

ARKHTIDE WORLD BOOK



A note to reviewers

This beta version is meant to show the core factions of Arkhtide: its world atmosphere, faction identity, and long-term vision. It does not contain the deep faction lore, the actual world story arc and character stories.

We especially welcome feedback on clarity, visual readability, faction feel, and the emotional impact of the world.

Reviewer beta copy

This book is part of the Arkhtide Beta Box created for preview, review, feedback, and playtesting purposes.

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Arkhtide

Reviewer Beta Edition, 2026

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ARKHTIDE WORLD BOOK

FIRST FRAGMENT

This is a world forsaken. Abandoned by its maker.
Left to crumble, to wither, to die.
But humanity did not die.
It crawled from the wreckage and built upon the bones of the past.
Empires rose and burned. Kings and tyrants carved their names into the ashes.
And still the darkness grew.
It swallowed hope. It buried cities. It pressed against the edges of every fire.
Then came the Seekers.
Marked at birth, bound to the unseen.
They alone walk the threshold of the world
where sense frays, and the energy of creation flows like lifeblood from a wound.
A power to restore.
A power to destroy.
A power to claim.
It was meant to be salvation.
Instead, it became war.
The strong took it.
The wise coveted it.
The blind wasted it.
And the hunger of men devoured the light meant to save them.
Now Réa stands at the edge once more.
Its fate unwritten. Its doom uncertain.
Some seek unity, forging the last hope of mankind.
Some hunt the Arkhons, believing them the source of all corruption.
Some carve their own dominion, shaping the world in their image.
Some shut their eyes to the wound, and live as if the world were whole.
And some bow to greater powers, serving the will of the unseen.
But the end has not yet come.
The storm has not yet broken.
And the final chapter is not yet written.



Shard of Wrath
Soma R. Molnár

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The World of Réa

Author's notes:

"As a traveler, investigator, and sage, I am usually confident that I can uncover the truth. In this case, I am not so certain.

Circumstances forced me to leave Réa unexpectedly, with no time to seek further perspectives or confirm what I had already begun to understand. Keep this in mind as you read. These fragments of my writings should be taken as accounts and reflections, not as absolute truth.

There is truth within them. Of that I am sure. But truth is never whole when seen from a single path, and to grasp the full picture, one must be willing to listen to many voices, and walk many roads."

K.T.



Echo of Creation
Dorottya Tóth-Kolozsvári

The Creator's Pride

According to the legends Scarlet shared with me – and according to fragments I have since found echoed in older texts – the Creator of Réa once gazed upon His work with admiration. As ages passed, admiration turned to pride, and pride to vanity.

In those days, humanity flourished in harmony with the higher planes, honoring both the Creator and the Arkhons, the celestial stewards of order. Many religions arose, each bearing different names for the divine, but sharing the same reverence.

It was not enough.

The Creator believed His world should rise faster, reach further. So He intervened. He whispered into dreams. He planted ideas in waking thought. He embedded Himself within belief itself, becoming the Lightbringer, unveiling fragments of His knowledge to a humanity eager to receive them.

A golden age followed. Monumental cities. Cathedrals whose spires pierced the clouds. Empires that named themselves eternal.

Knowledge became power. Power became hunger. And in time – as it always does – hunger became war. Civilizations turned upon one another, consumed by their own brilliance, and the world burned in the light its maker had given it.

The Separation – The Creator's Abandonment

The Creator, once enamored with His work, now looked upon it with disgust. Humanity had failed Him – or so He believed.

In shame, He made a terrible decision. One final act, to erase the mistake and begin again.

He tore the fabric of existence, severing Réa from the divine Cycle of Creation. Cut from its source, the world was left to rot. A forsaken realm, deprived of renewal, slowly unraveling into nothing.



Statue without name
Gergely Nagy

But the Creator made a mistake of His own.

In severing Réa, He also exiled His own servants, the Arkhons, the celestial beings who had helped shape and sustain the world. Though they were among the lowest order of divine entities, together they held immense power, and the Creator feared their vengeance.

So He went further. He veiled Réa in oblivion, shrouding the world in a divine fog, ensuring that neither mortals nor Arkhons would remember the truth: that they had once been part of something greater.

Where the Arkhons are now, none can say with certainty. Some claim they walk among us, blind to their own nature. Others insist they were broken by the Veil and became something else entirely. There are those who hunt them as the source of all the world's suffering. I have my suspicions, but no proof. This, more than anything, is the question I left Réa unable to answer.



The Maw
Dorottya Tóth-Kolozsvári

The Corruption

Before the Separation, the order of things was simple, even if few mortals understood it.

Quintessence, the divine essence, flowed into the physical realm and became Arkhé, the primal substance from which all things were shaped. Corpus Arkhé formed the matter of the living and the unliving. Logos Arkhé fueled thought, invention, and brilliance. Anima Arkhé carried emotion and its expression. And behind them all stood Nihilus Arkhé, the silent force that held the others in balance.

When a being died, or when matter was undone, its Arkhé returned to the Cycle. There it was purified once more into Quintessence, and reborn into creation.

After the Separation, this order collapsed.

Arkhé could no longer return. It remained trapped within Réa, unpurified, unresolved, accumulating. What had once been the source of all creation became a slow corrosion, poisoning everything it touched.

Nature was the first to change. Forests twisted into shapes the old chronicles do not describe. Metals lost their strength; minerals crumbled where they should have held. Animals mutated, or simply died, their bodies unable to bear the weight of the new world.

Humanity suffered most. In the centuries after the Separation, lifespans shortened drastically, and at the bitter peak of the corruption, it is said that men and women barely reached eighteen years before their bodies cracked apart, breaking against a world that no longer knew how to sustain them. We have since learned to endure. Our lives are still short by the measure of the old age, but we no longer shatter where we stand. Whether this is adaptation, or only a slower kind of cracking, I cannot say.

The Mystical Arts

In this desolation, a new force emerged.

From the frayed edges of reality, fragments of Quintessence still seeped into the world, fulfilling their ancient purpose – granting life and soul. But the tainted Arkhé, cut off from the Cycle, remained imprisoned in the physical realm. With nowhere to return, it accumulated, growing ever denser, pressing against the walls of the world.

Humans were never meant to touch such power. And yet, as Arkhé thickened around them, they began to sense it. And then, to use it.

Thus were born the mystical arts, a force capable of miracles, and of ruin.

But it demanded a price.

To cast a spell, a mage draws in the lingering Arkhé, strains it through their own soul, and releases it back into the world. The problem is this: each soul is shaped from a finite, unpredictable measure of Quintessence. Filtering Arkhé – the residue of dead beings and broken matter – scars that essence. With every spell, a fragment of the soul is lost.

And when the last trace of Quintessence is gone, so is the human.

Mind and form collapse. What remains is one of the Fallen, nearly immortal, soulless, and driven by a single hunger: to consume the Quintessence of others.

I have seen one. I will not write of it here.



Oblivions Maze
Dorottya Tóth-Kolozsvári

Arkhtides and the Rise of Seekers

Réa, though doomed, did not meet its end.

As Quintessence continued to overflow from the divine realm, the pressure tore rifts in creation itself. We call them Arkhtides – unstable breaches where Quintessence from the Cycle bleeds through into our world.



Arkhé (Neutral)
Soma R. Molnár

They do not last. The wounds heal quickly, sealing away whatever has not been claimed. But the brief flood of Quintessence is enough. Enough for humanity to recognize its value, and to fight over it.

Some are born with souls richer in Quintessence than others. These rare individuals can sense the Arkhtides, track them across great distances, and harvest the essence within. They are called Seekers, humanity's last hope, and its sharpest weapons.

Seekers hold a critical advantage. They are far more resistant to the corruption. They can enter the Arkhtides where others would perish. They can extract Quintessence – the only force that still sustains civilization.

But what they can carry is never enough. Quintessence is scarce. And where there is scarcity, there is war.

So the world became an open battlefield. Again.

Seekers, backed by followers, factions, and desperate rulers, pour into the Arkhtides, clashing in merciless skirmishes for as much of the precious essence as they can claim. The fighting does not end at the rifts' edges. Wars are fought far beyond them, for control of the surrounding lands, places where returning Seekers might be sheltered, exploited, or seized the moment they emerge.

And Quintessence is not the only prize. When an Arkhtide vanishes, it leaves behind Vitrium, a substance unlike anything known before the Separation. Through Vitrium, Arkhé and Quintessence can be gathered, stored, and shaped in quantities once unimaginable. With it, the struggle escalated from survival to dominion.

The cycle repeats, as it always has. Hope rekindles. Destruction draws nearer. And the fate of Réa, as ever, rests in the hands of those willing to fight for it.



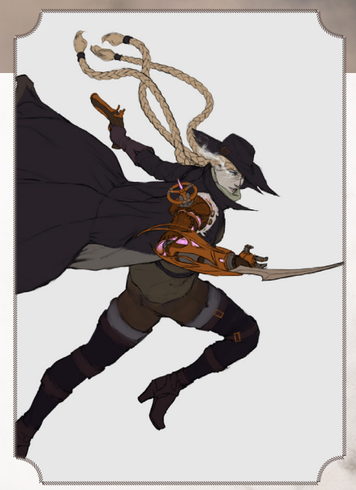
Epitaph
Tünde Keszerice



Emery Kreuz
Dat Tuan Phan







The Factions of Réa

Author's notes:

"In my travels, I have met more people than I can name in a single volume, and more cultures than any one traveler could hope to understand. What follows is not a survey. I make no claim to completeness, and I would distrust anyone who did.

I have chosen, instead, a few – those whose customs struck me as worth remembering, whose ways revealed something I had not expected, or whose company I simply could not forget."

K.T.

ROSEBORN EMPIRE

Roseborn Justicae

The Roseborn Empire was the greatest the new world has known since the Separation. Its cities once webbed the entire continent of Rios, and its reach was beginning to extend east and south when it fell. How it fell is a story for another page, and I will tell it. It is enough, here, to say that it fell, and that it fell badly.

What remains carries the name and little else. Today it is an empire in name only, thirteen surviving city-states bound by no shared crown, each one armed against the others, and each one quietly insisting that it alone is the rightful heir.

The Roseborn Justicae rule from the Fortress of Flags, and they have not forgotten what they were. Once, they were the Empire's secret police, the hand that kept magic from spreading where it was forbidden, the Fallen from spilling into the cities, and terror from taking root inside the Empire's own walls. At the end, they were also the hand that struck the killing blow. The other twelve city-states have not forgiven them, and most likely never will.

This does not seem to slow them down. The Justicae are the only power left in the Roseborn Empire that still speaks openly of unification, of rebuilding the Empire piece by piece, by whatever means the work requires. They believe themselves the true heirs of what was. And they are willing to bleed for it.



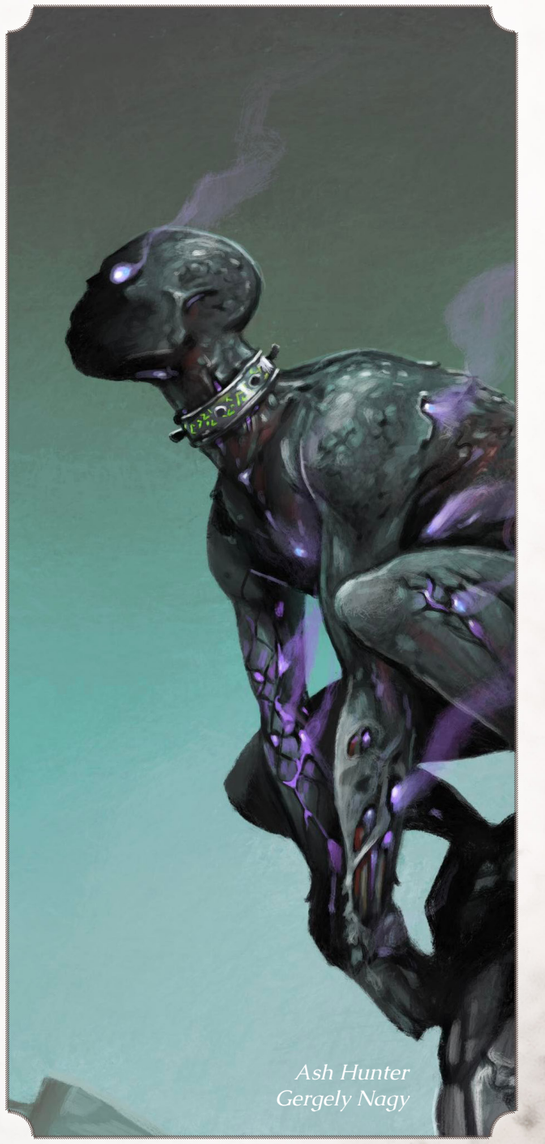
Justicar Kalanis
Dorottya Tóth-Kolozsvári

Everyone fears them, and for good reason. The Justicae are everywhere, in trade and in the black markets that shadow it, in the regulation of magic and the suppression of it, in the councils of the nobility and the back alleys of the poor. Their agents, called justicars, are the best at what they do, trained veterans, experts in hunting criminals and monsters alike, investigating the supernatural and killing mostly anything other humans never dare to face.

At their head stands the most feared person alive on the continent, Emery Kreuz, the High Justicar, and the murderer of the last Emperor.

On the battlefield, the Justicae rely on methods that secure them an edge with the least amount of danger to themselves. They deploy devastating vitrium-enhanced traps, Inferno Guns (cutting-edge weapons from the northern city of the Technocracy, fine-tuned with Borne-runes), and their most lethal asset of all: the Fallen.

The justicars have learned how to bind them. The method is called Soul-Linking. A large metal spike, crafted from a Fallen Core (the crystallized heart of another Fallen) is driven through the justicar's chest and several others through a special collar on the Fallen they intend to claim. Through those spikes, the creature's mind is yoked to the justicar's own soul. From that point on, if the justicar's soul and mind is strong enough, the Fallen serves and obeys.

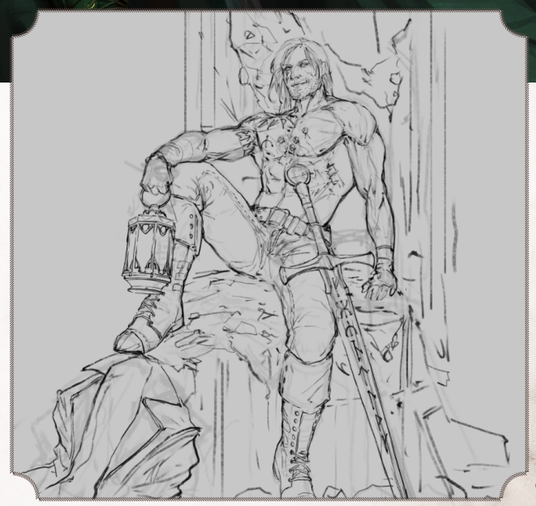


Ash Hunter
Gergely Nagy



Gregory Brandmayr
Dat Tuan Phan





SCARLET LEGACY

Bastion of the Legacy

The Scarlet Legacy was born from the ideals and the final will of Scarlet, one of the founders of the Roseborne Empire and, in the end, its most hated enemy.

They fight to save the world of Réa entire, humanity included, though not centered. The Arkhons, they claim, abandoned their original purpose. Whatever they were once meant to be, what they have become is something else: hungry, parasitic, devourers of Quintessence, draining the world to fuel their own continued existence. Scarlet believed the Arkhons were responsible for the slow death of Réa, and she swore that they would fall. Her followers have sworn the same.

The first order Scarlet created was the Bastion of the Legacy, the military wing of the cult. The Bastion exists for one purpose, and one only: to prepare for the prophesied Final Battle, the day on which every Arkhon will fall and the world will be freed from their corruption forever.

Scarlet is no longer here to lead them, but before she disappeared for good, she prepared Lord Korovin for the work. Unthinkable as it may seem, Scarlet and Korovin captured a living Arkhon into Korovin's own fathers body (it is a story for another time, but in short: it turned out really badly). They named the physicalized thing Anthalon, the dual ideal of Greed and Justice, the Arkhon who had devoured his own sibling and worn his power ever since.

What they did with their captive is the foundation of everything the Legacy has become.

They drank his blood. This ritual grants them supernatural abilities, at the price of their humanity. Those who survive it gain near-immortality, bodies that do not age, enhanced strength, rapid regeneration, and the power to wield blood-magic. The longer they live, the stronger they grow.

To the Scarlet Legacy, the cost of this power is not only acceptable, but necessary. You cannot kill an Arkhon with steel. You can only kill an Arkhon with another Arkhon. And so they forge themselves into what they must become: the monsters who will slay the monsters, and in doing so, save the world.

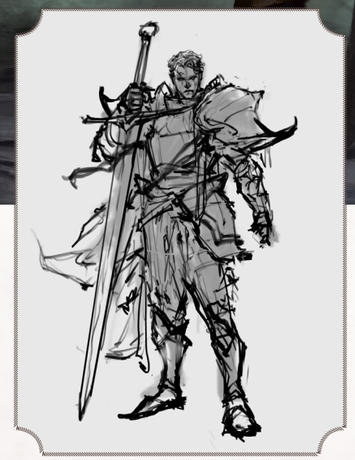
Under Lord Korovin, the Bastion is built around four orders, each with its own purpose, and each shaped by the blood they have taken.

The Red Mages of Scarlet are the priesthood. They oversee the rituals of blood, life, and death that hold the Legacy together. They administer the Ritual of Blood, by which candidates seek to join the Blood Knights. They tend Anthalon's prison. They are the keepers of Scarlet's teachings, and the architects of everything the other orders are permitted to do.



Lord Korovin
Dat Tuan Phan









Karvay
Lili Rózsa



Lady Raaha
Soma R. Molnár

The Blood Knights are the heavy hand of the Legacy, a heavily armored knightly order descended from the last remnants of Lord Korovin's original guard. Three and a half centuries on, they no longer age, and what was once a war company has become something closer to a relic kept in motion. They are Scarlet's vision made flesh, the warriors she shaped to lead the war against the Arkhons. Their numbers are small. Each one represents centuries of accumulated power.

The Nightshards are the Legacy's blade in the dark. They are light, fast, and merciless, drawn from the fugitives of the Roseborn Empire, killers, murderers, and thieves bound by blood ritual to Lord Korovin's will. Where the Blood Knights are seen, the Nightshards are not, and that is the point.

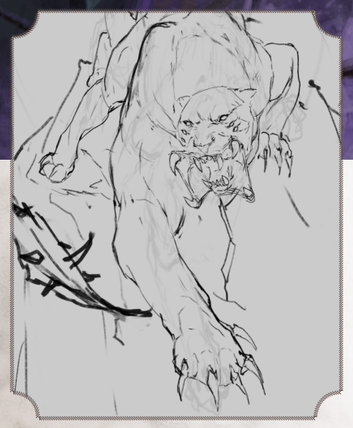
The Bloodslaves are the cost of the work. When a candidate fails the Ritual of Blood, they do not always die cleanly. What is left of them, broken in body, hollowed in mind, is taken up by the Red Mages and reshaped into something that can still serve. The Bloodslaves are sent ahead of the Blood Knights into open battle, unleashed against fortified positions to serve Scarlet one more time.

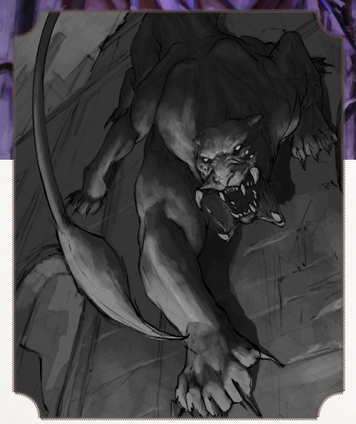


Screemer
Dorottya Tóth-Kolozsvári



Lord Korovin
Dat Phan Tuan







WILDERNESS

Amberkin & Shadow Host

Of all the Arkhons, the one who has touched mortal life most often is the one no mortal thinks to name. She is Réa herself, the world we walk upon, and the first Arkhon the Creator ever shaped.

She watched her father grow proud. She watched humanity rise under His guidance, and she watched it fall. When the Separation came, she pleaded with Him for another chance for the world He had decided to abandon, and she was refused. She watched the greatest of the Arkhons take up arms against Him, and she watched them fall. She watched the cataclysm that followed swallow every civilization she had cradled, and she has watched the slow decay that has gnawed at the survivors, and at herself, ever since.

She tried, in the early days, to fight for her children. The greater Arkhons forbade her. Survive, they told her. That is the only fight left to you. And so Réa listened, and turned inward, and began the long work of holding herself together.

She has been at that work ever since. What is left of her active will is bent entirely toward slowing her own death. She channels her own quintessence into every grain of dust, every stone, every leaf, every dying thing, holding the world a half-step back from the instant collapse it should already have undergone. The cost is constant, and in time, fatal. To keep the world from dying, she must spend herself, and what she spends she cannot recover. Without an outside source of Quintessence, she will eventually be consumed by her own grace.

So she did what she had to do. She wept, the old tales say, through the entire decision, but she did not hesitate. She went to the Sils.

The Sils were, and still are, the smallest and weakest of the Arkhons. They are the keepers of every small joy the world still allows: the warmth of sun on stone, the laughter that follows a successful hunt, the way light catches a drop of water. Réa asked them and of those who answered, she took only as many as she needed, and no more. The rest she left to their work, because the small joys of the world were the last small joys she had to protect.

Those who came with her were given physical bodies. They retained a thread of what they had always been, which is why, somewhere on a battlefield, a bound Sil with a spear in its hand may still be quietly tending a sunbeam through morning mist a thousand miles away. They serve, and they are still themselves. I am told this without proof by a mysterious creature called Nylvex. I find I want to believe it.

For a time, Réa and her bound Sils kept the balance. They entered the Arkhtides where she could not, harvested what Quintessence they could, and brought it home to her. It was enough.

Then the human nations rose, and the Seekers with them, and the Arkhtides became battlefields. What had once been a quiet harvest turned into a slaughter. The Sils, for all their bound power, were not built for war against trained mages and armored knights backed by empires. They began to fall in numbers



Arvelys Of Glade's Peace
Tünde Keszerice



Narra
Dat Tuan Phan

Réa could not afford. So she made more…

The first of her new creations were the Amberkin, great, glorious, honor-bound beasts, shaped to guard the Sils and the sacred places where her power gathered most deeply. The Wilderness names these places Wellsprings, and there are not many of them left. The Amberkin range from the small and swift to towering titans, each form built for the work it was given, and each one carrying in its blood a piece of Réa's own will. They do not fear death. They do not flee from a fight. They are, in every sense, what a guardian was meant to be before guardians became soldiers.

After them came the Shadow Host, smaller, faster, and far cleverer. Where the Amberkin hold ground, the Shadow Host go where no one expects them. They are Réa's eyes and ears across the continent, slipping through cities, forests and ruins alike, gathering whatever scraps of knowledge their mistress needs. They are also, when the need arises, killers. Quiet ones.

And then there is Silbone. When a physical Sil dies in Réa's service, its body does not return to the earth like other dead things. What remains is a sacred matter called Silbone, a residue of the divine being that once inhabited the form. The Wellsprings collect it then Réa decides what to do with it. What she does with it is reanimate the dead. Not only Sils, but monsters of the wilds, fallen Amberkin, ruined creatures of every kind, and, when the need is great enough, dead humans. The result is what they call a Silbone Unit. They walk. They breathe. They fight with skill and grace. To anyone who meets them in the open, they appear alive. Though they are not.

A Silbone Unit has no soul and no thought of its own. It moves only when Réa, through the Hosts, gives it a command. Between commands it stands still, or walks where it was told to walk, or waits in a forest doing nothing in particular until it is told to do something else. It does not remember what it was, because there is nothing left in it that could remember. The Silbone matter shapes the body, the bound Sils and the Hosts shape the will, and the original person, beast, or Sil is simply gone.

The outside world does not know any of this. To Réa, every bound Sil who came to her willingly, every fallen Amberkin, every Silbone Unit walking quietly through her woods, is a child she could not save by gentler means. She built what she built because the alternative was to die quietly, taking the world with her, and that, she has decided, is not what mothers do.



Silsteel Retributor
Lili Rózsa



Yan Minggui
Dat Tuan Phan





HEAVENLY SECT

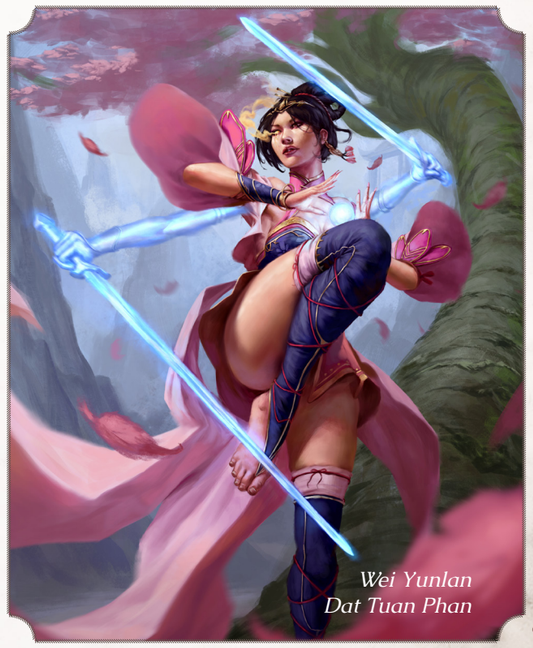
Sect of Ancients

Ten years after the fall of the Roseborne Empire, the largest and most powerful force in the world is the Heavenly Sect, which rules the continent of Assah from one end to the other.The Sect answers to a single being. His subjects call him the Immortal Golden Dragon. The rest of the world calls him the Heavenly Emperor. He appeared in Réa a little more than four hundred years ago. Where he came from, he has never said. What he is, no one can answer with confidence. The Heavenly Sect itself believes he is the son of the Ancient Star Dragon - who created the world and every living being - and now governs all earthly laws.

When he arrived on Assah, he conquered. He unified the continent under one banner, organized its peoples into five great martial temples, and gave each temple a fraction of his knowledge and a fraction of his power. For all of this, he asked one thing in return. Fun.

Every fifth year, the five temples compete in a great tournament of five categories. Every category is fought to the death. The rules change each cycle, and no temple is told them in advance. One year may bring solitary duels in shifting arenas. The next, full-temple team battles. The next, something the Emperor invented on the morning of the games. No temple can specialize narrowly without risking ruin. They train, in every cycle, for everything.The winning temple in each category receives a gift of its choosing: territory taken from a losing rival, a powerful artifact, or a new technique drawn directly from the Emperor's own power. Centuries of this have shaped Assah into something no other land resembles. The peoples here live to train, train to compete, compete to live, and die in numbers every fifth year so the Emperor will not be bored. Temples that could not adapt to the unpredictable games have been ground down to nothing. The current five are the survivors.

The youngest of the five temples is, despite its name, the Sect of Ancients. It is barely a hundred years old, founded under conditions the other temples still speak of carefully. Its leader is the Tianren Yan Minggui, and the temple exists at his command and by his methods.



Wei Yunlan
Dat Tuan Phan



Li Wuchen
Tünde Keszerice

Before him, the Valley of Flowers belonged to a different temple, the Sect of Flowers, whose leaders had abused and murdered Yan's family. Yan walked into the Sect of Flowers alone, and when he walked out, there was no Sect of Flowers left. The Emperor, presented with the massacre of a temple by a single man, gave Yan a task. Build a new temple, in the same valley, equal in strength to the others. Yan accepted.

Yan was born under a curse. He ages, like any living thing, but he does not die. When his body is struck down, he returns, and each return leaves him older than he was before. The curse will not let him escape into death by aging, either. When his body has aged past all motion, he will continue, motionless and aware, until at last he becomes dust. There is one way to reverse the aging. He can kill another living person and take their soul. When he does, he is restored.

In his youth, he did this. It is how he survived to walk into the Sect of Flowers alone. He has not done it for a long time. He has decided that he would rather grow old, and older, and at last become dust, than buy another century by taking what does not belong to him. He is, despite all of this, still one of the strongest people alive on the continent.

Since the Separation, no soul that dies in Réa passes on. Every soul ever lost is still here, somewhere, in fragments. Yan went looking. He found the ancients first, long-dead youxia and tianren from the ages before the Separation, drifting in scattered pieces across the continent. He made them an offer. He could build them a place, an afterlife of sorts, fed and stabilized with Quintessence, where they could rest and at last be at peace. In return, he asked them to lend their experience and their abilities to his disciples.

The ancients accepted. The Hall of the Dead was built. Yan and his disciples began entering Arkhtides for the Quintessence the Hall required, backed by the now bound ancients and their techniques and magics that had been lost for centuries. The Sect of Ancients, in a single generation, became dangerous in ways the other temples did not expect.

But the ancients were not the only thing Yan found. The realm of the lost holds more than human souls. It holds the soul of everything that was once remembered and is no longer. Beasts no one names. Songs no one sings. Secrets no one remembers. Among these, he found the Echoes, the souls of forgotten tales whose deeds were once told and retold and then fell silent. He brought them to the Hall. He rewrote their tales and gave the new stories to his disciples, who carried them out into the world. As they began to be remembered, the Echoes grew stronger. As they grew stronger, they joined Yan's work.

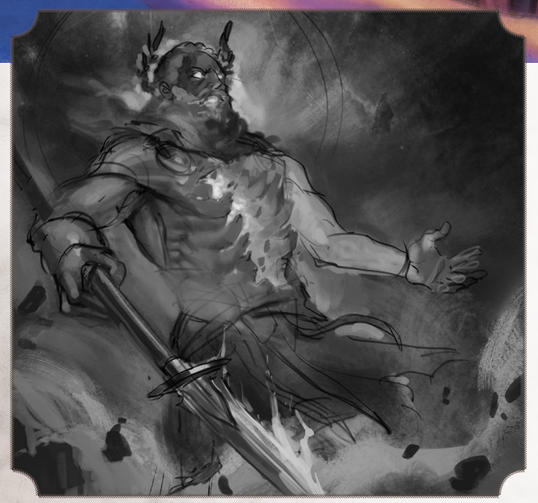
The Sect of Ancients may also be, though I will not insist on it, one of the kindest things still standing in Réa. The Hall of the Dead exists because Yan refused to let the dead simply dissolve. He himself has chosen, again and again, to age toward dust rather than take another life. None of this would be remarkable in a world where it cost him nothing. In a world where it costs him everything, it is the closest thing I have found, in all my travels, to grace.

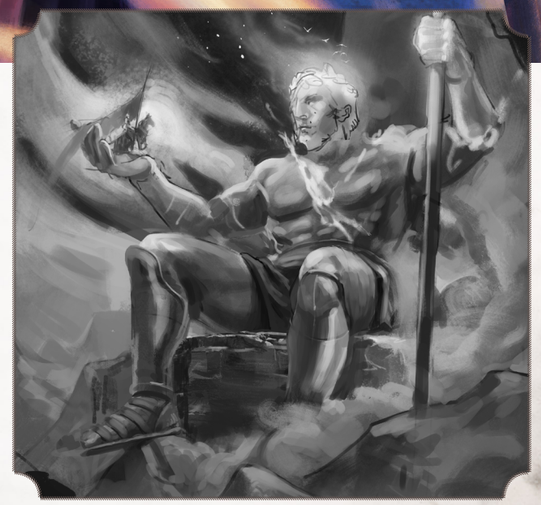


Yue Guiha
Gergely Nagy



Soul of Déimor
Tünde Keszerice





PARAGON ORDER

Banner of Devotion

What the Arkhons want, if any of them can want anything beyond their own ideals, is the question I have been trying to answer the longest, and the question I am furthest from settling. Every faction I have visited gives me a different account, and I have stopped trusting any single one. If there is a fuller answer to be had anywhere in Réa, it lies behind the walls of the Eye, the grand cathedral city carved into the mountain, headquarters of the Paragon Order.

The Paragon Order is a religious institution of the kind that calls itself devout and is called zealous by everyone else. They serve a single being, whom they name the Warden. By their current teachings, the Creator built the world and entrusted it to his three sons: the Beacon, embodiment of purity and ultimate good; the Equilibrium, embodiment of balance and cosmic wisdom; and the Warden, embodiment of struggle and transformation. The world was perfect for a time. Then humanity sinned, and went on sinning, until at last the Creator declared us unworthy of what he had made. The three brothers tried to save the world. In the end, the Beacon and the Equilibrium accepted their father's judgment and left with him, severing Réa from the Cycle and leaving it to a slow death. Only the Warden refused. From that day on, the Order teaches, the Warden has labored alone to save humanity.

The Paragon Order travels the world, helping where it can. Its priests heal the wounded at battles fought by others. Its merchants run guarded caravans connecting cities the broken roads no longer reach. Its houses take in the lost and the hungry and offer them food, shelter, and purpose. By any honest measure, the Order helps far more people than it harms, and the people it helps love it for that.

But on the other hand, the Order also collects souls. It seeks out Seekers, mages, and any person born with a soul rich in Quintessence, and it offers them the same arrangement it offers everyone: give your soul, willingly, to the Warden, and in return you will be cared for, your loved ones will be cared for, and your name will be remembered in the great roll of those who served.



Vow-keeper Mahaarius
Soma R. Molnár



Shard of Deceit
Lili Rózsa

This transaction is voluntary. The scripture is firm on this. A soul forced is no gift; only a soul given freely can reach the Warden's hand. Whether the donors fully understand what they are giving, when they give it, is another question. I have spoken with several. Some did. Some did not. The Order does not lie to them, exactly. The Order is simply very good at framing the offer. In return, the souls become the Order's strength, and the Warden grants his many boons.

The first Banner the Order ever raised is the Banner of Devotion. It is the spearhead of every Paragon operation, the elite that secures Arkhtides for the Warden, and the other Banners exist in part to supply it. It is also the strangest of them, because at its center stands a sacred figure. Déimor, the son of the Warden. The Order calls him a demigod, which he is not as I understand.

I learned what I learned by slipping into a hidden archive deep beneath the Eye, an act I will not describe further. The records there tell a different story than the one the Order tells its faithful. Déimor was the Warden's prototype, the first proof that a human could be made vast enough in soul to walk into an Arkhtide and walk out again. He was not born. He was crafted by the Warden as an experiment.

To understand the Banner's structure, I must first speak of the Husks.

A Husk is what becomes of a person who has given their soul to the Warden. The body remains. The mind remains. The personality, the memories, the voice, all remain. But the soul is gone, joined to the Warden's growing power. A Husk can walk roads no other traveler dares. A Husk cannot be tempted into despair, because despair requires a soul to feel it. Husks make superior guards, superior caravan masters, superior soldiers, and superior sacrifices. The Order uses them in all four roles, and the Husks themselves, having chosen this, do not complain.



Husk of Caldus
Soma R. Molnár

Some Husks are deemed worthy of more. They receive a Shard. A Shard is a fragment of an Arkhon, given to the Warden by one of the smaller Arkhons bound to him, and implanted in a Husk's chest. From the moment of implantation, the Shard begins to grow, feeding on whatever Quintessence the Husk passes through, slowly maturing inside its host. The Husk does not die from this. It lives, walks, and serves, with a piece of an Arkhon nesting silently behind their ribs.

The growth ends when the Husk dies.

At the moment of death, the Shard ruptures the body and manifests as a physical



Paragon Akreylor
Soma R. Molnár

incarnation of the Arkhon it came from. The incarnation lives for only a short time. While it lives, it is one of the most powerful and terrifying weapons in the Paragon arsenal. When the time runs out, it dissolves, and the Shard returns to its parent Arkhon, ready to be cultivated again in another Husk in another year.

Most Husks who receive a Shard die in the manifestation. A rare few, the Paragons, do not. The Paragons are men and women born with souls vast enough that, even after the soul is given and the body has become a Husk and a Shard has manifested through them, enough essence remains to allow them to reincarnate, regrow the Shard, and serve again. They are the great heroes of the Order, its military commanders and senior religious figures, its champions on every battlefield.

That leaves the Martyrs. The order of First Sister Erazu and her Martyrs is the strangest piece of the Banner. The Martyrs are drawn from women considered, by themselves or by others, to have sinned. Some come willingly, carrying a guilt they cannot bear: thieves, killers, betrayers, the cruel, women who have done things they cannot forgive themselves for. Some come less willingly. They are handed to the Order by rulers and councils and noble houses, accused of wrongs the wider world deems unforgivable for a woman. The Order does not interrogate the sin. The Order does not check whether the accusation is fair. A soul is a soul, and all of them can be purified by the same method. And this method is killing.

The Order teaches that the Martyr's soul is purified by each of the Warden's enemies she destroys, and that when at last the soul is clean enough, it can be given to the Warden in the most sacred of the Order's rites. The Martyrs have nothing left to lose except a soul they already consider damned, and they fight as though redemption itself is on the other side of the next enemy.



First Sister Erazu
Dat Tuan Phan

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