.

Quiet, placid, oft absorbed; kidnapped by a love that none could take from him: Guillermo lived only for his art.

They tried in vain to offer him, the already shining star of the great Dorado family, excellent positions and the daughters of the towns most important artisans' in marriage. "only one marriage is allowed in life," he quoth, and he had already married his profession.

All that Guillermo wanted he found in his modest, crowded with tools but tidy laboratory, and he rarely left Rodelia. An unexpected letter, alas, pushed him to leave of his own free, burning with enthusiasm as never before, and with all his tools in tow: Paddath, mayor of Salso Nero, asked him to create a magicians scepter, set with a dark pearl, the towns legendary treasure.

Love may seem diverse from heart to heart, yet it doth not change in its very nature, 'twixt obsession and happiness.

Brahima the Mystic

Of the Far Lands we still know little.

In the far south are the kingdoms of primates, some writings say, extending as far as the eye can see, far beyond the borders of the lands that are familiar to us in the maps.

From those kingdoms came a mysterious figure, of the name Brahima, called by some "the Mystic" and by others "the Pilgrim".

He was first seen in the slums of Salso Nero, carrying a staff that was quoth to be a bone relic, decorated with arcane scriptures.

His name began to fly from mouth to mouth after, people quoth, that he had healed the lame leg of a poor beggar, whom ever since followed him on his pilgrimage.

Over the months he oft appeared in other villages, far and wide throughout the pit, preaching peace and helping the needy.

The primate's acolytes continued to augment in number, ten some quoth, a hundred quoth others. I didst not know much about him, yet I knew that the people of the pit spoke of him as if he was a saint.

He was quoth to hast healed the sight of a hunter, saved a mother from death by childbirth and whom had driven out a disease from the mine.

The kind of legend that twists the nose of the temple and of his holiness.

I had the opportunity to speak with the hunter healed of his blindness, and he confirmed what was quoth: he had to be a magician, because no earthly being could hast done it.

None of the other magi whom I asked knew, or wanted me, to know nought about him, alas!

The hunter told me, ere I left, that Brahima, leaving, asked him to offer his greetings to the "wrinkled-faced chronicler ".

Nobody could say where he was or where he would appear.

The rumor spread that the inquisitors of the temple were at the borders looking for the pilgrim and I am quite inclined to believe it, because I ne'r knew any rival, of the faith or in the kingdom, whom looked upon the magi with a good eye.

Apopi of Whispers

Among the fragrances of incense and precious spices, 'twixt the shouting and the colored fabrics of the great bazaar of Calìda, there I found Apopi, called the "Merchant of Whispers", among the high shelves and the precious carpets.

From distant lands Apopi first arrived in the town of Calìda, where she established her first shop. Exotic rarities from afar, unique in their kind, could be purchased from her.

Together with the extraordinary quality of the goods, the asp has the gift of speech, capable of enchanting with its smooth intonation and light hiss that caressed the ear of those whom listened to it.

Some murmured that Apopi was able to creep into thoughts and know your deepest secrets, but it is known that talent appears to the inept as a supernatural gift rather than the result of study and exercise, because envy finds it convenient not to harm self-esteem.

Certainly, no reader would be surprised to know that Apopi of Whispers and Paddath of Salso Nero would soon go into business together.

Over the years Apopi opened shops in all the wealthiest towns, traveling 'twixt 'em to talk about contracts and trade with the rich and powerful.

Thanks to her magnetic charisma, the power of her money, her capillary network of knowledge or mere fame, Apopi soon realized that she had the goods most requested by all the lords and the powerful: information.

It is no mystery that 'the merchant sells what his customer requires, and that it is not required by the profession to take sides.

Apopi of whispers was the perfect example of mercantile thought: what the inquisitors bid to know, it shall cost 'em what the Black Master wants to know, and so on, without taking sides.

Indeed, little of what she was told by the buyers had not already been whispered by someone else yet, quoting her words: "only by listening with two ears may you be sure of the truth". This was the power of Apopi: she whispered truth.

It is known that knowledge is the poison of those whom plot secrets, and that we all, powerful or humble, rich or miserable, hast some secrets of our own. Just as the most powerful Bear fears the bite of the mitely Snake, all feared to see the coffer of their secrets violated, whereto Apopi had every key.

Muhur-Khan

'twere oft difficult for me to distinguish what the right advice was, because that Methought was the best for mine friend Muhur, oft it wasn't for mine Khan. It is not easy to reign over a large empire like his and inspire obedience from diverse peoples whom were oft rivals, yet Muhur succeeded. He loved peace, because he believed that fraternity among people was the greatness of an empire.

Muhur understood that, to fortify his kingdom, internal peace had to take precedence over the wars that for generations his family had brought to neighboring peoples, conquering lands, driven by insatiable hunger.

He entered into non-belligerent agreements with neighboring territories and took care to unify the people of the empire under the like flag, a common identity. Some of the old patriarchs of the ancient clans accused him of weakness, of being disrespectful of the ancient warrior traditions of their peoples and challenged him on the battlefield, marching as rebels towards the palace.

I do not think it was to protect traditions the intent of their rebellion, yet a mere thirst for power and blood. Plotting deceptions, the khan seemed to retire towards the mountains where he attracted the traitors, superior in force to a third of the army, in a gorge on whose slopes his soldiers were positioned, waiting. When the first half of the foes army passed the entrance of the gorge thanks to the black powder he dropped a hail of boulders towards the foes soldiers, cutting their ranks in half: one half closed in the gorge, the other at the feet of the slopes, too far away to hope to conquer the walls on which the emperor's army was waiting for 'em.

Swarms of arrows and boulders rained down from above towards the fragmented and frightened rebel forces. They fought bravely, the enemies of Muhur-Kahn, as best they could, yet were finally subdued.

Forgiveness was granted to all soldiers whom agreed to swear allegiance to the Khan. 'Twere not the like for the rebel commanders: one by one they died under the deadly saber of the Emperor himself.

Muhur-khan showed that sometimes in order to make peace last, it is necessary to win the war first, because the thirst for power and blood oft cannot be quenched if not by the most terrible example.

The Merchant and the Magus

Paddath arrived in Salso Nero while still young. Few roads are excluded for those whom hast no scruples, if content to bear on their conscience the burden of their actions.

He went into debt up to his neck in order to build his fortune: he bought a ship, on which he crammed young and old women without distinction; sold as slaves in the far lands, in realms of which i ne'r e'en know the names.

In the pit, the disputes over whom should'st hast a field or a gutter end in blood, with the losers being captured by the winners. Buchebuie's takeover of Tanafonda was no different, it was a turning point for Paddath: more than half of the poor people in the large mining town were killed, or sold into slavery, and he was the buyer.

With the capital that he obtained, he paid off all his remaining debt, and made good use of it, buying one piece at a time of the Salso Nero salt market. With the help of Apopi, he exported the precious salt to the corners of the globe, even the Khan himself wanted to stock it. He became so wealthy that the nobles of all the kingdoms knew about his palace, built with his image and decorated with gold.

Paddath didst not crave to remain a merchant, because the wealth he accumulated now no longer brought him any pleasure. He wanted to leave a mark, to hast a say in the events of the world.

Politics seemed to him the only way. Thanks to his influence, he was elected mayor of Salso Nero for ten years. Yet 'twere still not enough. He met the sorceress Ni-Shung during one of his trips to the court of Muhur-khan, and 'twere there that he asked her to be part of his court as a grand counselor. He knew that in Salso Nero no one could revoke his status of mayor whom had at his service a sorceress such as Ni-Shung.

She accepted, yet on one condition: she wanted the dark pearl of Salso Nero, inlaid on a scepter worthy of her whom would hast carried it.

Paddath bought the pearl from Rudolfo, another rich merchant whom was his rival, for a ship full of gold, still a ridiculous price for the uniqueness of the dark pearl, black as sin and as big as a Rodelian' skull.

Some say that Rudolfo was convinced only after his son, kidnapped by mysterious brigands, was rescued by Paddath, whom paid an impossible ransom. Curious coincidence, forsooth.

Bjorn, the Stranger

Few lands are as inhospitable as the Kaldjord islands, in the cold northern ocean: little moe than rocks and trees, oft snowy and windy, the islands offered little to live on.

Yet tougher people had settled there eons since, and still live there today, making a living by fishing and on the goods, they raid from the unfortunate ships that traversed the icy waters. Bjorn the bear was born there, on the island of Seloy, and grew firm-set and proud there. Everyone in the village knew Bjorn, his youth, strength and courage they quoth was gifted to him by the storm gods. Jarl Havar Hvalrosson, mighty and wise of the respected Tricheca lineage, named the Bear second in command of his son Olaf's ship.

Olaf hated Bjorn, his arrogance and luck were unendurable, and as an only child he could not stand to see another one rival with him for his father's and the clan's esteem. One night, Olaf and a handful of his followers crawled to Bjorn's bed, muted him with a gag and after beating him tied him in rigging and threw him overboard, among the black and cold waves.

Bjorn ne'r knew whom 'twere, in that last instant before being thrown overboard, secretly placed a knife 'twixt his legs. He managed to cut himself free from the ropes yet, after swimming desperately for days began to lose hope, he succumbed to hunger and fatigue, abandoning himself to expiring in the bleak dark sea.

He awoke in a hut, bound once again, yet among different people: The Clan of the White Desert had found him dying on the shores of the ocean. He reclaimed his freedom by fighting, because he knew that hard people respect strength, of which he had in abundance.

Bjorn was changed, the belief grew in him that the gods wanted him to travel to the warm lands of the south, to find his deserved place. With the warriors whom followed him, he decided to protect the caravans of merchants in exchange for their money, because they understood that 'twere much more fruitful to hast given over a coin each for a hundred customers, rather than becoming a hundred corpses.

Desmond, il Paladino

He was Sir Desmond, marshal of the 'Boule-Terrière, Paladin in the decree of the bone, the eighth son of a small patrician family from the border lands. As the youngest son, aye since he was an infant two paths were reserved for him: the bone cross and monastery, or the sword. He embraced both.

He was a shining example of both.

In the service of Femur III, he rose to the rank of Paladin, in command of the personal warriors to his Holiness, bid the guardians.

He bore much faith in the psalms, such was the obedience Desmond had for the commandments of the Custodian, to the point that he ne'r disputed the orders given to him.

He re-established order in the Kingdom during the Conspiracy of the Seven, crushing the rival armies without word, without asking for an explanation.

He burned all the seven Dukes on the purifying stake, purging the world of traitor's blood, and exiled their families.

Among them e'en a distant cousin of his, Sir Petar de 'Boule-Dogue, was captured and finally burned on the pyre by Desmonds own hand, without hesitation.

The betrayal had to be punished with the maximum example, so that others whom plotted to confound the peace that had reigned for a hundred years under the guidance of the temple, knew the terrible fate reserved for traitors.

Alas, I saw a different dog the last time I met him.

I was able to read in his eyes the pain of not asking questions, of blindly obeying e'en when it comes to slaughtering commoners whom defend their home, their roots and their families, in lands without lords with whom to treaty, or armies to fear reprisal, because to justify these facts in his conscience he could not come to terms.

He confessed all to me, with the request that I would talk about it only after his bones were resting in the crypts of the temple.

From the bitterness of his words I recognized a soldier, a zealot, whose faith was cracked and perhaps betrayed.

Blind faith, although devoid of envy, was ne'r good faith. 'tis lined with countless dilemmas, a long search and meager certainties. Faith is not truth and answers, yet questions and doubts.

The Bone Keeper

He was Femore III, Keeper of the Bones during the events concerning the green pit, whose name in his youth was Mastinio Partenopio.

Son of Agenor Parthenopio, already High Count of Nochenburg and older brother to the keeper of the sacred bones II, to whom Agilulf succeeded.

For countless generations the family had ties deeply rooted to those of the Sacred Citadel, where the Great Temple stands, to the point that two of the former Keepers, Perone V and Sterno VI, carried the surname of Partenopio in their youth.

It be quoth with certainty that I shall hast passed away by the time Femore III reads these writings, whe'r from old age or from punishment for the sin of blasphemy against him. When I converted to the faith of the bones and forswore mine old name, in fact, it was certainly not what the Church represents that I swore fidelity to, because I was not interested in the salvation of the soul.

I swore faith in the profound mysticism of the Brotherhood of the Indicants, whose name is owed to the Custodians Index IV, whom two centuries ago preached the detachment from temporal power to cure what was the true ministry of the temple, spirituality. His reign was cut short, because sneakily poisoned he perished seven years after his appointment, yet his spiritual power still continues through us today. And to be honest I write these words, because 'my job is not that of the Bard Luscinia, whose sweetened stories, full of jokes and romance, serve to cheer the soul of the tipsy patrons at the town inns. I am a historian, and respected as such, therefore I shall keep faith to terms with myself and with those whom shall succeed me, because our office is to spread truth, so that our children and their children never repeat our misdeeds.

Femore III didst what was good for the holy kingdom, to the detriment of those who were not part of it. A friend, whose name i didst not wish to quote, told me that he had seen a snarl appear on Femore III's face as he summoned the council that day when, during dinner, he was told about the discovery of Santa Plautilla, and how he had felt a slow shiver roll down his back.

Fear those whom never hast to worry for their actions, that titles or apparel alone shall ne'r compose a man better than they already are and remember that the red color of blood stands out e'en more brightly on the whitest apparel.

Hermann Von Rott

Sire Hermann Von Rott was the first of the Rott family to have a noble title, because his family's origins were anything but patrician: first of four children, whose father was a cobbler and his mother a nurse.

During the conspiracy, he served on the field as a sergeant under Duke von Behrmann, because his martial bearing had aye made him naturally suited to command. There he distinguished himself for his boldness in battle and for his tactical ability, by means of which, e'en in limited numbers and in difficult conditions, he made use of his meager troop ten times more than they were.

The exploits that granted him fame came from the capture of Fort Lacustre, perched on a waterfall overlooking the lake. In strong winds, they proceeded forward at night under his command, armed with the tools of rock climbers and little more. They climbed up the waterfall and the rock face, and then the high walls, up to the studded gates and the drawbridge. Twenty held the doors, and defended 'em with blood and steel, while the rest of the force was waiting, armed and ready.

Hermann was the first to climb the ramparts, and the last to leave 'em, deprived of an eye by the blow of a pike. Thanks to Rott's ardor, the fortress capitulated, saving many of the lives that would hast shattered like waves against the solid ramparts. Hermann sat in the tents of the war councils, alongside the nobles and the powerful, till the end of the conflict, because his opinion was held in high regard.

Once the conspirators were defeated and their bones burned, the lands of the traitors were redistributed among the nobles, and to his surprise Fort Lacustre was assigned to his command, and the duchy was conferred upon him. Returning from the war to his humble homeland, he took his parents with him along with his brother and two sisters and took 'em to the possessions he had conquered for himself. He granted his elderly parents a peaceful and comfortable old age, making sure that they had all he could give 'em till the end of their days.

He wrote on their Crypt: "Beloved parents, what nought they possessed they gave to their children. 'tis simple for the rich to be gracious and grant a hundred gold dinars, because a thousand more remain in the coffers. Thou bought with the savings of a lifetime the weapon that saved me in battle, and for that i ne'r can recompense thou."

De lo Arcimagus

To be a Magus thou want the brave thought of the philosopher, the abstractness of an artist and ecclesiastical zeal, and Siegfried had each of these qualities in tremendous abundance. Yet, above all, oft the finances of a Duke are needed to entice a Magus to take charge of the training of a student.

By the law of the magi, only one acolyte can be taught per master, because the dedication necessary to school a young man in the art and how not to be lost to the power of the like doth not allow distractions.

Siegfried's family was not wealthy enough, because the caste of which they belonged was certainly not of the Rapax, but his brilliant mind made an unknown Magus, take him with him. They left, and for twenty years the young Siegfried ne'r saw his home again. Once an apprentice is taken, the Magus for ten years may not but school him in the rudiments of the art, to allow him to perfect 'em in time. After the apprenticeship period, for ten years the apprentice is still considered as belonging to his Master, years in which he shall hast to study the art and perfect an aspect of it, although albeit with the title of Novice he is in fact considered a Magus in all respects.

After the apprenticeship, the Magus no longer depends on his Master, and in turn he can take an apprentice onto himself. Siegfried returned after a long period to the Avian islands. The family of the Rapax caste, unaware or forgetful of the young heron whom had left the islands twenty winters earlier, they soon recognized him, and he became a councilor to one of the most influential families in all the archipelago: The Pilgrims. In a short time, the families began a cold struggle to augment their power and acquire the services of the Magus. He was able to nourish everyone's hopes, without ever giving ground, till the credits accumulated led him, for the first time in all history, to be officially recognized and named Arcimagus of the Avian islands.

Siegfried show'd how foolish it is to regard something as impossible, because with dedication and stubbornness e'en those whom were destined to submit to the established order can break the pattern and reverse their fortunes, till you get to the top of the pedestal where to everyone raises their heads to see you.

Saint Plautilla

Plautilla was born in a small border village in the duchy of Vesterre.

In any town, large or small, there is almost a strange tradition of nature, an inhabitant that everyone knows for their strangeness, sometimes physical, sometimes in the mind. Poor Plautilla was known by the nickname of "walk and talk", since as a child she seemed to talk to anyone, or perhaps to herself, while wandering the streets of the village. Her poor parents didst not know what to do with her, villagers looked upon her with suspicion and mockery, and as the years passed her condition seemed to get worse and worse. She quoth that she heard voices and saw things that nobody else could. Voices talking to her from the dark and the corners where no eye could see.

One day, mysteriously, the poor wench disappeared into thin air. Some quoth that she had left, others quoth that the evil spirits of the Forest of the green pit had taken her, others still that she was dead. Plautilla's parents didst not know what to do: they had other children to look after, healthy children whom were needed for working in the fields, and they could not afford to hire someone to search for her. Painful months passed, in which their feeble hopes died, because they knew that the poor girl could not survive on her own. Her parents gave her up for dead.

Alas, in the winter of the following year, the unexpected happened: Plautilla returned to the village, dragging behind her a bone, centuries old, of such a size that no known animal could hast left it. People fell to their knees, begging her to forgive their ill faith, that hers wasn't a madness, yet a blessing from god, whom through his emissaries spoke to her.

She barely heard 'em, mumbling disconnected words with the heated and fevered gaze of those whom hast long crossed the line 'twixt sanity and madness.

The tidings spread afar, and emissaries from the temple arrived. They questioned her to find out the source of the relic. Nobody knew how, yet Plautilla had discovered the Ossuary, setting in motion events that her simple mind was unable to understand.

The Dukes Alocco and Pigmea

Alocco of Guzza Rock and his wife, Pigmea of Dense Forest: Ambassadors from the Avian Islands to the Holy Kingdom were crucial players in the events that preceded the disputes over the Green Pit.

Children of prominent families once rivals, both proud representatives of their powerful family, whom Avians called "Rapax", since children they were schooled in the arts of languages, hunting and war.

Great was their merit in their homeland, and the Avian singers, famous in all the lands, sang their history. A love story of centuries-old feuds that only the strength of their union pacified their quarrel. Yet allow me to say to thou that which the bards won't sing about. A story of intrigue, of dark and threatening Bubulii, of amber-colored eyes among the dark branches, of pointed beaks and sharp claws, of blood and silence in the dark night.

Because it is known that peace ne'r was, and ne'r shall be, a cheap thing. Among the issues of the Avian islands, good blood ran only when the bad one didst not flow.

The Pigmea family, of the Rapax caste like that of Alocco, was seen by the latter with wary eyes, because their small size and ties of alliance with the lower castes in the past were unacceptable for the ancient family of Alocco. The Matriarch of the family was Gertrude, grandmother of Alocco, whom certainly was not the type to give caresses and biscuits to children.

She was the first to leave the scene. Granted her old age, she was no longer the aviatrix she once was, and rarely flew for long or in strong winds.

And yet, on a stormy night, she was seen falling towards the black and pointed rocks. Her battered body was found two days later, on an island further south. She was recognized for the ring worn on her gnarled claws and was returned to the family, whom buried her with the honor she deserved.

O'er the next two years, the two families were struck by continuous mourning, thinning the ranks of those that opposed their wedding. Aye once their families united, their influence expanded, affecting the interest of the Arcimagus Aviano.

Ariuna and Lucille

There are those whom forswear themselves to destiny which from birth they preserved without trying to free themselves, adapting to the like and deluding themselves of its inevitability.

For Ariuna and Lucille their fate was the same as other daughters of the wealthy whom for centuries before 'em: married some young son of a wealthy family, hoping in a lasting bond.

Fate wanted 'em to meet. Lucille's father, Amilcare of the de Gheppi family, dealt with in trade. He met Ariuna's father, Ulzii, of a noble lineage of the Lynx from the Khan empire, during one of his youthful trips. Since then there hast been rich trade 'twixt 'em for decades.

The year the two met, Ulzii told his daughter Ariuna that for the warm season they would hast a guest whom was a business partner from the Avian islands with whom commerce had flourished for years, and that it was her job to entertain the daughter. Amilcare on the other hand told his daughter that she would hast to come with him on his journey that, e'en though she was a girl, she would one day inherit her father's business along with her future husband.

She was saddened, because her dream was to be an explorer like the legendary Alderigo, and yet she could not withdraw from her duty and could only accept. Neither of the two young women seemed happy at first about the trip ahead, but as soon as they met, they changed their minds.

Lucille had ne'r seen such a wide land, with prairies and mountains as far as the eye could see, and Ariuna loved the joyful and candid spirit of her new friend, and envied her for the freedom to rise so high in the sky and see beyond the horizon.

One day, at the end of the summer, the fathers had to leave for a short time. Only three days they quoth, so that they could arrange for the protection of their merchandise with a foreign mercenary named Bjorn. Ariuna and Lucille wasted no time: they ran away, together, towards the horizon and the freedom to explore the world, without duties and without future master husbands that neither of 'em wanted.

They were our guides across the white desert. They gave up comfort, preferring freedom. Destiny, mine children, no matter how hostile is reality, is not accomplished on its own, yet 'tis developed by our choices.

Ranieri De' Porchis

Ranieri's family hath origins in the pit, because his father Gualtiero worked in the mine in a specific role: digging tunnels. His mother, alas, was of poor health and fell ill, and 'twere for this reason that his father decided that, in order to save her life, he had to take away his consort along with the children from the wet hole that was their home in the underground town. They packed up all and left for Rodelia, the town of craftsmen, where Gualtiero found employment with a distant cousin whom lived there.

Ranieri as a child was already interested in his father's job, because the black powder, imported from the empire, was oft needed to break rock. Ranieri loved the sound, feeling his chest and the ground vibrate when they set off the fuses, the feeling of the powerful energy, harnessed like a magus, to compose miracles.

Ranieri was able to study forging, working as an apprentice to Ramón, of the guild of blacksmiths, and with dedication and passion he became one of the crafts greatest experts. One day he discovered that a leader named Torquato was in town to conduct business with the guild of tailors, to whom he commissioned picturesque liveries for his arms company.

Ranieri had heard stories about young the young Badger, and he could not imagine what would befall him. Torquato himself came to visit him: "it befell mine attention, Master Ranieri, that ther's none more expert than thou in the use of black powder. I am here to bid thee to work with me in exchange I shall provide all thou need to continue thy studies, and money worthy of thy genius. Thou shall see the world by mine side, and thou will work with what thou love most." Ranieri accepted, and the rest is history.

He perfected the rough mortars that the brotherhood had bought from the merchants of the empire, making 'em bombards and harquebuses, marvels of war still unmatched by any power. The young and fiery Torquato and the more posed Ranieri became friends, as well as comrades in arms. The Boar was appointed Deputy Captain of the Brotherhood. There was no decision in the years that followed that Torquato took without consulting his trusted friend, because where his basest and fiercest instincts gained the upper hand on his judgment, Ranieri was aye there to provide reason.

Jamyang

Far and wide I traveled through all the lands. I saw the gondolas on the Salso Nero canals and walked in the damp woods of the Green Pit. I looked out over the ocean from the high cliffs of the great capital of the Avian Islands and crossed the merciless plateaus of the White Desert.

At every instant I had thou with me, Jamyang, mine sweet and taciturn friend. This work is dedicated to thee, because if thou had not been by mine side, I would ne'r hast seen those places so far and wild that mine eyes didst not e'en dare to look at.

I found thou when I was still young and strong, and thou were but an infant, sold as merchandise. I saved thou from the miserable fate that awaited thou, because thy sweet and dignified gaze, under those tufts of fur that hid thy eyes, asked for naught, and endured the hard work of turning the wheel that, although so young, thou had been assigned. I bought thou for little, like the humblest fabrics, because your lack of speech was taken as not having intelligence by those miserable individual's incapable of aught but being unscrupulous.

I saw thou grow over the years, and from mine like height thou became the greatest and strongest animal I hast ever seen. Even if thou never spoke, I learned to understand thee, mine friend, because with one glance and one gesture thou say to me more than a thousand and a thousand words yet.

Tireless as none, I saw thou marching for hours in the white desert: even 'twixt the snow and blizzard, where even our guides seemed to be exhausted, thou uttered no complaints, oft carrying mine stubby old bones on thy mighty shoulders.

I dedicate mine work to thee, because I know that you will be by mine side until the end of mine days, and it gives me great joy that, although I lack a wife waiting for me or children to look after me, I have never missed it.

To thee, Jamyang, I shall leave all my earthly belongings: that they serve thee to live the rest of thy years in the tranquility thou deserves, ere we find ourselves among the stars of the infinite sky.

The Wanderer of the Pit

Not much was known about Alcibiades: already he wandered the forests of the Pit when Torquato was a child, and he never changed according to people.

when he arrived in a village, the inns offered him food and drink, because everyone knew that after dinner, around the hearth, he would tell in his cavernous voice stories from all corners of the Pit. Tales of distant villages in the hinterland of the forest, the border towns of the confederation and the kingdom, or of the great Salso Nero.

Alcibiades lived with little, the woods were his home, the earth his bed, the branches and the stars the roof over his head. He helped people any way he could, as a guide to travelers, because it is said that he knew every path and landscape by heart. He was for the people of the Pit almost part of the earth itself, a wandering guardian of the forests.

The story that I am going to tell is one that, all in the Pit know. It is told to infants as a fairy tale to school 'em in courage and kindness. During the capture of Tanafonda of Ermello, Alcibiades was there, trying to understand how he could help the poor people of the town to escape the horrors of war and slavery. He could doth little, indeed, because when blood boils, drunk on the fumes of battle, and who are not friend is taken as foe, and a dead Elk could help no one.

As it happens, the young Torquato rebelled, fueling the revolt among the prisoners. Alcibiades decided to act, and took with him all those he could gather, guiding 'em through the dark leafy paths towards salvation. Today the rumors say that Alcibiades hath left the Pit to travel east, nobody knows why or where he is going.

Torquato and Tanafonda ne'r forgot Alcibiades's help during those bloody days, so much so that over one of the entrances to the town a silver plaque reads:

"To Alcibiades of the Pit

that in our saddest and darkest hour
was the guide of the rebel fugitives,
brave and fearless,
preferred claws to the enemy's knives."

Rolando from Acquascura

When I met Rolando of Darkwater he told me:
"to spare the hell of war on earth,
I am content to sacrifice heaven in the supernatural one."

He was born of a stonemason, he grew up like his father, his children still had turquoise eyes when the war reached them. He had to leave, and fight for lands that didst not belong to him, for a lord whom had no interest in. The war ended with a sumptuous banquet and a treaty of peace for those whom dressed in silk, yet 'twere defeat for those whom had marched in the mud.

He returned, scarred and exhausted, to his small border village, where his home, heart and his family were. He found nought yet the acrid smell of death and ash.

He learned that e'en a blind eye can shed bitter tears of sorrow and he swore revenge and punishment on the powerful villains whom didst not inflict a rapid and violent death on him, yet a life of suffering.

Now they call him the black master, commander of the spies of the confederation, whom only crave the defeat of the cursed holy kingdom, the temple and the cruel lords.

Rolando knew that there are no saints among any of the parties, yet despite this he preferred the lesser evil, that part that could still be saved. During the conspiracy of the seven he was accused of conspiring with the rebels, and for this reason the name of Rolando was feared to the point that a rich bounty still hangs over his head.

Over the years, terrible plots and crimes were attributed to Rolando, many of which he didst not commit at all. That man didst not mind, because he wanted all the unrighteous to fear the name of the Black Master, and in his heart he rejoiced that no one knew how deep they really were, distracted by the absurd stories about him, those gnarled roots that were the plots of the dark feline.

Alderigo and Juan

I saw that painting in the Guild of Gold and Jewel when I visited Rodelia.

The famous explorer Alderigo, from a family of pelican merchants, and Juan, a gilder, founder of the Guild of Cartographers, were two crucial figures for the development of the secular relationships that existed 'twixt Rodelia and the Avian islands.

Flying in the beak of Alderigo's, Juan was able to compose the first maps of the Green Pit: they were the first to hast contact with the far lands, and from those times on, 'twixt the Avians and the Rodelian there is a firm and deep alliance, so in exchange for the protection of the Avians and the free passage in their ports, Rodelia supplies the best works that the minute and agile legs of her craftsmen can produce, because the Avians hast not the manual dexterity to perform those technical feats.

They lived more than three centuries ago, yet their names and their discoveries survive to this day.

There is oft fear and distrust for the diverse because differences are thought to make us superior to others. Yet, history is a teacher, as Juan and Alderigo knew, and it teaches us that by putting these differences at each other's service, they allow us to compose the greatest progress for our society.

Primus Consul Alistaire

"…I say to thee, mine cousin, that I am most worried of the fate that the future holds for me. The magus that hath recently settled in town, Alistaire, is taking power at a surprisingly pace.

Still mysterious is the fortuitous series of events that closely concern him, since he does not seem to be doing anything to gain power in the Council of Consuls. Power seems however to fall into his lap.

As thou know, our academy hath been the pride of the city for over a century and, after the premature departure of our beloved Rector Paride, the prestige and luster that a Magus would grant the academy seemed the right choice.

As thou well know, the Magi are not allowed to compete for political positions, because the interest and magic art are never in agreement. Yet, he did not contribute anything, because it was the council that asked him to have the honor of being the new rector.

A few months later, alas, a terrible fire broke out in the academy, and Consul Olderico, responsible for town security, didst not arrive in time to rescue the students, because the gates to the Guards barracks were blocked. And yet, the Magus was there, and using his art he saved those whom were still imprisoned inside.

The crowd cheered him loudly. The "Savior Goat", they called him. 'twere a few nights later that the proud Olderico was found hanging by his neck from his balcony, suicide: the note he left behind gave reason for his gesture, that the sense of failure and the disaster that almost befell the students, killed him.

I knew Olderico, and although he was a proud one, he never showed any sign of this weakness, and I know for sure that he was a sheep of integrity, one of those whom would not hast left the world as a coward, yet one whom would hast repaired his error, a mistake which wasn't his and had one that in the end had not led to serious consequences, after all.

Anyhow, the town wanted Alistaire to take his place, praying and canonizing his deeds. Nine months hast passed since the foreign Magus came here, and already he sits at the council. What doth thou suggest I should do? "

From the letter of the first Consul Isidore from Twisted Mount to his cousin Adalberto of Wind town, written on the day he died, of an unexpected heart attack.

Homar il Paziente

Ten years since, the Guardian Femore III traveled to the unknown far lands, and 'twere during that time that he met Homàr the patient: a wealthy banker from an ancient family, a thinker and philosopher.

A great celebration was organized for the occasion with noted personalities of the kingdom, the nobles and the wealthiest and most influential merchants, that they might make the acquaintance of the Guardian, so that each of them could snatch promises and agreements from the theocrat.

During the banquet, and after it, the discussion 'twixt Femore III and the gentle guests was of the highest levels: philosophy, morals, religion. All the diners seemed to agree with the Guardian, some of 'em e'en seemed to change their minds to be more in tune, e'en contradicting themselves from sentence to sentence when needed.

The Guardian noticed this and began to get bored, because there is no conversation with those whom persist in not thinking with their own brains, or with those whom reason like fools.

Homàr began to speak, after having long listened to the empty words of the diners. Femore III was enlightened: Homàr didst not crave to agree with every word of his: he e'en retorted, responding in kind at every objection and any previous speech that was delivered.

Haqir, whom was present albeit young, told me that he ne'r had the opportunity to witness such a like dialectical struggle. From one side to the other came strokes and parries, feints and countermoves that only Apopi could hast faced. After hours of debate, Homàr seemed almost to put Femore III in the corner.

He restrained and said to Homàr: "in Nochenburg I have need of a banker with clear thinking like yours. Join, and I promise that thou shall hast naught to repent of and I shall ensure that thou want naught. " Homàr accepted the proposal, intrigued by the experience of seeing distant lands.

It is well known that in interests there is little that resembles honesty, since all good merchants know that there is less risk in being accommodating than voicing one's own opinion. Alas, every good leader knows that it is much more convenient to hast honest advisers rather than those that are accommodating, because their office is to hast their own point of view. To those whom showed skepticism about Homàr, Femore III replied: "no doubts about him, because although he is a reptile, he hath a backbone. "

Placido Bentivoglio

"Placidesco banquet" is now a popular term to describe a delicious meal, and for good reason, I say to thee. The legend of friend Placido is now well known beyond the lands of the kingdom, whom for years worked for different nobleman, cooking dishes of such goodness that the vocabulary doth not hast enough words to describe.

Years ago, for territorial disputes, three dukes of the kingdom gathered their banners, content to contend with blood for the disputed lands. None of 'em were intent on stepping back from their positions, and blood was soon shed. Femore could not allow it, because internal war creates power gaps that too many are prepared to fill.

He summoned the contenders, keeping 'em busy at the negotiating table, still unable to get aught out of it except that of a ceasefire in the internal war. They did not know that the Guardian had instructed Placido and his assistants, skilled Lemurs, to prepare a banquet.

Femore needed all his diplomatic ability to ensure that the three didst not leave to be able to command the troops on the field, and he succeeded for over six months: Placido was at work, and whatever thou say, waiting months are worth the experience of tasting the creations of the master cook.

The negotiations could proceed no longer, as the three had nothing more to say, except that the battlefield was waiting for them to resolve the dispute as honor required.

The Guardian asked them to come together for a banquet that evening. Reluctant and impatient to return to their castles, they had to accept, because Femore III's invitation to dinner cannot be declined.

What happened next was marvelous: such delicacies were served, such was the joy of experiencing those delicacies that the three Dukes were moved, remembering the times when they also held banquets in their palaces instead of war councils. They made peace, and the conflict was ended right there, thanks to the slow but nevertheless wise culinary art of Placido.

Since then it is customary in the Kingdom to always eat before dealing with politics.

I saw Placido when I visited Nochenburg, because we shared our faith in the preaching's of Index, and he said that he was worried. He had recently seen the gleam of an eye observing him from the dark and although I had reassured him that no one wished him harm, I confess that I fear that the dense web of events may even have enveloped him.

Luscinia The Bard

Many made use of the art of writing stories. Keep care, alas, because not all that is written hath value in itself. It serves attention, a wealth of research and investigation, because without arriving at the roots of the facts is the risk of creating distorted perceptions of what indeed was the time that is told.

Luscinia was a mercenary of words, a bard. As an honest and impartial historian, I must admit that I never had the opportunity to hear a more musical voice than hers. This doth not mean, towards the other hand, that it is right to tell tales poor in historical truths, because unfortunately people are inclined to swallow as truth any story that they read, that speaks more to their stomach than their intellect.

Much easier, in fact, is to fall into the shadow of ignorance, taking as true what is offered to us so easily, since it deludes us to what the facts are, although we are only granted empty words. On the other hand, it is painful to dig through the mud of rumors and opinions to find the most precious truths.

I am convinced that Luscinia, given the fame she enjoys, her ability as a storyteller and her silky voice, could sing about all that happens to us, helping our thankless work, opening the eyes of poor people whom could not afford the luxury of literary education and math.

Unfortunately, I was not granted the gift of singing, and for this reason I delegate what the voice cannot to the quill and to writing. It would be wonderful if everyone could read and if everyone could understand the power of culture and science!

Alas, it pains me to confess that, as I know the nature of all animals, I fear the day that we will find individuals, albeit without the singing art of Luscinia, sellers of lies and falsehoods, able to circumvent the ignorant and lazy in favor of self-interest. In life I hast met humble peasants whom hast a vivid and curious mind, lovers of knowledge e'en if poor in means, and I hast spoken with ignorant rich people, some e'en educated, whom preferred the sleep of reason to the exhilarating yet more demanding and constant search for knowledge.

I learned that ignorance, alas, is naught but an attitude.

Dall'arte sapiente di **Laura Guglielmo**

De Vicarius Mortificatorum

Odo Two Lives, some call him.

The first of his lives was that of arms, whereto he owed his nickname of Odo the Bloodthirsty. Atrocities were the misdeeds perpetrated by Odo and his team of beasts, because in the frontier lands, as well as in the most remote villages of the Green Pit, none could oppose his power, the terrible thirty. With the bogus promise to keep the villages they captured safe from raids and robbers; the villains turned out to be perhaps worse than the threats from which they vowed to protect the poor people. Alas, Alcibiades of the pit learned of their bloodthirsty cruelties and traveled where Torquato and the brotherhood were, asking for help from him and the soldiers at his command. Torquato took thirty of his best men, armed with harquebuses, swords and shields, and accompanied by Alcibiades left for the village, leaving command under the decrees of Ranieri.

One night they found Odo and the thirty, intent on debauchery and reveling in the tavern of the poor village they occupied. The sentinel barely had time to sound the alarm horn that the bullet from Torquato's harquebus killed the guard.

The Thirty ran out, weapons in hand, ready to punish the daring fool who dared to raise his hand against their minions. Alas, they found themselves confronted by a row of harquebuses, that fired in unison, filling the air with smoke and making pulp of the vile troops.

Some fled to the forest, taking unfortunate villagers as hostages. Odo was unable to escape, he was captured alive, because he took shelter behind one of his and saved his life. For two days he was subjected to torture by Torquato, till, shattered in body and spirit, dripping blood, he revealed where the den of the bandits under his command was, in exchange for the promise to end the torture.

Tis not difficult to imagine what befell the rest of his crew. From that time, Odo changed: he understood that the pain inflicted by Torquato was not enough to wash away the wickedness in his soul. He decided, feverish and delusional, that he would devote his remaining days to penance and mortification of the flesh for the redemption of his sins. The confraternity of the Humble welcomed him into their ranks, and there was never a more suitable animal than he, who found in self-inflicted pain the relief for his tortured soul.

The Tribune of the People

Wealthy by birth yet certainly not of gentle lineage, because his family was made up of merchants and craftsmen, because his family was made up of merchants and craftsmen, he soon found out why the tax collectors were invisible to all those who want to do business and gain fortune.

On the one hand, the temple taxes, because faith seems to need earthly foraging to save souls from damnation, and on the other those of the nobles, whom like the first, want to save people from evil, paying the guards at their service.

When thou hast only the strength of the mind and resourcefulness on thy own, it is insufferable to see whom thrives on the assets that cost so much effort to those whom own 'em, thanks only to their birthright.

Wolfgang spoke with the boldness of a general to the people of his town, St. Mastino on the rivers. He wanted to free the town from the yoke of nobles and clerics, giving control to merchants and ship owners and half the towns citizen soldiers, paid directly from their coffers. What he called the "people's power" would guarantee control of half the army under a town court, whose tribunes were elected by the people among those merchants whom didst a lot to augment the wealth of the port town, while others sucked their blood like mosquitoes.

Gabrinus was captured one night, in his bed, on charges of heresy and treason for wanting to interfere with the sacred law of the kingdom, someone had falsely declared that he wanted to overthrow the duke's family, e'en providing bogus evidence.

Unfortunately, loyalty is oft a commodity, that can be bought and sold with the right weight in gold to the highest bidder. He was transferred to Nochenburg, to the cells of the inquisitors, waiting the inevitable death sentence. Yet someone, silent as the passing of time, helped him escape from the cell, and out of the city.

"Go to Twisted Mount," he said, before disappearing into the dark.
"Because we need people as daring as thee".

The Mining City of Buchebuie

Buchebuie was the largest of the mining cities. Perhaps the only one, together with Tanafonda, truly worthy of being called a city. Located in the rocky central moors of the Green Pit, named the Thorn, it didst not hast enough fertile soil on the surface to support the population.

One would wonder why colonists wanted to settle there, yet the answer is marvelously clear: metals. In ancient times, the people whom settled there were naught yet fugitives, poor and forswore, fleeing the law, hunger or wars. In such an inhospitable place is certainly no easy life, because the struggle for survival takes place every day that the Father sends to earth.

The few fields on the surface were soon too small to feed everyone, so that underground they began to cultivate mushrooms, mosses and lichens, and to breed insects to supplement the food supplies, together with what was imported.

The export of metals from the Pit to the richer towns of the confederation and to the holy kingdom to the east grew, and the inhabitants of the town also grew, the town was expanding year by year.

Nowadays Buchebuie is structured in two levels: in the upper one, wider and bathed by sporadic rays of sunlight from the surface, lived mostly the owners of the tunnels or the merchants whom deal with trading precious metals for the goods that the town needs.

In the lower level, called the hole, dug deep into the earth, lived mainly miners, oft a few meters from the entrance of the tunnels where they worked hard digging, every day. Generally, life in the mining towns is not for the weak, yet there in the hole, it is even more true that light is seen very little, literally or physically.

Ossarium

From the writing of St. Mastodon, the "Book of Visions" which the temple still considers apocryphal:

"The martyr shall find the place where the ancient bones rest.
he shall see the majesty of the past, and the cataclysm of ruin,
shall see the mortal remains of the ancestors and the scars on the earth,
he shall see the mother, whom in the last instant bends towards her son.

IThe father, devoured by Gaea as a sacrifice for our salvation,
Leave him to his eternal rest, so that he continues to protect us from among the shining stars,
in his eternal struggle,
from the day of wrath, when Gaea shall take back what belongs to her.

take care of those whom shall dress in holiness,
for evil is hidden even where the brightest light shines;
watchful are the heroes, and firm in their will,
for the darkness of those hours shall blacken the stars. “

I managed to read these verses in a fleeting visit to the Sacred Library of the Guardians of Nochemburgo, although in secret and at night, with the help of trusted friends.

In the light of the lantern mine fingers, unrestrained, trembled with emotion and wonder, because I know not what emotion I felt in mine heart and guts touching those pages that the feet of the excellent Mastodon had written centuries before.

I say to thee, oh readers, that if instinct and soul hast any reason for being, those verses were written by the saint himself.

Nidialti

Nidialti lies perched on a rocky mount that over the centuries was dug and carved into. The great Avian capital, built on a cliff called the Great Perch, protected by a circle of rocky Bluffs, is located in the center of the huge island of the Head, so called because the archipelago resembles a birds skull, with the smaller islands forming the vertebrae of the neck.

Within the Nidialti basin, the waters, closed from the rest of the sea, swell placidly in the sea winds, making the big town a safe harbor for navigators whom find refuge from bad weather. Its foundation goes back to the same century in which Alderigo, the famous explorer lived. About fifty years before its fondation, the first Pelican community on the island made an agreement with the large White-Headed Eagles, whom lived in the upper part of Nidialti, and began to cohabit in peace.

After Alderigo, Nidialti experienced a great expansion: the Rodelians helped to expand the town, and built what is the port of the Claw, perched on a rocky spur that plunges into the waters from the central mount. Alas, the differences 'twixt the Avian families, despite the peaceful coexistence in the big town, are still felt, because the Rapax families bear that ancient power granted them by the fear of beak and claw.

I still wonder, after climbing high towards the cliff of Nidialti and looking towards the sea, how may you hast such a narrow perspective of the world when thou can hover in the air and see all things for what they are: a distant point in the vastness of the world.

The Worm's Den

Built over a century ago by Duke von Behrmann, Fort Blizzard represented the defense of the Holy Kingdom from the incursions of the barbarians from the white desert.

Oft, bands of marauders crossed the Vulture pass, over which Fort Blizzard was built, entering the realms just to kidnap the poor unfortunates of the border villages and to raid crops as often as possible. Mercenary troops were paid to defend the border posts, yet this was not enough, and the people began to move away from the fertile lands for fear of being robbed and killed by the barbarians.

Peace lasted for seventy years, and the lands were repopulated with skilled workers whom continued to produce for the kingdom.

Rudolph von Behrmann, brother of Archduke Kurt, was however one of the seven separatist Dukes during the conspiracy, whose fate we know well. His eldest son Otto fled; nobody knew where. Shortly after, considering the power vacuum, one of those bands occupied the castle, and the now weak and fractional local nobility found themselves making pacts with the raiders, in exchange for peace, they sent the barbarians food and gold.

All this until the nobles of those lands ten years ago, with the monitary support of the Temple, called the Brotherhood of Torquato to arms to regain the castle. Through the secret passages where Otto fled years before, the Worms broke into the fort, sparing the life of only a handful of the savages.

"Let everyone know that this, from now on, shall be the Worm's Den." von Behrmann put an end to the raids by building on the impervious mountains the bulwark that was Fort Blizzard.

In collaboration with **Lorenzo Lanfranconi**

The Theft of the Stone

From Hermann von Rott's report to Desmònd de 'Boule-Terrière:
"and it is therefore unexplained how an individual alone could have robbed us, that the caravan was watched on sight by mine armies and thy Guardians.

Suddenly from the tail wagon I heard a broken meow torn from one of the porters, and swirls of smoke rose quickly. The guards rushed to investigate what had befell, when from the main chariot, which carried the stone, an explosion was heard, and smoke rose in the same way as the first.

Confused and dismayed, the soldiers saw an agile figure with long ears running away, knocking over one of 'em. We tried to follow him, yet he disappeared into the woods. Strange fact is that there is no trace of the feline that meowed in the first place."

In collaboration with **Claudia Iannicello**

Salso Nero

I arrived in Salso Nero, and I was immediately struck by how large and picturesque the great Pearl of the Pit was. Built near the delta of the Aterium river, the town was made up of one hundred islands, connected to each other by piers and rafts.

On the smallest islands there were groups of houses with bizarre shapes and foundations similar to stilts, over the years the formation of these oft changed.

The palaces of the wealthy merchants or those of the town government were built on the larger islands, because there was stability to support the weight of their houses. 'Twixt one island and another, the preferred way to get around was not the sedan chair, as used in many towns, yet the

gondola, because the narrow pontoons, the crowded walkways and the irregular structure of the city made it easier for anyone wishing to pay to move on the water.

When I arrived and saw the palace of the Mayor Paddath, I was struck by the magnificence and the singular aspect of the structure, made in his image and likeness, and decorated with gold as the rumors had said. The large flags, more like sails, swayed gently with the breeze, making the emblem of Salso Nero move. Paddath welcomed me and mine trusted Jamyang with all the honors, for he said that he never wanted it written that he was not a gracious host, and offered us to stay in his mansion, where we ate the finest fish I have ever tasted, smoked black in a salt crust.

Alas, I had a strange sense of uneasiness all same, which I later learned came from Ni-Shung the sorceress, whose enigmatic expression disturbed me somewhat.

In collaboration with **Roman Kuteynikov**

Settling the Debts

The only qualms about taking Tanafonda, for Torquato and Ranieri, was about how to limit the loss of life of both the innocent and the Worm Brethren. Taking Tanafonda, since Ermello had fortified its entrances, had become more difficult than it once was.

Granted the only two entrances to the without and the steep rocky ridges, it would hast been easier to take the town by siege and starving it, once the supply lines had been cut and the two bridgeheads had been taken, they would only hast to wait for capitulation and surrender.

Since Tanafonda was the birthplace of Torquato, and Ranieri like other Worms had like origins, they didst not want to drop the hammer of war and hunger on the poor folk, whom already had suffered in the past.

So Ranieri, along with three of his engineers, infiltrated Tanafonda to study its structure. Once among the worms, he prepared a plan: through tunnels they would travel underground to the center of the town, where they would set fire to the black powder which, exploding, would hast opened a passage impossible to close, catching Ermello by surprise.

The plan succeeded, and the Worms entered the town, 'twixt smoke and steel. "nobody takes Ermello! he is mine." ordered Torquato. The battle lasted a few bloody minutes, and finally the soldiers of Buchebuies, outnumbered, were hopelessly overwhelmed.

The fight 'twixt Torquato and Ermello, alas, lasted much longer, struggling with claws and fangs. Ermello, e'en if of advanced years, still moved quickly, yet Tasso's fury was uncontainable. When Ermello finally lay defeated, silence surrounded 'em.

The Miracles of the Blood

Once they were considered heretics, like those whom still worshiped the gods of nature; they wandered into the villages, mortifying their flesh and haranguing the crowds.

Their feverish words often impressed the people, who saw in the burning faith and miracles that some these heretics were capable of accomplishing, something more tangible and real than the presence of the Temple.

Those "miracles" they perform, Alistaire the Magus assured me, are naught more than magical manifestations: coming from years of study and application of the magic along with the solid

and burning faith and the corporal pain that they inflicted, which caused an ecstatic condition most like that which the magi achieved through their incredible ability to concentrate.

Under Astragalus I the Humble, as they called themselves, were integrated into the Temple, where they served from then on while remaining formally independent: the Guardian knew well that sometimes in order to win over an enemy, he had no choice but to welcome him among their ranks.

The magic produced by their bloody rituals was terribly powerful and included terrible tortures, scourges, long processions wearing sackcloth, burning and cutting; alas, the rough magical manifestation, without the study necessary to harness it, is like the water of a swollen river, from which only hope can protect the homes of the unwary whom dare to build alongside the banks.

Sometimes ignorance is a precious commodity, because in the hands of those whom hast no scruples but malice, certain sciences can cause unimaginable catastrophes.

In collaboration with **Antonio De Luca**

The Last Journey

Jamyang woke me up before the sun rose to warm the earth, my breath still labored by the dry cold. I looked around, saw mine house, and had the precise feeling that this was probably the last time. Mine heavy eyelids, in fact made heavier from sleep, caused mine vision to blur, spreading the soft and warm lights to the point that all I saw seemed immersed in the mist, soft and distant.

I looked at the map of mine travels, the awls to mark mine stages, illuminated sideways on the wall. I looked at the table with mine ampules and beakers reflecting the morning sun, which filtered through the shutters.

Finally, I looked at mine desk, with the papers that I would not be taking with me stacked in piles, and mine luggage ready, lying on mine stool.

Then I looked at Jamyang, with his gentle expression, bent over as not to touch the ceiling with his horns as he held out his arm to help me up. I clung to him, rubbing mine eyes of sleep, trying to wipe the tear that ran down mine face, licking it away without him seeing me.

We went to the low table where breakfast was, and ate in silence, continuing to look around me, trying to impress mine home on mine mind, so full of memories of what was mine life.

Once our frugal meal was over, I got up, taking mine staff. I went out the door, the wind on mine face, the rising sun, the frost on the road.

Ariuna, Lucille, and mine last journey awaited us on the other side of the placid stream. Walk old man, I said to myself, and rejoice in what thou hast.

In collaboration with **Andrea Tentori Montalto**

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