



Dark Prologue

An Adventure of Long Long Ago
Luka Rejec

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By Luka Rejec

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WizardThiefFighter Studio

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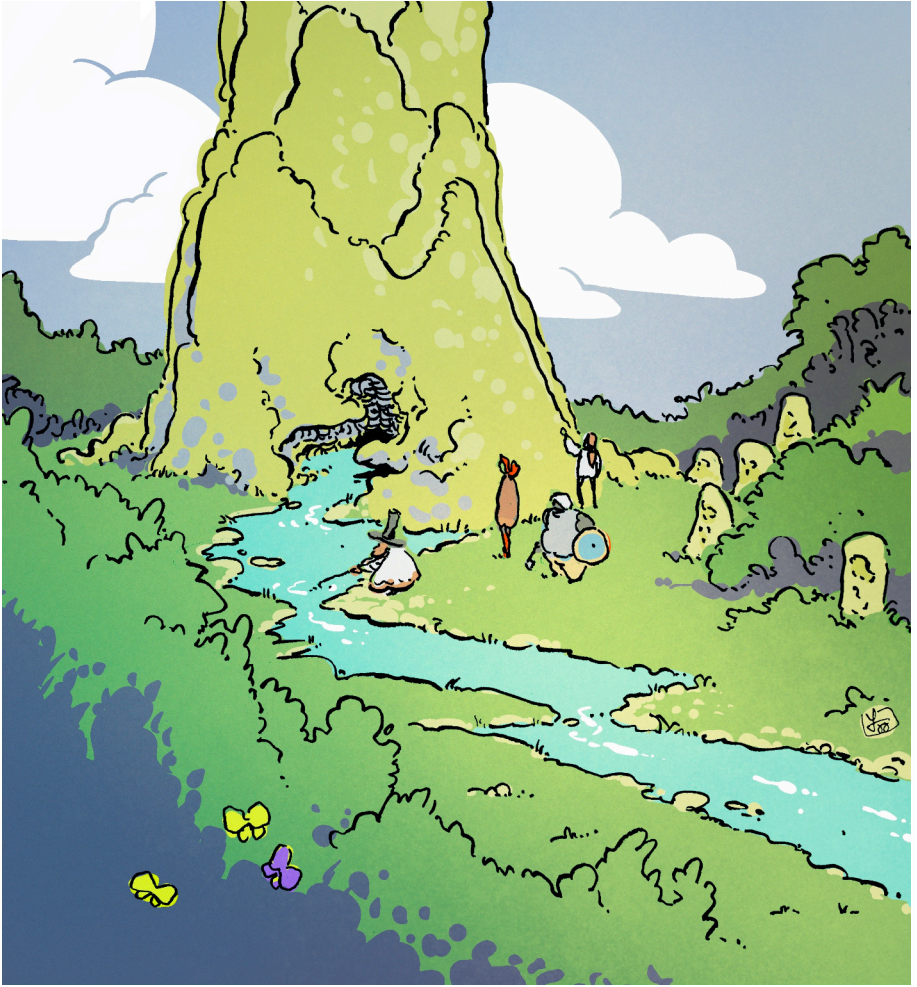
Spark

The coals burned low in the dark and no more smoke rose from the ancient ceramic crucible. The old woman watched a while, nodded to herself and went back to work on the skybringer stone, scraping it with a rough brush to remove lichen and old paint. She worked by touch in the dark, each of her long, steady strokes a prayer to the ancestor spirits.

When a pale green flicker marked skybringer ascending on their solar chariot she stopped scrubbing and took tongs to open the crucible. One by one she removed the charcoaled bones and dropped them into a heavy porphyry mortar. With blackened oak pestle she crushed them dust fine. Then she took a silver spoon and scooped three spoonfuls into a small bronze bowl, fat-bellied as the eater of worlds. One scoop for the giver, another for the keeper, a last for the taker. Finally she mixed in bone marrow for the ox lord to bind the pitch black powder and make it ready for painting.

*With a calm voice she began to chant as she painted wheel and wing, cross and beam, pinnacle and pit on the skybringer stone,
“When the world was young,
giving gods dividing,
world and selves and time,
each allotted space,
each sacrifice ...”*

Then the sky exploded.



Introduction

D*ark Prologue* is a four-player one-shot adventure for analog tabletop roleplaying games. It uses special characters and works as a flashback that sets up a ruined location for later regular play.

The text assumes the players are using this game with a traditional rpg system that involves a referee, so only the referee should read beyond Chapter 1: The Exploded Sky. All of the art is laid out with full-page pieces to make it easier for the referee to share it with the players.

Dark Prologue is written as far as possible using natural language. Obstacles facing the heroes are described with words. For example, a turbulent river might be described thus: “crossing the river is a difficult test. If the heroes fail, they are swept away, losing time and an item.”

Hopefully, players will find it easy to adapt *Dark Prologue* to their preferred system in play.

Decision Tokens

Dark Prologue introduces a narrative overlay that bypasses the regular rules of any rpg system the players are using.

The text often requires a player to make a **decision**, which modifies the setting, creating the history of the ruin the group may return to with their usual characters.

0.0: “Decisions are presented like this.”

>> Arrows mark instructions.

Each player begins with a single **decision token**. This should be one small but memorable object for each player, perhaps a meeples, a large die, or a polished stone.

When a player takes their turn making a decision, the player declares their choice and places their decision token in the centre of the table. Players also spend decision tokens to undertake heroic deeds and in a few other more specific situations.

When all the players have spent their decision tokens, they collect their tokens and the circle resumes.

The purpose of decision tokens is to ensure players take turns undertaking heroic deeds and making the fateful decisions required by *Dark Prologue*.

Marks of Destiny and Heroic Deeds

Each player also begins *Dark Prologue* with a narrative currency in the form of **marks** of destiny (or simply marks). The marks come in four suits: **batons**, **coins**, **cups**, and **swords**. Players may represent their marks with chits, tokens, or cards—the suits are from Italian playing cards. Each hero comes with a different set of marks.

These marks can be spent on some of the fateful decisions. They can also be used to perform heroic deeds. Players can gain additional marks from some decisions or by making hero- or item-specific **sacrifices**.

Each hero in *Dark Prologue* has a specific list of **heroic deeds**. These are special actions that they can take once during play. After a heroic deed is performed, it is crossed off the list. Players may choose to keep their list of deeds secret from one another (indeed, this might be fun).

Players can have their heroes perform a deed at any time, so long as they have a decision token available. Some locations or events require a player with an available decision token to perform a deed and spend a token.

The Clock

Dark Prologue runs on a clock. Every time the heroes travel from one region to another, the bell of doom tolls and the clock advances. Some events and choices will also advance the clock. Unless otherwise specified, spending a decision token. These are marked, like so:

■ 0.1: >> Advance the clock one toll.

This was an instruction. The clock is at the end of the document and it has advanced one toll. The players or the referee should read what has happened as a result. Players are encouraged not to read ahead through the clock.

Encounters

Sometimes, when the clock tolls or when players make decisions, the heroes will encounter monsters, challenges, or other antagonists. These encounters may or may not turn hostile. The precise power and mechanics of the encounter are left to the referee (and the system the group is using). The encounters are only loosely categorized based on how powerful they are in relation to the heroes:

- (•••)—much more powerful than the heroes.
- (••)—about a match for the heroes.
- (•)—weaker than the heroes.
- (0)—no threat to the heroes.

If no other mechanics are used, a sacrificed item should take care of an encounter that is a match for the heroes. Two sacrificed items could take care of a more powerful encounter.

Note Taker

Over the course of *Dark Prologue* the players' decisions set up a ruin for play with their regular characters in later sessions. It is helpful if someone notes down their decisions to make it easier to assemble the ruin and its background. An easy way is to simply mark the decisions in this document itself. All the decisions and instructions are also labelled (e.g. 0.0., 0.1., 0.2.), which may be useful if the notetaker is using a separate notebook. The note taker need not be the referee.

Sometimes the players will be directed to make specific notes. For example:

- 0.2: >>Invent a symbol for the settlement the heroes' tribe, the Ours, calls Home using three circles and five lines.
- >> Player gains a mark of batons.

That was an instruction. A player should now spend a decision token and invent a symbol for their tribe's home settlement. In return, they gain a mark of batons (they'll mark that on their hero's sheet in a moment).

Epilogue

If the players intend to use *Dark Prologue* as a basis for a later adventure, they should leave the epilogue to the game master or referee player alone. On the other hand, if they are playing a collaborative game or simply want to find out the consequences of their game, they can go through the epilogue together, step by step.

The Map

The players' decisions and travels change the map of the ruin and its surroundings. The note taker can simply build on the provided map, noting whether the heroes visit a location or not, and their decisions. The map maker can also be a different player, creating a new map from scratch.

All the labels use plain English.

The map's regions work as a pointcrawl, with travel times noted in the locations. Travel between most regions will advance the clock. The heroes decision to visit locations or avoid them will change them at the end of the game.

PLACES OF NOTE

Home—where the game begins.

Our Lands—the territory of the heroes' tribe.

There—the home town of the other tribe.

Their Lands—lands of the other tribe.

The River—a great river, too wide to swim.

Ford—twin settlements where rafts cross the River.

Third—home town of the third tribe.

Ruined Land—now devastated, once the third tribe's home.

Crater—a terrifying new landmark.

OTHER PLACES

Gateway—gorges, a strategic series of rapids.

Big Grass Sea—a rich grassland, home to smallfarmers.

West Woods—a drier land, home to wild people.

South Mountains, West Mountains, North Ranges—dark-forested lands. Hard to cross. Wolves and bear people.

Big Wet—great swamp before the Great Green Sea.

Horselands—edge of a vast plain. Home to herdsfolk.





Chapter 1: The Exploded Sky

Is this a dream? A waking delusion? The radiating echo of ghosts long gone? A recording in stone and time, inscribed into the very fabric of reality? The sky seems like some other sky. The soil is flayed and torn like the hide of a gentle beast assailed by lions. Strange, foreign emotions awaken and rise like bile in the throat.

The players' regular characters find themselves almost-spectators in the lives of other persons. Perhaps no more substantial than the daemons of temptation and encouragement that whisper in men's ears on the best of days. Yet, queerly, there is no fear. No danger. The spectator knows they will survive.

| >> Each player takes their decision token. The next section introduces the decision mechanic.

AS ONE DOES (DECISION)

Reality folds together neatly, like a well-pressed handkerchief. If this is a dream, it is shared. The characters recognize other riding spirits, sharing bodies with other people of this strange place.

The sky is aglow. Clouds like shredded banners flit. The acrid smell of fire. Soot. Ash floats gently down. Everything sounds muffled, ears ring. Leaves stripped from trees swirl in the cool air.

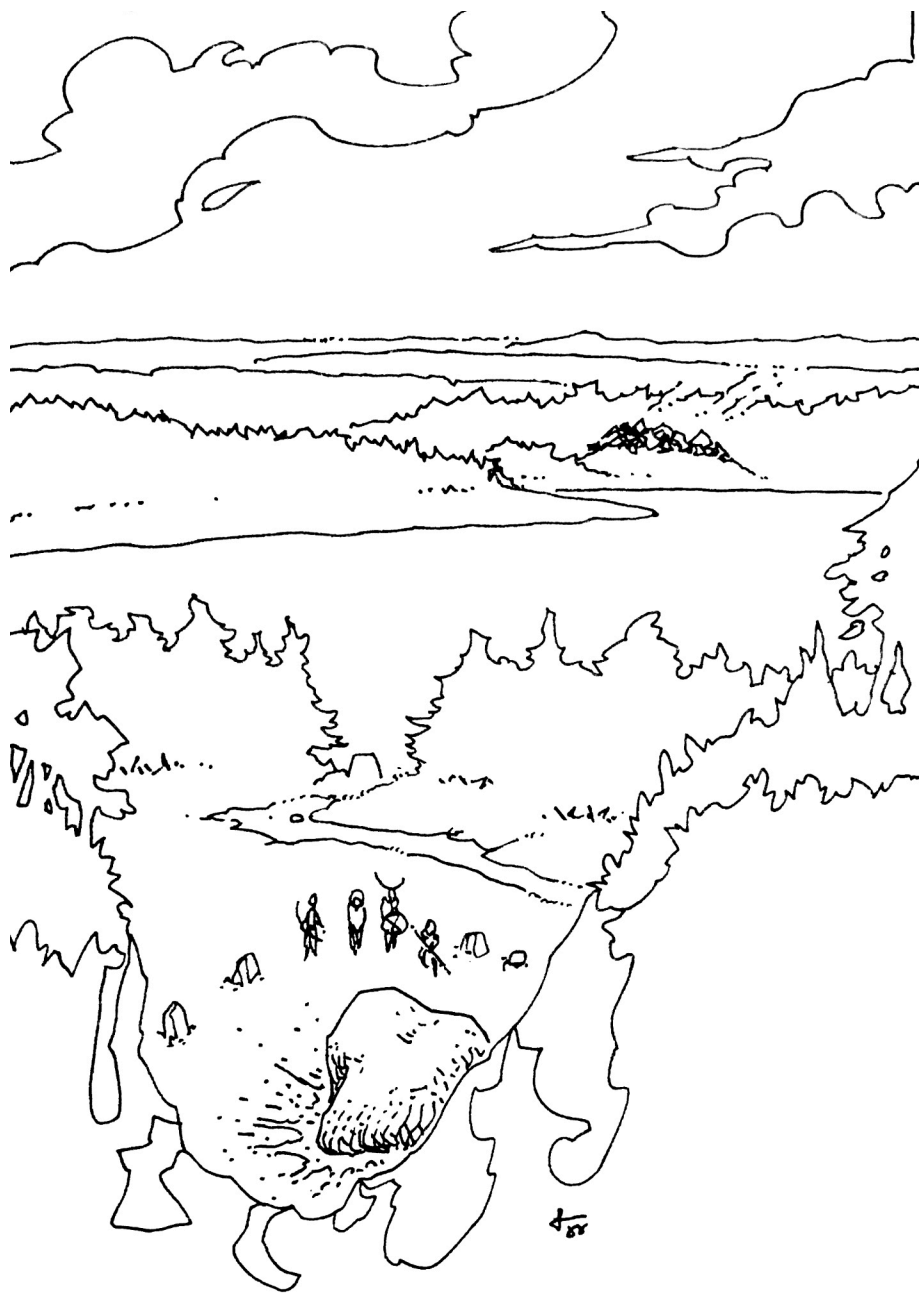
0.3: “What are we doing here?”

>> A player makes a decision:

- a) The shaman Noksaya was about to induct us into the house of the Skygiver, bringing us into the quiet circle of Our tribe.
>> Player gains a mark of swords.

- b) We belong to the Taker’s house. Too long we have submitted to the Others. We were about to smash the Skygiver stone and leave an otherstyle jade axe lodged in the heartwood of the hanging tree. Then the rest of Ours would have listened to the Taker’s house and we would have gone to war with the Others, taking their pigs and burning their granaries.
>> Hero gains the otherstyle jade axe (item).

The otherstyle jade axe is a unique item with special effects. It is detailed in Appendix I: Items. Other unique items are labelled in the same way, with “(item)”.



MEANINGS IN THE SKY (DECISION)

The Skygiver stone stands in a glen, in a secluded valley high above Home, the heroes' sacred central settlement. The glen seems untouched by wind or fire. All is silent. All is the same. Except the stone. The big stone.

When the sky exploded the great stone "bear's head" toppled off its perch above glen and fell onto the shaman Noksaya and the Skygiver stone, crushing them both.

0.4: "What does this mean?"

>> A player makes a decision:

a) The Skygiver is defeated! That explosion, there is a celestial battle afoot. The Ours must choose our new side carefully.

>> Player gains a mark of coins.

b) We have angered the Skygiver. This is their mark of displeasure. We must find out what the Skygiver wants so that we can appease them.

>> Hero gains the bronze bowl of the eater of worlds (item).

SEARCHING THE GLEN (D6)

1. A heavy, depressing rain. It tastes of regret and fear. There is nothing left to find here.
2. A runty wolf cub with a lame leg. Perhaps it is an omen?
3. The shaman's walking stick. A sentimental thing, but sturdy (works as a club).
4. Four amulets of the quiet circle in a beaded bag.
5. Waxy wool cloak, neatly folded in a niche in the spring's cave. The shaman won't need it now.
6. An ancestor's skull that rolled out of the cave of the forebears. Its third eye gem has faded and cracked.

HOME TRUTHS (DECISION)

Down in the valley, on the shores of Our Lake is Home. The sacred settlement of the Ours. Its wooden houses stand two and three stories tall, clustering together on the mound of life. Every generation the old houses are burned together to nurture the new Homes that grow on top of the old.

0.5: “What has happened to Home?”

>> A player makes a decision:

a) It seems untouched. Some chimneys and the midsummer pole of sacrifice have toppled, but the new gods have spared Home.

>> Heroes skip the Immediate Tragedy event.

b) Home is aflame, like at the generational purification, but this is no celebration. Even from this high vantage the heroes can see their kith and kin, clan and taboo, running around like confused lice.

>> Player gains a mark of cups.

RUNNING HOME (D6)

1. The firs whip, the flowering clematis clings and catches.
2. An uprooted tree, its rot exposed by the wind of the exploding sky. An omen?
3. The hunter Widery’s trap has caught a rabbit. It has chewed through its skin trying to escape.
4. A boar’s tusk, bound to a branch. A ward?
5. A beehive, tossed to ground by the wind.
6. A gully thick-drifted with leaves lets the heroes fly down the hill like loons diving at a lake.



Chapter 2: Heroes Under Heaven

As home draws closer, the heroes hearts grow heavier. There lies a fisher's boat hastily pulled ashore, catch still flopping. Here an adam gardener has left their basket of mewling fruits in the trail.

The heroes stop a moment and look at one another. Look to find a leader amongst themselves.

- >> Each player will now choose one of the following four heroes to play. Each of the heroes also has some decisions to make at this point—using the decision tokens, each player announces the choices.
- >> The referee then hands out each hero's list of deeds (not written yet).



Ehsi the Reaper

They were a foundling. An orphan, half wild, mewling beneath a prickly pear cactus. Child of the wild one, the Daälgi, thus also named Dalg'da (“wild-given”). Curious, half-cursed, always so keen to learn, to prove home-worthy. Half-blessed to be bound half-free to till the crops of Home till they proved themselves. Better that than the freedom of starvation among the beasts who cannot see the stars.

ATTRIBUTES

Ehsi is marked by **endurance** and **resolve**. Though others might doubt in Ehsi, they will not give up.

MARKS

3 batons

3 coins

SKILLS

Ehsi is an **adam gardner**. They plant the budding eggs of flesh (*mehyom*) in the soil and harvest them when they mewl, stopping the adams' mouths with clay to preserve them through the lean times.

>> The tribe also knows Ehsi as (player chooses one):

- a) a **painter**, a stealer of meanings who goes into the deep rocks to pray to Earth.
- b) a **trap-maker**, who lays snares for rabbit and field mouse, sparrow and pigeon.

>> Secretly, Ehsi is also (player secretly chooses one):

- a) a nimble **thief**, stealing from the honey eater and the neighbor they envy alike.
- b) a **cook** of dreams, mixing herbs and meats to bring sleep and waking, joy and ... sometimes ... death.

ITEMS

knife of meteoric steel—Ehsi was found in the wilds, clutching this blade till their hands bled.

solar brooch—A gift from the old chief when Ehsi came of age and became a bondsfolk of the tribe.

pouch of adams—Three salted adams, their mouths stopped with clay, ready to emit piercing shrieks.

The Heroic Deeds of Ehsi

I FEEL NO FEAR

A keen mind, its contours harsh, its ideas macabre. Ehsi feels no fear where others dread, among our ancestors or among the sacred places of foreign gods.

Special: Ehsi can perform this deed three times.

Price: 1 sword.

COMPASSION IS WEAKNESS

#monstrous

Irshe commits sacrilege or breaks a taboo without fear and gains 2 batons or 2 swords.

Price: 1 cup and Ehsi becomes #monstrous.

MONSTROUS HUBRIS

#monstrous

Never to be accepted by the gods or the homefolk, nothing remains but to cross the rivers of memory and forgetting and discover the fruit of the earth in the garden of the givers. From now on, Ehsi can no longer be harmed by the ancestors (undead) or the foreign gods.

Requirement: Irshe must be #monstrous.

Price: 5 swords.



Gyome the Hunter

They are the child of a great head hunter. The shrunken heads their parent won adorned their circle house. Then their parent died in battle with the Others and their head was taken. Gyome grew up in the care of the aunts of the village, envied for their powerful ancestor, taunted with their example, tempted by their sickle blade.

ATTRIBUTE

Gyome grew in the signs of **strength** and **cunning**. Where the strong thrive, there will Gyome thrive.

MARKS

3 cups

3 swords

SKILLS

Gyome **hunts** the forest and the swamp, the savanna and the hills, bringing shaggy smallhorse and antlered deer, collared duck and gnashing turtle, river pig and savanna goat to the pots of the tribe.

- >> The tribe also knows Gyome as (player chooses one):
 - a) a **comedian**, telling jokes that makes fear lessen and laughter lighten hearts.
 - b) a **stoneshaper**, creating arrowheads and spearpoints, microliths and scrapers, from the precious work stones.

- >> Secretly, Gyome is also (player secretly chooses one):
 - a) a **killer**, who has killed humans before and not been driven mad by the vengeful spirits of taboo.
 - b) an **orange-smith**, meeting the charcoal wizard in the woods to melt ores and shape metals.

ITEMS

shrunkn chief's head—Small as a fist, it gives courage and protection in battle.

ancestor's sickle blade—A bronze sickle, long as a forearm, on a sturdy haft. Perfect for decapitating enemies.

humorous stone—A malachite nodule of very humorous shape.

P

The Heroic Deeds of Gyome

LACEHOLDER



Lete the Poet

Marked with a second spirit, Lete channeled the voice of sky and earth from the day their mother's brother's third-child struck them in the head with an amethyst geode. The teller of the tribe's stories, Sprega, taught Lete to channel the story-spirits and overcome the fire headaches.

ATTRIBUTE

Lete is marked by **wit** and **endurance**. Where no path seems clear, Lete will find a new way.

MARKS

3 batons

3 cups

SKILLS

Lete **memorializes** the names and deeds, debts and gifts, of the tribe, incising them on poll poles. Their songs and chants record the movements of people under the unchanging sky.

>> The tribe also knows Lete as (player chooses one):

- a) an **orator**, painting pictures with words and moving the hearts of beast and folk alike.
- b) a **carpenter**, singing the poles and beams into interlocking shapes to build the circle-houses of the common folk, and even the square-house-roofs of the divine folk.

>> Secretly, Lete is also (player secretly chooses one):

- a) gifted with the **sword**, learning from the restless lake spirit who gave them the long bog blade.
- b) a **flesh-writer**, inscribing secret spells and curses into the skins of the living and the dead, creating scrolls to curse or bless.

ITEMS

bronze bog sword—Lete accepted it from a restless spirit.

wood bone flute—A flute that shapes the growth of trees.

bundle of whittling knives—Chalcedony and obsidian and bone and bronze for shaping memories into wood.

P

The Heroic Deeds of Lete

LACEHOLDER



Vasni the Keeper

The beloved child of a large brood, in a year of hunger Vasni was given to a barren couple of keepers in the outlands of the Ours. There they were taught to keep bees and sheep, carp and wolves. They were never unloved, but distance and lonely days bred bitter in their heart.

ATTRIBUTE

Vasni grew in the signs of **patience** and **kindness**. Where the cycles of nature propose, Vasni disposes.

MARKS

5 batons

1 cup

SKILLS

Vasni **keeps animals** and makes them tame, bringing wool and honey and fermented fish eggs and pups to the memorializer of debts.

- >> The tribe also knows Vasni as (player chooses one):
 - a) a **woundbinder**, setting bones, using poultices and bandages to stop injuries going rotten.
 - b) a **lover**, charming all who behold them and bringing the brightness of the goddess of love and war to all who dare.

- >> Secretly, Vasni is also (player secretly chooses one):
 - a) a **blasphemer**, who has mocked the gods and no longer believes in charm or curse.
 - b) **cursed by second sight**, seeing glimmers of prophecy and dreaming premonitions of dread.

ITEMS

pet wolf—Tall, shaggy, and a little goofy. A loyal companion.

crooked spear—A stout staff with a crook on one end and a short bronze spike on the other.

wax candles—three fine-smelling wax candles.

PLACI

The Heroic Deeds of Vasni

EHOLDER

Chapter 3: Places Of Note

This chapter presents the regions most important to the self-styled ‘human’ tribes of the given world of the River. It starts in Home, the sacred settlement of the Ours tribe, as heroes come (running?) back after the sky exploded. Chaos and hard choices await the heroes.

As the referee runs this chapter, the events and history of the *Dark Prologue* begin to be written. What will be starts to take shape. The heroes decisions and journeys will shape the world that came after.

A: Home

Naish Tanai (“*the-ours-that-is-ours*”)

The sacred and first settlement of the Ours tribe rises on its holy fire mound above the waters that flow from Our Lake (Naisholoki). Generation after generation has built and rebuilt the sacred town, cleansing it in fire with every new turn of the grand clock.

FACTS OF HOME

>> Each of the players (including the referee) chooses one of the following statements. They are now fact.

1. Only the elders and the ancestors live on the hill itself, the children-of-us, the members of the tribe, live in surrounding hamlets and villages.
2. The stag clan lives in wicker houses among the trees and the pike clan lives on post-and-beam dwellings on the great shallow lake itself.
3. Each clan collects the skulls of their ancestors and keeps them in clay pots beneath their communal meeting houses, so they can give advice when called upon.

4. The warrior clan and the shaman clan live on the hill with their bondsfolk. Other clans come to offer tribute on the moon days.
5. Any member of the Ours can become a warrior by channeling the Taker (Yamar). The more shrunken heads a warrior displays, the more beloved they are of the Taker.
6. Human members of the Ours can see the stars, can speak the language, and can adorn their heads with antlers, horns, and feathers.
7. The Ours know three ranks of humanity. The humanfolk who are free and participate in the circles and the clans. The bondsfolk who can be made human by the rites of circles and clans. The beastfolk who cannot see the stars and must be kept leashed.
8. There is a great monster in the lake, the Exile. It was once a member of the Ours, but it rebelled against the skygiver and the all-mother-father by entering the high and stealing their secret dream. As punishment it was condemned to eat all who speak to it. Now it swims the waters by moonlight, which is why no member of the tribe swims at night.
9. The Ours built a wall of stone around Home, but after they lost a war against the Others, all the stones were thrown into the lake, which is why Home has no wall now except the courage of its warriors.
10. The Ours are the kindest of the tribes, and this is their strength. They accept all who come to their skulls, from beastfolk to free humans, and with their potions even a beastfolk may come to see the stars and become human.

HOME UPTURNED

Coming upon Home the heroes see chaos descended when the sky exploded.

- >> Each player (except the ref) must make a decision. The referee presents the effects of the decisions simultaneously. Each hero can help with a single consequence.

1. *Shamanstruck*

A shard of sky hit dead center in the heart of the hanging tree as the shamans were having their ritual, destroying the house of spirits and scattering the skulls and long bones of the purified messengers all over the hill.

Fires are spreading, left alone they will consume half of Home. The last of the shamans is crawling crippled. Left alone, they will die taking the spirit secrets of the Ours to the grave with them.

Hero gains 1 mark of swords.

Yosek, Last Shaman: "There is war in heaven, woe! The madness is coming!"

2. *Flying Heads*

A shard of sky struck the hall of warriors, flinging shrunken heads as far as the sacred sunflower fields.

Fires are spreading. Left alone, they will consume half of Home. A couple of imbecile beastfolk children are using a head of heroism as a football! If not stopped, they will summon a vengeful ancestor. A grey-haired warrior with a broken leg is wailing. The ivory sword (item) will be consumed unless it is retrieved from the burning house of heroes.

Hero gains 1 mark of batons.

3. *Lake Impact*

A shard of sky struck the lake, sending a great wave crashing into the post houses and the lakeside gardens. Gardeners have been swept out into the lake. Some will drown unless they are saved. A fishing boat out on the lake has capsized. The lake monster will eat them unless someone saves them.

4. *Charcoal Fires*

A shard of sky has hit the orange-smiths' furnace out by the charcoal woods. Woodsmen and their beastfolk are running around, trying to save their cast bronzes. The fire is spreading. If a firebreak is not made, it will destroy the village of the stag clan. A dozen beastfolk have thrown off their memory leashes and seized a cache of bronze sickle swords. If they are not bested, they will foment a wider rebellion.

5. *Landslide*

The rumbling earth has triggered a landslide, sweeping down the flanks of the moraine behind Home, creating a natural dam. The waters are rising, flooding gardens and pens.

A couple of tribesfolk are trapped in the earth and mud. Left alone, they will suffocate. A great flock of sheep is stuck in their cave pen. The rising waters will drown them unless they are released.

6. *Madness and Fear*

The exploding sky has driven the young warriors mad. They accuse the elder warriors of betraying the Ours by accepting the cruel peace of the Others. Knives and maces are drawn, arrows are nocked.

The warriors will fight and half will die if nobody makes them see reason. If the heroes help one side or another, half the warriors will still die, but the hero captures an aluminum shield as a trophy (item).

7. *Bid for Freedom*

In the confusion, the communal beastfolk have slipped their leashes. Some have taken to indiscriminate slaughter and pillage, but a group has looted the house of warriors. If the killers are not stopped, dozens of tribesfolk will be maimed and killed. If the looters are not stopped, they will make for the hills with their slings and maces and start a wider rebellion.

8. *Spared*

A great shard of sky hurtled past, smashing into the Riverlands to the north, but sparing Home. If it had hit, it would surely have caused great pain and chaos. The tribesfolk celebrate.

Hero gains unique deed “Sorrow Along The River” and a jug of summerwine (item).

9. *Red Dead Angel*

After a drawn out scream, like the sky tearing open, a seed of sky appears floating down, like a dandelion seed. Then, silvery lines of fire burst out along the bristles of its pappus and suddenly it's plummeting, faster and faster, before it strikes the marshy lakeshore like a palm slapping flesh. The mud hisses, steam boils out of the cracked seed.

Inside is a cooked messenger from heaven, their skin pinging and contracting, the meat inside bright red.

Clutched in their hands is a skygiven wand (item).

Price: 2 marks of coins.

10. *Forbidden Fruit*

After a great resounding boom, like the gong of heaven had been rung, a seed of sky floats down and falls into the lake. The waters hiss and bubble, like when a hot cooking stone is placed in a stew pot, and the seed of heaven begins to sink. If no one paddles out in a bark canoe, it sinks and disappears.

The seed of heaven is open, like a walnut shell, the flesh inside exposed, protecting a feebly twitching messenger of the skygiver. Tight around one wrist is a cosmic golden bracelet (item). If rescued, the messenger recovers in a week and gives a message.

Hero gains unique deed "Words From The Stars"

Price: 5 matching marks of any suit.

THE TRIBE NEEDS HEROES

The living regroup, the dead are buried, voices are raised.

Nuya, a big soul of the tribe, raises their voice, “We need heroes to follow the sky-ripper! We must know what is going on.”

Wekti, another big soul, responds, “No, our heroes must stay home! We are not as strong as in other times. We must protect our home, we must bury our dead, we must lash the unfaithful beastfolk.”

A player must decide

a) “We travel now. The gods do not wait.”

>> Heroes travel to a different region. Player gains a mark of cups.

b) “Yes, we must set home aright first.”

>> Heroes help set home aright, many lives are saved. Clock advances one toll. Player gains a mark of swords.

TRAVELING

From Home the heroes can travel to Our Lands or the South Mountains. Either journey takes only a day or so, not enough to advance the clock (traveling to return will advance the clock, however).

B: Our Lands

Näiprehor (“our-owned-lands”)

The gently rolling lands beneath the South Mountains, which the seven clans of the Ours tribe call their own. From the sunrise to the sunset range the five clan-mounds of the red eagle, the grey fox, the white aurochs, the black snake, and the red horse. On the higher slopes, around the holy Home, is the clan-mound of the blue bear. On the river, next to Ford, is the clan-mound of the black sturgeon.

*... to add many more pages ...
-the regions + events there
-the climax at the crater
-the clock
-the epilogue
... and here I thought this was going to be super short.*



PLACI

Section C:

The Clock

Before the world was as it had always been since the world was given to the people by the gods. One day, in the morning of the year of the fox came the time remembered well, when the sky exploded and a new thing came into the world.

The tolls of the clock mark the inevitable progress of time. The movement of doom. If the heroes leave things alone long enough, the world unfolds according to the taker's design.

Sometimes, when the clock tolls, the heroes will encounter other creatures or possible opponents. These encounters may or may not turn hostile. The precise power and mechanics of the encounter are left to the referee (and the system the group is using). The encounters are only loosely categorized based on how powerful they are in relation to the heroes:

(•••)–much more powerful than the heroes. Heroes must sacrifice about two items or spend two marks to overcome.

(••)–about a match for the heroes. Heroes must sacrifice an item or a mark to overcome.

(•)–weaker than the heroes. Overcoming this encounter will cost the heroes an item or a mark if they are unlucky.

(0)–no threat to the heroes.

TOLL 0 (T0)

As things were, so they must be, for the way things are is the order of the skygiver, is it not? The riverlands are given to the three tribes of humans, the forests and the highlands are given to the five groups of beastfolk (the 'sweli'). The bearfolk the North Mountains, the horsefolk of the East Plains, the foxfolk of the Western Mountains, the catbirdfolk of the Western Forests, and the boarfolk of the South Highlands. This is order, this is nature.

TOLL 1 (T1, THE DARK PROLOGUE BEGINS)

The sky explodes. Nothing will be as it was. Pieces-of-sky ('dayedyäüye') rain upon the riverlands of the given world and history begins. Settlements and forests burn, mountains fall and valleys fill, the birth pangs of a new world are all about. *Crater*—the largest piece of sky obliterates the home of the Third tribe ('Tatritin') on the upper shores of the River. So great is the impact, that a round wall of hills blocks the River itself. A lake begins to form where the crater wall obstructs the waters.

TOLL 2

The sky is unusually hazy, filled with the smoke of hundreds of small fires.

Forest Fire—in all the regions, except along the River and in the Big Wet, fires disrupt settlements and clans. Bands of refugees struggle to find home and shelter.

>> A player must choose who the heroes come upon as the bell of doom tolls (they may roll a d10).

1. Maddened earth dragon (•••), a beast all hackles and teeth and too many legs, its whiskers singed, its great lidless eyes red from smoke.
2. One-tusked shaggy elephant (••), its remaining tusk blackened with blood and soot.
3. Angry burned bear, the small-body of a living beastfolk skintaker operating it from within its belly like a strange fruit.
4. Three noble aurochs (••), flesh seared, horns brazen.
5. Herd of wild sheep (•), wool smoking, horns curled and sharp.
6. Pack of ragewolves (•), hungry and scared.
7. Parcel of green deer (0), their antlers dripping dried-out moss.
8. Parliament of flustered crows (0), drawn by the smell of a dead shaman's clan. The shaman has a brazen heart (item).
9. Beastfolk refugees gathering berries and nursing wounds.

10. Human refugees hunting small game and nursing burns.

TOLL 3

The River nearly dries up, as the Crater blocks the largest part of its waters.

Dead Fish: dead fish litter the exposed riverbeds. Fish choked by the mud float in the remaining streams. Predators and fishermen alike make a bounty of the fish clustered in the remaining pools.

Easy Crossing: fords open up all along the River, making it easy to cross. Bands of raiders take advantage.

TOLL 4

The Small Flood: the floodlake of a tributary of the River spills past the western end of the crater wall. A rushing tide of brown, of broken logs and spilt reeds rushes down the valley of the River. Riverside settlements are swamped. Crossing the River is impossible. Travel in the Big Wet is impossible. The small flood soon recedes, leaving devastation.

TOLL 5

The River waters breach the north end the crater wall, flooding the crater.

New Lake: the crater is filled with swirling, muddy water. Carcasses and debris swirl as it swiftly fills.

A Trickle of the River: below the crater, the River is again a trickle, exposing great mudflats, broken trees, and devastation.

TOLL 6

The stillness before the disaster. Is all to be well? Where is the River gone? The crater lake fills, the lake north of the crater refills.

Stinking Flats: dead fish, dead carcasses, rotting piles of vegetation. The River resembles a hellish judgement upon the living world. The Big Wet swelters in the sun. The River can be forded at many places.

TOLL 7

The crater's south wall is breached and the pent-up mass of six weeks' worth of the River's flow is released at once.

The Great Flood: a wall of water scours the the floodplain of the River. Animals and humans alike are swept up and destroyed. Every settlement along the River and in the Big Wet is destroyed. The devastation will be passed on in oral histories and later in holy books for over a thousand years.

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Section I: Items & Equipment

Every unique item in Dark Prologue provides the hero who bears it a unique ability. Each item can also be sacrificed as a unique heroic deed. This destroys the item, but can be quite powerful (or interesting). Items in this appendix are marked as (item) in the text.

For the purpose of this game it is best if each hero carries no more than six items, possibly as few as three. Any more is right out.

The referee can make things easy for the other players by printing out and cutting up the items as individual handouts, or sharing copies if playing online.

ALUMINUM SHIELD

A gift from the skygiver, a shield from the time when the world was given. Nearly as tall as a man, strong and light, stone weapons break against it.

Always—the bearer takes half damage from beasts or stone weapons.

Sacrifice (the aluminum shield is sundered)—the hero takes no damage and disarms an opponent, before defeating them.

Killing is optional. The hero gains 1 mark of cups and 1 mark of swords.

BRAZEN HEART

A gift from the forgedwarf, the tricky spirit who lives within all metals. It is a perfect model of a heart.

Always—the brazen heart pumps and filters liquids. It can clean a bucket of fresh, clean water in the time it takes a resting person to count thirty breaths.

Sacrifice (unique deed)—hero spends a mark of cups and cuts open a freshly slain creature, replacing their heart with the brazen heart.

BRONZE BOWL OF THE EATER OF WORLDS

A small fat-bellied bowl with a silver spoon, filled with a sacred pigment. It can hold enough pigment for six symbols. When found, it is half full.

Ability—Sacred pigment stored in the bowl can be used to paint the face with the symbol of the shaggy elephant heart, which makes its bearer brave against the fearsome spirits and ancestors.

Ability 2—It can also make the forebearer symbol, which makes its bearer invisible to the restless dead.

Sacrifice (bronze bowl is buried with a restless spirit)—Hero lays a restless dead to eternal sleep.

COSMIC GOLDEN BRACELET

A mark of divine favor or punishment, a thing from the world above. Though it shines as gold, it is hard as adamant. Once clasped around a wrist, it never lets go.

Always—the bearer can see divine ghosts and spirits like another person sees a goat or a stoat.

Sacrifice (the hand is cut off, the bracelet given up on an altar)—the hero gains favor from a god (and their shaman).

The hero gains 3 marks of cups.

IVORY SWORD

Carved, shaved, and polished from the tusk of a shaggy forest elephant, hardened with the spells of the keeper Wergar, it is the equal of any bronze long blade.

Always—the ivory sword deals double damage to wild beasts.

Sacrifice (the ivory sword breaks)—the hero decapitates a foe.

Sacrifice (the ivory sword breaks, spend 1 mark of swords)—the hero turns back a pack or swarm of enemies, leaving half of them dead upon the ground.

JUG OF SUMMERWINE

A large gourd filled with sweet wine of summer flowers and honey. There is enough for three celebrations.

Celebration—the summerwine restores spirits, gives advantage against disease spirits, and removes fear.

Sacrifice (traded to the Others or the beastfolk)—the hero purchases acceptance and passage. Gain 1 mark of coins.

KNIFE OF METEORIC STEEL

Its handle waterhorse ivory, its blade so keen it parts flesh like a galley's prow parts the great green.

Ability—Advantage in close quarters combat.

Sacrifice (knife is lost)—Hero kills their opponent and gains 1

cup or 1 sword mark.

OTHERSTYLE JADE AXE

A polished teardrop as long as a forearm, smooth as wax, incised with the chariots and biting northwind arrows of the Others.

Ability—Advantage when negotiating with Other ancestors or when fighting ghosts.

Sacrifice (axe is returned to the Others)—Hero gains the gratitude of the Others and gains 1 coin mark.

POUCH OF ADAMS

Three salted adams in a pouch, their mouths stopped with clay, ready to emit piercing shrieks.

Ability—the sessile gastropod emits a loud shrieking when its mouth is unstopped.

Sacrifice (an adam is eaten)—A hero is healed or fed for a week.

Sacrifice (all three adams are given away)—The hero gains 1 cup mark and 1 coin mark.

SKYGIVEN WAND

A glittering silver gun that feeds on sunlight and dreams and ambient radiation.

Always—with a whoosh, an immolating ray bursts out of the gun. It deals damage as a great axe and sets plants on fire. It also impresses people.

Sacrifice (drained in a wail of energies unleashed)—a creature as large as a leviathan, a forest, or a settlement is set aflame and reduced to ash.

SOLAR BROOCH

A bronze brooch, depicting the triple-sun, polished and

Section U:

Unique Deeds

Some player choices and events unlock unique deeds that a hero can (or must, if it has an #unavoidable tag) perform when the time is ripe.

FIRE OF THE GODS

#hubris #crater

When the hero enters the Crater they see a great column of mist rising from an island of metal and glass in the middle of the crater lake. The egg of heaven has hatched! The secrets of the gods are within reach! Paddling on a log or a raft, the hero makes for the island, fleeing from all who would stop them. Those who would join them, may.

Effect: Unique Event—the hero finds the gods' fire, the tiny demons that build and change, and unleashes them upon the world. Nothing will ever remain the same.

SORROW ALONG THE RIVER

#unavoidable #river

When the hero enters the River they see a great devastation. Though the marshy banks swallowed the shard of sky, a great round depression was excavated where the Ford stood. For miles around, trees are flattened and broken. There are no enemies to threaten the heroes here, no allies to give succor. All is death and broken doom in along the River.

Effect: Unique Event—The Ford is destroyed. Any random opponents encountered along The River are dead, burned by the blast, disrupted by scavengers. The Ford plays no part in the epilogue, the between clans are absorbed by the

larger tribes.

Gain—Hero gains 2 marks of swords or 1 mark of batons, cups, and coins.

TO LIVE LONG ENOUGH

#crater #hubris #monstrous

WORDS FROM THE STARS

The hero announces what the skygiver's messenger has come to do. Player chooses one message:

>> They have come from the skygiver to bring us strength, teaching us how to wield sunlight against the forces of darkness! Our tribe's force of arms will be as none before!

>> They have come from the skygiver's mother, teaching us how to overcome the demons of disease and horrors of hunger! Our tribe shall grow as none before!

>> They have come with dire warnings from Yamar, the Taker, to warn us of the war in heaven and bring us the forbidden knowledge of the stars! Our tribe shall be as wise as none before!

Effect: Unique Event—The Ours tribe gains forbidden knowledge. What will come of this?

Effect: Unique Event—Draw the attention of the skygiver. Either they will rise to greatness or be brought low by the gods.

Gain—Hero gains 2 marks of swords or batons.

Miscellany F:

Fantasy

Language

To keep things simple, the map and the realms of the Dark Prologue are presented with simple English names. However, there is something to be said for fantastic names, and should the players like to travel into the realm of the River, there are some place names and given names they might enjoy. The invented names are loosely based on reconstructed proto-indo-european stems.

Pronunciation Rules

All the vowels are short and simple. The trema (¨) marks a second, distinct vowel. This might occasionally glide into a diphthong. For example, “Unii” is pronounced with three syllables: “oo-nee-ee”. Stress and pitch are left up to the imagination of the players.

The “w” creates sounds that resemble diphthongs. For example, “wa-” sounds like “oo-ah”. The “y” works in a similar way, much as in English.

Lexicon

Agirya (“*swift messenger / angel*”)—short-lived flesh-wrapped messenger of the skybringer Dyedehar.

Aughas (“*southsun-house*”)—home of the heroes’ tribe.

Augwerhor (“south-highlands-of”)–pine and oak-shrouded highlands, hard to cross, home to wolves and boar-folk. The boarfolk do not see the stars.

Bel Gelhwara (“big green-water”)–the sea.

Bel Volot (“big muddiness”)–the great swamp where the River empties into the Great Green Sea.

Bel Wedros (“big water of”)–the entire lower valley of the River, home to the three tribes.

Bel Wekeros (“big sunset of”)–the large plain (big sky) north of the gateway gorges.

Daälgi (“wild [one]”)–old-god or spirit of the wild places. Also spirit of the long time, the deep time before people saw the stars.

Dehar (“giver”)–aspect-god of the All-mother-father (Matarpatar), representing strength, generosity, humility, offering, birth, and rot.

Dehuleö (“dusk-forest-of”)–the thick woods of beech and oak and creeping beard-moss that choke the gently rising southwestern tributaries of the River. Home to wolves and catbird-folk.

Dehverhor (“dusk-highlands-of”)–the larch and beech choked western mountains, low but rough, home to wolves and fox-folk. The fox-folk do not see the stars.

Dewhasor (“destruction-house-of”)–the land of the Third tribe, obliterated when the sky exploded. Formerly *Dehwehas* (“dusk-house”) or *Treïhas* (“three-house”).

Dwerwedeyi (“door-waters-to”)–the gorges of the River that separate *Bel Wekeros* from *Bel Wedros*. Also a bit of a pun, since *Dwerwegeyi* (“door-way/passage-to”) also indicates the strategic nature of the gorge for river travel.

Dyedehar (“sky-giver”)–the deity who opened the three people’s eyes and showed them the stars.

Engsüi (“those-who-fire”)–the stars that give the people souls.

Engwië Kawos (“hole-of-living fire / -great fire”)–the crater

where the sky exploded.

Har (“*earth*”)–the sleeping spirit beneath the feet of the tribes.

Hekworas (“*horsefolk-place*”)–the edge of a vast plain,
peopled by beastfolk herders of cows, horses, and sheep.

Keü Devar (“*forge/smith-knower/dwarf*”)–the tricky spirit
who lives in all metals, guarding secret knowledge.

Matarpatar (“*motherer-fatherer*”)–the pan-deity representing
the given world itself.

Mehyom (“*meat-egg*”)–the main crop of the three tribes,
something between a gastropod and a tuber, they are
harvested when they being to make their mating call. Their
clone buds look vaguely like starfish and are called *adam*
(from the prayer *Yo har deham*, “I, the earth, give you”).

Naii (“*us-plural*” lit. “*the many who are we*”)–the heroes’
tribe, composed of many clans.

Na Wedor (“*land-on-the-water*”)–the floodplain of the River,
common hunting grounds for the three tribes, home to few
people.

Skehas (“*northwind-house*”)–the home of the Other tribe.

Skehwerhor (“*northwind-highlands-of*”)–the grimpine range,
home to wolves and bear-folk. The bear-folk do not see the
stars.

Tanaï (“*the ours*”)–the heroes’ Home, sacred and first
settlement of the people.

Tatritin (“*the third’s*”)–the sacred and first settlement of the
destroyed third tribe.

Tayun, also *Taün* (“*the theirs*”)–exonym for There, sacred first
settlement of the Other (Unii) tribe.

Taweda (“*the water*”)–the main river.

Tritoï (“*the third*”)–the third tribe, destroyed when the sky
exploded.

Unii (“*those-them*”)–the Other tribe.

Usker (“*in/where-cross*”)–the main ferry / ford site on the
River (Taweda).

Sweli (“*the wood-people / the wool-people*”)–the beast folk

who have not seen the stars, perched on the sill between human and animal.

Wergar (“keeper”)—aspect-god of the All-mother-father (Matarpatar), representing endurance, suffering, honesty, preservation, and stagnation.

Yamar (“taker”)—aspect-god of the All-mother-father (Matarpatar), representing agility, hunger, pride, destruction, and death.

Epilogue: The Consequences

Was it always meant to end this way? Was it the will of the gods? Was there some other way we could have come here? We stand at the end of our civilization, the doom of our people, and look back. Were we doomed from the start? Did our heroes fail us so?

... many words to add ...

There are three components to the aftermath of Dark Prologue:

1. The power of each major human faction: the heroes' tribe (the Ours), the Other tribe, and the beastfolk. This is based on how many points they score. This is the major deciding factor on the longterm history of the region.
2. The favor of the two divine factions, the skygiver and the taker. This adds detail to the previous component.
3. The impact of unique events, which add details to individual regions or factions.

Thus the history of the lands are revealed.

Tribe and Power

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE OURS OR THE OTHER TRIBE:

All shamans lost: tribe loses 3 points.

Only one shaman survives: tribe loses 1 point.

All warriors lost: tribe loses 3 points.

Ivory sword lost: tribe loses 1 point.

Home half burned: tribe loses 1 point.

Clan village destroyed: tribe loses 1 point.

Every Beastfolk rebellion: tribe loses 1 point.

Home untouched by the exploding sky: tribe gains 3 points.

Heroes help set home aright: tribe gains 1 point.

Tribe finds a gift from the skygiver: tribe gains 1 point.

Tribe rescues a living messenger from the stars: Ours tribe gains 3 points.

Tribe receives the skygiver's favor: tribe gains 3 points.

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE BEASTFOLK

Favor of the Gods

The favor of the divine factions modifies the stories of each of the human factions. However, if a human faction is destroyed by the outcomes of the *Dark Prologue*, then that's that and the referee can ignore this section of the epilogue.

THE SKYGIVER AND TAKER BOTH INDIFFERENT

As above, so below, some say. But in this case those above ignore the workings of the ants below.

FAVOR OF ALL THE DIVINE

THE SKYGIVER'S FAVOR, TAKER'S INDIFFERENCE

THE SKYGIVER'S HATE, TAKER'S INDIFFERENCE

THE TAKER'S FAVOR, SKYGIVER'S INDIFFERENCE

THE TAKER'S HATE, SKYGIVER'S INDIFFERENCE

SKYGIVER'S FAVOR, TAKER'S HATE

TAKER'S FAVOR, SKYGIVER'S HATE

HATE OF ALL THE DIVINE

Unique Events

THE FORD IS DESTROYED

The lands along the River are depopulated, the border clans disappear from history like ghosts.

Each tribe, Ours and Other, loses 1 point. Beastfolk gain 2 points.

ATTENTION OF THE SKYGIVER

The location (Ours or Other) draws the attention of the skygiver.

a) IF the location is favored by the skygiver, it is exalted. Blessings shower upon it. A great pearl of cosmic force, large as a small elephant, appears and becomes the heart of a temple complex. Sacrifices to the skygiver saturate the very air with sweet scents. A powerful cult of fire priests butchering and burning offerings holds sway to this very day.

b) IF a second location is favored, it is also exalted. A second pearl, this one bright like the sun, appears, and plants around it grow fecund and strong, summer and winter alike. A second temple grows around it. The sacrificial cult's grip grows unshakeable, sacrificing at least one sentient creature every day to keep the skygiver pleased.

c) IF the location is disliked by the skygiver, it is brought low. A dark pearl of cosmic force, large as a small elephant, descends from heaven. As the locals come to admire it, a voice rings out, "Hark! You would steal the fire of the gods? See now, the fire in its glory!" And the dark pearl contracts to a pinpoint, then explodes in sound and light and radiation. The entire location is turned to brittle glass.

All die except a fool, pure of heart, whose mind is cured by the skygiver that they may bring the lesson to other tribes. Named the New One, "Néweh", the fool became one of the canonical wise ancestors of the humble way, an anti-religion of

hermits and teachers in the wild places.

d) IF a second location is disliked by the skygiver, it is also destroyed. Its glassy remains testament to the translucent purification of this skylord.

A beastfolk slave present at the destruction is uplifted and becomes the In-Speaker, “Ukteyeh”, compounding the testament of the humble way to emphasize community with nature and wild things as the lot of humans. The sustenance of the given world becomes a dominant force in the region.

FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE

The messenger from the sky is trapped on the given world, barred from heaven. Week by week they become more human, learning the grammar of humans more swiftly than a child. Though they pretend to not know the ways of the skygiver, day in, day out, the children and the warriors and the shamans learn new things from the skygiver. How to master time and flame, pot and bronze, writing and mind.

The tribe where the messenger lives learns to shape form with thought and song. Meditating for days upon the ground, they pull great stones from the ground and shape them to fit together without a seam. Chanting for days for days to the living things, they make them grow large or small, in shapes to serve the needs of the tribe.

The great places of the tribe and their ancestors are marked by cyclopean architecture, grand hybrid trees, and great snow white aurochs with golden horns.

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