

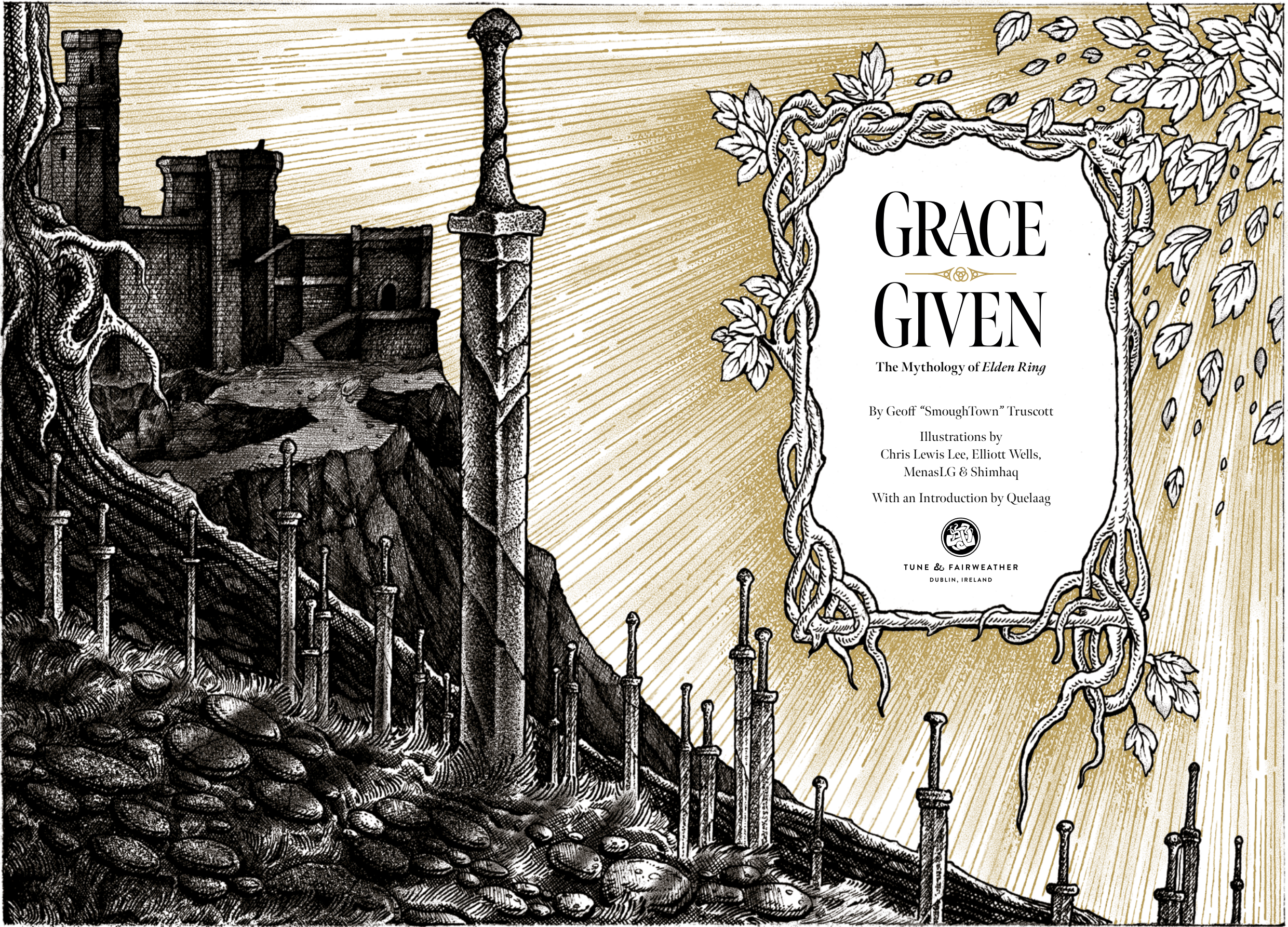


GRACE GIVEN

The Mythology of *Elden Ring*

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The Mythology of *Elden Ring*

By Geoff "SmoughTown" Truscott

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With an Introduction by Quelaag



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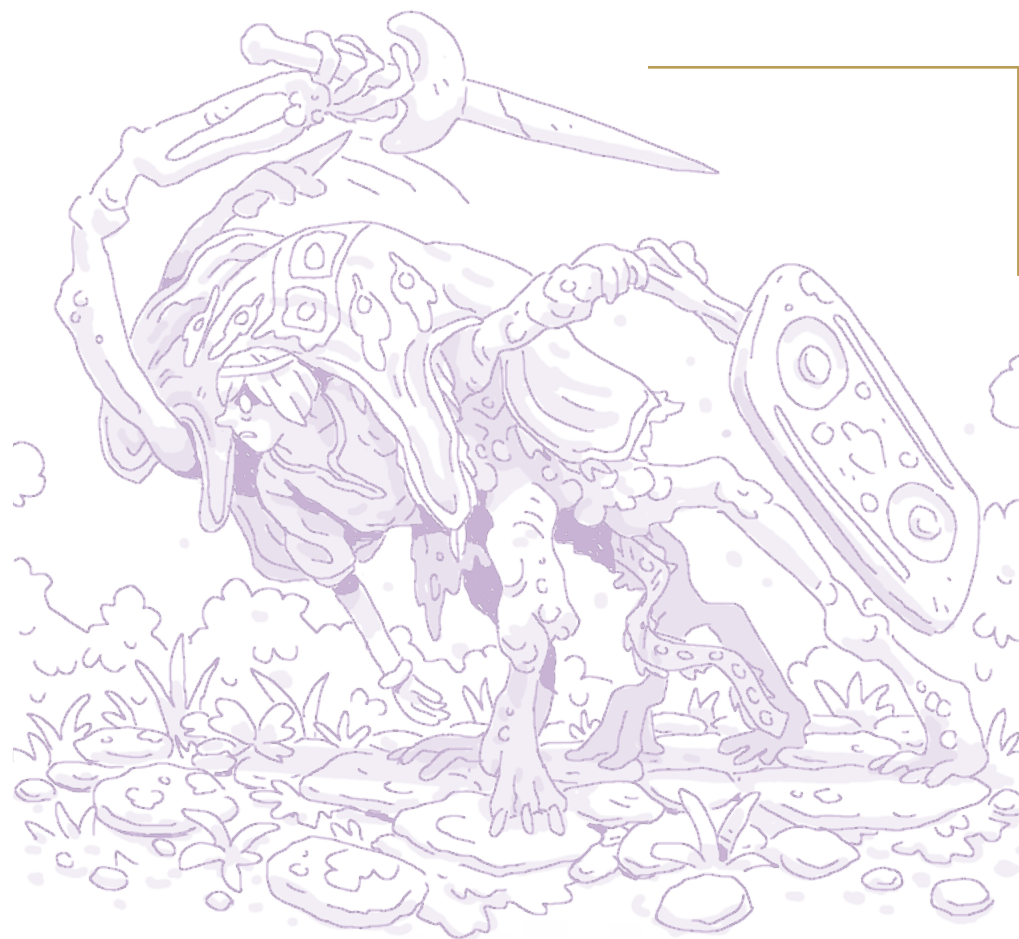
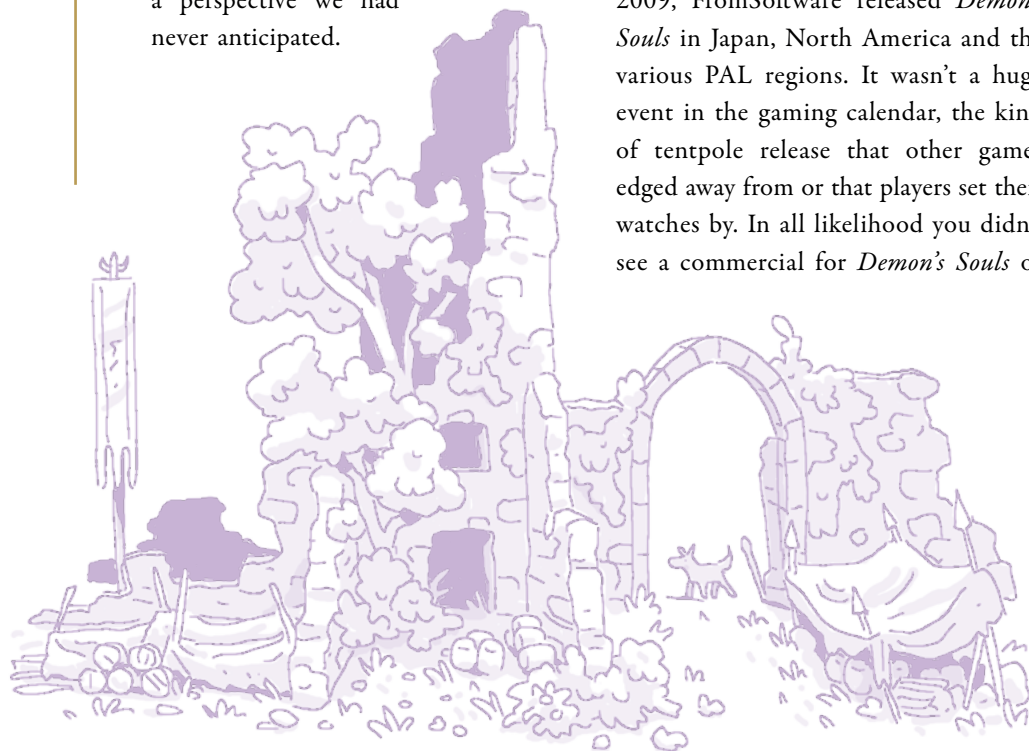
INTRODUCTION

By Quelaag

Who is here in the flickering, shifting darkness, gathered around the bonfire, the lamp, the Site of Grace? Today, FromSoftware's games are legendary. We know the way they like to stage combat, with openings to be exploited and stamina to be managed. We know the way they like to arrange their landscapes, with oxbow lakes, switchback hallways, and doorways that somehow deliver us back to a location we already knew, but viewed from a perspective we had never anticipated.

And we know, most of all, how they like to tell their stories, how they like to make us work for each new beat, each new insight. Storytelling is something these games like to involve the player in quite thoroughly, spreading lore across the many surfaces of the land as well as the items that foes may or may not drop. We know all this now, because today FromSoftware's games are legendary. But they weren't always.

This too had its pleasures. Back in 2009, FromSoftware released *Demon's Souls* in Japan, North America and the various PAL regions. It wasn't a huge event in the gaming calendar, the kind of tentpole release that other games edged away from or that players set their watches by. In all likelihood you didn't see a commercial for *Demon's Souls* or



read a review. Instead, perhaps you went for coffee with a friend one morning, and your friend looked slightly contemplative, drawn inward, clearly struggling with something bright and complex.

Over coffee, this friend told you about a game they were playing. *Demon's Souls*. Heard of it? Japanese. Sort of a hack-and-slash, but also nothing like a hack-and-slash. Its combat was quietly refined, brutal yet somehow formal too. Its world was cruel and shadowed, but very richly imagined. And the way it all worked – it had these rules, but it didn't seem to want to tell you these rules up

front. You sensed that they were consistently applied, you sensed a rigor was there, but as you played you had to feel for the contours of the design itself and build your own idea of how it all worked.

Rival players would warp in from nowhere and attack. Death would come without warning. But then, over time, what had first seemed needlessly harsh actually started to seem beautiful, strange and unprecedented. And the story? The story worked in the same way. You had to dig for it. Feel for it. Claw it out and then try to make sense of the pieces you had found.

It's a long journey from *Demon's Souls* to *Elden Ring*, the game that this book explores, celebrates and ultimately illuminates. But that experience of playing a FromSoftware game, of working your way into the design, inching forward, growing in understanding as well as blunt skill, is still as rich as it ever was.

But this book is also a reminder that all of that process of slow personal progress through the games FromSoftware makes, thrilling as it is, is only ever half the story. The other half – whether you're playing *Demon's Souls* or *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice* or *Bloodborne* or *Elden Ring* – is told in the community by a group of patient, thoughtful, intricately-minded players scattered around the world who seek out the lore, discuss it, make videos about it, write posts about it, share theories about it, go back to earlier translations and dig through cut content, all to bring together a more complete idea of FromSoftware's adventures than a single person could construct alone.

I've been one of those people since the days of *Demon's Souls*. I was part of the tight-knit communities scattered across various forums and Facebook groups, made of players who banded together to decipher the archaic game menus, which provided no tooltips or explanations. Made of players who pondered weapons that sometimes included secret damage or resistance modifiers, and that carried item descriptions that offered sly revelations about the game's world and its inhabitants.

I had no real strategy at the start, just a frenzied energy of excitement that my passion for mythology would help inform my understanding of the game's narrative. Between college courses, I would turn on my old MacBook laptop and film myself answering questions and tying together item descriptions.

Over the years, more lore YouTubers popped up to iterate on the loose format I started. People like SmoughTown, who has written the beautiful book you're currently holding. SmoughTown has dived deep into *Elden Ring* just as he's dived deep into every game FromSoftware has made before it. He's read the item descriptions, puzzled over the landscape, taken journeys back and forth through the cursed heart of the Lands Between weighing things up, probing possibilities, and making connections. And now he's created something that, in many ways, is as intricate as FromSoftware's own work: *Grace Given* is an appreciation of *Elden Ring* that makes sense of one of



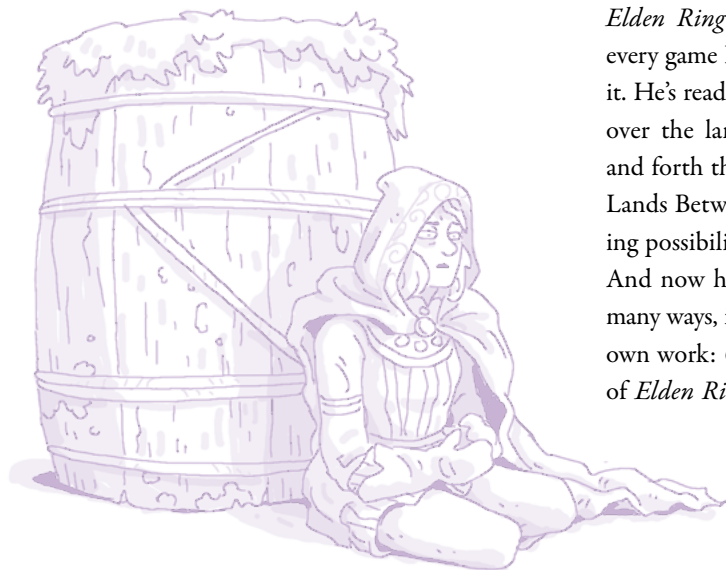
gaming's most complex imaginary histories, that balances fact and smart speculation, that brings what the poet once called "the disciplined eye and the wild mind" to this bright, terrifying new mythology.

SmoughTown combines things that did not initially seem to fit together and he shows us that they do. He makes clear what was hidden in the fog. More than that, he lifts up others in the community and builds on their insights with his own, uniquely generous way of thinking about things. He is tireless and inventive and endlessly thoughtful. His imagination is always restless, always focused on the riches hidden in the lore.

This book is about *Elden Ring*, then, but it's also about FromSoftware, and all the studio's games, about the way they work and the way they like to unfold themselves. It's also about SmoughTown, in its own quiet way. It's a portrait of how his mind works as much as what he's inclined it toward.

And yes, it's about sitting opposite a friend, over a coffee, and hearing about something implausibly beautiful and intricate, and realizing that you have to learn more, that you have to see it for yourself.

Thank you, SmoughTown, for keeping the fire lit and the tradition alive.





PREFACE

By Smough

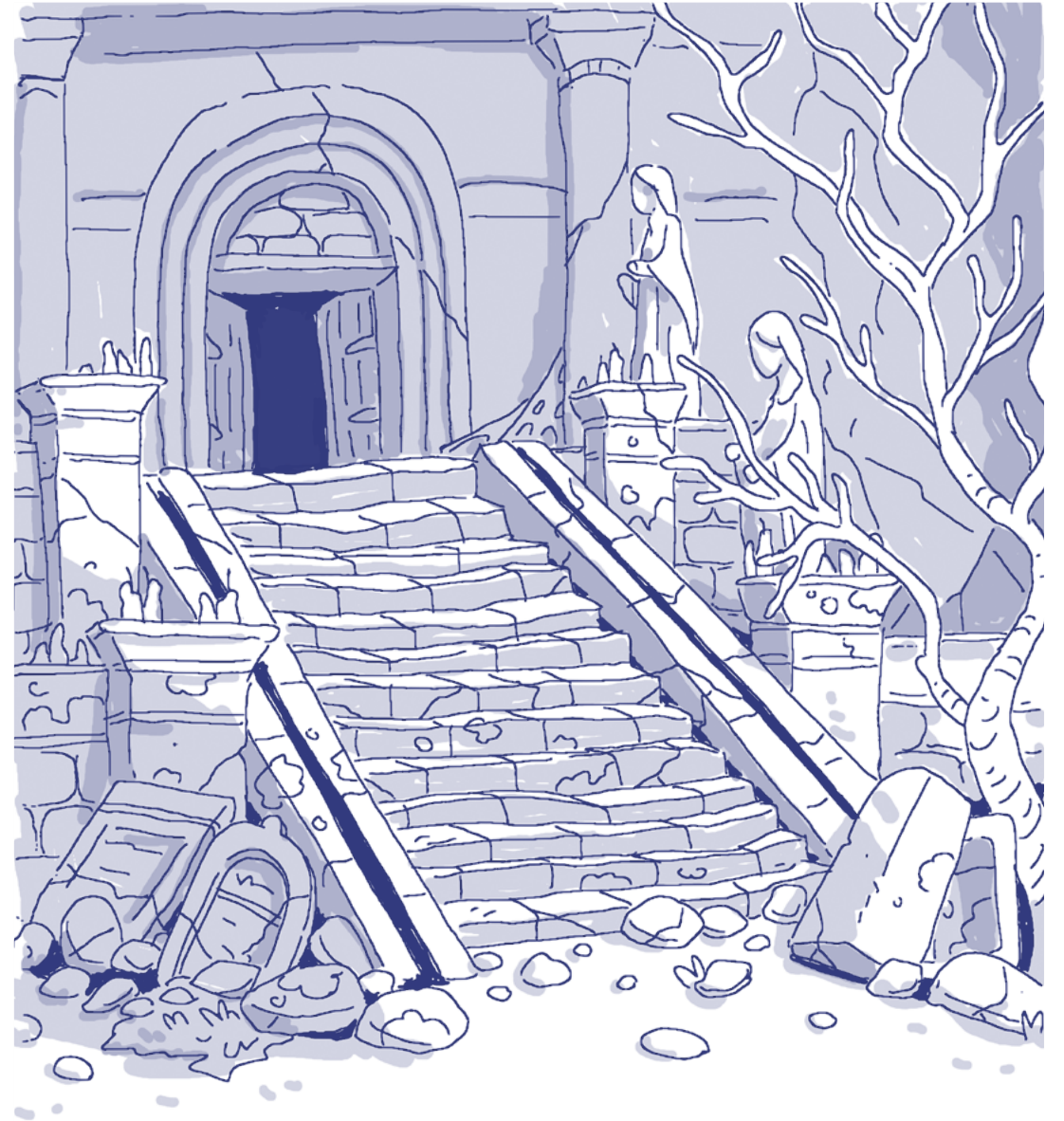


hen *Elden Ring* was announced at E3 2019, many of us were not sure what to expect. For months we had heard rumors of FromSoftware's next "Great Rune" project, but we were not prepared for what was actually coming. To this day, the announcement trailer is captivating. It feels majestic. I still dim the lights before playing it, before Jimmy Livingstone narrates the story of a world gone awry, brought about by the destruction of a mysterious artifact only known as the Elden Ring.

Seeing this trailer at the time of its release is one of those moments of my life that I remember vividly. I can even tell you where I was. I still worked in finance, and

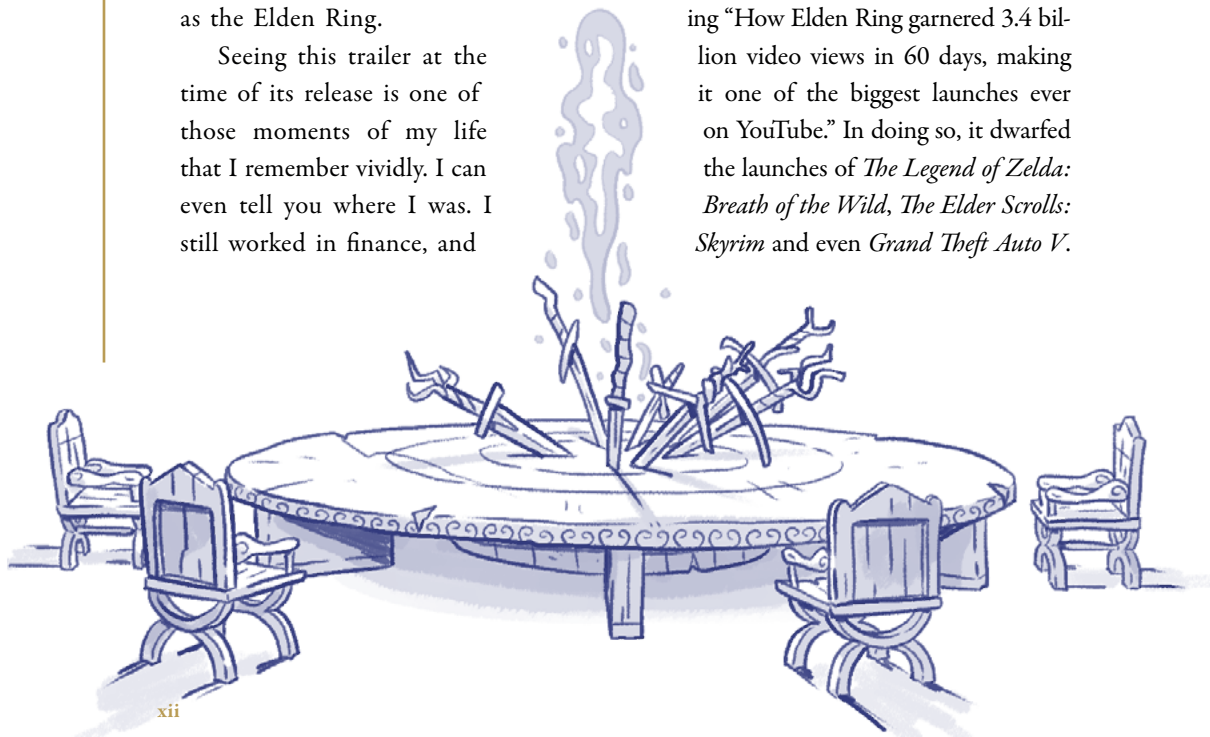
I distinctly remember scurrying away from my desk to watch this jaw dropping trailer over and over again. *Elden Ring* has held me and many others captive ever since, not only through the breadth and majesty of its open world but also by the epic nature of the story. And yet part of the legend of *Elden Ring* was also created outside of the game, by the community of players who surrounded it.

It was an overnight sensation. On the 2nd of August, 2022, the YouTube Gaming X account released an infographic detailing "How Elden Ring garnered 3.4 billion video views in 60 days, making it one of the biggest launches ever on YouTube." In doing so, it dwarfed the launches of *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, *The Elder Scrolls: Skyrim* and even *Grand Theft Auto V*.



As impressive as these facts are, they still do little to illustrate the incredible environment and community spirit that *Elden Ring* engendered. You could not throw a stone online without seeing lore theories, boss guides, fan art, tips, secrets and builds.

There was the birth of the legendary Let Me Solo Her, a personification of our collective desire to defeat Malenia. Challenge runs were catapulted to new heights with players like Iron Pineapple leading the charge, with pacifist and Soul Level 1 runs. Data miners like Garden of Eyes,





Zullie the Witch and Sekiro Dubi were able to peek behind the curtain, too, only adding to *Elden Ring's* breadth and mystique.

And everyone was uncovering this world together. Everyone was helping one another, sharing experiences and making memories. No matter what else happens in life, I will be forever grateful I was able to witness the launch of *Elden Ring*. The love for the game persisted even as we waited for – and then immersed ourselves in – the *Shadow of the Erdtree* expansion.

Elden Ring still holds me in its grip, as I am sure it does for many of you. No matter what game I play and how enjoyable it is at the moment, I always find myself thinking of that golden tree and that shattered god.

Almost every day I ruminate, write and produce content about *Elden Ring's*

lore, and despite the colossal amount of time I have spent doing so, I feel I have only grazed the surface. This book serves to go deeper, to scratch the itch for anyone who shares my passion for *Elden Ring's* deeper mysteries.

The Souls series of games have always had a very opaque style of storytelling, leaving much up to the player to interpret. *Elden Ring* is no different. Yet the scope of *Elden Ring's* world is far grander than that of previous games, with so many story threads, characters and quests that keep the lore hunter busy.

I chose the word “epic” when describing the story earlier, because to me the story of *Elden Ring* is a modern Homeric epic for a new age. It offers us a cast of colorful characters and gods warring for supremacy.

And there is a journey. We start as a mere insect in the ruins of this broken world, intimidated by the sheer overwhelming burden of our ultimate goal: to become Elden Lord. Yet in time we come face to face with each of these fabled demigods, find them wanting and eventually stand tall among them as an equal ready to lead the next age.

The beauty of *Elden Ring's* story cannot be captured in a few sentences, however. Each character has a story to tell and a message to convey. What emerges is a story of courage, rebellion, and persecution, of morality and also power. It's a story of heroes and villains, of gods and men, of horror and death, of unity and disorder. It's a story of love and heartbreak, of generational schisms, of identity and existentialism, of choice and self-determination. And above all else it is a story of belief.

It asks us: what do you believe in? What do you

think is right? Where do you stand when all is said and done?

And more. How do you make the world right when the power is in your hands? Do you repair the world? Do you right some wrongs? Do you pull everyone down to the same level? Do you try to solve the issues that lead to the collapse? Do you replace power with logic? Or do we not even deserve a second chance – should we burn it all down?

These are the questions the game asks of the player, and they still affect me to this day. While the story of *Elden Ring* is impossible to unravel fully, this book is my way of sharing my interpretation of its complexities, characters, nuances and themes.

So, my fellow Tarnished, join me as we return to the Lands Between, in search of the Elden Ring, emboldened

by the flame of ambition!



GRACE

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PART I:
——
GODS AND
NATIONS



Chapter 1: Gods and the Elden Ring

To really understand the story of *Elden Ring* and the history of the Lands Between, we need to look at the structure of its universe. This means examining the Greater Will, the outer gods and the Elden Ring.

These are the great cosmic forces that influence the world in which the characters play out their schemes. Attempting to understand these more eldritch elements has greatly enriched my appreciation of *Elden Ring's* world building, and the

following chapter will seek to unravel these mysteries in turn. We'll start with the origins of diverse life, the One Great.

"All that there is came from the One Great. Then came fractures, and births, and souls." - Lightseeker Hyetta

The interaction between the One Great and the Greater Will appears to be the *big bang* event, so to speak, in which life was first "fractured" to create diverse life-forms.

Now, I think it is worth saying that the ideas of early history in *Elden Ring*



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are a little difficult to understand and we have no evidence of how long ago this all really happened. Regardless, we are able to gain a glimpse of the primordial origin of life during our encounter with the eldritch being known as the Three Fingers.

Hyetta seeks these Three Fingers in order to become their maiden. Upon being touched by the Tarnished Lord of Chaos, she too is touched by the Frenzied Flame. Her already blind eyes burn and melt in her sockets and she reveals a startling vision of the world, via the Three Fingers themselves:

"The words of the Three Fingers. As your maiden, allow me to divine them. All that there is came from the One Great. Then came fractures, and births, and souls. But the Greater Will made a mistake. Torment, despair, affliction... every sin, every curse. Every one, born of the mistake. And so, what was borrowed must be returned. Melt it all away, with the yellow chaos flame. Until all is One again." - Lightseeker Hyetta

These are the words of the Three Fingers, a source with their own agenda. Even so, I don't think we have a huge reason not to trust most of what is said here, particularly since we don't have any contradictory evidence.

The picture painted by Hyetta with those lines is fascinating. In the beginning life was "one," a great singular form of life. What form this took is really beyond the scope of the lore in the game, however.

Was it sentient? Did it exist in the Lands Between? I think the fact we don't know very much about this One Great is actually the point. This is a cosmic concept that is meant to be beyond the ken of humanity.

Hyetta is burdened with knowledge from a higher being in this moment, and in this way it is fitting that she is blind. Blind seers are a classic archetype in myth and literature, whose ranks include figures like Tiresias, of Greek mythology. Hyetta cannot see in the conventional sense, yet inwardly she sees far more than any human, witnessing visions not meant for mortal eyes.

Given all this, my own internal depiction of this One Great will likely differ greatly from yours. All ideas are equally valid. For me, I imagine a giant sphere existing within the void. Whatever shape this cosmic lifeform took, it is clear that the fracturing of this One Great is where the timeline of *Elden Ring* begins – as it is from this fracturing event that diverse life arose.

What interests me more, however, is the role that the Greater Will played in this event, as this seems to cement how important the Greater Will is to this story.

The Greater Will has been influencing the Lands Between since the very beginning. While this Greater Will may not be a creator god, it does nonetheless appear to be responsible for stimulating life as we know it.



Gods and the Elden Ring

Some may consider the Greater Will to be simply another outer god and suggest that it is merely the one that is in control of the Lands Between. This is reductive in my eyes, as it overlooks the intrinsic relationship between the Greater Will and the Lands Between. There would be no life in this world without the interference of the Greater Will, a force that has been here from the very beginning.

Outer gods, comparatively, are those whose domain is outside of the current Order, and if we were to consider the Greater Will to have a domain it would simply be Order. Here at the start of everything, we see it removing the chaos of unformed, blended and undefined life and creating a new order from it all.

To achieve this goal the Greater Will never acts directly upon the Lands Between. One of its chief instruments are the Two Fingers. We get in-game lore that tells us directly about the relationship between the Two Fingers and the Greater Will. This is via the Fingerslayer Blade, which tells us:

“Cannot be wielded by those without a fate, but is said to be able to harm the Greater Will and its vassals.” - Fingerslayer Blade

Indeed the blade can harm said vassal, as we witness Ranni mercilessly butcher her Two Fingers with this blade. The Two Fingers essentially act as the Great One’s emissaries, able to directly commune with the Greater Will and interpret its will.

“Shaken by this turn of events, they are busy consulting the Greater Will. When they are finished, the Fingers will once again offer their guidance.”

- Finger Reader Enia

The Fingers’ role in this world is pretty simple. They provide guidance according to the will of their master. The ones in the Roundtable Hold are here to guide the Tarnished to the Greater Will’s ultimate goal: the establishment of a new Order and crowning of the next Elden Lord.

As we will see in the following chapters, the Two Fingers are numerous and they all seem to serve the same purpose, whether it be grooming an Emphyrean to become Marika’s successor, or directing the Tarnished. Indeed, each of the demigods’ Great Runes has a corresponding Two Fingers, suggesting they each had a Two Fingers guiding them at some stage.

Yet the real mark of the Greater Will’s rule is the existence of a god and accompanying Elden Lord. Marika has been the god who represents the Greater Will’s authority in the Age of the Erdtree, having had two Elden Lords, Godfrey and Radagon.

Following this template, Placidusax was Elden Lord and ruled alongside a god in an earlier age, a god that must have been Marika’s equivalent. Through both the Two Fingers and these godly representatives, the Greater Will imposes its Order indirectly.



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Yet the greatest instrument in the Greater Will’s tool box is the eponymous Elden Ring, a powerful artifact that imposes its will upon the mortal plane.

THE ELDEN RING

“I doubt you could even imagine it; that which commanded the stars, giving life its fullest brilliance. The Elden Ring. Oh, Elden Ring!” - Elden Ring Announcement Trailer, 2019

The fracturing of the One Great may coincide with another event that seemingly happened early on in the timeline of this world: the coming of the golden star.

The incantation description of Elden Stars reads as follows:

“This legendary incantation is the most ancient of those that derive from the Erdtree... It is said that long ago, the Greater Will sent a golden star bearing a beast into the Lands Between, which would later become the Elden Ring.” - Elden Stars

Even if the fracturing of the One Great and the coming of the golden star are not linked, it is clear that the arrival of the Elden Beast and Elden Ring had at least occurred by the time of the dragons, given the depiction of the Elden Ring we find in Farum Azula.

Let us dissect what is being said in the Elden Stars description. In a time described

as “long ago” the Greater Will sent a golden star to the Lands Between, which would bring the Elden Beast and the Elden Ring.

The language here can be confusing. Is it the star that became the Elden Ring or the Elden Beast itself? The final moments of the game should provide the answer. When we defeat Radagon, the Elden Ring within him goes out, and the room is enveloped in an abyssal mist from which the Elden Beast emerges.

The Elden Beast is the Elden Ring, and it is the true god and source of Order in this world, hence the message of “God Slain” that appears when we defeat the Elden Beast. This is further evidenced by a cracked wound on the Elden Beast’s belly, showing that the Beast itself was shattered as the Elden Ring was.

So at some stage in the distant past, the Elden Beast came to the Lands Between and would morph into the Elden Ring. As I’ve said, this needs to have happened before the dragon civilization. I would argue that it most likely happened around the time the One Great was fractured.

Why? Because the fracturing of the One Great marks the beginning of the Greater Will’s interest in the Lands Between and the mortal plane. Would it not also make sense that at this time it would also send the Elden Ring, the very artifact through which it exerts Order on the Lands Between?



Gods and the Elden Ring

We could go even further and suggest that it was the Elden Ring itself that stimulated the fracturing of the One Great. Consider what we know of the Greater Will. It is a force that never acts directly but only via the Elden Ring, the elected god and Elden Lord. The arrival of the Elden Ring could have exerted the Greater Will's vision of Order onto the One Great and fractured it into new life.

This could also explain why the Frenzied Flame's utter destruction of the Erdtree and Elden Ring in the Lord of Chaos ending paves the way for all life to become one again – absent the Elden Ring's influence.

This is a suitable juncture to speak directly of this Elden Ring, the titular force that is the heart and soul of the world's Order.

The true nature of the Elden Ring is nebulous and a true understanding of it is meant to lay beyond human comprehension. That being said, we can go some way to understanding the role that it plays in the world if we closely examine the lore surrounding it.

Firstly, we know that it is an object that is composed of different runes, and that these individual runes comprise the greater whole Elden Ring and work in concert to provide the rules of the current Order.

We know this thanks to the various Mending Rune endings, in each of which a different form of Order is implemented, depending on which modifying rune is

Indeed it is the actual physical form of the Elden Ring and its makeup of runes that creates the basis for the current ruling Order.

used. This makes it clear that each rune can implement a new aspect of Order that is then given power by the Elden Ring, with the Order being the sum of all the runes that make up the total Elden Ring.

When the Tarnished stands before the Elden Ring depiction in Farum Azula, it becomes readily apparent that the Elden Ring has had different forms, different rune compositions, throughout its history. The expansive version depicted in Farum Azula, with its many runes and gnarled branches, is a far cry from the stripped-back version found emblazoned on the prayer books of the Golden Order.

FromSoftware games have always had a cyclical nature to them; the nights of the hunt in *Bloodborne*, the linking of the fire in *Dark Souls* and the multiple scourges of demons in *Demon's Souls*. *Elden Ring* seems no different in this regard, and if the subtext wasn't enough, the in-game text confirms this outright, via the Memory of Grace item description:



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"It is merely a cycle. Stand before the Elden Ring. Become the Elden Lord."
- *Memory of Grace*

This again suggests the longevity of the Elden Ring, and that it has been adapted and reformed to enforce the rules of the Order of the day; from the Primeval Order of the Dragons to the Deathless Golden Order.

Indeed it is the actual physical form of the Elden Ring and its makeup of runes that creates the basis for the current ruling Order. This is confirmed by Enia, a finger reader who describes the Elden Ring as the "root" of the Golden Order. And it's further reinforced by the description of Radagon's legendary sword, the Golden Order Greatsword:

"Greatsword made of light, modeled after the Elden Ring itself. Forged by King Consort Radagon to proudly symbolize the tenets of the Golden Order."
- *Golden Order Greatsword*

To recap: When we examine the lore surrounding it, we begin to understand that the Elden Ring is an artifact of power that enforces the rules enshrined in its runes, and by doing so represents the Order of the mortal world.

The Elden Beast is the living avatar or form of the Elden Ring, and so it behooves us to analyze its lore for further answers regarding the nature of the Elden Ring. In particular I find the description of the Elden Beast's Remembrance very revealing:

"It was the vassal beast of the Greater Will and living incarnation of the concept of Order." - *Elden Beast's Remembrance*.

The Elden Beast itself is a cosmic being of unfathomable origins and power. But clearly it is an instrument of this Greater Will, and is used to impose its will on the mortal plane. Given the Elden Ring and Elden Beast are one and the same, we can apply this to the Elden Ring itself; it is the embodiment of Order itself and enforces it through some unseen metaphysical power.

This is probably best illustrated by the Deathless Golden Order configuration of the Elden Ring, a configuration that was made by the removal of the Rune of Death. We learn of this from a number of sources, such as via Enia, who says:

"The Rune of Death goes by two names; the other is Destined Death. The forbidden shadow, plucked from the Golden Order upon its creation..."
- *Finger Reader Enia*

We also hear this sentiment repeated in the description of the Mending Rune of the Death-Prince, which reads:

"The Golden Order was created by confining Destined Death. Thus, this new Order will be one of Death restored."
- *Mending Rune of the Death-Prince*

This description not only confirms that the removal of the Rune of Death created the Golden Order configuration, but also tells us that the addition of this



Gods and the Elden Ring

new Mending Rune will itself establish a new Order. This in turn reinforces the idea that the sum of the Runes in the Elden Ring determines the exact Order that will be enforced.

In the case of the Golden Order, the absence of a Rune that governs Death is one of its defining features. The consequences of this are best articulated by the Old Aristocrat Set:

“Gown of soft cloth adorned with fine gold embroidery. Travel attire worn by nobles in the capital. Garb favored by the aged. Abandoning their birthplace after the Shattering, these undead wanderers are the pitiful product of unending life.”

- Old Aristocrat Gown

There is no natural life found in the Lands Between anymore, and this is the lore explanation for why most humanoid enemies look like dried-out zombies, from the Wandering Nobles to Soldiers of Godrick. It is because they are unable to die and have instead over time become walking husks.

This explains the rather incredible scene we find at Agheel Lake. Here we discover dozens of undead humans gathering around Agheel’s nesting ground, and if you listen carefully you can hear them praying to Agheel for death: *“Agheel, oh Agheel, Feral*

Flame of Agheel.” As our fight with the great beast begins, many of them have their wish granted as Agheel descends upon them dousing them in flame.

We will revisit Death and the various forms of immortality later, but the point of illustrating this rather interesting side story now is to show that the Elden Ring does have a genuine effect on the rules that govern this world. With no Rune of Death, the Elden Ring enforces a rule where natural death does not occur.

Through the Elden Ring, the Greater Will maintains order and its control over the diverse life of the Lands Between, with the Order of the day being overseen and represented by the earthly god and

Elden Ring consort. We see this arrangement three times in the game: Placidusax and his god, Marika and Godfrey and finally Marika and Radagon. We can also become part of the newest cycle, as Elden Lord to the crumbling Marika, and overseeing whatever Order we see fit to implement:

“Marika’s trespass demanded a heavy sentence. But even in shackles, she remains a god, and the vision’s vessel. Confer Great Runes to become Elden Lord, and join Queen Marika as her consort. The Fingers have willed it so.”

- The Two Fingers, via Marika



Grace Given

All the vassals, followers and powers of the Greater Will seek to restore this system of balance following the Shattering. From the Two Fingers, to Enia to Grace itself, all seek to guide us to restore the Elden Ring, usher in a new Order and become Elden Lord.

THE OUTER GODS

The outer gods: nebulous, influential and endlessly intriguing. Very few topics in *Elden Ring* are of more interest to the community than the outer gods, no doubt as a result of their enigmatic presentation, as well as their permeation through different aspects of the story. In truth, we get little in terms of direct assessments of the outer gods’ true nature throughout the game, but let us look at what little we do have in order to create a framework for this discussion.

Let us start with the name *outer gods*, a term that invites several interpretations. To begin with the most commonly held interpretation, the term “outer” has a cosmic meaning, and so these gods fill a similar role to the Great Ones in *Bloodborne*.

This isn’t an unreasonable view given the massive cosmic elements present throughout the game. Certainly it has a very clear logic to it, especially when

you consider that both terms outer gods and Great Old Ones exist in the expanded Lovecraft mythos, and are used to describe great cosmic beings beyond human comprehension.

The Lovecraftian outer gods in particular are a force that exert their will from beyond the confines of the human world, from the cosmos. This would generally seem to line up with what one sees of the outer gods in *Elden Ring*. We see their influence but we never directly come into contact with them ourselves.

The Japanese term for outer god is *Sotonaru*, and this word is used to define beings outside of a group or system – in this case the Golden Order or the mortal plane. All of these explanations work for me in concert with one another. These are great cosmic beings, whose domain exists outside the current Order. Blood, Rot, the death rites and the Frenzied Flame are all excluded from the existing Order. Therefore it makes sense that these beings are doing everything in their power to exert their influence to change that fact.

With this in mind let us look at the wording found in the description of Miquella’s Needle:

“One of the unalloyed gold needles that Miquella crafted to ward away the meddling of outer gods.”

- Miquella’s Needle



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The word “meddling” here is of particular interest, as it implies that the outer gods are trying to advance their power within the Lands Between. With what little we do see of the outer gods this seems to be the case. Each of the outer gods has a medium through which they spread their influence.

The Formless Mother’s influence is seen in blood. Rose Church and Moghwyn Palace are places drenched in blood, and thus are the places where her reach is most keenly felt. Likewise the Outer God of Rot’s influence is felt in Caelid or the Lake of Rot where the Scarlet Rot has taken hold.

So while I agree that the outer gods are cosmic forces that are trying to increase their influence, I reject the notion that the Greater Will is at war with them. On the contrary, I believe that we have some evidence that the Greater Will would be happy for some of their influence to be integrated into the next Order.

I referred the subject of gods to Last Protagonist, content creator and respected authority on the Japanese translation of Elden Ring. Regarding outer gods they said the following:

“It’s kind of difficult to broach. Linguistically, yes, 外なる can be taken more along the lines of being ‘external’ gods, but 外なる神 is also used to mean ‘outer gods’ in Lovecraft’s work. The issue is in English

when we hear ‘outer’, we tend to think of ‘outer space’, but those connotations aren’t as strong in Japanese.” - Last Protagonist, Translator and YouTuber

The idea of the outer gods being more akin to external gods lines up with the idea that these cosmic beings are external to the existing Order and that their relationship to order is what defines them.

My theory posits instead that the outer gods are not rivals to the Greater Will but instead a consequence of the Elden Ring. They are spirits that govern certain facets and elements governed by the Elden Ring, while falling out with the current Order – an ordering that is man-made by vassals on the mortal plane, who have made their own choices about what is right, independent of the Greater Will’s design.

This concept would be somewhat consistent with the Kami of Shintoism (this was an idea first presented to me via the translator Mirko), which are manifestations of certain elements within the world – elements like death and disease. So these are cosmic beings which are the representatives and expressions of concepts and forces which influence the Lands Between.

This sort of idea helps me reconcile some of the difficulties I have had with perceiving the outer gods as rival outer gods. The main example of this is related to Malenia’s story.



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We learn the following from Ranni:
“I was once an Emphyrean. Of the demi-gods, only I, Miquella, and Malenia could claim that title. Each of us was chosen by our own Two Fingers, as a candidate to succeed Queen Marika, to become the new god of the coming age. Which is when I received Blaidd. In the form of a vassal tailored for an Emphyrean. But I would not acquiesce to the Two Fingers.” - Ranni

Ranni, Miquella and Malenia are the Emphyreans of the current era, and we learn that this was a position once held by Marika as well, via Maliketh’s remembrance. This implies that all of the Emphyreans are chosen by the Greater Will as potential candidates to godhood, to succeed goddess Marika and form a new Order.

This initially seems to mesh well with the information found in Malenia’s remembrance, for it reads:

I agree the outer gods are cosmic forces that are trying to increase their influence, I reject the notion that the Greater Will is at war with them.

“Miquella and Malenia are both the children of a single god. As such they are both Emphyreans, but suffered afflictions from birth. One was cursed with eternal childhood, and the other harbored rot within.”

- Remembrance of the Rot Goddess

We also learn of Malenia’s importance via Malenia’s Great Rune:

“Malenia is daughter to Queen Marika and Radagon, and her Great Rune should have been the most sacred of all.”

- Malenia’s Great Rune

Because Malenia is born of Marika and Radagon, the immortal single-bodied god, she and her twin were meant to be special. However they were both born with flaws, perhaps a commentary on this rather unique case of self-mating.

Malenia was born with the Scarlet Rot within her, a vessel chosen by the Outer God of Rot. Yet despite this, she was still chosen by her Two Fingers to become Emphyrean. Gowry, disciple of rot, suggests she was chosen because of her rot, not despite it:

“Queen Marika and her King Consort Radagon were blessed with twin demigods, and Malenia was one of them. She was born an Emphyrean, carrying the scarlet rot. An Emphyrean...is no mere demigod. In the age of the Elden Ring, and Queen Marika, the precious Emphyrean was born. A new god to forge a new Order.”

- Sage Gowry



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Gowry claims that Malenia was chosen to forge a new Order, an Order of Rot:

“Since Malenia fought Radahn, and the great scarlet flower blossomed in Aeonian, I have dedicated myself to her. And to the resplendence of the Order of Rot. The cycle of decay and rebirth.” - Sage Gowry

When you study the cycles of *Elden Ring*, you begin to realize that the Greater Will only wants one thing. It wants Order, and it doesn't care what form that Order takes¹. When directing us on our journey to become Elden Lord, the Greater Will and Two Fingers aren't fussy, as long as the Elden Ring is repaired.

Both Goldmask and Dung Eater, according to their mask and chestpiece respectively, received visions of a ring. That ring is the Mending Rune that they both produce through their journey, and it is heavily implied that both the Dung Eater and Goldmask received this vision via the Greater Will, depicted by Goldmask as his shining halo, and Dung Eater as the sun medallion. This means that the Greater Will is equally happy with Dung Eater's Mending Rune and the cursing of the world, as it is with Goldmask's Perfect Order.

The Golden Order has now faltered and failed, and as the Tarnished, we can rebuild the Elden Ring as we see fit and establish a number of new Orders: the Order of Fracture, the Perfect Order,

the Order of Despair or the Order of the Duskborn.

There is an engraving of the Elden Ring found within Farum Azula, which clearly has a different, more chaotic form of rune make up – suggesting that the dragons and their Elden Lord brandished the Elden Ring and imposed a different Order, far removed from the later Golden Order.

What if the Greater Will's intention was that Malenia could be the goddess of the new age, an Age of Rot sanctioned by the Greater Will? Until now most of us assumed that the Outer God of Rot is a rival cosmic entity, but then why would Malenia be elected as an Empyrean to be a goddess of a new Order?

An observation I owe to the translator Mirko, known for working with Italian YouTuber Sabaku no Maiku, is

When you study the cycles of Elden Ring, you begin to realize that the Greater Will only wants one thing. It wants Order, and it doesn't care what form that Order takes.



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that many of the outer gods are related to Death. They cover blood, disease and funerary practices.

This is an astute observation by Mirko, as the Golden Order is very much founded upon the removal of and confinement of the Rune of Death. We learn this from the Mending Rune of the Death-Prince:

“The Golden Order was created by confining Destined Death. Thus, this new Order will be one of Death restored.” - Mending Rune of the Death-Prince

The Golden Order has failed, Queen Marika has disappointed the Greater Will and now the time has come for a new Order all together.

Thus Malenia and her potential Order of Rot was considered, and she was elected as Empyrean. The Outer God of Rot was not a rival cosmic entity. Rather it represents an element that found itself outside of Order. Choosing Malenia to be a living vessel for its power means that the potential to reverse that position had come.

Again, the idea of Malenia being elected as an Empyrean, a successor chosen by the Two Fingers, has always been an awkward point of the lore should we choose to see the ancient God of Rot as a rival. Instead, if we see the Greater Will as only being concerned with Order itself, then there is no reason why the Outer God of Rot can't herald the next age.

ANCIENT GOD OF ROT

With these basic ideas in mind, a good place to start when looking at these beings is the Outer God of Rot, since we have already discussed this in a decent amount of detail. So if we assess this outer god in this new light, let's ask: What is this god's domain? As we have already seen, Gowry describes its domain as a cycle of decay and rebirth. Indeed, we get further elaboration on this Order via the Poison Mist incantation, which reads:

“Those who dwell within poison know rot all too well. The death that begets life, that comes to all equally. That is to say: it is the cycle of rebirth put into practice.” - Poison Mist

This is a cycle of life being born from death. It is best represented by the Scarlet Rot, the medium of the Outer God of Rot. It's a corroding force of death, and a medium through which this outer god can enforce the cycle of death and rebirth through diseases, despite being external to the Golden Order:

“The rotting sickness that afflicts Millicent has no cure. When the Erdtree flourished, even the demigods could not stave off its effects, despite their nigh godhood.” - Sage Gowry

The Scarlet Rot is not like the other poisons we find in the world. It is truly an unstoppable force, because it is the purest expression of this Kami's domain.

¹ “The Greater Will Doesn't Care About The Golden Order” - Ratatoskr



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We see the cycle of life from death in effect wherever we find the Scarlet Rot. While the Scarlet Rot eviscerates all life it touches, from death come the Kindred of Rot – beings that resemble silverfish or cockroaches.

This type of life from death is reflective of our real world where plenty of life, bacteria and insects and carrion eaters, flourish due to the carcasses of other life-forms. We see the Kindred of Rot rising from death like maggots, and we see the carrion eaters in the forms of the dogs and crows. Caelid isn't as simple as a field of death; it is a new ecosystem where new life-forms flourish and others die, other life benefits and the current ruling Order certainly would not.

As in our world, rot, decay and life rising from all that is just a natural part of the order of things. We should see this Order of Rot in the same way.

Likewise we see the story of the Rot's greatest rival, the Blue Fairy, as further evidence that these great beings are expressions of natural forces. We learn that these two spirits came into conflict via the Blue Dancer Charm, which reads:

"The dancer in blue represents a fairy, who in legend bestowed a flowing sword upon a blind swordsman. Blade in hand, the swordsman sealed away an ancient god – a god that was Rot itself."
- Blue Dancer Charm

Significantly, this swordsman seems to be the same warrior who would go on to be Malenia's mentor, as we learn from the Prosthesis-Wearer Heirloom. (This is something that we will return to later.) We can see this warrior's techniques in Malenia's own style, most clearly her Waterfowl Dance. What is interesting is that the dancer's movements, a flowing technique, seems to have some sort of power over the rot, as well as a connection to the flowing waters.

We learn this from the Blue Cloth Set, the set for the Warrior starting class. But it also seems to refer to the warrior of the flowing blade, due to the language used and the use of the color blue. Its description reads:

"The blue color of its fabric symbolizes brisk waters, as fluid and flowing as the sword in the hand of its wearer. Just as still waters turn foul, stagnation leads to decay. Warriors must remain ever drifting."
- Blue Cloth Cowl

So the blue is representative of flowing waters – a color used in reference to the fairy and the warrior of the flowing blade. Flowing sword movements are therefore evocative of fresh, moving waters, in opposition to stagnant still water. This idea of movement being related to purity while stillness is related to stagnation is nothing new to FromSoftware games. The purity and





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The Scarlet Rot is not like the other poisons we find in the world. It is truly an unstoppable force, because it is the purest expression of this Kami's domain. We see the cycle of life from death in effect wherever we find the Scarlet Rot.

stagnation of water plays a massive role in *Sekiro's* storyline, for example.

In Shintoism, the ever continuing cycle of life is represented by flowing water. Stagnation of water is seen as a corruption of this natural flow. Forgive this grossly simplified explanation, but I hope you get the gist.

This Warrior class is described as being part of a nomadic tribe in the class selections screen, so not only do they represent their flowing waters and therefore life through their combat style, but also in their actual nomadic lifestyle.

So flowing movement and blue, symbolizing flowing water, is an opposing force to the scarlet stagnant rot, and has

some power over it. It now makes sense that this warrior was able to ward away the outer god of decay using the purifying techniques of his flowing blade.

This clearly means that the fairy is a force connected to flowing water and is in opposition to the power of decay found in the Scarlet Rot too. In that case, who is this fairy, as it is never mentioned again in any other in-game lore? Well, thanks to Reddit user NamelessSinger, we may well have an answer.

In their Reddit post on this very subject, this writer suggests that the fairy is an embodiment of the Siofra River itself. This already fits in with the flowing water themes we have picked up on, but more importantly, Siofra is Gaelic for "fairy".

This works, because in various European folklore, especially in Celtic mythology, fairies are often seen as metaphysically tied to water. Given this, I do believe it was the Siofra River that gave the dancer his flowing techniques that drove away the Outer God of Rot: the flowing natural water vs. the stagnant rot.

With the outer god sealed and the rot forestalled for now, the dancer would keep his vigilance until the rot would surface again. It would resurface, inevitably, and this time in the form of Malenia, a subject we will return to later.



Grace Given

THE THREE FINGERS

We cannot talk about the outer gods without touching on the Greater Will's terrible shadow: The Outer God of Frenzied Flame. The very fact that it is the Three Fingers who tell us about the One Great suggests that this being is very old indeed. And this makes sense when you consider that the Frenzied Flame represents a primal human emotion that must have existed from the very moment that sentience was wrought: grief.

Life is difficult, the world is an unfor-giving place, and we all experience grief, heartbreak and loss. But for most of us these moments are buoyed by the support of our loved ones and the beauty that can be found in the world. Yet what if these moments of grief could be distilled into a single element, the collective grief and suffering of humanity, coalesced into a single form, a powerful force that sought to undo the mistake of life itself?

These are the powerful philosophical ideas behind those who have succumbed to the Flame of Frenzy, those who would seek to bring a Lord of Chaos forth and burn away the diversity of life. However, behind the philosophical and human aspects to this story, there are elements that are a little harder to grasp. There's the story of a force that exists solely to reduce the work of the Greater Will

to ash, a force that is born of the collective suffering of this world and has manifested not only a powerful concept, but an actual power that threatens to swallow the world.

This concept is heavily implied to be an outer god, via the descriptions of the varying stages of Miquella's Unalloyed Gold Needle. This is described as an implement designed to ward away the influence of the outer gods, and its only true use in the game is to ward away the influence of the Frenzied Flame. However, it is unique amongst the outer gods in that it exists almost as a mirror reflection of the Greater Will's Order and in opposition to it.

In this world, Order is essentially structure. Order means giving life structure as the Greater Will did when it fractured the One Great, giving life form and drawing it out from an indistinguishable mass. But when the Greater Will created the idea of Order, it must have created the concept of disorder; every concept has an opposite.

So with Order came a shadow, a shadow that opposed the most central and fundamental facet to the Elden Ring's domain, Order itself.

Yet the story of those who would become the representatives of this particular ideology is intriguing – and somewhat confusing. It's important for us to assess



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this in order to get a stronger understanding of this particular force.

For me, the best place to start would be with the Fingerprint Stone Shield, which reads as follows:

“A great stone shield with an intricately carved fingerprint design. One of the heaviest of all greatshields. Part of the tomb of an ancient god, the Readerless Fingers relayed their message through these imprints, said to be the very seeds from which frenzy first sprouted.”
- Fingerprint Stone Shield

This is a really fascinating piece of lore, because it tells us that this is the source of the Flame of Frenzy, that it was the words of the Three Fingers that allowed it to spread. Unlike the Two Fingers who have interpreters like Enia, the Three Fingers are “readerless” and thus use fingerprints to convey their messages.

What is more pertinent for the current discussion is the mention of an ancient god that is placed within a tomb.

Now where this tomb is located should be a straightforward question for the player to discern, as we find the shield in the tomb of the Great Caravan – directly above the Three Fingers themselves. Indeed the tragic Caravan is described to have been “entombed” in the description of the Nomad Ashes:

“A member of a tribe that was entombed in the earth so as to bury the maddening

disease that followed them.” - Nomad Ashes

But what is this tomb, and what is the ancient god that was entombed within? And the question remains: whose message is this? Is it their own, or are they envoys like the Two Fingers are?

The first suggestion that I have for you is that it is the Three Fingers themselves, a case of Occam’s Razor, given that it is the Three Fingers we find in the tomb and the Three Fingers are mentioned in the same breath as the ancient god in the Fingerprint Stone Shield’s description.

I believe that this is backed up by the item Note: The Lord of Frenzied Flame:

“Beneath Leyndell, at the very bottom lies our lord, lord of the frenzied. The Three Fingers who holds us in thrall.”
- Note: The Lord of Frenzied Flame

The specific wording here suggests that the Three Fingers are revered not just as envoys of the Frenzied Flame, but as a lord themselves. I believe that the Three Fingers are the corporeal manifestation of the Outer God of Chaos, and that they take the form that they do because of what it stands for. It stands for reunification, it stands for all becoming one once more. I see the Three Fingers as a manifestation of the God of Chaos itself, its chosen form meant to symbolically oppose the Two Fingers, representing the other three of the whole five – a reflection of its goals to return the world to a single state of matter.



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The way in which these Three Fingers communicate only serves to further contrast them with their Two Finger counterparts. The Two Fingers Heirloom highlights the fact that the Two Fingers communicate in a far more graceful and organized manner:

"Fingers cannot speak, yet these were eloquent. Persistently did they wriggle, spelling out mysteries in the air. Thus did we gain the words. The words of our faith."
- Two Fingers Heirloom

The Two Fingers wriggle and are interpreted by finger readers, and from these come words of faith, transcribed into cipher as shown by the Cipher Pata; a language of light. It's all so sophisticated, organized and orderly, and then you have the Three Fingers that crudely transcribes its messages by gouging its fingerprints into stone. It is truly a chaotic and primitive way to convey a message.

The YouTuber Lore Hunter² speculates that the Three Fingers themselves once served a god who ruled and brandished the Elden Ring in days long passed before Marika. Upon the death of this god it was enshrined in a tomb alongside their Fingers, and they were cast aside and left to rot beside their fallen god. These Two Fingers would warp and become envoys for the Frenzied Flame, becoming the Three Fingers, distorted versions of their former kin.

THE FORMLESS MOTHER

The Formless Mother is a fascinating part of the lore, whose very name evokes a connection to Oedon the Formless One from *Bloodborne*. In the most basic of terms, this is a cosmic deity beyond our comprehension that uses blood as its medium to communicate and interact with the mortal plane, with particular fondness for the corrupted blood of the Omen.

Oedon also has a deeper connection to particularly potent blood; he chooses Arianna for a surrogate precisely because of her Cainhurst blood. Upon the death of Arianna and her child, she drops a One Third of Umbilical Cord which reads:

"Every Great One loses its child, and then yearns for a surrogate, and Oedon, the formless Great One, is no different. To think, it was corrupted blood that began this eldritch liaison." - One Third of Umbilical Cord

Likewise the Formless Mother is a being of no physical form that imposes her will through viscera, and there is no more potent blood in the Lands Between than that of the Omen. In the depths of the Leyndell sewers this being found the perfect vessel for manifestation, an Omen of significant power and lineage. The incantation of Bloodboon reads:

"The mother of truth craves wounds. When Mohg stood before her, deep underground,



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his accursed blood erupted with fire, and he was besotted with the defilement that he was born into." - Bloodboon

Blood is one of the most important elements of life. Therefore the potential power of the Formless Mother is something to be reckoned with. In the lands where Mohg's influence holds sway, we can see the raw, visceral power of the Mother of Truth on full display. Blood, corpses, viscera and excrement all layer the hellish landscape that sits below Mohgwyn Palace.

Blood is the primordial matter of all life, but it is also a fluid that is meant to belong inside the body, and we humans have natural revulsion to blood as a result. The very sight of it is wrong to us, and the domain of the Lord of Blood reflects this as if the swamp itself is an infected wound upon the earth.

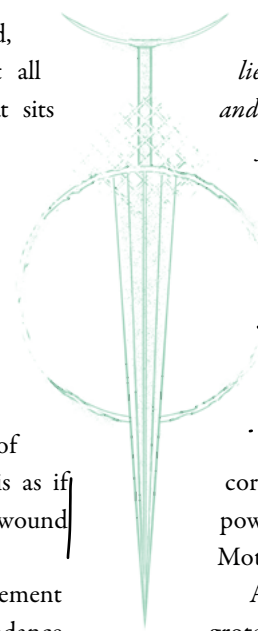
From this decay and defilement breed larvae, as there is an abundance of Blood-Tainted Excrement found here, which reads:

"Mixed inside with half-digested flesh are dense colonies of tiny eggs of unknown but assuredly revolting origin."
- Blood-Tainted Excrement

The servants of the Lord of Blood then harness these blood-born flies in a

horrific incantation that can lead to the further spilling of blood. The Swarm of Flies incantation reads:

"A Blood Oath incantation, shared from the Lord of Blood's power. Releases a swarm of bloodflies before the caster to assault foes. The vile swarm deals damage and builds up onset of blood loss. This incantation can be cast while in motion. The new palace of the Lord of Blood lies in a swamp of festering blood, and these flies are said to spawn from excrement in that land."
- Swarm of Flies



The nature of the blood utilized by the Mohgwyn dynasty is "festering", ~~putrid~~ or corrupted blood.

Again, this reinforces the idea that the more potent or corrupted the blood is, the more powerful a medium it is for the Mother of Truth.

Any being living within this grotesque landscape is corrupted, with bloody sores covering crows, dogs and the environment itself alike.

Thus the servants of the Mother of Truth are devoted to the spilling of blood and the spreading of the defiled blood of the Mohgwyn dynasty. The microcosm of the Mohgwyn Palace paints a grim picture of the future, should Mohg and his patron

² "Don't Fall for the Lie in Elden Ring That Brought Chaos to the Lands Between" - The Lore Hunter



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succeed: a hellish landscape of seeping, oozing, stinking and bloody bogs filled with crazed adherents obsessed by the notion of bloodshed.

However, I think a certain connection does need to be addressed here: the Blood Star. I have essentially tied the Mother of Truth to blood and the shedding of blood, and there is one particular region of this world that really feels defined by these ideas. This is the Land of Reeds.

This is the region from which the Samurai starting class owes their heritage, and we learn a fair bit about it from the armor item description, which reads:

“The Land of Reeds has long been locked in a miserable civil war, during which time it has remained alienated from the cultures of its neighbors. Little wonder that the entire nation has succumbed to the blood-soaked madness, or so it is said.” - Land of Reeds Helm

I find this description to be truly fascinating. While the idea of a civil war in a region clearly based on medieval Japan is most likely a reference to the real world Sengoku era, the era in which *Sekiro* was based, I think there is something more here too.

The term “blood-soaked *madness*,” suggests that the warfare may not be entirely mundane, and that another force may be encouraging this constant shedding of blood. Indeed, the Land of Reeds is almost entirely characterized by blood,

for the Reedlander appearance default tells us that this is a land in which blood is a common sight, and all of the Reedlander weapons, variations on katanas, are designed to specifically emphasize blood loss in their opponents.

This blood-soaked madness is best personified by one of the most infamous among their number, Okina. We learn of this legend via his mask, which reads:

“The more he sharpened his mind, the more the absurdities of the world came into stark relief. And so Okina renounced it all, and rose to a higher plane. There was only himself. His katana. And its mastery. Before long, Okina became a demon of a swordsman.” - Okina Mask

Mohgywn Palace paints a grim picture of the future, should Mohg and his patron succeed: a hellish landscape of seeping, oozing, stinking and bloody bogs filled with crazed adherents obsessed by the notion of bloodshed.



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Okina really highlights what I am getting at: that the shedding of blood for some was almost an act of religion and belief, beyond an act of war or pride in one’s swordcraft. This item description describes Okina as ascending to a higher plane, as if he was becoming an instrument of the divine.

In a way this is true, for through Okina’s blood shedding he was indirectly honoring and empowering the Kami of Blood, the Formless Mother. Thus it makes sense that he would come to the attention of Mohg, Lord of Blood. We learn of this via the Rivers of Blood item description, which reads:

“When Mohg, the Lord of Blood, first felt Okina’s sword, and madness, upon his flesh, he had a proposal, to offer Okina the life of a demon, whose thirst would never go unsated.” - Rivers of Blood

It makes sense that the **Lord of Blood** would raise **Okina** up and harness his prowess for bloodshed. The more blood is shed the more his agenda is fulfilled in a god of blood at the center of the next Order. That is all well and good, but there is a connection between the blood-soaked lands of the Land of Reeds and the Blood Star.

We hear of this mysterious force via the **Thorn Sorceries**, the Briars of Sin and Briars of Punishment. They both read as follows:

*“The guilty, their eyes gouged by thorns, lived in eternal darkness. There, they discovered the **Blood Star**.”*

- Briars of Punishment

These Guilty are the Thorn Sorcerers who upon having communed in their blindness, blinded by thorns, have learned the power of Thorn Sorcery apparently through their contact with the Blood Star. In a way this star is connected in a similar fashion to the way in which Primeval Sorcerers commune with stars, though in a more bloody visceral manner. I discuss this in my video “Elden Ring Lore | The Primeval Current and the Graven Witch”; in essence I talk about how the Primeval Sorcerers are able to view the abyss of space in which stars are born through connection with the Primeval Current.

This Blood Star also seems to exist in an abyss, the abyss of blindness. And so the bloodshed may make us wonder whether this Blood Star is an instrument or form of the Mother of Truth.

But why does this connect with the bloody Land of Reeds? Well, the Samurai starting class wields the Red Thorn Roundshield, and these red thorns can only symbolize one thing: the Briars of Sin and by extension the Blood Star. Is it a coincidence that both the Mother of Truth and the Blood Star are connected to this bloody region?



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Are they the same being, or do they just draw from the same realm? I leave it to you to decide, but one thing I would suggest is that some kami, like Sarutahiko Okami, are leaders of groups of kami; in their case they lead the earthly kami. Both the Formless Mother and Blood Star could be seen in a negative light, but remember: in our definition of kami it is clear that they can possess positive and/or negative traits.

Could it be that the Blood Star and Mother of Truth are separate entities of similar domain? One of bloodshed and one of blood-soaked guilt? Again, I leave it to you to decide.

TWINBIRD AND DEATH RITES

As in our world, the denizens of the Lands Between had varying beliefs and practices when it came to dealing with the end of their lives.

In the modern era, the systems of death have been hijacked by the Erdtree and Golden Fundamentalism, with Erdtree burial being the nominal idea of the ideal death. And yet there exist far older symbols of death, relics of different funerary rites whose very image still elicits a tie to the other side. There are those who cling on to their own practices, beliefs and divinity separate from the dominion

of the Erdtree, and yet one thing unites them all. It is not simple and there is no clear end to life.

The most interesting facet of the practices associated with Deathbirds is that they were developed in a world absent the Erdtree. For the player, this should immediately be intriguing as the Lands Between we get to explore is so dominated by the Erdtree, both physically and culturally.

We learn that the associated practices were developed outside of the Erdtree's purview via the Explosive Ghostflame spell which reads:

"Sorcery of the servants of Death. Strike the ground with the staff, triggering an explosion of ghostflame that burns the surrounding area. In the time when there was no Erdtree, death was burned in ghostflame. Deathbirds were the keepers of that fire."
- Explosive Ghostflame

Clearly there was a period of time when cultures and society developed and existed outside of the dominion of the Erdtree, and given its function in regards to the processes of death, it makes sense that a prior mechanism needed to exist. As such the influence of an outer god was able to spread and become the dominant funerary rite of the world. This is the influence of what we know to be the Twinbird, a being we learn of via the Twinbird Kite Shield which reads as follows:



Grace Given

"Shield featuring a vividly painted twinbird. The twinbird is said to be the envoy of an outer god, and mother of the Deathbirds." - Twinbird Kite Shield

This is the only direct mention of this Twinbird and its associated outer god. That being said, this small piece of evidence actually gives us a lot to chew over. First of all, it directly links the Deathbirds to an outer god, as well as placing their creation at the feet of this Twinbird.

Now, this Twinbird is described as an envoy to this outer god. As VaatiVidya says in his great video, "The Lore of Elden Ring's Bosses (feat. Death's Kindred)", the image we get of this Twinbird is indeed very reminiscent of the mythological phoenix.

The phoenix is already a bird heavily associated with death, through its endless cycle of death and rebirth. However, I think we can learn a little bit more from the appearance of this bird, as it is known as the Twinbird. So we can see from the shield that this title is reflective of their actual appearance: two heads and two halves of the body both represented with a different color.

If I was to guess what this is representing, I would say that one half is meant

to represent life and one half is meant to represent death, in order to symbolize its hold over the cycle of life and death.

As is always the case with FromSoftware, nothing is really selected by chance. We can assume a degree of thought went into giving this branch of death custodians a crow/raven form. There are so many instances of birds cropping up throughout history and cultures as a symbol or messenger of death. Of course the raven and crow are heavily associated with

death, and most consider this to be an association born due to them being carrion eaters.

No doubt on battlefields throughout history these birds would have been a common sight among the dead, and thus where there was death, there

would be crows. Birds (particularly crows) are seen as psychopomps, which is why they gather near the dead, ready to guide them to the other side.

The Death Rite Birds specifically take a crow-like appearance, and this makes sense. There is something inside me that associates these beings with death, even before knowing their lore. Indeed we will see that the association of death and these birds is deeply ingrained within the





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culture of Erdtree society, leading to people taking the form of the bird to represent death in many instances. One great bit of lore that helps exemplify this is the Hidden Plumage item description, a crafting material cut from the game:

“Death’s bearers were once said to have taken the form of birds, symbolized by these black feathers.” - Hidden Plumage

But this does carry over into their lore and their role. They are shepherds of death, the ancient overseers of death who presided over the burning of the dead within the Ghostflame.

THE GHOSTFLAME

We learn of these practices via their instruments, the Death’s Poker, the description of which reads:

“The birds are graveyard fire keepers; it is said they rake out the ashen remains of the dead from their kilns.” - Death’s Poker

These birds are the overseers of something known as the graveyard fires, and being a massive fan of semantics, this phrase is of great interest to me. It suggests that in this era before the Erdtree, before Erdtree burials, there were graveyards and in these graveyards there were great fires or kilns in which the dead were burned, before their ashen remains were scraped out.

The burning of the dead is a very common practice throughout history. However, given my own experiences and cultural background, it specifically reminds me of Western Protestant crematorium funerals. For those unfamiliar with these practices, the deceased is placed into a coffin. The coffin is then placed into a kiln, before the kiln is lit. After the coffin is burned, the ashes are then retrieved and typically placed into an urn – and then optionally these ashes can be buried.

So quite clearly that is the role which these Deathbirds play, overseeing the funerary rites of an old practice, that practice being the burning of the dead – and specifically the burning of bones within Ghostflames. We can learn of these practices via the Rancor Pot, which reads:

“In times of old, the dead were burned with ghostflame, and from those cinders arose vengeful spirits.” - Rancor Pot

The Ghostflame Torch tells us about the fate of the Fallen Hawks, which explains how this flame is generated:

“Metal torch that burns with cold ghostflame. Tool of the Fallen Hawks who prowl the underground rivers. When the band’s last embers were used up in their long search, they began to burn the bones of their fellows, acquiring the cold ghostflame, but sealing their fate as dwellers of the underground for all eternity.” - Ghostflame Torch



Grace Given

Before Erdtree burials, there were graveyards, and in these there were great fires or kilns in which the dead were burned.

So it appears that burning bones is what creates the Ghostflame, and within this generated flame would the Death Rite Birds burn the dead. The Ghostflame fascinates me because, while they are seemingly generated by burning the bones of the dead to burn the dead to ash, they also seem to be intrinsically linked to the resurrection of Those Who Live in Death.

Now we do have a fairly tentative way of explaining this. Because it seems that Ghostflames are also tied to vengeful spirits, as is seen in Ancient Death Rancor:

“Summons a horde of vengeful spirits that chase down foes. Charging enhances potency. They are cinders of the ancient death hex, raked from the fires of Ghostflame by Deathbirds.”

- Ancient Death Rancor

Here it is implied that from these ashes of the dead can be found vengeful spirits, and I would suggest that we see this in the game, when the Ghost-

flame appears around the bones of a resurrecting undead. This is as if it is symbolic of their vengeful spirit, once again inhabiting their form and refusing to leave.

This idea of Those Who Live in Death being a *life-form*, a spirit that refuses to die, is something that can be backed up with a translation. Once again I turn to fellow content creator Last Protagonist, who has provided a fascinating translation of one of Rogier’s dialogues. In the English, Rogier says:

“You may find this peculiar, but I discovered something in my examination of the Night of the Black Knives. These souls [Those who live in Death] have committed no offence. They have every right to life, only, they happened to touch upon a flaw in the [Golden] Order.”

- Sorcerer Rogier

However, according to Last Protagonist’s own translation of the Japanese, he reads it in the following way:

“おかしいことを、と思われるでしょうけれど私は、陰謀の夜を調べる中で知ったのです。彼らは何も侵していない。ただ懸命に生き、それ故に、律の傷に触れてしまっただけなのだ。You probably think I’m strange, but I’m in the middle of researching the night of the plot. They haven’t made any transgression(s). Just living determinedly, and because of that, they’ve run into a flaw of the order.” - Last Protagonist



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Living determinedly – in other words, they essentially refuse to die. I see this as tying into the vengeful and rebellious aspect of their existence as well as explaining why we see the Ghostflame well up around their bones as they resurrect. Their spirits will not allow themselves to die.

In general Ghostflame does seem to be a little more complex than it appears at first glance – it isn't just generated by burning bones, but is a force metaphysically intertwined with death and spirits. I think this idea is further backed up by the curious Grave Violet item description which had perplexed me for a long time before I had pondered these questions. It reads:

“A purple flower that blooms in graveyards. Material used for crafting items. The hue of Ghostflame, it's believed to be useful in calling forth spirits.” - Grave Violet

The fact the flower itself can be used to summon Ghostflame and the associated spirits suggests a sort of cycle. These flowers grow in areas where the dead are decomposing, and thus they are infused with the power of these vengeful spirits, and can be burned to produce Ghostflame as a result.

Returning to the idea of the Deathbirds being able to summon vengeful spirits, this does seem to fit into the logic of the world, given that we know the dead can be controlled via ash, an ability we ourselves abuse via the Spirit Calling Bell.

These flowers grow in areas where the dead are decomposing, and thus they are infused with the power of these vengeful spirits, and can be burned to produce Ghostflame as a result.

The Rancor spells suggest that the Death Rite Birds were able to manipulate spirits in a more primitive manner, summoning the vengeful facet of the deceased through raking their ashes rather than a full one-to-one recreation of the spirit like the summoning ashes do.

Is it possible that this more sophisticated version of spirit calling was developed by building off the practices of the death rites? I certainly think this is plausible, as both practices do directly draw upon an aspect of the spirit directly from ashes.

The idea of Deathbirds harnessing the power of spirits is further developed by our understanding of the augmented wings that we see on the more dangerous Death Rite Birds. These birds possess massive spiritual wings that appear to have people sitting within them, holding staffs.



Grace Given

The Deathbirds would be supported in their rites by certain priests, as we learn via the Death Ritual Spear, which reads:

“The priests became guardians of the birds through the rite of Death, which also serves as an oath sworn to their distant resurrection.” - Death Ritual Spear

So it seems that collectively these practices overseen by the birds are known as the death rites, and I do find it interesting that there were clearly humans involved with these rites, who most likely venerated the Deathbirds and their Twinbird mother. These priests wielded staffs and made an oath to become the guardians of these Death Rite Birds, in exchange for a future resurrection. We must assume it is these priests who are visible in the wings of the Death Rite Birds, and it appears as though this is how they act as guardians.

NECROMANCY

Necromancy is a small yet interesting part of the lore, and it makes sense when looking at this subject to unpack the sole necromancer we come across in the game. This is Garris, the boss of Sage's Cave.

Garris is wearing the Sage Set, tying up with the name of the cave we find him in. This set reads as follows:

“Thick burgundy robe. Attire of the wise sages who were deemed heretical. Evidence that the wearer was driven from town.” - Sage Robe

We of course meet another sage in the game, Sage Gowry, and I would argue that the town that Gowry was driven from, as is mentioned in the Sage Set, was in fact Sellia, Town of Sorcery. Not only is he located near Sellia, but is also very intimate with the secrets of the town and its sorceries. It is he who provides us with the item Sellia's Secret, and it is he who teaches us their Night Sorceries.

However, Gowry has become an adherent of the Rot and its incantations, and I conclude that it is these heretical interests that have had him driven from his former town. So while I don't necessarily conclude that Garris is also from Sellia, I would suggest that he suffered a similar fate: he was once a sage of some order, only to be expelled for his heretical magicks.

Yet for Garris, instead of Rot Incantations, his interests lay in necromancy, which no doubt led to his expulsion. His motivations for doing so are pretty clear to us, as we can learn via the weapon he wields, the Family Heads flail:

“Three bludgeoning copper heads attached to a handle by chains. Signature weapon of Necromancer Garris, the heretical sage. The heads were made to



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resemble those of his wife and two children.” - Family Heads

Those familiar with the first *Dark Souls* game may find this story similar to that of Pinwheel, a necromancer who stole some of the power of Gravelord Nito in order to resurrect his wife and child. Here Garris’ aims can definitely be interpreted in the same way: a man mourning his wife and child and looking into necromancy surely only has one real goal in mind.

I include necromancy in this section because the branch of necromancy we encounter in *Elden Ring* appears to be an offshoot of the sorceries of the death rite.

We have already discussed the spell Ancient Death Rancor, as a spell that manipulates the vengeful spirits found within the ash of the dead. This is an ancient art that has been resurrected by the necromancer Garris, for the Rancorcall spell reads:

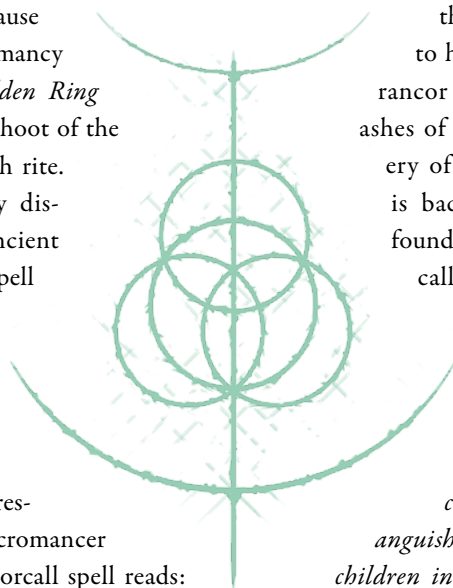
“Sorcery of the servants of Death. Summons vengeful spirits that chase down foes. Charging enhances potency. Once thought lost, this ancient death hex was rediscovered by the necromancer Garris.” - Rancorcall

This is an interesting bit of lore for a number of reasons. Firstly it appeals to my obsessive need to understand and place the *Elden Ring* timeline, as it uses the term “ancient,” indicating to us that the time of Deathbirds and their associated practices happened a long time ago, and shows in turn just how long ago this Erdtree-less period was.

Secondly, it does firmly liken necromancy to the practices of death rite, leading us to conclude that necromancy seeks to harness the spirits and rancor found within the ashes of the dead, a rediscovery of these practices. This is backed up by the skill found on the Family Heads called Familial Rancor, which reads:

“Gently rattle the copper heads to summon vengeful spirits that chase down foes. The anguish of a spouse and children invites accursed wrath.” - Familial Rancor

Clearly Garris has found some success by managing to harness the vengeful spirits of his wife and child, resurrecting them in a sense, though I can hardly believe this pale and



Grace Given

Clearly Garris has found some success by managing to harness the vengeful spirits of his wife and child, resurrecting them in a sense, though I can hardly believe this pale and tortured imitation was his end goal.

tortured imitation was his end goal. And thus I see Garris’ story as another tragedy, something far too common in *Elden Ring*.

And so, while what we learn of the Death Rite Birds may be very threadbare, their legacy is far more prominent in the game, as these birds essentially become synonymous with death. We see this on the attire of the Ravenmount Assassins, including their cloak, which reads as follows:

“A ritual implement for transforming into a Deathbird, if only by imitation. Strengthens jump attacks. ‘We are birds of prey, bringers of death.’” - Raptor’s Black Feathers

These bringers of death, these assassins, have taken the raven appearance of the Deathbirds but also emulate their movements by diving down from above as we learn via their Raptor Talons weapons. This is all because they want to appear as death themselves.

Additionally, another entirely different order takes the appearance of the Deathbird to symbolize their allegiance to death. I am of course referring to Mausoleum Knights whose set makes it clear that the wings on their backs are meant to evoke the Deathbird.

It becomes clear that the most recognizable symbol of death is the Deathbird in the Lands Between, much as maybe the skull is for us. What this shows is that while the Death Rite Bird’s days of dominance have long since passed, they are deeply ingrained in the culture of the Lands Between.

But ultimately the Deathbirds are shepherds, shepherds of the dead to guide them to whatever purpose the shepherds are bound to. For the Deathbirds, the burning of the dead in Ghostflame and raking their ashes is their purpose, given to them by their Twinbird mother and its outer god.

Throughout *Elden Ring* many of the beings associated with death play this guide or shepherd role, and so in the next section I want to look at the idea of psychopomps.



SHEPHERDS OF THE DEAD

The word psychopomp is derived from an ancient Greek word that is used to describe a being or spirit whose purpose is to help guide the dead. This idea is very much a repeated theme in *Elden Ring*, as the dead are frequently described as lost and/or needing guidance.

For example, Rosus' Axe reads as follows:

"Usher of Death, Rosus, who shows the path to the catacombs throughout the Lands Between, is depicted on this ritual axe. The dead easily lose their way, and have always been in sore need of a guiding hand." - Rosus' Axe

The usher of death, Rosus, is the clearest example of a psychopomp in the entire game, and is actually one of the first characters that we will probably come across in our exploration of the Lands Between.

What's interesting is the idea that there are those who become lost in death. And this is an idea we see repeated in the Tibia Mariners shortly. To me this gives the impression that the dead are a sort of resource that each system of belief must learn how to guide and gather, in order to dominate the world's life.

Unlike the Deathbirds, however, it is clear that Rosus is a being or psychopomp

that appears to be aligned with the status quo, to be a guide of Erdtree Burial. Hence the blue lights that Rosus' statues produce that guide us to the catacombs, the site of greatroot burial.

The description I read at the beginning of this discussion was the item description for Rosus' Axe, and again it reinforces the idea that we mentioned before: the dead need guidance and it is Rosus' role to guide them to the Greattree roots.

Not only that but it seems as though Rosus has some role in watching over these sites of burial as well, summoning the sentinel Chariots and generally performing varying roles in the burial sites.

Rosus' appearance is interesting and very fitting. He most closely resembles a Finger Maiden, with their hunched appearance and hollowed eyes, suggesting that they are both creations or spirits of the Two Fingers or the Erdtree.

We will discuss Erdtree Burial later, but suffice it to say that it is important for the Erdtree Order's control over life.

However, in regard to the subject of psychopomps, I think most of you will know where I am going. We are of course speaking of the Tibia Mariners.

A good place to start with the Tibia Mariners is with one of the only in-game pieces of lore that relate to them, the Tibia's Summons, which reads:



"Summons a group of Those Lost in Death. Three skeletons will appear some distance from the caster and attack foes before disappearing. The dead have long been left to wander; what they need is leadership."

- Tibia's Summons

As I mentioned earlier we repeatedly see this idea of the dead becoming lost, but Tibia's Summons actually capitalizes a title, "Those Lost in Death", which I take to be a state of being comparable to Those Who Live in Death. Again it gives me the idea that the dead are in this wayward state, and it is up to the varying factions to gather this resource to their cause – whether that be Rosus or the Tibia Mariners.

Rosus' appearance is interesting. He resembles a Finger Maiden, with their hunched appearance and hollowed eyes, suggesting that they are both creations or spirits of the Two Fingers or the Erdtree.

The Tibia Mariners are dripping with lore when it comes to their appearance. They are linked to the aquatic themes of the Prince of Death, stagnation, *kegare* (uncleanness, defilement) and centipedes. In short the aquatic facet of the Tibia Mariner makes sense, especially in relation to the relevance of stagnant water to Those Who Live in Death.

However, to most players, their appearance is most likely evocative of a famous character of myth: Charon, the ferryman of the river Styx. The ancient Greeks would often place a coin on the eyes of their dead, and this was so they could pay the fee demanded by Charon when they reached Hades. Upon receiving the fee, Charon would ferry the dead across the river Styx that divided the land of the living and the land of the dead.

For those who could not pay Charon, or were not buried properly, they would be left to linger and languish on the banks of the river Styx. I think there would be very little argument that the Tibia Mariners are meant to evoke this same image, and in concert with the Tibia's Summons, we clearly see that the Tibia Mariners are guides to bring Those Lost in Death into living death, to join Those Who Live in Death.

Indeed we see them use another tool of theirs to this very end, their long trumpet, which doubles as both



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paddle and instrument. Given the Greek themes behind the Tibia Mariners and the psychopomps in general, I liken this trumpet to the salpinx, a trumpet-like instrument of the ancient Greeks.

Historians have speculated that this salpinx was a military instrument, meant to give commands before a battle started, and in *Elden Ring* I would speculate that the Tibia Mariners use it in a similar way. They use the trumpet to guide those who are lost through to our world, no longer lost but becoming Those Who Live in Death, new warriors for these mysterious boatmen.

The Tibia Mariners can also be related to another talking point in regards to psychopomps, Helphen's Steeple³, as the Tibia Mariner in the Mountaintops of the Giants drops this item.

Let's start to unpack the ideas found in this item by reading its item description:

"Greatsword patterned after the black steeple of the Helphen, the lampwood which guides the dead of the spirit world. The lamplight is similar to grace in appearance, only it is said that it can only be seen by those who met their death in battle." - Helphen's Steeple

Again we quite clearly see the recurring themes of the guidance of the

dead, and I believe that the choice of name also illustrates this. This spelling of Helphen may not necessarily mean anything, but phonetically it is the same as the German word *helfen* – meaning *to help* or *to be of assistance* in English.

And this makes sense given its role in helping the lost spirits of the dead in finding their way in the spirit world. The idea of a spirit world is a fascinating concept for the Lands Between, especially given that we get hints of spirits overlapping with the world. It is only made more interesting by the fact we hear nothing else about it.

The other facet of this sword is the skill called Ruinous Ghostflame, which wreathes the sword in Ghostflame. The Ghostflame is discussed

While the psychopomps have different masters and different allegiances, they are essentially performing the same role, and drawing on the power of the same world.

³ "The Lore of Elden Ring's Bosses (feat. Death's Kindred)" - VaatiVidya



Grace Given

previously, tying us back to the death rite and the Deathbird.

Helphen's Steeple is very similar to the Death Ritual Spear, but also to both Feathered Branchsword⁴ talismans once used in ancient death rituals - doubtless the death rites given that these items drop from Deathbirds:

"A talisman adorned with red feathers, once used in ancient death rituals... The heart sings when one draws close to death, and a glorious end awaits those who cling so tenaciously to life." - Red-Feathered Branchsword

Is it possible that the Helphen Tree was the model for these ritual implements used in the death rites? And if so, does the Ghostflame on the sword and the possession of this sword by the Tibia Mariner tie them both together?

In my opinion the answer is both yes and no. I think that D's initial dialogue makes it clear that the Tibia Mariner's are essentially manifestations of the Deathroot and shepherds for Those Who Live in Death:

"Ah, a Tarnished, are you? I'm known as D. I hunt down Those Who Live in Death, and weed their Deathroot. Heed my warning. The village here has been touched by Death. And worse yet, it is home to a mariner. If you value your life, then go no further."
- D, Hunter of the Dead

This is reinforced by the fact that the Tibia Mariners are one of the main holders of Deathroot and summon Those Who Live in Death to assist them. Yet Those Who Live in Death do seem to burn in the Ghostflame after they die before resurrecting. The Ghostflame is wielded by the Deathbirds and is wreathed on the Helphen, which in turn is borne by the Tibia Mariner in the Mountaintops of the Giants.

While the psychopomps have different masters and different allegiances, they are essentially performing the same role, and drawing on the power of the same world.

The spirit realm. I have already discussed how the Ghostflame, while often associated with the Deathbirds, is actually more an intrinsic part of all dead and all spirits, hence why it can be summoned via Grave Violet, which has grown from carrion. This also explains why Ghostflame is associated with Those Who Live in Death, necromancy and the Helphen's Steeple.

As in the real world, it seems as if all funerary rites, whether connected to the Erdtree, Those Who Live in Death or anything else, draw upon prior traditions. And why shouldn't they? They all ultimately deal with the same subject matter, and the same grander concepts of death.

⁴ "Elden Ring Lore: The Helphen" - Crunchy



Chapter 2: The Time Before the Erdtree

Following the fracturing of the One Great, the first real species that we hear of having an effect on the timeline are the ancient dragons. To me, they are in some ways analogous to the real world dinosaurs. They're titanic and primal reptilian beasts that ruled the world in a time long before the arrival of mankind.

We know that this was a prehistoric civilization thanks to the Dragoncrest Shield Talisman, which reads:

"The ancient dragons, who ruled in the prehistoric era before the Erdtree, would protect their lord as a wall of living rock."
- Dragoncrest Shield Talisman

"Prehistoric" here refers to a historical era that existed prior to literary civilization. This is clearly an era that far precedes the age of the Erdtree. Look closer though. The talisman states that the ancient dragons *ruled* in the time before the Erdtree. Indeed it appears that the ancient dragons were the first instruments of the Greater Will. The main source for this is Placidusax's remembrance, which reads:

"The Dragonlord whose seat lies at the heart of the storm beyond time is said to have been Elden Lord in the age before the Erdtree. Once his god was fled, the lord continued to await its return."
- Remembrance of the Dragonlord



Grace Given

Placidusax was an Elden Lord, the position that would later be held by Godfrey, Radagon and then, potentially, ourselves. Elden Lord isn't just a generic title for a lord of any outer god, in other words. It is a specific title for a lord associated with the Greater Will and the Elden Ring.

Within this, we begin to see a pattern, a template for each Order. Again, there is a god, an Elden Lord and the Elden Ring. The form of the latter determines the nature of Order. Indeed, within Farum Azula, the capital of the dragons' society, we find that depiction of the Elden Ring. The Elden Ring portrayed, however, is a far cry from the refined form of the Golden Order, covered with chaotic roots engulfing its form. The impression given is of a Primal Order for this primeval age of the dragons.

One of *Elden Ring's* greatest design choices is the clear delineation between the ancient dragons and their lesser mortal kin, the modern dragons. Modern dragons, like Agheel, do appear to be more animalistic in nature, akin to the drakes of *Dark Souls*. Bipedal and wild, rather than having a civilization they have nesting grounds, all of which implies a sort of devolution from their superior ancient ancestors. (Returning to the dinosaur analogy, the modern dragons even have a certain feathery quality, making one think of the birds of the real world, which of course are the modern descendants of winged dinosaurs.)

The main defining feature of the ancient dragons, however, the facet that their lesser kin lack, are the Gravel Stone scales. In a manner that's reminiscent of the lore of *Dark Souls*, it is these scales that give ancient dragons their immortality. We learn this via the Dragonscale Blade:

"A weapon made by sharpening a Gravel Stone scale, thought to be the source of ancient dragon immortality, into an unclouded blade." - Dragonscale Blade

The immortality granted by the scales may be a result of the stone's manipulation of time. The Ancient Dragon Smithing Stone reads:

"Smithing stone made by polishing a golden Gravel Stone. A scale of the Ancient Dragonlord, and hidden treasure of Farum Azula... The Ancient Dragonlord's seat is said to lie beyond time. This stone lightly twists time, allowing the creation of a weapon capable of slaying a god."
- Ancient Dragon Smithing Stone

While this item description only refers to the Dragonlord, i.e. Placidusax, I believe that we can extend it to all Gravel Stones.

Being able to twist time might explain the dragons' immortality. It begs the question: What if the stones mean that the dragons do not really exist in time as we do? Perhaps, like Farum Azula, they exist beyond time and thus never actually age, a position that in effect makes them immortal.

Being actual stone, the strength of the ancient dragons' stone scales is evidently



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legendary. In time, dragons would come to represent the idea of protection itself, as we learn from any of the dragon talismans:

“And so it is that the shape of the dragon has become symbolic of all manner of protections.” - Dragoncrest Shield Talisman

The four named ancient dragons we come across are Fortissax, Lannseax, Placidusax and Gransax¹. These names are Latin derivatives and thus we can translate them as follows: Fortissax the Strong, Gransax the Large, Lannseax the Bearer of the Lance and Placidusax the Calm or Peaceful.

I think this is fitting in each case. Fortissax is mighty, Lannseax does bear her lance or glaive, Gransax is undeniably massive and Placidusax is becalmed when we first meet him. However, it is the second part that is of interest to me: “sax”, which could be translated as “stone”. I think this is correct, because the description of Fortissax’s Lightning Spear appears to translate this in the same way: *forti sax*, “mightiest boulderstone.”

With the basic forms of the majestic dragons discussed, I want to touch upon their Elden Lord and god. Placidusax is obviously a being far greater than the rest of his kin. He is so strongly connected to the power of the Elden Ring that he breathes golden fire, as we learn via the

Placidusax’s Ruin item description – and as we are able to witness first hand in his fight with us.

Those astute enough will recognize that there is one other being who can breathe golden fire: the Elden Beast itself, which also has a sort of draconic form.

Now, this could just be an indicator that Placidusax has a close relationship with the Elden Ring, and thus its powers have been imparted to him. However, it could be a hint at how the Elden Ring took special care in molding these beings in particular.

Something else to note: If you look closely enough at Placidusax’s wounds and the fleshy skin therein, you can’t help

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Grace Given

but notice that it too is gold in color². To me, this all suggests that the dragons have a far closer relationship to the Elden Ring and Elden Beast than any other life-forms, and that this is particularly true of Placidusax.

Alongside Placidusax’s ability to bend time, he also once had at least four heads, as seen by his neck wounds and the depiction on the Old Lord’s Talisman. I believe this is a reference to Tiamat, the Mesopotamian goddess of the sea and the symbol of primordial creation.

With more ancient depictions of Tiamat, the imagery doesn’t match up quite as well, since Tiamat often appears as a serpentine hippogriff creature. However, thanks to Dungeons and Dragons in the 1970s, Tiamat was reborn as the multi-headed dragon we all know and love, and it’s this depiction which *Elden Ring* seems to be drawing on.

Linking Placidusax to Tiamat is a fascinating connection to ponder. Tiamat is an important figure in Mesopotamian mythology. She creates a number of beasts including dragons and serpents (note that in D&D mythology she is directly the mother of dragons). This fits in with Placidusax being the lord of the dragons. Perhaps it even suggests that Placidusax was the first of his kind and birthed the others through coupling with the enigmatic god he is consort to.

If we look at the wording found in the Dragon King’s Cragblade, we could even suppose that Placidusax was the first to summon the lightning, for the blade’s item description reads as follows:

*“Piercing Gravel Stone sword containing primeval lightning.”
- Dragon King’s Cragblade*

What is clear is that Placidusax is a very ancient being, most likely the oldest living creature that we encounter during our journey, and potentially the progenitor of all draconic life.

Let us now try and address the god mentioned in Placidusax’s remembrance, for there is no other mention of this god in the lore. This god is presumably comparable to Marika, a vessel god of the Greater Will, supported by its Elden Lord, Placidusax.

Let us try and relate this to Tiamat once more. In mythology, she had a husband known as Abzu. Abzu is the Sumerian god of the deep sea – of the abyss, the primeval sea below the underworld.

In the Enuma Elish, a Babylonian epic, Tiamat and her husband are representative of the overland sea and the deep sea respectively. The two mate by mixing their waters – before both are murdered by their children who overthrow them. In all the mythologies in which they appear, both are seen as the primordial gods who bore the first generation of deities.

¹ Reddit comment by u/SnooPeppers9223 from post “The Uncanny Naming Convention of Elden Ring’s Lightning Dragons?”: bit.ly/44HhM0V

² “Elden Ring - A horrible nightmare” - Zullie the Witch



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Given Placidusax's association with creation and early chaotic life, it is fair to assume that this missing god might have taken a similar form. Ultimately, then, they will have been a god representative of chaotic primordial life, much like their Elden Lord.

However, Lokey, my friend and the author of *Abyssal Archive*, has suggested that the female figure depicted in Farum Azula surrounded by three wolves could be the god to which Placidusax was once wed. This certainly makes a kind of sense, given the statue's place of pride in Maliketh's arena, where it sits directly below the depiction of the Elden Ring it would have once borne. The wolves that surround the maiden could also be symbolic of the beasts that this god once ruled over.

And this neatly takes us into our next subject, where we will discuss the other constituent members of Farum Azula society. These are the Beastmen.

THE BEASTMEN

Beastmen are a race of sentient beings, but they weren't always this way. Prior to gaining intelligence and standing upright, the implication is that they were just beasts. There are a couple of instances showing connections between regular non-sentient animals and the Beastmen. For example, in Groveside Cave we find a pack of wolves

that is seemingly being led by a Beastman of Farum Azula. Together they have slaughtered the soldiers who were originally here, and taken up residence in their place.

As pointed out to me by Lokey in our discussion regarding this subject, there is another instance of a Beastman *pack*, so to speak. This one's in Dragonbarrow Cave, a cave filled with a Runebear and another pack of wolves. Once again, all are seemingly led by a pair of Beastmen.

How did these Beastmen get there? Perhaps they had fallen into the cave with the rubble and formed a new pack. Regardless of the specific reasons, it does suggest a certain kinship between the wolves and the Beastmen.

One can also observe something fascinating upon first entering Farum Azula. Some of the Beastmen here seem to be reverting to their prior bestial behaviours, crawling on their hands and knees and eating off the ground as if this was actually their natural state of being³.

My conclusion, therefore, is that the Beastmen are evolved, sentient variants of regular animals such as wolves, lions, and horses. We find different types of animal skulls in the Farum Azula burial sites that match up with lions and horses. The undead Beastmen have skulls that resemble those of wolves, for example, with a long snout. Meanwhile, the skeletons of the Beastmen found bound to the columns are very much



Grace Given

lion-esque in nature. Any living Beastmen we encounter are a little more amorphous, however, suggesting that, over time, the current Beastman appearance has taken shape following interbreeding.

The theory that the Beastmen evolved from non-sentient animals is supported by the Bestial Vitality incantation, which reads:

"Having gained intelligence, the beasts must have felt how their wildness slipped away as civilization took hold." - Bestial Vitality

This process of transformation from beast into a sentient species is an event well documented in a couple of other items, most notably the Cinquedea, which reads:

"The design celebrates a beast's five fingers, symbolic of the intelligence once granted upon their kind." - Cinquedea

Cinquedea itself means five fingers, describing the width of the blade at the guard, and *Elden Ring* makes this more literal by having five fingers inscribed upon the blade. Indeed the name, width and design are all representative of the five fingers, the symbolic representation of their intelligence. (It works as a symbol due to the opposable thumbs that have aided humans with tool use, so it's the hand that serves as a shorthand for all that separates this intelligent bipedal race from its non-sentient ancestors.) We will revisit this later when we look at the clergy of the Beastmen. For now, the fact that this symbolism is associated with a blade wielded by the

religious arm of Beastmen society really shows how important this formative event still is. It's their genesis – the beginning of their story as a people.

The method by which the Beastmen gained intelligence is described in an unusual fashion, in my opinion. Let us once again reexamine the Cinquedea, which says: "the intelligence once granted upon their kind." It wasn't a result of natural evolution.

When we talk about the advent of intelligence in animals, I often think of our ancestors picking up the tool as one of the first indicators of our own ascension. While evolution is, by its definition, a gradual, incremental process, there is a fascinating interpretation of such a pivotal moment in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

2001: A Space Odyssey is science fiction on a vast canvas. It's an aeon-hopping narrative that charts humanity's advancement from the early hominids to a race that is taking its first steps beyond its home planet. But what makes this story more than just a dispassionate appraisal of our history is the fact that each stage of human advancement is marked by contact with a cosmic force, represented by the film's stark black monoliths.

The implication is that each encounter with these monoliths somehow gives humanity the knowledge necessary to ascend to the next level of consciousness. After a tribe of hominids comes into contact

³ "Elden Ring Archaeology: Farum Azula and the Dawn of Unalloyed Gold" - The Tarnished Archaeologist



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with one of these monoliths in the film's opening sequence, one of their number, Moon-Watcher, learns how to wield the first weapon – a bone that is used as a cudgel to drive a rival group from a watering hole. The film then skips forward to show the human race with a base on the moon and an orbiting hotel – heavily implying this alien influence was responsible for granting humanity the first crucial elements of intelligence.

Now, while I am not suggesting that the Beastmen of *Elden Ring* encountered a monolith, I believe the wording in the Cinqueada likewise suggests that intelligence was seeded in a way that would result in the Beastmen. And I think this ties in with the wording of Besital Vitality, which again suggests that the beasts were aware of this transition from mere beast to intelligent life form, something that wouldn't make sense if this had all been a gradual evolutionary process.

This now brings us to the big question. If intelligence was granted to the Beastmen, which forces were responsible for it?

This is where we must enter the territory of speculation. For me, the most likely culprits for this act were the lords of the day, the prior guardians of Order and the Elden Ring: the dragons.

It is clear that there was a sort of relationship formed between the dragons and the beasts, as indicated by the statues found throughout Farum Azula, and it

was one of servitude. As we have already discussed, Placidusax was Elden Lord and alongside his god they ruled over this era.

There is an engraving found in Maliketh's arena that displays the Elden Ring but with many more rings and an overall feral appearance, suggesting that the dragon civilization was once the capital of Order, as Leyndell would become later.

Thus it would make sense if intelligence was granted to the beasts by the dragon god or Elden Lord, or at least the Elden Ring. As we have already noted, the idea of intelligence is closely linked with Beastmen clergy, via the Cinqueada's design. Likewise we see statues of what appear to be Beast Clergymen worshiping dragons. Would it not make sense, then, if the bestial clergy and religion is built around the advent of their intelligence as a whole? This would make sense of the celebratory Cinqueada and the Beastmen's worship of the dragon masters, to whom they attribute the granting of their intelligence.

So yes, this is speculation, but I do believe it was most likely Placidusax's god consort, the then bearer of the Elden Ring, who granted beasts intelligence. If not them, then it is more or less certain to me that the Greater Will and Elden Ring are ultimately responsible for it. And, given the dragons were the chosen vessel for both at the time, they would still have received the credit for this event.



Grace Given

It is clear that there was a sort of relationship formed between the dragons and the beasts, as indicated by the statues found throughout Farum Azula, and it was one of servitude.

There is another question here. As we have discussed earlier, there is some evidence to show that certain Beastmen were reverting to their earlier nature. What could be causing that?

We find a reference to this resurfacing of bestial nature in the lore of Gurranq, seen in the Beast Claw incantation description, which reads:

"This incantation represents the fury of Gurranq, his bestial nature returned, as much as it does his restless agitation." - *Beast Claw*

There is a sense here that Gurranq's true nature is returning, suggesting again that an external force was responsible for his intelligence. Perhaps his reversion makes sense if we consider that he is a Shadow to Queen Marika, and Queen Marika's Order has been shattered.

Here it might be useful to take a moment to quickly discuss the Shadows

of the Empyrean, as I do believe it is a helpful illustration of the idea of an outside influence imposing intelligence on a being. Ranni, in her often-quoted speech, gives us a brief insight into how a Shadowbound Beast comes into being:

"I was once an Empyrean. Of the demigods, only I, Miquella, and Malenia could claim that title. Each of us was chosen by our own Two Fingers, as a candidate to succeed Queen Marika, to become the new god of the coming age. Which is when I received Blaidd. In the form of a vassal tailored for an Empyrean."

- *Ranni the Witch*

This describes the process by which Empyreans are granted their Shadowbound Beasts from the Two Fingers, themselves vassals of the higher power known as the Greater Will. I therefore believe that the power of the Greater Will, or Elden Ring, specifically tailors these beasts so that they are useful henchmen for their elected Empyrean. This gives us some precedent for beasts being molded, being tailored, by outside forces.

In regards to the Beastmen, I do believe we see them reverting to their bestial ways, again no doubt as a result of the collapse of their civilization, god and order. And it suggests an interesting parallel. If the dragons are somewhat analogous to the dinosaurs, then we could see the evolution of Beastmen society as being analogous to prehistoric man.



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WRATH VS. WISDOM

This ultimately brings me to the central conundrum regarding the Beastmen, the interlinked yet oppositional themes of bestial nature and wisdom.

So let's start with the most basic components of beasts. And I mean component in the most literal sense, as in *Elden Ring* we have access to all sorts of ingredients for crafting and alchemy, including bodily remains of beasts we have killed. One such crafting component is the Beast Liver, which reads:

"The fresh liver of a beast; a luscious fruit of life." - Beast Liver

The "fruit of life"! So, clearly, we are already looking at an allusion towards life and vitality – unsurprisingly, perhaps, since, in the real world, wild animals are the most common shorthand for these ideas in myth and symbolism.

Then we get the Beast Blood, which reads:

"Fresh beast blood, glinting with gold... This glimmering blood never rots or decays." - Beast Blood

Whilst less directly a reference to vitality, it ties into the same themes. The "blood never rots or decays," suggesting the supernatural power of lively vigor found within a beast's blood. We also know that gold is associated with the concept of life, as we can very much see from the greatest

lore item in the game, the Albinauric Bloodclot, which makes it clear that artificial life-forms are seen as impure because they lack the grace of gold – a subject we discuss in more detail in Chapter 7.

The Beast Blood stands in stark contrast to its pale cousin. Where the latter represents silver, artificiality and the absence of grace, Beast Blood represents gold, grace, natural life and vitality. These concepts refer to the beast in its natural state and form – they speak of the wolf, the lion, the bear, animals that are vicious and uncompromising, full of life and true to their nature. Elsewhere, the description of the Clawmark Seal speaks of Gurranq's "wrath," and in tandem with the Bestial Claw incantation describing Gurranq's bestial nature returning, we can see wrath and violence as another bestial trait.

The wrathful aspect of the beasts' nature is easy to understand. Humans behave in a civilized manner, while those in touch with their primitive bestial side are more likely to succumb to acts of great violence or lust. This oppositional approach to civilization and beastliness is well illustrated by the Ruler's Mask item description⁴ which reads:

"Such a mask illustrates the qualities of an ideal lord: chiefly, wise and possessing a certain defanged geniality. One at the center of society often finds these qualities most expedient." - Ruler's Mask



Grace Given

The implication here is clear. Defanged behavior – poise, wisdom and their like – is aligned with civilization. Fanged behavior – violence and animalistic urges – is associated with beasts. And yet, confusingly, beasts within *Elden Ring* are used to represent both wisdom and animalistic power.

Let's take Serosh, for example. He's a beast himself, yet one firmly associated with wisdom and advice. One mention we get of Serosh is via the Beastclaw Greathammer, which reads as follows:

"Greathammer with a striking end modeled to resemble five beastly claws. The black nails protruding from golden fur are said to represent Serosh, Lord of Beasts, who went on to become King Godfrey's Regent." - Beastclaw Greathammer

Here we have a hammer modeled on Serosh that makes reference to the Five Fingers, or claws, of intelligence. Furthermore we find the following described in the Golden Beast Crest Shield, which reads:

"The beast depicted is Serosh, aged counselor who guides the golden lineage." - Golden Beast Crest Shield

So here the mighty Serosh is described chiefly as a counselor – an advisor, valued for his wisdom rather than his physical prowess. In addition to this, as we see in the description of the

Godfrey Icon talisman, it is Serosh's presence that actually calms Godfrey's bloodlust, draining it rather than exacerbating it.

Indeed Godfrey is actually less of a beast when he is paired with Serosh, and Hoarah Loux reveals himself as a beast when he violently breaks that connection by killing Serosh with his bare hands. Yet at the moment of their ascension to sentience, the beasts clearly

struggled to come to grips with their new found consciousness and this is a fascinating dichotomy, I discussed the matter with Lokey, author of *Abyssal Archive*, in great detail.

Lokey pointed out the description of Bernahl's helmet, which reads:



⁴ "The Color Theory of Elden Ring | Elden Ring Lore" - Hawkshaw



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“The beasts, their eyes and ears covered, represent an oath: ‘See nothing, hear nothing, doubt nothing, and carry on, along the path set in stone.’ - Beast Champion Helm

This may be alluding to the mantra of “see no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil” or a wilful blindness to everything outside of your immediate aim.

So maybe there is less of a contradiction than one might initially believe. Yes, there is a wisdom to beasts, but thematically it still ties in with what we know of their baser behaviors. It’s a straightforward wisdom that places you on a single path, but blinds you to the greater mysteries and questions of life and your actions.

Regardless of what it means, or how it came to pass, the advent of intelligence clearly changed the Beastmen forever. They let go of the wild power and had to come to terms with their intelligence. And with that idea in mind, I want to revisit the wording of Bestial Vitality once again.

“Having gained intelligence, the beasts must have felt how their wildness slipped away as civilization took hold.” - Bestial Vitality

The wording to me here suggests a sort of panic, as if the beasts could feel themselves being stripped of their true natures in real time. And no wonder. They are left almost naked, defenseless, and newly conscious of the world and of this fact.

With this in mind, Lokey would say the following on the beasts loss of their innate wildness:

“We see the idea that as they develop a culture/religion, they also see their innate qualities as wild beasts (superior natural healing) decline now that they can rely on cities and tools for protection... Sort of a tradeoff. When you have only yourself, your body steps up to the challenge. But when you have all these add-ons to fall back on, your body slacks. And slowly we evolve to be almost dependent on those trinkets. Until they are ripped away, then instinct takes over and we fall back on old habits. Like the beastmen who fell from FA crumbling and now hide in caves leading wolf packs.” - Lokey, author of Abyssal Archive

This is a very insightful nuance that I hadn’t caught. In essence, the Beastmen built a civilization not because they could, but rather because they had to in order to survive. Modern humans are extremely fragile compared to some of the more powerful predators that exist in nature. But because we have walls, tools and weapons, we are able to look beyond our lack of animal strength. Likewise in *Elden Ring*, we have the Beastmen who have felt their wildness fall away – and thus lost their animalistic power, rage and violence. And so we see them build walls, weapons and shields. And likewise, when we see that Gurrang has his wildness





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returning to him once more, he becomes more associated with the claw once again.

This could help explain the almost obsessive relationship Beastmen society has with death. Farum Azula, the heart of their civilization, is one giant mausoleum with Beastmen bodies on display everywhere – in ornate burials, posed dramatically against columns and embedded in the floor and walls. It's even more stark in the vicinity of Bestial Sanctum, clearly a region that was once part of the Beastman society. Here we find pillars covering the hillside, all embedded with the remains of Beastmen.

All sentient species need to deal with the terrifying specter of death; in the real world, many religions deal with death and the question of what comes next. In the context of *Elden Ring*, this makes sense to me. Moving from a predatory animalistic race to a more intelligent species would have brought death into terrifying focus for the Beastmen. No doubt this explains the veneration of their dead that we see throughout Farum Azula.

So to summarize: Beastmen in an era long past were once regular beasts. They were granted intelligence by a higher being, an event still memorialized by the Bestial Clergy of which Gurrang was once a member, and an event they attribute to the dragons whom they would serve. It is their gift of intelligence, their worship of

the dragons and their focus on death that would form the pillars of their religious and cultural ideals.

With that said, let us now look at the evolution of beast society through this prehistoric era.

FARUM AZULA

A concept that was introduced to me by Tarnished Archaeologist, in their “Elden Ring Archaeology: Farum Azula and the Dawn of Unalloyed Gold” lore video, is that the environmental design of Farum Azula can be compared to real world archaeology.

In doing so we can trace the various prehistoric eras of the Beastmen as they follow a similar trajectory as our own human prehistory.

First of all, let's clarify why we are calling this prehistory. Prehistory, in the real world, is the period of human history that took place before the advent of written records. Prehistory is generally marked by three main ages, though there are various sub-periods within each of these. These are the Stone Age, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age – all named for the materials used for tools and weapons during that period. This is subject to great variation from one culture to the next, but it is a good framework to employ in order to begin to understand this period of history.



Grace Given

Only one civilization in *Elden Ring* could be considered part of prehistory. The dragon civilization is clearly situated early on in the timeline, according to the Dragoncrest Shield Talisman, which places it before the Age of the Erdtree, and the shield refers to it, accordingly, as “prehistoric”.

As such, given that the Beastmen society is intimately tied to the dragons, we could feasibly infer that their society is also one that emerged during prehistory. Thematically this makes perfect sense, since we are talking about a group of animals evolving into an upright, intelligent species, representing a clear analogy to our own human evolution and development.

And interestingly, we can then observe the Beastmen society passing through the three major ages of human prehistory. First we can see the Stone Age, thanks to the description of Bestial Sling which reads:

“It is said that in the time before the Erdtree, stones were the first weapons of the beasts who had gained intelligence.”

- *Bestial Sling*

Again: “Stones were the first weapons of the beasts who had gained intelligence”, neatly matching with human prehistory in which humans used basic stone tools and weapons in the earliest Stone Age.

Then we move to the piece of evidence first presented by Tarnished Archaeologist, who highlighted archaeological evidence that could align the Beastmen with the

real-world Chalcolithic Era⁵.

The Chalcolithic Era is also known as the Copper Age, and is generally seen as a transitional period between the Neolithic and Bronze Age.

This is a period in history when humans had not yet discovered bronze alloy but had started manipulation of copper.

Tarnished Archaeologist identifies this era in the stratigraphy of Farum Azula, via their burial practices. Some of the beast burials are more or less exact replicas of the Varna burials, a chalcolithic burial site in Bulgaria.

Finally we move into the Iron Age when we consider the current weaponry of the Beastmen. Take the Beastman's Cleaver:

“Curved greatsword of colossal size forged of dull iron and wielded by the beastmen of Farum Azula.” - Beastman's Cleaver

Given that the Beastmen society is intimately tied to the dragons, we could feasibly infer that their society is also one that emerged during prehistory.



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So with a weapon forged of dull iron, the path through Beastmen prehistory is complete, reinforcing the fact that this likely is the very first or one of the first cultures to develop in the history of the Lands Between. Where the other cultures use more advanced steel weapons that would usually be associated with later ancient history, Farum Azula is a culture which used the tools associated with prehistory: stone, copper and iron.

Farum Azula was clearly not built to be a floating city. Rather it was once situated in the Lands Between before being wrenched from it. This is made all the clearer by the segments of earth and trees still attached to its base.

We can tell this because some of this civilization still remains on Earth, namely the Bestial Sanctum in Caelid. The Bestial Sanctum is not only where Gurranq, a beast clergyman of this society, resides but it also shares the exact same architectural hallmarks of Farum Azula. It has the same burials, the same lion iconography and the same building exteriors.

The final link is the Site of Grace just south of the Bestial Sanctum, which is called Farum Greatbridge. This bridge, that leads to the Bestial Sanctum, is of Farum Azula design suggesting that Farum Azula was once located in the massive crater west of Caelid and east of Liurnia.

With that said, let us try now and understand the structure and culture of this society.

While the regular Beastmen seem to make up the vast majority of this society, there are other species and animals that also belong to it. At the very top of this society are the dragons, clearly worshiped by the Beastmen clergy. We have already discussed these mighty beings, but in short not only are they powerful but also incredibly intelligent. We can see in Lansseax's actions, wherein dragons had the ability to appear as human and led the Dragon Cult of Leyndell:

"Lansseax was the sister of Fortissax. It is said that she took the form of a human to commune with the knights as a priestess of the ancient dragon cult." - Lansseax's Glaive

In fact Farum Azula, the crowning achievement of the Beastmen society, seems to have been built in honor of a particular dragon, as the Azula Beastman Ashes reads:

"Spirits of beastmen from doomed Farum Azula, the slowly crumbling ruins in the skies. These ruins are said to be the remains of a giant mausoleum enshrining an ancient dragon, guarded by chosen beastmen who wield weapons clad in lightning." - Azula Beastman Ashes

Again this very much reinforces the subservience of Beastmen within their society. Not only is the whole of Farum Azula built in honor of a dragon but





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Beastmen are chosen guards, meaning they are honor guards in service of the dragons.

This description also alludes to the fact that these chosen Beastmen wield lightning clad weapons, and we do see some Beastmen in Farum Azula coating their weapons in lightning, specifically the red lightning of the dragons. Lightning, in other words, does seem to be a staple of those connected to this society, from the dragons, to the hawks to the Beastmen themselves.

I would argue that the command over lightning originates from Placidusax himself, not only because his command over lightning is beyond that of any other dragon (he is able to take the form of a literal storm cloud), but also because the Dragon King's Cragblade describes his lightning as "primeval".

When Placidusax uses his "nuke" attack, we see him raise a lightning stake before slamming it into the ground. What's interesting here is that this stake is the exact same form as the Bolt of Gransax, as if this weapon that channels lightning is modeled on Placidusax's innate control over the storm.

My point in highlighting this connection between dragons and the storm is that I want you to bear it in mind when we speak of the next species of beast that makes up this society: the hawks.



While most people will be familiar with the grafted Warhawks of Stormveil, we actually find these creatures in a more natural form in Farum Azula, living in harmony with the dragons here. It is the first piece of evidence that the Stormhawks originate from this bestial dragon society. To reinforce the fact these birds are very much part of this society, we can find bird iconography in the walls of Farum Azula and adorning the Clawmark Seal, a seal of the Beastmen clergy.

We also know that the hawks are closely aligned with the storm, as the Stormhawk Feather reads:

"A feather from a hawk that lived as one with the storms." - Stormhawk Feather

This also seems to be in line with what we see of Stormveil itself, a place where the storms also rage.

Stormhawks also have a strong presence on the Stormveil mount, a relationship described by the description of the Stormhawk King, which reads:



Grace Given

"Ashes of a hawk revered by all others as sovereign back in the days when Stormveil's winds still raged like no other. This ancient monarch is proud however, refusing to answer anyone's summons."

- Stormhawk King

The two places in which we find Stormhawks are very much aligned with the storms as we might expect. This again underlines the close relation between hawks and storms, a relationship well illustrated by the Stormhawk Axe:

"Battle axe designed to resemble a hawk, with its wings comprising the blade. Signature weapon of warriors who strive to remain one with the storm, despite being so far from their place of birth. Their hearts are proud, and thereby easily undone." - Stormhawk Axe

This is a weapon forged in honor of these hawks, and its skill summons the power of storms and lightning.

While most people will be familiar with the grafted Warhawks of Stormveil, we actually find these creatures in a more natural form in Farum Azula.

As a result of all this, I suspect that the Stormhawks are not just aligned with the dragons, but rather they are actually descendants of them. I believe this would explain why the hawks are so innately linked to the storms.

Why do I believe this?

Again we enter the territory of speculation, but just as I have suspected that the dragons are analogous to our real-world dinosaurs, I believe it would make sense if their descendants were connected to our birds, who have evolved from the winged dinosaurs. And if the hawks are in fact descended from the dragons, it would explain why the two species share the same connection to the storm.

Now, the examples of the Stormhawk King and Serosh are very interesting here, because Serosh is described to be a "Lord of Beasts" and Stormhawk King was considered as a monarch by all other hawks. While it is clear that the dragons were the ruling force – and almost gods – of the early Beastman era, this doesn't mean that there weren't lords among the beasts themselves. Serosh and the Stormhawk King seem to be leaders in their own right.

So for whatever reason the dragon civilization fell, but in a way it lived on through iconography and ideals that were picked up by Godfrey and his conquests. As I have previously said, Farum Azula clearly once existed on the ground in the Lands



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Between and thus it makes perfect sense that aspects of this society would bleed out into different regions. Their descendants, modern dragons, take residence in Dragonbarrow and on the Mountaintops of the Giants, and more specifically, we get a nexus of Farum Azula history at Stormveil. But this is a subject which we will discuss later on.

THE BEAST WITHIN

The final constituent member of this society that I want to talk about is humanity. To begin with, we have the various human scenes depicted in the stonework all throughout Farum Azula, and while I could just write this off as generic artistic filler, I don't think that's ever a wise approach in a FromSoftware game.

To explain these scenes, many people point to the fact that dragons are able to take human form, something we highlighted earlier via Lansseax's Glaive. However, Lansseax taking human form is a response to a specific situation – i.e. the establishment of the Dragon Cult in Leyndell. Furthermore, there is a specific reference to humans that lived among the dragons, via the Draconian character appearance template, the description of which reads:

*“The stony face of the people of the ancient dragons, among whom life is typically short.”
- Draconian character appearance template*

There is a lot of interesting lore here to consider. Firstly, their lives being typically short would make sense if these people were among the first humans, as the human lifespan has grown longer over time. So perhaps the shorter lifespan is a reference to this being a form of early man. I would suggest that these Draconian humans are the ones who lived among the dragon civilization and are, as a result, the humans who are depicted in the various art of Farum Azula.

We could just leave it at that and say that humans at some point emerged and joined the main civilization at the time. However, there is a wilder, yet far more interesting suggestion to be made here – that humans evolved from Beastmen.

This idea was first brought to my attention by YouTuber Dark Tark, a content creator known for comedic explorations of Elden Ring. In a video on Farum Azula they made the excellent observation that the Skeletal Beastmen of Farum Azula drop *human* Bone Shards.

Admittedly, these could just be a drop, representing that the Beastmen eat or kill humans. But I don't think so, since the description of the Human Bone Shard specifically states that these are “found by hunting Those Who Live in Death” and



Grace Given

Given that Farum Azula was once earthbound, was the Sun Realm a successor kingdom built by Beastmen and their human descendants? Food for thought.

it is only from the undead Beastmen we get them. This suggests in turn that these *Human* Bone Shards are breaking away from the body of the Beastmen themselves.

We have already paralleled Beastmen evolution with the human evolution of the real world, so why don't we go all the way? Arguing that humans are descendants of Beastmen makes even more sense of this parallel because Beastmen are to humans what the early hominids are to us. (This would solve a lot of little mysteries, such as the matter of why Deathroot seems to affect Beastmen in the exact same way that it affects humans.)

There is a further connection for those seeking to link the civilizations of man and Beastman that comes in the form of a particular shield: the Sun Realm Shield. We can find this shield in the possession of two enemies. The first is the Skeletal Soldier and the second is the Skeletal Beastman. Both of these enemies are fully

modeled holding this shield, reinforcing it as an intentional drop.

The description of this shield reads:

*“Shield of honor depicting a city crowned by the sun. It has seen better days. Much like the wear upon the shield, the Seat of the Sun is long faded away.”
- Sun Realm Shield*

I had long believed that this “Seat of the Sun” was either a clever nod to Anor Londo, or a reference to Leyndell in the days when the light of the early Erdtree was brighter – a possibility I felt was more likely given that we find lots of these Skeletal Soldiers in the graveyards surrounding the capital.

Yet reassessing the potential evolutionary link between Beastman and man, is it possible that this is another sign of a shared heritage? Is it possible that Farum Azula is the Sun Realm? Or, given that Farum Azula was once earthbound, was the Sun Realm a successor kingdom built by Beastmen and their human descendants?

This is all just speculation but it provides some interesting food for thought. And if man is descended from beast, then it adds greater weight to what we see of men like Hoarah Loux, and the difference between the Age of the Crucible and the Age of the Golden Order.

Revisiting that description of the Ruler's Mask, modern civilization is essentially a defanging process, a curbing of the things



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that connect man to beast. Things like violence, wildness and animalistic lust.

One of the item descriptions that Hawkshaw highlights in their lore video “The Color Theory of Elden Ring” is the item Turtle Neck Meat. In the current version of the game it has a very generic description, but back in version 1.00 of the game it would have said the following:

“Turtle is said to boost virility, but none in the Lands Between seem to have much appetite for it these days. In Lands Between, the urge to reproduce has waned long ago.”
- Turtle Neck Meat, v 1.00

Now, while this waning “urge to reproduce” may be tied to the deathless state of the world, or the role the Erdtree plays in providing life, we can also see it following a pattern of more basic instincts and wildness being suppressed as civilization has advanced. This is clearly seen in the examples of the Omen and Misbegotten, two species very wild and animalistic in nature and appearance, who greatly suffered under the “civilized” Golden Order. Indeed even the Crucible Knights, once great heroes of Order – are seen as too chaotic and wild, and are sidelined as ideas of civilization are codified – a point well made by the Crucible Gauntlets.

Yet the relationship between beasts and champions is clearly still venerated in some quarters. Bernahl’s armor is covered

head-to-toe in beasts, and reads as follows:

“Worn by Bernahl the Recusant. Beasts are drawn to champions, and to lords. And this armor befits a champion worthy of becoming a lord. And that is what Bernahl was. Until his maiden threw herself into the fire.” - Beast Champion Armor

Bernahl was himself almost a lord, and the beast symbolism may very well be straightforward. Beasts are strong, violent and brave much like Bernahl himself – and others like Godfrey, whose coat of arms is that of a lion rampant.

As we had discussed earlier, the helmet of the Beast Champion set talks of a certain wilful blindness, a determination to get the blinkers on. This is an

While this waning “urge to reproduce” may be tied to the deathless state of the world, or the role the Erdtree plays in providing life, we can also see it following a pattern of more basic instincts and wildness being suppressed as civilization has advanced.



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animalistic focus on your prey or goal, and this could describe Bernahl in both his path to lord and path of blasphemy. Being like a beast means losing that human nuance, that human awareness, and focusing solely on your base instinct or goal. In terms of traits, this is very relatable to champions or heroes.

The beast within man, and the taming of it, is nowhere better illustrated than by Godfrey and Hoarah Loux. Upon taking his axe and title of first Elden Lord, Godfrey separates himself from his more bestial counterpart. When he sheds his Godfrey affectations and becomes Hoarah Loux once more, you would be hard pressed to find someone who is more beast-like, ripping and tearing with wild abandon. No weapons needed here, only the strength and savagery of a wild beast.

So while the symbolic links between violence and beastliness are easy to draw, perhaps the *beast within men* is more literal than first thought. Perhaps all humans must struggle with their Beastmen ancestry.

SHADOWBOUND BEASTS

One of the first Tarnished to reach the Roundtable is the legendary Vargram the

Raging Wolf, so named due to the signature wolf pelt that adorns his helmet. Yet there is more to his pelt than meets the eye. It is no mere bauble or affectation. It is a symbol of Vargram’s true goal.

It seems as though Vargram’s aspirations were not to claim the Elden Throne. In fact, even amongst the myriad of schemes and plots of his kin, Vargram’s aims stand out as truly unique amongst the Tarnished.

Every Emyrean, resplendent in their power and allure, is granted a dark reflection, a warrior beast without equal to enforce their will and enact their plans. These are the Shadowbound Beasts, the very Shadows of their masters, and part of their very being.

Whilst on the surface the relationship between Shadowbound Beasts and their masters may seem like a fairly straightforward subject, there are a few intricacies and nuances that I would like to explore.

So let’s begin with how these beings come to be. And let’s get the obvious point out of the way. The Shadowbound Beasts take the form of wolves, a fact confirmed by both Maliketh’s and Blaidd’s appearances, and the Raging Wolf Armor description, which reads:

“According to the old legends, wolves are the shadows of the Emyrean.”
- Raging Wolf Armor

While Maliketh is the most famous of the Shadowbound, I feel that we



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actually learn more of the life and role of his kind from Blaidd, Ranni's Shadow. Ranni herself tells of how an Emphyrean is granted their Shadow Beast:

"I was once an Emphyrean. Of the demigods, only I, Miquella, and Malenia could claim that title. Each of us was chosen by our own Two Fingers, as a candidate to succeed Queen Marika, to become the new god of the coming age. Which is when I received Blaidd. In the form of a vassal tailored for an Emphyrean."
- Ranni the Witch

This bit of dialogue is critical to our understanding of the gestation of such beings. Firstly, it makes it clear that they are granted by the Two Fingers, and Ranni's description actually goes as far as suggesting that their very form is molded by the Two Fingers. She states: "In the form of a vassal tailored for an Emphyrean." It is as if Blaidd himself was formed as he was by the Two Fingers, specifically to serve as Ranni's enforcer.

In turn, the idea that these beasts are provided to Emphyreans by the Greater Will is reinforced by what we know of Maliketh, for his remembrance reads:

"Maliketh was a shadowbound beast given to his Emphyrean. Marika's sole need of her shadow was a vessel to lock away Destined Death. Even then, she betrayed him."
- Remembrance of the Black Blade

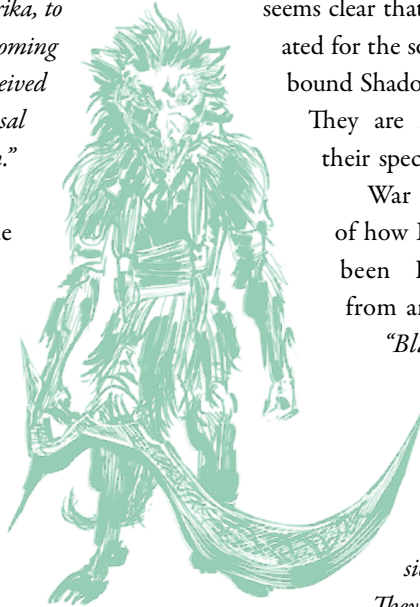
The use of the "bound" in "shadowbound" is interesting to me because, taken in combination with Ranni's dialogue, it seems clear that these are beings created for the sole purpose of being a bound Shadow of their Emphyrean. They are inexorably linked to their specific master.

War Counselor Iji speaks of how Blaidd has essentially been Ranni's companion from an early age:

"Blaidd is Lady Ranni's stepbrother. Ranni's mother, Queen Rennala, approved of him, and they played like siblings from childhood.

They were always happy to have me tag along, as well. When Lady Ranni renounced her flesh, and chose the dark path of the Emphyrean, Blaidd and I swore allegiance as vassals, but none of us will ever forget our earliest days together."
- War Counselor Iji

This shows that Ranni must have been selected by the Two Fingers very early in her life, as was most likely the case with Malenia and Miquella.



Grace Given

The term "stepbrother" is used here, and this is interesting because a similar term is used in reference to Maliketh. The description of Maliketh's Armor reads:

"Maliketh, Queen Marika's loyal half-brother, bore a blade imbued with Destined Death, and there was not one demigod who did not fear him."
- Maliketh's Armor

I mentioned before that the word "bound" interests me, and the reference to a sort of familial tie brings me back to that word choice. Because we do need to ask ourselves: Why are they referred to as step- or half-brothers?

We shouldn't take this too literally. If you would indulge me in a little bit of speculation here: Both of these terms imply that one is not necessarily a full brother, but part of an extended family that is connected by blood or circumstance. After all, the very nature of a Shadow is that it is part of you, but also distinctly separate from your physical nature. Returning again to the word "bound", I believe that when these vassals are created, they are created already connected to their Emphyrean – they are born from their Emphyrean, in a way. They are born as if they are part of them.

As such: When Blaidd has his meltdown at the end of Ranni's quest, he basically says that he could never betray Ranni *because he is part of her very being.*

To me this is why familial terms are used; I believe that these Shadows are born of the Emphyreans themselves – and in that way they are family.

Thus, I see them as being similar to the vahana of Hindu deities. Vahana are usually seen as the vehicle of their attached gods, and are essentially part of their associated deity. Like the Shadowbound of *Elden Ring*, while they may have their own behaviors and take their own actions, they are an aspect of their deity.

Take, for example, Nandi, the vahana of the god Shiva. While he is depicted as Shiva's mount, he also acts as the guardian to Shiva's domain and a guru to certain disciples. He is both bound to Shiva but also has his own individual features and powers.

To summarize, then: These Shadows are literally part of their Emphyrean. They are designed for them specifically and bound to their master.

Yet what is the purpose and nature of these beasts? How do they behave and what are their limitations?

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

If we become one of Lady Ranni's vassals, we become compatriots with Iji, Seluvis and Blaidd, and we work closely with the latter to locate the Eternal City of Nokron



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and retrieve the Fingerslayer Blade. We know already that Blaidd was created by the Two Fingers, yet Ranni has long ago sworn herself as an enemy of her Two Fingers:

“But I would not acquiesce to the Two Fingers. I stole the Rune of Death, slew mine own Empyrean flesh, casting it away. I would not be controlled by that thing The Two Fingers and I have been cursing each other ever since... And the Baleful Shadows... are their assassins.” - Ranni the Witch

So what we see here is Ranni railing against her destiny as an Empyrean. And it shows us that her Shadow, whilst a creation of the Greater Will, does have some semblance of autonomy – for the description of the Royal Greatsword, his sword, reads as follows:

“In defiance of the fate he was born to, Blaidd swore to serve no master but Ranni. As proof, the sword was imbued with a cold magic at the moment the oath was sworn.” - Royal Greatsword

So despite essentially being an instrument of the Two Fingers, Blaidd actually chose to serve his master, even as her path would bring him into conflict with his creator, and he and Iji swore themselves as Ranni’s vassals.

As a result, we see him actively pursuing her end-game in regards to bringing about the Age of Stars, despite his very nature. Yet his nature remains, no matter what Blaidd wants. And we begin to understand that, while in Blaidd’s mind

he may be Ranni’s creature, he is really no more than a tool for the Two Fingers.

Iji concisely explains the situation and simultaneously reveals the true nature of a Shadowbound:

“There is something you should know. The Two Fingers gave Blaidd to Lady Ranni, as a faithful follower. Her very shadow, incapable of treachery. But if Lady Ranni, as an Empyrean, resists being an instrument of the Two Fingers, the shadow will go mad, transforming from a follower into a horrid curse. But such is his destiny. In such matters, Blaidd’s own thoughts hold no weight. It pains me so, but he must be neutralised. For Lady Ranni’s sake.” - War Counsellor Iji

So not only are Shadows granted to help Empyreans claim godhood, but they are also the insurance policies of the Two Fingers. If an Empyrean were to make themselves an enemy of the Greater Will, to shirk off their obedience, then the Shadows would become the assassin, and slit the throat of their master.

But perhaps that is too simplistic an explanation. Does Iji in fact mean that because of the contradictory nature of Blaidd’s situation, serving a goal that is in opposition to his very purpose is paradoxical and drives him mad? I believe this is closer to the truth, though the former explanation that he is an insurance policy does a more straightforward job of illustrating the end result.



Grace Given

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Either way, what this highlights is that, despite the nature of their creation, the Shadowbound can develop their own personalities and ideals. Blaidd is loyal to Ranni, not the Two Fingers. He doesn’t understand why Iji would lock him away, for in his heart he is one-hundred percent Ranni’s man:

“Oh, it’s you... It’s me, Blaidd. Old Iji trapped me here. Told me I’d bring nought but bale to Lady Ranni. But there’s no chance that could happen. I’m part of her being. Her very shadow... I thought old Iji knew as much... Honestly, I don’t know what’s going on anymore...” - Blaidd the Half-Wolf

It’s sad watching the deterioration of Blaidd, because despite his heart, he is ultimately a creation of the Fingers,

and he does appear to succumb to his conflicting reality before throwing himself at us in a rage. And, in doing so, showing that the true masters of the Shadowbound are their Two Fingers.

Blaidd’s fate shows the ultimate nature of these beasts, then. While real independent beings, the Two Fingers are still their creators and as such can compel them to such drastic action.

Or did he resist? Was it just that he was driven to madness by the blades of the Black Knives? For after we tell Iji of Blaidd’s death, it almost seems to be implied that Iji was wrong about his assumptions regarding Blaidd’s nature. Furthermore, Ranni says the following of Blaidd:

“Even when I turned my back upon the Two Fingers. Blaidd remained my loyal ally. Heh. Though he was created a vassal for an Empyrean, He was a colossal failure, on the part of the Two Fingers.” - Ranni the Witch

At the very least it shows that the Two Fingers had not anticipated that a Shadowbound would have remained loyal to a traitor for as long as he did. And even at the very end Blaidd rails against his fate, professing his loyalty to his dearest Ranni.

And I do think that Ranni is right in a way, for even if his paradoxical role caught up with him eventually, Blaidd did serve Ranni’s rebellion against the fingers for some time, showing that he was ultimately a failure on the part of the Two Fingers.



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Now that we have covered the creation and purpose of these beasts, I want to talk about their mortality.

If you decide to do the unthinkable and strike Blaidd while he is in his friendly state, you can find out more about his true nature. Upon his death he makes a rather ominous remark:

“You’re... you’re strong of arm. But ask yourself... What harm can be done... to a shadow?” - Blaidd the Half-Wolf

Following this, should you quit out of the game and then reload it, Blaidd respawns and gives you a nice, “I told you so”:

“Didn’t I say? No harm can befall a shadow.” - Blaidd the Half-Wolf

This line implies that Shadows may not so easily die in the normal corporeal sense, and it even goes as far to suggest that Gurranq can exist in two locations wholly independently – for even after you kill Maliketh, Gurranq still exists.

To take this idea further, I would speculate that a Shadow can only truly be killed if their bond with their Empyrean is fully severed. They are bound creatures and to me this suggests that their fate is tied to that of their master.

In Blaidd’s case, I would suggest that he would be truly destroyed when Ranni destroyed her Two Fingers, fully severing her connection with the Greater Will who granted her Blaidd in the first place. This is why we are able to put down Blaidd

permanently when we face his enraged form at Ranni’s Rise.

Before we move on from this, I wanted to touch on something else: the Baleful Shadows. Ranni describes these as the assassins of the Two Fingers, unleashed against her due to choices that she has made. Yet these Shadows are Blaidd copies, are they not? They are red phantom versions of Ranni’s loyal hound, yet seemingly without his free will.

This makes sense to me; Blaidd is also a Shadow creation of the Fingers, but he is a complex creation capable of myriad actions and independent decision making. He is a true companion to his Empyrean.

The Baleful Shadows are Shadows created by Fingers but with a singular simple purpose. They look and move like Blaidd because they are generated by the same process and by the same Two Fingers. I also believe these Shadows are connected to Ranni just as Blaidd is, and that she needs these Shadows eliminated to fully shed her attachments to the Two Fingers.

MALIKETH

We can’t discuss the Shadowbound Beasts without talking about the greatest among them: Maliketh.

The Black Blade is no different to Blaidd in displaying his own personality



Grace Given

and his absolute loyalty to his Empyrean. We have already discussed a few of the in-game lore references to Maliketh, but let’s review the story of this fascinating character from the top, because I believe there are some details that we may not have touched on.

Firstly, we know that Gurranq is Maliketh’s alter ego. Gurranq’s quest ties in with Maliketh’s appearance later, and his dialogue can differ depending on how much of Gurranq’s quest you have done. If you completed Gurranq’s quest to recover all of the Deathroot, then he recognizes you as you enter his arena in Farum Azula:

“Tarnished. Why wouldst thou... Why... Tis no matter. I hereby vow, that Destined Death shall not be stolen again.” - Maliketh, the Black Blade

Gurranq is confused, because earlier you had assisted him in trying to restore the Rune of Death, and yet now you are here to steal it.

To reinforce these characters are one and the same we can look at the item description for Stone of Gurranq, which reads:

“Long ago, Gurranq was a beast of such terrifying ferocity that his former name meant ‘Death of the Demigods.’” - Stone of Gurranq

So Gurranq is the unassuming appearance that Maliketh has taken following

the Night of the Black Knives. Let’s review Maliketh’s past and we will return to his new identity.

As we learned from his remembrance, Maliketh was given to Marika when she became an Empyrean. Much as Ranni uses Blaidd for her own ends, likewise does Marika use Maliketh to further her agenda.

The coming of Maliketh as we know him centers around the apostasy lead by the Gloam-Eyed Queen and her Godskin movement, something we will discuss in far more detail in the coming chapters. After this, as the Blasphemous Claw states, Maliketh would eventually become known as the black beast of Destined Death – a being synonymous with Destined Death.

It is suggested that this power was turned against Marika and her ilk, given that it was Maliketh who would ultimately defeat them. And, of course, Maliketh would have been acting on Marika’s orders. Indeed, we get confirmation from the Godslayer’s Greatsword that it was Maliketh who defeated the Gloam-Eyed Queen and ultimately the Godskin movement as a whole, again confirming that the Godskin’s target was Marika’s brood.

We know from the Scouring Black Flame item description that prior to Maliketh sealing Destined Death, these apostles could slay the gods with



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the power of the Black Flame. It would be the sealing of the Rune of Death within Maliketh's weapon that would therefore lead to their defeat, for the description of his Black Blade reads:

"Maliketh's black blade which once harbored the power of the Rune of Death. A sad shadow of its former glory. After a fragment of Death was stolen on that fateful night, Maliketh bound the blade within his own flesh, such that none might ever rob Death again." - Maliketh's Black Blade

Maliketh's armor description reinforces Maliketh's infamy for wielding the power of Destined Death:

"Beast's armor made of black iron and decorated with gold. Worn by Maliketh the Black Blade. Maliketh, Queen Marika's loyal half-brother, bore a blade imbued with Destined Death, and there was not one demigod who did not fear him. Champions knew what was at stake. Indeed, that is what made them champions." - Maliketh's Armor

I'll try to unpack this as best I can but be warned that some of what will follow will naturally be my interpretation and speculation.

Maliketh's remembrance states that he was needed to seal away Destined Death. So it is logical that this need arose when Marika's rule was threatened by the Gloam-Eyed Queen. Bear in mind that she was an Empyrean and therefore

someone capable of assuming Marika's place. With the godslaying power of Destined Death at her disposal, this was a very real possibility.

The Black Blade and Maliketh's Armor description make it clear that the Rune of Death, i.e. the source of Destined Death, was harbored within Maliketh's weapon, meaning he could not only wield its power directly, but also restrict its power to that vessel and that vessel alone. I believe, therefore, that, threatened by the Gloam-Eyed Queen, Marika had the Rune of Death removed from the Elden Ring and it was at this point that Maliketh became its seal. Yet, unlike in the case of his guise as Gurrang, he used it in a flamboyant and dangerous manner, literally wielding it within his blade as a powerful weapon.

This would have crippled the Godskin movement, and simultaneously granted Maliketh the immense power needed to defeat the Gloam-Eyed Queen.

And this would also be why the demigods would fear him. His wielding of Destined Death literally within his blade, along with the defeat of an Empyrean, would serve as an example to all who wished to rebel against Marika's rule.

As a result, Maliketh would become a significant enough figure within the pantheon that he would garner his own followers and warriors. For example, we



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have the Black Blade Kindred, which are gargoyles who serve Maliketh, such as the one that guards the entrance to his sanctum in Caelid. Their weapon item descriptions, for example the Blackblade, tell us of how they mark their service to Maliketh. They read:

"Bronze greatsword wielded by Valiant Gargoyles mended with blackened corpse wax. Deals holy damage. Such is the mark of those who serve Maliketh, the Black Blade." - Gargoyle's Blackblade

So we see here that those who serve the Black Blade mark themselves with black corpse wax – a fitting tribute to their lord, since corpse wax is representative of their lord's position as the wielder of Destined Death and black for the Black Blade.

Indeed, if we take a closer look, we can see these gargoyles are regular

Valiant Gargoyles but are completely coated in dripping corpse wax. Looking even more closely, we can see a further indicator of their loyalties, for they also don the gray mane of Maliketh upon their helms.

Indeed they seem to be doing the work of Maliketh, for one guards his master and the other guards the Mountaintops of the Giants and the forbidden flame.

Yet Maliketh's open wielding of the Rune of Death would later be exploited by Ranni and her co-conspirators, as we all know that the Black Knife Assassins would successfully steal fragments of this rune, imbuing it in their blades to slay Godwyn's soul and Ranni's Empyrean body.

It would be at this point that Gurrang was born. Maliketh sealed the sword, and thus the Rune of Death, within his body so that it would not be so easily stolen. Again we learn this from the description of his Black Blade. Maliketh would then retreat from the public eye, taking on the guise of the Beast Clergyman of Farum Azula. It seems as though Maliketh wanted to keep himself, and therefore the Rune of Death, hidden. As we can tell from his dialogues when we fight him he is desperate to resist a similar outcome to the last time.

"Thou, who approacheth Destined Death. I will not have it stolen from me again."



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His dagger, the Cinquedeia, can give us some clue as to what the Gurranq persona is all about. Its item description reads:

“Short sword given to high ranking clergymen of Farum Azula. Raises potency of bestial incantations the design celebrates a beast’s five fingers, symbolic of the intelligence once granted upon their kind.” - Cinquedeia

This is a really important item, as we have already discussed, and when I first ruminated on the subject of Gurranq, I believed that this was just a disguise rather than a position he actually held.

While he returns to Farum Azula, he also established a base within the Bestial Sanctum in Caelid. This is clear even before we reach the beast himself, as this area is guarded by Black Blade Kindred and Vulgar Militia. From here Gurranq has been cooperating with Golden Order fundamentalists like D in order to track down the lost fragments of the Rune of Death: the Deathroot.

Gurranq’s dialogue seems to suggest he *hungers* to ingest all of this material, and suggests that this appetite overlaps with his sense of “sin,” as he states:

“It is... it is all... consumed. Still, I am not sated... Not nearly sated...” (screams) “Marika... Is this... what it is... to sin? Will things... never be the same... again?” (panting)

It is almost as if – having been, as Maliketh, the bearer of the Rune of Death

– he can feel part of it is absent, like a hunger that can only be sated temporarily by Deathroot. This hunger seems to genuinely consume him, as we can see when he goes berserk and attacks us after we have provided him with three Deathroot.

After all, Deathroot is born of that stolen fragment, as its description states:

“On the night of the dire plot the stolen Rune of Death enabled the first Death of a demigod. Later, the Rune of Death spread across the Lands Between through the underground roots of the Greentree, sprouting in the form of Deathroot.” - Deathroot

This is Maliketh’s penance for his sin, his failure to protect the Rune of Death, and now he seeks to undo the damage he has previously done by gathering the fragments of the Rune of Death.

And yet we now come to the elephant in the room: Maliketh’s relationship with Marika, what his final orders were, and how much he truly knew of Marika’s ultimate plan.

It’s mentioned that Marika betrayed Maliketh, and I believe the reason for this is pretty straight forward. If you defeat Maliketh in Farum Azula after completing Gurranq’s questline, then he will essentially apologize to Marika, stating the Golden Order cannot be restored.

This suggests that in his exile, and through his desire to repair the Rune of Death, he seeks to restore the Golden



Grace Given

Order, and he has toiled in obscurity since the Night of the Black Knives to achieve that end.

However if we kill Maliketh as Gurranq in the bestial sanctum, he appears hurt and surprised by Marika’s actions in shattering the Elden Ring, for he says this:

“Marika...why...wouldst thou...gull me? Why...shatter...”

This to me is the betrayal that is mentioned in Maliketh’s remembrance, as this line makes it clear that Maliketh had no hand in whatever Marika had done or had planned after the Night of the Black Knives. He saw the theft of the Rune of Death as a failure to do his duty to Marika, yet wasn’t privy to the fact that, despite his penance, Marika would seek to shatter the Elden Ring anyway.

So this is how I see Maliketh, once a proud and mighty champion of Marika’s Order, reduced to a life of penance and guilt, but still loyal to his oath. And it’s an oath he dies defending, whilst Marika betrays his loyalty by shattering the Order she once commanded him to defend.

WOLVES AND MEN

So there are of course two other Emphyreans that were chosen by the Fingers, Miquella and Malenia – and it begs the question: who are their Shadowbound Beasts?

In short, we just don’t see them in game – but we do have to assume that they were each given a beast. Ranni mentions they were elected as Emphyreans in the same breath as she tells us about being granted Blaidd.

We have to consider that Miquella and Malenia have chosen a path contrary to the Greater Will. It could be that the twins have already dealt with their Shadows, similarly to how we see Ranni having to deal with hers in her questline. It could be they have simply abandoned their Shadowbound Beasts, or that they are in fact sending them on missions, much as Blaidd still serves Ranni.

I’ve seen a lot of speculation that Malenia is in fact Miquella’s Shadow, given that she is his “blade” and I agree that this is most certainly a symbolic reference, and that Malenia has effectively taken on that role. However, she isn’t a true Shadowbound. She is an Emphyrean herself, and ultimately becomes a god, something clearly beyond a Shadowbound. So, no, Malenia is not the Finger-given Shadow to Miquella, and I think we simply do not see the twins’ Shadowbound in game.

We cannot talk about the Shadowbound Beasts without dealing with another elephant in the room: the Bloodhound Knights. Let’s start the discussion by reading the item description for their armor:



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“The Bloodhound Knights are trained as hunters and known to be unshakable trackers. Without the use of language, each knight chooses his own master. Once the decision has been made, the knight stays loyal for life.” - Bloodhound Knight Armor

So we can instantly see some similarities between the Bloodhounds and the Shadowbound. Firstly the term “hound” makes us think of the “wolven” nature of Shadowbound Beasts, as alluded to by Vargram’s armor set. Secondly there’s the very nature of their service as described by the armor we just read. Bloodhound Knights attach themselves to one master and serve them for life. The stray hound Floh shows how important these bonds are to their creed:

“Spirit of a Bloodhound Knight they called the Rabid Stray. Will attack without pause immediately after being summoned. Floh vowed that there was only one lord he would ever serve: a true king. And so, the Rabid Stray never found a master.” - Bloodhound Knight Floh Ash

Much like the Shadowbound, then, the Bloodhounds are bound to a single master. (However this description also highlights an important difference between the Shadowbound and the Bloodbound – and one we will return to in a moment.)

The hounds also behave and even move like wolves as well. They don’t use language like other humans, and their movement,

on all fours, is reminiscent of their four legged counterparts. Even their weapons, the claws and fangs, are meant to replace the authentic tooth and claw of a hound.

So it does beg the question – what is the Bloodhound’s relationship to Shadowbound? Can they become shadowbound?

In short, I believe there is mainly a symbolic connection between the two. As I will argue later on, the Shadowbound are created, not trained. They are tailor-made to be the most useful form for their particular Empyrean. The Bloodhounds, however, become the way they are through rigorous training and by following their particular ideals.

Another difference is that the way in which Bloodhounds become bound is also clearly different to that of Shadowbounds. The Bloodhounds choose their master, whereas the Shadowbound are given to their master.

Even so, they clearly are analogous to Shadowbounds. To me, much like Vargram, this Bloodhound organization is a creed clearly inspired to reflect the cosmic bond of Shadow Beast and Empyrean. But it achieves this in a more earthly manner – through training and discipline.

Finally, there is one Bloodhound Knight that we encounter during Blaidd’s quest, so it is worth discussing it.

The first time we meet Blaidd, he wants our assistance in locating a



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“traitor”, who is called Darriwil and who turns out to be a Bloodhound Knight. So why is he a traitor? Well, most obviously we could assume that Darriwil was a sworn Bloodhound in the service of Ranni. But we can go a bit further, if you’ll allow me some speculation, for we can find the Black Wolf Mask near Seluvis’s Rise, a mask that clearly imitates Blaidd’s visage. Its description reads:

“A mask fashioned after the head of a black wolf. Relic of an assassin who assumed the guise of Ranni the Witch’s loyal shadow. The likeness is striking.” - Black Wolf Mask

So at some point in time, someone disguised themselves as Blaidd in an attempt to kill Ranni. Would it not make sense that the would-be assassin might very well be a creature who can easily pass for a half-wolf? As well as possibly being close to Ranni and Blaidd already, if he was sworn to their court, this would also neatly explain why Blaidd calls him a traitor and is so determined to hunt him down.

It’s just speculation. But it’s the story I choose to believe.

WHAT ABOUT VARGRAM?

So let us come full circle with the concluding subject of this chapter. Vargram: the man who would become the Shadow

to an Empyrean. Yet whose Shadow is he attempting to become?

We are never outright told the answer, but I believe that the Empyrean he is seeking is the Gloam-Eyed Queen. Not only is she the only missing Empyrean, but Vargram himself wields the Godslayer’s Greatsword. This is the very sword once wielded by the Gloam-Eyed Queen, and while it may just be a weapon choice, I always believe that very little in FromSoftware games is done by chance.

Is his quest fruitless? Or is this something he can achieve?

I think that Vargram is playing a role that we have seen before in Souls games: that of a powerful warrior who ultimately embarks on a fruitless quest to achieve something that is simply beyond his grasp. I feel we see similar paths taken by Solaire, in his quest to claim a sun, and by Hawkwood, in his quest to become a dragon. These are both powerful warriors, and both meet pitiful ends.

Ranni makes it clear in her speech to us how Shadows are created. They are provided in the form that they are – in the form of a vassal suitable for an Empyrean, and are created in their shadow. They are tailored to be the way that they are and, as I discussed at the beginning of this section, I believe that each Shadow is born tied to their Empyrean and each is, in essence, part of their very being.



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Looking at it like that, and taking in everything we have discussed thus far, it may seem like it was an unachievable aim. However the tailoring of an Emyprean may not involve entirely creating someone new from scratch. As I mentioned earlier, I believe it is likely that Gurranq isn't just a cover persona; rather it is who he was before he became Marika's Shadowbound.

Specifically what Ranni actually says is that Blaidd was tailored to a form that suits an Emyprean and their needs. Tailoring is fitting, taking existing clothes or materials to fit the needs and form of the customer. This means that a Shadow is an existing being that is tailored or altered to fit the needs of said Emyprean.

Blaidd looks very wolflike, and so to me it suggests that he was straight-up tailored from the form of a wild wolf. Maliketh is something different, however. He has two distinct identities, playing the role of a Bestial Clergyman when in his form of Gurranq, and retreating to the old haunts of Beastmen society, Farum Azula and the Bestial Sanctum.

In regards to Maliketh, I believe that he truly was a Beast Clergyman like the ones depicted in the statuary. And I believe that when Marika needed a Shadow, Gurranq was reformed into a more powerful shape – that of Maliketh. Now that Marika has gone, Maliketh retreats into his former life, partially

to disguise himself, because it is a role he knows well. Yet, like the other Beastmen, he has felt his wildness returning, as we see in his Beast Claw incantation and in his aggressive behavior when he attacks us.

So perhaps it would not have been impossible for Vargram to be reformed into the shape of an Emyprean. Sadly we will never know, as his story ends at the end of a recusant blade, his power claimed for the cause of their rebellious lord.

ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

Between the time of the dragons and Marika's rule, there is clearly a huge chunk of history in which varying societies have risen and fallen. There is of course the society that is responsible for building the now ruined palaces of Uhl and Uld as well as Mohgwyn Palace and the Grand Cloister.

Very little is told to us of these civilizations but there is a fascinating story here, if we examine what little we have. Despite the little we know of this civilization, it stands as one of the most impressive cultures in the Lands Between. From the awe-inspiring gates of the Grand Cloister, to the beautiful Mohgwyn Palace that looms over Siofra



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River, inviting the intrepid explorer to find a way to it.

This much older civilization is the civilization that built the Uhl and Uld Palace Ruins that we find in game, as well as the renamed Mohgwyn Palace. This palace seems to have been a mausoleum for this community at some stage, for the palace map description reads:

"In the lightless depths lies the grave of an ancient civilization."

- Map: Mohgwyn Palace

It is apt that this civilization is referred to as "ancient" by the map here as the majority of the architecture found around these civilizations is very clearly based on classical Greek architecture as we can see from the composite Romanesque columns and the Parthenon-inspired Mohgwyn Palace. This is

I think that Vargram is playing a role that we have seen before in Souls games: that of a powerful warrior who ultimately embarks on a fruitless quest to achieve something that is simply beyond his grasp.

combined with some Sumerian influence⁶, given that the various obelisks found throughout them are clearly modeled on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III.

What this tells us is that whatever this civilization was, it is clearly one of the most ancient in the Lands Between, given it is based on real world ancient civilizations. We know very little about their culture but there are statues of a great bearded figure holding a tablet that are prevalent in every ancient palace.

In a video on this ancient civilization, Tarnished Archaeologist highlights that this clay tablet is clearly modeled on the Babylonian World Map, again in keeping with the ancient civilization real world inspiration. On the tablet itself is a symbol of a tree and roots emerge from a figure's robe and wrap down his legs. While it is impossible to know for certain what this figure represents, we know that he was important to this society; a leader, an oracle or a deity.

We know that the society was religious as is evident by the temple-like structures of the Grand Cloister and Mohgwyn Palace. As to what their religion was, we cannot know for certain but Tarnished Archaeologist suggests that, based on the oracular practices and the tree iconography found on the tablet held by their statue figure, they "prophesied" the coming of the Greattree

⁶ The Sumerian connection was first brought to my attention by Quelaag via X: bit.ly/4dE8ruN



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and that this prophecy was central to their culture and religion⁷.

We also know that this civilization had their own funerary practices, as Mohgwyn Palace, a building now repurposed by Mohg, was clearly once a Mausoleum, with the burial sites sitting beneath the temple structure on top.

The beings that are most clearly linked with these ancient ruins are the Claymen, the annoying zombie-like enemies that we encounter in great numbers below the surface. The Claymen are the originators of the bubble spells, and the item descriptions for these spells can tell us something about them. The Great Oracular Bubble spell reads:

“Sorcery of the claymen who served as priests in the ancient dynasty... The claymen search for lost oracles within their bubbles.” - Great Oracular Bubble

So these Claymen served the ancient dynasty as priests, reinforcing the idea that this ancient civilization had its own culture and religion. These priests seemingly played the role of oracles, again calling to mind the Oracle of Delphi of real world ancient Greece.

One can't help but notice that the Claymen seemingly have an association with water; their staffs are called harpoons, they see their prophecy in bubbles and they are now made of clay, a material that often has water added to it.

These are the “warped remains” of priests, which to me suggests that they were once human but some calamity turned them into the clay remnants we see today. This would explain why they can no longer function beyond very simple actions.

Additionally it is hard to ignore the fact that many of the palaces are found around bodies of water: Uhl is next to Ainsel, Mohgwyn is next to Siofra and the Grand Cloister sits abreast the Lake of Rot.

As we will discuss in Chapter 22, the Lake of Rot was once a lake but has become infested by the rot because of the outer god sealed beneath it. Did this ancient civilization worship the water? It is certainly something interesting to consider.

Regardless of what purpose these Claymen played before, it has been long lost and they are now nothing more than mindless drones. The Clayman's Harpoon even describes the Claymen's occupation



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of the ancient ruins as an infestation. They are almost bestial and feral without their masters in place. Furthermore the Clayman Ashes description reads:

“The warped remains of priests who searched for revelation in service of the ancient dynasty, they employ two sorceries that produce smaller and larger bubbles.” - Clayman Ashes

These are the “warped remains” of priests, which to me suggests that they were once human but some calamity turned them into the clay remnants we see today. This would explain why they can no longer function beyond very simple actions. Perhaps they're only able to perform their primary function, reading oracles in bubbles but without any real purpose.

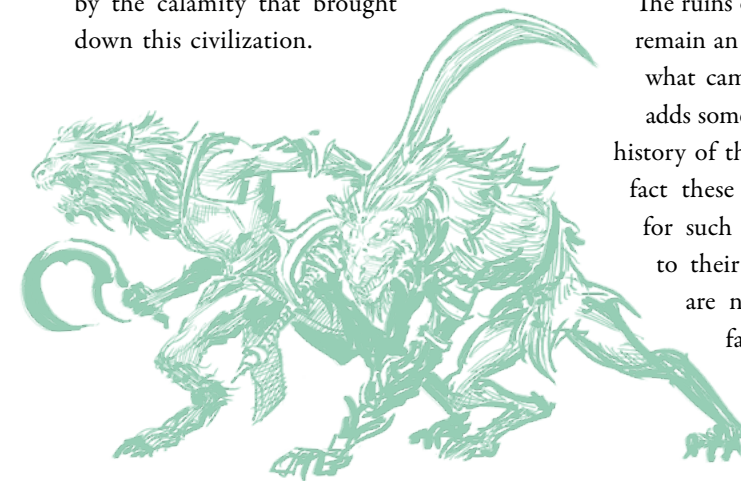
Perhaps they were warped by the prolonged exposure to the bubbles themselves, or perhaps they were affected by the calamity that brought down this civilization.

When we ponder what said calamity was, we have to consider the current state of the Grand Cloister. The Grand Cloister is arguably the most impressive structure of this lost civilization and clearly was a location of great significance to them.

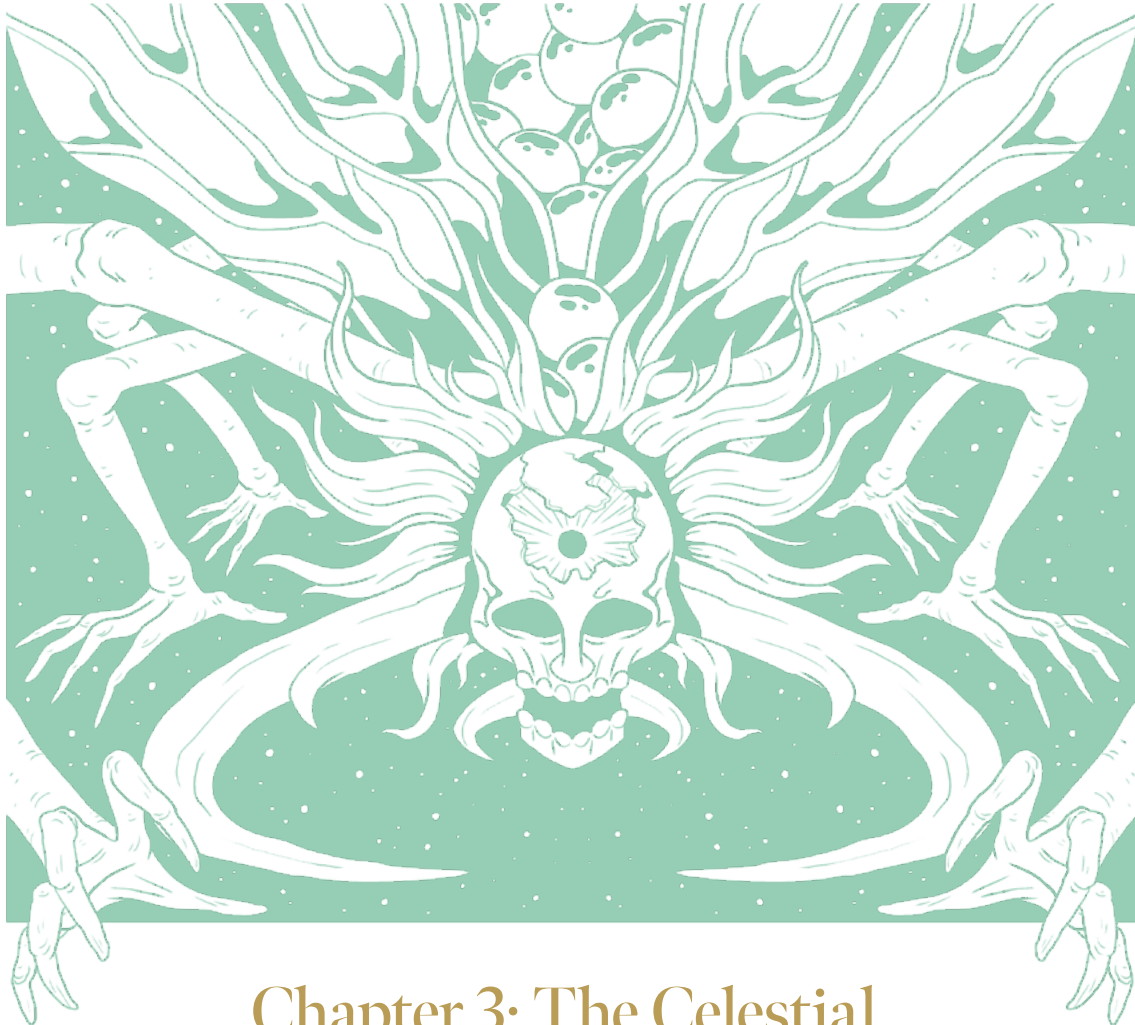
Yet now it is home to the Lake of Rot and turned into a place of worship by the Kindred of Rot; the pests. The question needs to be asked, did the rot take this location at a time when the Grand Cloister was still occupied by its original inhabitants? Was the worship of rot stoked by the Ancient Civilization itself?

Again it is possible to know for certain and we will discuss the old lords of rot in a later chapter, but all that matters is that now the Grand Cloister has been repurposed as a temple of rot with a relic of the Outer God of Rot itself being worshiped in its central shrine; the Scorpion's Stinger.

The ruins of this great civilization remain an impressive reminder of what came before and certainly adds some depth and scale to the history of the Lands Between. The fact these structures have lasted for such an age is a testament to their building prowess and are now home to different factions, who themselves could not match this grandeur with their own hands.



⁷ “A tablet tells the secret history of Elden Ring's Ancient Dynasty” - The Tarnished Archaeologist



Chapter 3: The Celestial

A lot of what we know of the giants' history prior to the war with the Erdtree comes in dribs and drabs and so it is up to us to pull it together into the semblance of a timeline.

We know that the giants have long lived on the mountaintops and it appears that long ago a tribe of astrologers co-existed with them there. We learn this from the *Sword of Night and Flame* which reads as follows:

"Astrologers, who preceded the sorcerers, established themselves in mountaintops that nearly touched the sky, and considered the Fire Giants their neighbors."
- *Sword of Night and Flame*

So this is a time long passed, as we are here speaking of astrologers who preceded even the sorcerers of Raya Lucaria and the Carian royal family.

The practice of astrology would one day lead to the development of sorcery,



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a fact confirmed by the Preceptor's Gown, which describes sorcerers as descendants of the astrologers:

"Glintstone sorcerers are the descendants of astrologers, a fact that the Carians remain aware of. Even if their fate has been long severed from the stars."
- *Preceptor's Long Gown*

We have the archaeological evidence on the mountaintops as well: the various astrological basins and the Stargazer's Ruins, no doubt a settlement of this astrological community.

So in this time before the academy, these astrologers clearly established themselves at the highest peaks of the Lands Between to be as close to the sky as possible. This makes sense given that we are dealing with fairly primitive astrologers.

The most interesting aspect of this, however, is that the Fire Giants lived in peace with these star-studying humans, showing that they aren't automatically hostile to the rest of civilization.

It is their relationship to their fire god that determines their allegiance, something we can infer from their animosity with the Zamor and the Erdtree.

Even in this period of night and flame they are still referred to as *Fire Giants*, meaning their Fell God had no animosity with the stars, thus allowing the flame and the night to live in peace.

I think that one of their early conflicts is a decent indicator of when the community of Fire Giants first flourished. The conflict I am referring to is the war they waged against the ice dragons, something learned about from the description of Borealis's Mist which reads:

"The ice dragons were once lords of the mountaintops long ago, until they were defeated by the Fire Giants and chased from the peak." - *Borealis's Mist*

So the ice dragons must have been an offshoot of dragons, kin to Borealis himself, who once ruled these mountaintops. This is a useful piece of lore for placing the establishment of the Fire Giant society because Borealis and presumably the rest of the ice dragons are a type of dragon known as "modern dragons."

We learn this from the *Lightning Strike* incantation:

"One of the incantations of the capital's ancient dragon cult. Ancestors of the modern dragons, the ancient dragons had scales of Gravel Stone and wielded lightning as their weapon. It is said that once they attacked Leyndell, the Royal Capital." - *Lightning Strike*

The ancient dragons are those we see like Fortissax with the four wings and stone scales, and with the ability to wield red lightning. Borealis and the likes of Agheel form the modern dragons.



The Celestial

This shows us that the modern dragons once ruled the mountains before the Fire Giants would drive them off and establish themselves as the masters of the mountains and eventually live peacefully alongside the astrologers.

Given Borealis's Mist states this happened "long ago" we can assume that this places the time of the giants a fair while after the reign of the ancient dragons, but before the age of Marika.

We can determine that it was after they had claimed the mountain proper that they would build some sort of society here. We see evidence of their craftsmanship in the form of the forge, a focal point of their civilization.

While to us it is merely a vessel for the destructive Flame of Ruin, the term "forge" implies that it was used for metalwork. It was the giants who actually pioneered the practice of smithing, something we learn from the Hammer item description:

"Originally a blacksmith's tool. The art of smithing is said to have originated among the giants. This weapon's striking attacks boast ample weight behind them."
- Hammer

Given how basic a skill smithing is, it underlines that this civilization of the giants really was an early one which developed fundamental practices and science.

Indeed the Troll's Hammer very much suggests that this was a cornerstone of their society, for it reads:

"Trolls are descended from the giants, and these were supposedly once used as ceremonial smithing tools. In the distant past, smithing was considered divine."
- Troll's Hammer

Given the fire of their very god would have been used to smith weapons it is no surprise that it would have been considered divine. We can assume that the giant smiths would have forged their jewelry, the likes of the metal cooking bowl wielded by the Fire Giant and the great chains that connect the mountaintops together.

The forge itself seems to be built upon the same architecture of the kind we find scattered about the mountaintops, and therefore we can speculatively argue that the giants were builders too.

The Divine Towers are somewhat of a mystery, those six structures that each contain a Two Fingers and the resonance of a Great Rune. But one thing that isn't a mystery is that they were built before the Erdtree emerged; as content creator Eredin points out in his superb video on the Golden Lineage¹, there is a painting in Stormveil that shows Stormhill. Two things are conspicuously absent here; 1) Stormveil Castle, which we will get on to later, and 2) the Erdtree and its light.



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So this at least narrows it down to pre-Erdtree and pre-Godfrey conquest, and I place it close in time to the giants civilization, because their architectural style closely matches that of the Forge of the Fell Flame. As to the purpose of these buildings? We can only guess. Perhaps they are an attempt to reach to the sky to be closer to their god?

Yet their god was not one of creation but of destruction, and again, it is implied that the giants are the enemies of those who are antithetical to their ruinous flame.

This would include beings like the dragons of ice and the champions of the Erdtree. Yet it is also reinforced by their conflict with another of their ancient foes: the people of Zamor.

We can see from the Zamor Ruins, the collection of structures on the lower slopes of the mountain of giants, that these people also inhabited this region. The Zamor are a people who seemingly worship the winter, as described by the Zamor Curved Sword:

"In apparent devotion to winter, the curved blade is styled after an icy wind and imbued with a powerful frost effect."
- Zamor Curved Sword

Yet their armor set makes it clear that these warrior people have been battling the giants even before the war with the Erdtree:

"These long-lived warriors, clad in biting, freezing winds, are said to have been the mortal enemies of the Fire Giants since time immemorial." - Zamor Armor

The Zamor's association with ice is already being made clear, as if they are one with it much as the giants are one with the flame. Indeed the Zamor Ice Storm sorcery even goes as far to suggest that they are "cloaked" in ice and it therefore makes sense these two tribes would battle for dominance.

The term immemorial makes it clear that the Zamor had been battling the Fire Giants since well before the Erdtree's conflict with them and that they just became allies of convenience at this later stage.

But to better understand the nature of the Fire Giants, we must explore their deity: the Fell God, as this being is central to their identity.

THE FELL GOD

It's suggested that the Fire Giants are the way they are due to a curse binding them to their duty as the custodians of the Flame of Ruin and thus the Fell God. The Burn, O Flame! incantation reads:

"The Fire Giants borrowed from the power of a fell god, and still they were defeated. Yet their failure released them from their solitary curse: to serve as keepers of the Flame for eternity." - Burn, O Flame!

¹ "Elden Ring Lore: The Golden Lineage" - Eredin (unlisted)



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Whether or not the Giants at one point voluntarily entered into this contract or whether they were always cursed this way, the result is the same.

They are servants of the flame forever, they must watch over it no matter what – a fact illustrated by the fate of the final giant who even after being beaten and left as the last of his kind is doomed to tend to the smoldering embers of the flame for eternity.

While the Fell God has many manifestations of his power, the Ruinous Flame of the forge seems to be his most potent and important tool. Given the entire purpose of his Fire Giant race is to safeguard and tend to this flame, we can see that it is the strongest aspect of the Fell God on this earth. It is a testament to the god's power, given it is the only thing in the mortal realm that we are aware of that poses a direct threat to the Erdtree itself.

Another fairly horrifying result of this curse is that the Fire Giants have the Fell God literally imprinted upon their physiology. I refer to the one-eyed face on their abdomens. This Fell God is inexorably linked to each of the giants; something we learn from Flame of the Fell God, which reads:

“Arghanthy, the chief guardian of the Flame, had kept this incantation a well-kept secret until it was stolen by Adan. The

Fell God still lurks within the Fire Giants.”
- Flame of the Fell God

So the Fell God exists within every Fire Giant, suggesting it is this very connection that makes them what they are. The power of these giants, suffused with the power of their god, is expanded upon in the Roar Medallion:

*“In ancient times, the giants were mortal enemies of the Erdtree. Their bel-
lowing roars desolated nature, triggered
avalanches, and whipped up storms of
flame.” - Roar Medallion*

These giants could whip up “storms of flame” and in our battle with one we can see how true this is, as the last Fire Giant is capable of unleashing the Fell God's flames upon his enemy and wreaking unfathomable destruction on the battlefield, when the eye awakens in the second stage of this fight.

To me it is clear that the stomach face is an aspect of the Fell God made manifest, showing the Fell God truly exists within each and every Fire Giant.

When it awakens – as it does in the giant's fight with us – the god is actively present, a fact marked by the opening of its eye. Incidentally I would hypothesize that this is why the Trolls have a gaping hole in their stomach regions, as they would disavow their loyalty to the Fell God. But more on that later.

We know this one-eyed face is the face of their Fell God as we see his



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visage represented on many sources. We see it on the One-Eyed Shield, the Giant's Seal and the Fire Monk Armor. Looking at the description of the One-Eyed Shield we can learn more of this enigmatic deity:

*“Tricksome shield made from white
stone depicting a malformed one-eyed god.
The barrel of a firearm pokes through the
open mouth. Once worshipped by the giants,
this evil deity is believed to have been slain
by Queen Marika.” - One-Eyed Shield*

The word “evil” is used here in reference to the Fell God, and it is possible that this is once again an example of an unreliable narrator; i.e. we are meant to believe that this god is evil, as if it is written by a member of the Erdtree faithful, and I would argue that there are no true evil or good forces in *Elden Ring*.

We know this one-eyed face is the face of their Fell God as we see his visage represented on many sources. We see it on the One-Eyed Shield, the Giant's Seal and the Fire Monk Armor.

That being said, I do believe that by looking at the real world mythologies that most likely inspired the Fell God we can see that there is some truth to the implication that this is a god of destruction.

There are a number of beings in real world mythologies who have one eye and are also depicted as “evil”. For example there is Balor, Lord of the Fomorians of Irish mythology and Likho in Slavic mythology. There is of course the cyclops of Greek mythology and the Ojáncanu of Cantabrian mythology.

I think it is clear that the Fell God and his giants draw heavily from these traditions, with most of the real-world myths of these types of beings drawing from the cyclops of Greek mythology. Balor, the cyclops and Ojáncanu are all evil beings of great size and power. But I specifically think that the story of the Fell God to have been inspired by a combination of Balor, Lord of the Fomorians and the Ojáncanu.

The Ojáncanu were giant cyclopean beings who were the embodiment of cruelty and brutality, with their appearance remarkably like that of a Fire Giant: They were red-maned and massive and they even sported one eye. Balor, the leader of the hulking Fomorians, was said to have had a single eye that when opened would cause untold destruction, highly reminiscent of the eye opening scene in our battle with the Fire Giant.



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Not only is this helpful in understanding the likely myths that FromSoftware drew inspiration from, but it also possibly lends credence to the idea that these beings and their god are inherently evil and destructive due to the source material that uses this same kind of negative language, and I do think it gives us a greater understanding of what this Fell God stands for.

Its visage would come to be symbolic of the Fire Monk's devotion to his Flame of Ruin as well, as we can see it ornamenting their chest piece, the description of which reads:

"The grotesque face sculpted on the chest is said to depict the corrupt ancient god of the flame. Taboos transform into lasting obsessions by virtue of the fear that they inspire." - Fire Monk Armor

Again we have a negative term, corrupt, being used to describe this one-eyed being as if it was a being solely possessed of evil intent. Indeed the only actions we see in the game do seem to be ones of destruction and brutality.

For example there is the fact that the Fire Giant we battle is *only* able to awaken his god within him by offering a sacrifice – in this case his leg. It is therefore possible that this god was one that demanded sacrifices.

In addition, his only gifts to the world are ones of destruction, his Flame

of Ruin being an unstoppable fire with the only purpose being to destroy. This destructive nature is why the Fire Monks, though mesmerized by his power, are also extremely wary of it.

Unfortunately we do not know much more besides these facts, so let us surmise: This god, a one-eyed being, was a mighty god of fire. His chosen vessels were the Fire Giants who he cursed with keeping his ruinous flames forever and he was also was part of each and every Fire Giant, with his face physically manifesting on their bodies. It was this close association with their god that gave the giants their power of fire and while they survived, so too would this god.

However despite their victory against the dragons and their stalemate against the Zamor, the reign of the giants would not last forever. A new age was dawning, and its origins would be bloody indeed.

VITALITY OF THE STARS

The stars remain distant to the denizens of the Lands Between, as they do for us in the real world, and the astrologers of an earlier age would locate to the Mountaintops of the Giants in order to be closer to their subject of study.

This fascination with the stars would continue through the history of the



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Lands Between. In fact it would become central to many communities' identity, as it is to the sorcerers of Raya Lucaria and to the banished Nox.

Thematically the stars and the associated color of silver is seen as an opposing force to the Greater Will and its gold. We learn that the stars are born in a lightless void, an abyss, via the description found in Astel's remembrance and the description of Comet Azur:

"When Azur glimpsed into the primeval current, he saw darkness. He was left both bewitched and fearful of the abyss."
- Comet Azur

It is therefore fair to say that the stars are well removed from the mundane plane of existence, being born and existing in an abyss. It's also fair to say that this void, this abyss, is the deep dark of space which is indeed referred to as the void and abyss in real life. The connection between Astel's void and the abyss mentioned in these Primeval Current sorceries can be cemented if we refer to the original Japanese.

Thanks to Last Protagonist we can see that "Astel Naturalborn of the Void" can be more closely translated as "Spawn of Darkness" rather than "Naturalborn of

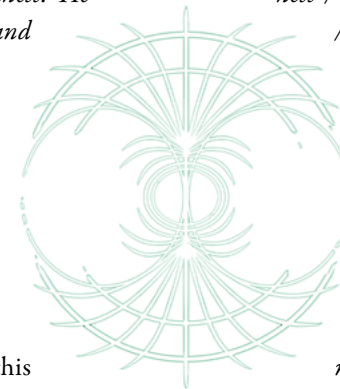
the Void". Last Protagonist believes the ties to "darkness" are lost in translation and would translate Astel's remembrance as the following:

"暗黒の落とし子の追憶 / 黄金樹に刻まれた / 暗黒の落とし子、アステールの追憶 / 指読みにより、主の力を得る / ことができるまた、使用により莫大なルーンを得る こともできる / 遙か彼方、光の無い暗黒で生まれた星の異形 / それはかつて、永遠の都を滅ぼし / 彼らから空を奪った、悪意ある流星である"

"Remembrance of the Spawn of Darkness / Hewn into the Golden Tree / Remembrance of Astel, Spawn of Darkness / Can obtain the power of its owner from the Finger Reader, / Or one can also obtain a great amount of runes from its consumption. / In the distant past, a star malformed was born in the lightless darkness / It destroyed the eternal city long ago / It's a malevolent comet that stole the sky from them."

- Translation via Last Protagonist

This "darkness" is also reflected in the skill Waves of Darkness, an ability that is made from Astel's remembrance and used by the beast himself in our battle with him. It's a power evidently tied to the dark of space from whence it hails, and we will return to this later.





Furthermore if we look at the original Japanese of Founding Rain of Stars, we again find reference to the abyss of space, once again connecting this region or dimension to the primeval especially when you consider this spell is *the* founding Glintstone sorcery.

Last Protagonist highlights that the use of the term “darkness” specifically is again missing in the English translation. Instead Last Protagonist translates this spell as follows: “空に暗黒の星雲を呼び” is like *“call a nebula of darkness in the sky.”*

The point of all of this is to cement where the stars appear to be from: a dark space, a void far removed from the mortal plane.

And yet while the stars generally remain far removed from the Lands Between, fortunately for those who study them a medium exists that allows sorcerers to tap into the power of the celestial: Glintstone.

The founding Glintstone sorcery, Founding Rain of Stars, reputedly describes how Glintstone came to be on the mortal plane: through a connection with the Primeval Current an astrologer essentially summoned a nebula of darkness from which came the “stars’ amber”.

I want to briefly segue into the specifics of what actually happened here and how it happened, because I believe that not only does this abyss exist physically

The founding Glintstone sorcery, Founding Rain of Stars, reputedly describes how Glintstone came to be on the mortal plane.

in “space” but also exists metaphysically, which is how certain people are able to interact with it.

For example in this tale told to us by the Founding Rain of Stars, the astrologer glimpsed the Primeval Current and what he saw within the current then manifested itself.

Likewise the astrologer described to us in the Founding Rain of Stars sorcery didn’t actually travel into space physically, rather they touched the Primeval Current and manifested what they saw as a sorcery.

So what is this Primeval Current? We need to understand that, in order to understand the nature of Glintstone and the stars that it connects to.

My interpretation of the Primeval Current is actually quite simple; the Primeval Current is just another term for the cosmos or space.

Firstly let us consider the name itself, Primeval. That is relevant to space as we understand it; the current of space



indeed is much older than any water on any planet. And as the abyss of space is often likened to water, we get the name Primeval Current.

With this understanding, if we replace the term “Primeval Current” with the abyss or space in the description of any of the relevant spells it certainly makes sense. For example, let’s read the Comet Azur but swap out the “Primeval Current” for the “Cosmos.” It would read:

“Legendary sorcery devised by Azur, primeval sorcerer. Fires a tremendous comet in a torrent akin to the distant starry expanse, the place said to be the origin of Glintstone. Hold to continue releasing the sorcery’s power. When Azur glimpsed into the Cosmos, he saw darkness. He was left both bewitched and fearful of the abyss.”
- Comet Azur

This also ties in nicely with the work provided by Last Protagonist; his translation of Founding Rain of Stars associates the Primeval Current with “a nebula of darkness.”

The stars are spatially disconnected from the terrestrial world, but the miraculous material of Glintstone allows one to summon their power or peer into their world. The primeval sorcerers pay a price for utilizing the power of the Glintstone in this way, however. They open their mind to the cosmos, but peer long enough into the abyss and it will peer back into you.

As such their minds, being in constant contact with the Primeval Current, begin to transform into Glintstone itself. This is something we learn of via Azur and Lusat’s headpieces; Lusat’s reads:

“The giant blue glintstone crown worn by Lusat, primeval current sorcerer. This crown replaced Lusat’s brain and skull altogether, and now, removed from his body, it is all but dead. What power remains within raises the potency of Lusat’s primeval current sorceries at the cost of additional FP consumption.” - Lusat’s Glintstone Crown

Zullie the Witch made a really excellent video called “The risks of Blood Magic” which focused on the character Mad Tongue Alberich. By removing his hat Zullie showed that underneath, Alberich seems to be suffering a similar fate to Lusat and Azur, except with red Glintstone.

The “star’s amber” that is mentioned in the Founding Rain of Stars is Glintstone, since this is how Sellen describes it when she tries to explain the nature of Glintstone. So this was how the study of the stars evolved – it started with the astrologers upon the mountains. And indeed, the one who discovered Glintstone via the Founding Rain of Stars was themselves an astrologer, and this is why the Preceptor’s Big Hat describes the Glintstone sorcerers as the descendants of the astrologers.





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Given the environmental details, this first deluge most likely happened in one region in particular, Liurnia, as this is the region with the most Glintstone growths by a fair margin.

Now let us return to the nature of Glintstone because I need to get to the core of it before we later discuss the Crystallians.

Sellen describes the nature of Glintstone to us:

“Our powers draw upon the powers embedded in Glintstone, but what is the nature of such power? Glintstone is the amber of the cosmos, golden amber contains the remnants of ancient life and houses its vitality, while Glintstone contains residual life. And thus, the vitality of the stars. It should not be forgotten that Glintstone sorcery is the study of the stars and the life therein.” - Sorceress Sellen

So Glintstone is an amber-like substance that contains a residual life energy of the stars. This is crystallised star stuff, and that is why Sellen and her fellow primeval sorcerers don't want people to forget that this isn't just “magic” but is rather the study and manipulation of star energy.

Through this miraculous material all kinds of sorceries can be produced, and apparently this also includes gravity magic, which many assume to be its own thing. Rather it appears to be a type of magic tied to Glintstone or stars as the Meteorite of Astel reads:

“One of the Glintstone sorceries that manipulates gravitational forces. Summons a void that emits a hail of meteorites. Hold to continue the effect. A manifestation of the power with which Astel leveled the Eternal City.” - Meteorite of Astel

The power of stars being linked to the power of gravity of course makes sense, when you consider that Astel, a star, freely manipulates it. Additionally the Alabaster and Onyx Lords, which I consider to be celestial beings, also freely manipulate gravitational forces.

In the real world crystals grow or form – usually when a liquid rock cools and begins to harden and the molecules arrange themselves in a uniform fashion – and they can grow as more and more molecules are added to this arrangement.

Yet Glintstone is different. The liquid that is hardening and reforming is the residual life energy of the star, and this star energy came to be in this realm via the event described in the Founding Rain of Stars:

“The eldest primeval sorcery, said to have been discovered by an ancient astrologer. A sorcery of legendary status. Summons a dark cloud of stars overhead. Shortly after, the cloud will release a violent deluge of star rain. This sorcery can be cast while in motion. Charging increases potency. Thought to be the founding glintstone sorcery. The glimpse of the



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primeval current that the astrologer saw became real, and the stars' amber rained down on this land.”

- Founding Rain of Stars

Star “rain”: so a liquid that would become a crystal. Again this is a masterly analogy for the real scientific process of crystallization, except in this case the liquid that is hardening is a living substance, which is why it acts in a different, more corrupting manner than it does with regular crystals. I would suggest it's almost radioactive in its behavior.

The radioactive nature of these crystals is most notably seen upon other organic life with which it interacts, especially those who have had long-term exposure.

For example, we have the Glintstone dragons of which Smarag and Adula are two named individuals. We find more unnamed dragons upon the Moonlight Altar. Both Adula and Smarag are literally suffused with the material; not only has it warped their bodies with crystal growths but tainted their fire with a

Glintstone hue and provided them with magical abilities.

We learn of how this came to pass via the description of Smarag's Glintstone Breath, which reads:

“Smarag was a devourer of sorcerers, and over time, his body became corrupted by their Glintstones.” - Smarag's Glintstone Breath

This radioactive effect can be seen very clearly on the bodies of the Glintstone Miners, beings who clearly have had a long term exposure to Glintstone, and as a result their bodies have been overrun with Glintstone.

Another interesting observation of the Glintstone properties comes when we examine Azur and Lusat, two of the founding primeval sorcerers. As many will now know the outfits that Azur and Lusat wear aren't really outfits – these are actually growths that have taken over their bodies. We learn this via their outfits, e.g. Lusat's Glintstone Crown:

“This crown replaced Lusat's brain and skull altogether, and now, removed from his body, it is all but dead.”

- Lusat's Glintstone Crown

And now his manchettes:

“Manchettes corroded by blue Glintstones. Worn by Lusat, primeval current sorcerer. Lusat had reached a near-inorganic state.”

- Lusat's Manchettes





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Again the term corrupted is used here, showing that while the form of the Glintstone may be that of a regular crystal, its behavior is different. Sellen says the following regarding Lusat: *“He’s nigh a child of the stars, such is his body now...”*

Not only does this again highlight how much of Lusat’s original human components have been taken over by Glintstone crystals but also she clearly sees it as a positive. The primeval sorcerers *want* this type of transformation, as evidenced by their graven schools and Sellen’s ultimate fate.

Either way, the effects are interesting ones to observe and serve to remind us that Glintstone is no ordinary crystal – it is a vessel of powerful celestial life energy and thus acts in a way fairly alien compared to what we might expect. Ultimately I think the nature of Glintstone is best summed up by a comment on the nature of Crystalians found within the Shattering Crystal spell which reads:

“The Crystalians are inorganic beings, yet they live.” - Shattering Crystal

It is an inorganic material yet contains life energy, resulting in corruption and spread.

Speaking of Crystalians, it is no surprise that the interest in Glintstone, its power and its connection to the Primeval Current, would result in the creation of these characters. These are the enigmatic

golem-like creatures who we will attempt to shine a light on now.

The Crystalians, unlike the Alabaster Lords, were not born but were in fact created, and we learn of this via the Crystalian Ashes:

“Spirit that wields round crystalline blades, both big and small. Its sturdy body, itself hewn from crystal long ago...”

- Crystalian Ashes

These were beings “hewn”, meaning they were sculpted from Glintstone, as a statue would be from marble. Why would this happen? What could be the purpose behind the creation of these bizarre creations? They do seem to have some sort of purpose to them, as we learn from the Crystal Sword:

“The inscrutable Crystalians have but one clear purpose; to safeguard their crystals unto the end. One theory posits that they yearn for the return of their creator who will carve for them new brethren.” - Crystal Sword

The effects are interesting to observe and serve to remind us that Glintstone is no ordinary crystal – it is a vessel of powerful celestial life energy.



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There is a lot of uncertainty in this statement, but it at least hints at a purpose behind the original crafting of these beings: defending the Glintstone crystals. This does seem to line up with their visual design, as they are most likely inspired by the 1915 silent film *The Golem*. This film is based on Jewish and European folklore, and tells the story of a Golem that was created by a rabbi to protect the Jewish people. It would therefore make sense if this Glintstone golem was made by a Glintstone sorcerer to protect Glintstone.

This tracks with the placement of every Crystalian we meet in game; found as bosses in Raya Lucaria Crystal Tunnel, Sellia Hideaway, Academy Crystal Cave and Altus Tunnel, all are in areas associated with Glintstone crystals.

This extends to the overworld variants we face as well, which we find in Moonlight Altar and Liurnia. The only exception is the corrupted rotted variants we find in Miquella’s Haligtree, but it can be explained away by the cosmic power of the Scarlet Rot overriding their usual instincts and making them gather around the main rot vector, Malenia.

These aren’t just mindless automations. They are spirits that have their own way of thinking, referred to as the “wisdom of stone”. For example the Crystal Staff item description reads:

“The Crystalian’s faint cogitation is known as the ‘wisdom of stone.’ This staff can only be wielded by those of intellect high enough to grasp such wisdom.”

- Crystal Staff

Let us try and unpack what’s being described here, though by its very nature it is supposed to be a difficult concept to grasp.

Cogitation is described by the Oxford English Dictionary as: “The action of thinking or reflecting; attentive consideration, reflection, meditation.” So in essence it is just the Crystalian’s thinking. I think this word is used to convey the idea that these beings still make decisions but without the use of an organic brain.

So this process, for these beings, seems to be a result of the “wisdom of stone”, a concept that is very difficult to grasp. However, we can guess how these beings make decisions by reexamining what they are. They are crystal, yes, but what is inside of these crystals? Inside the Glintstone?

The residual life energy of stars. My speculation is that while these golems were hewn and given automation and a purpose by their creator, no doubt through magic, it is the life inherent within these beings that drives their decision making – like a collective memory or hive mind of the stars that exists within the residual star energies.



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I think further evidence that these beings are connected to the greater star gestalt consciousness is found in the description of the Shattering Crystal spell:

“The Crystalians are inorganic beings, yet they live. They cleave close to the ideals of the primeval current, and as such, they are revered guests of the sorcerers.”

- *Shattering Crystal*

The Crystalians are still closely linked to the Primeval Current, the metaphysical conduit that connects one to the stars, again suggesting this is what guides their ‘cogitation’.

Indeed the spell Crystal Barrage describes a “Crystal Cadre,” a group of sorcerers who are interested in unpacking the secrets of this “wisdom of stone.” If this is connected to the Primeval

Current and the knowledge of the stars in general then it makes sense why the Crystalians are so valued by sorcerers.

As an aside for those who maybe question if Crystalians are actually made of Glintstone, due to their color being different from the regular blue-green crystal: there is more than one shade of Glintstone. Specifically, Azur’s Manchettes refer to a blue-green variant

while Lusat’s Glintstone Crown refers to a blue variant.

Indeed this is reflected in the color of the crystals found on Azur and Lusat and Smarag and Adula. Obviously we can’t know for sure the meanings of each color, but in both cases shown here, the blue variant is found on the stronger or at least “later game” characters, Adula and Lusat.

Indeed the cogitation that is provided to them by the celestial isn’t even that alien. The Crystalians,

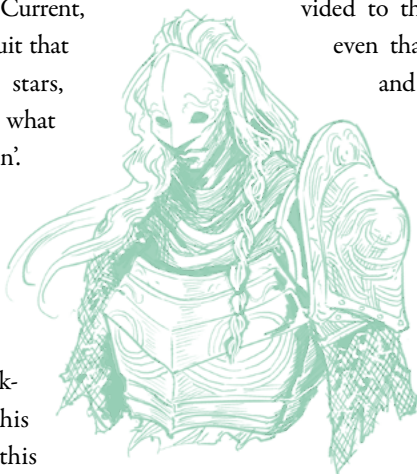
and therefore the stars, appear to have emotions. After all, the Crystal Torrent is described as the wrath of the Crystalians made manifest. Also the Crystalians appear to have a hierarchy, showing they do have societal structures much like humanity. We

learn of this via the Crystal Release spell:

“This sorcery is used by high-ranking adepts among the Crystalians. Some also call this sorcery ‘the Crystal Sun.’”

- *Crystal Release*

Again: The fact that they were crafted by some creator doesn’t mean they are mindless golems; they almost have their own societal structure and are capable of making intelligent decisions.



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This is why they are able to make an accord with the Carians, as we learn via the Magic Downpour spell:

“One of the sorceries of the Carian royal family. Summons a mass of magic that fires projectiles over a wide area. This sorcery can be cast while in motion. Charging extends duration. Said to have been taught by the Crystalians to mark the swearing of the old concord.”

- *Magic Downpour*

This spell is interesting because it appears to be a form of magic rain, which again makes us think of that original star deluge described in the Founding Rain of Stars. Again I believe this illustrates how close the Crystalians are to the Primeval Current and to the very stars themselves.

It is of course their connection to Glintstone and the Primeval Current that has led groups like the Carians and the Crystal Cadre to desire the knowledge of their spells and powers. Which sorcerer wouldn’t? These are beings of living Glintstone, the core material to modern Glintstone sorcery, and a connection to the mysterious Primeval Current.

Yet the question remains: Who created these curious beings? Well, given their purpose is to guard Glintstone, it is very possible it was a sorcerer who created them. As I noted earlier – the visual callback to the film, *The Golem*,

seems to suggest that it would have been a Glintstone sorcerer who created them to protect Glintstone. Perhaps it was an esteemed sorcerer like Lusat or Azur, who would have the skill and knowledge to create such a being.

THE BLOOD STAR

There is an anomaly that stands out amongst the stars, and that is the Blood Star, a sinister eldritch entity that is named a star but behaves very differently.

There are two spells that mention the Blood Star by name, Briars of Sin and Punishment, and for that reason I will quote the full description of Briars of Sin:

“An aberrant sorcery discovered by exiled criminals. Theirs are the sorceries most reviled by the academy. Wounds the caster with thorns of sin, creating a spiral of bloodthorns. This sorcery can be cast repeatedly, up to three times. The guilty, their eyes gouged by thorns, lived in eternal darkness. There, they discovered the blood star.” - *Briars of Sin*

We will return to the context of these spells shortly; the blood sacrifice element, the blindness and relationship to the blind. For now I want to focus on the fundamental identity of this entity: the fact it is a star. By unpacking the



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lore surrounding stars we can gain a foundation to work from.

The fact it is named a star isn't enough to confirm that it is the same as the others, given this could just be a name given to a cosmic being by humans who struggle to understand its true nature. We know that stars, in the world of *Elden Ring*, are living beings. Glintstone contains "the vitality of the stars," something told to us by Sellen, and we of course face a living star ourselves in the form of Astel.

We gain surety about this star's nature when we discover that it shares a similar relationship to Glintstone that other stars do. We find this thanks to the robes of Alberich, the rogue sorcerer. Alberich's hat reads:

"Mad Tongue Alberich's pointed hat, a sign of a heretical practitioner. Set with red glintstones, said to be formed by the blood of sacrifices. Strengthens thorn sorcery. Alberich was an aloof yet disturbed heretical sorcerer said to have been driven mad by jeering tongues during his service to the Roundtable Hold long ago."

- Alberich's Pointed Hat

These are red Glintstones, created by sacrifice, granted, but Glintstones nonetheless, and these are connected to the Blood Star. They specifically empower its Thorn Sorceries. Again, this reinforces the idea that the Blood Star is indeed

The Blood Star is "found" in the darkness, suggesting it plays by a different set of rules than regular stars that can be connected with via the Primeval Current.

a star, one that can be communed with through the same medium as others – albeit with a certain sinister twist.

Two things appear to be required to use its power: loss of sight and blood. This is true in the case of both the Guilty and Alberich, the only practitioners of this magic that we know of.

The Guilty are literally blinded, and the pain and blood that comes with such an act plays the role of the blood sacrifice. But you will also notice that every time someone uses a thorn sacrifice, they cut themselves.

Alberich's case is fascinating, and is one of those really great examples of FromSoftware's attention to detail. With the Guilty as a baseline we know we need the occlusion of sight and a blood sacrifice. Alberich artificially recreates these conditions without permanently



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blinding himself. How? He has covered his eyes with a black cloth and he has covered himself in red Glintstone. This stands in for the blood sacrifice, given that was how these stones are made.

How Alberich was able to uncover this work-around is something we will talk about later, when we discuss the potential connections to the cult figure known as the Snowy Crone.

The Blood Star is "found" in the darkness, suggesting it plays by a different set of rules than regular stars that can be connected with via the Primeval Current. It exists perhaps in a different abyss that can metaphysically connect to those who only see darkness.

The description of the Guilty seeing the Blood Star in the darkness of blindness sounds very similar to Azur's experience of peering into the Primeval Current, an event described by Comet Azur.

When compared side by side to the Briars of Sin, these do appear to be different types of communion, which makes the Blood Star unique. This communion was not achieved by Glintstone and indeed isn't even taking place in the Primeval Current. How the Blood Star is able to commune with humans in the abyss of sight-loss rather than from the abyss of space is ultimately a mystery.

But it does make it clear that this star is unique among its kin, and is able to

be found without the use of Glintstone. When the Thorn Sorcerers use Thorn Sorceries, their eyes glow red, showing that the Blood Star can always be summoned by them, no Glintstone required.

Let's now explore what makes this star unique, by examining its followers and how it manifests itself in the terrestrial realm.

THORNS AND THE GUILTY

Evidently we cannot discuss the Blood Star without reviewing the most prominent practitioners of its magic: the Guilty, the Thorn Sorcerers.

We have already read the associated spells, Briars of Sin and Punishment, and we know that these people are "exiled criminals" known as the "Guilty." We know that thorns are used as a punishment in the Lands Between. For example there is the garb called the Guilty Hood, covered in thorns:

"Coarse hooded cloak of olive brown. The garb of those accused of lesser crimes, indicated by the collar of sharpened branches." - Guilty Hood

Bear in mind these thorn collars are only for "minor crimes," and so the blinding that is inflicted upon the Thorn Sorcerers must be for more serious crimes. I think it is a fair assumption that this



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is a specific punishment of the Golden Order – of the Erdtree authority.

I say that because they are the current ruling force. Indeed throughout Limgrave we see people wearing this Guilty garb, crucified on what appears to be Marika's Rune, mimicking Marika's iconic sacrificial pose.

Then we have the Thorn Sorcerers themselves, who are put to work by the order of Fire Monks, an order clearly created by Marika to contain the Ruinous Flame.

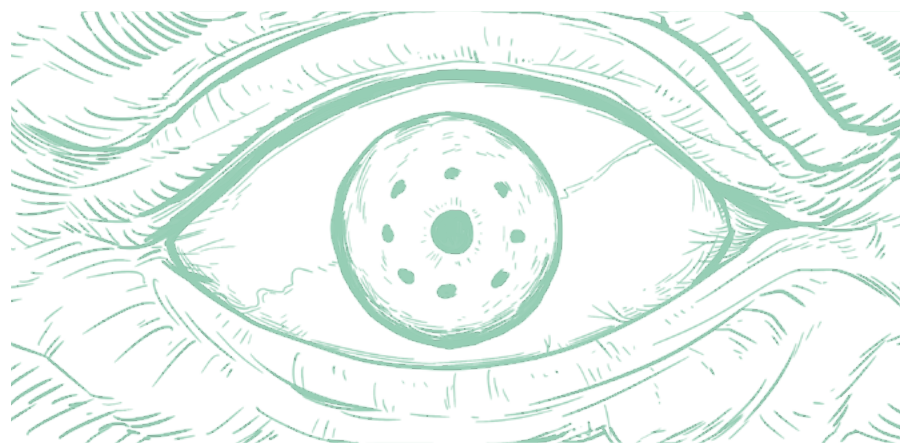
It makes sense that she would create this order of monks to watch over the deadly flame. We get confirmation of their original allegiance from their base at Giant-Conquering Hero's Grave, which has Two Finger banners throughout its interior.

So in short, it is Marika's regime which is punishing these Guilty, and

likely it is to this mountaintop that they are exiled as part of their punishment. To me this implies that Marika and her regime are well aware of what their punishment does. They know that by blinding guilty people in this way they are likely to have an encounter with the Blood Star before they are shipped off to serve their sentence as a Fire Monk sorcerer.

Indeed the Blood Star and its Thorn Sorceries are so central to the Fire Monk order that even the Prelates have incorporated it as part of their equipment, via the whips that they wield.

The Fire Monk organization is a complex combination of different beliefs and ideals that have evolved over time. It was clearly established with the sole purpose of guarding the flame, and yet in time they began to



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Perhaps there is a reason that Thorn Sorcerers are employed here. Perhaps there is knowledge that the thorns are effective against Fire Giants.

worship their charge, mimicking the appearance of the Fire Giant himself by dyeing their hair red and placing the face of the Fell God on their chest plates. So it isn't too surprising that this mongrel theocracy would incorporate the thorns of the Blood Star into their symbology.

It is speculation, but there is a good chance that thorn magic was wielded against the Fire Giants in the climactic conflict. One of the things in *Elden Ring* that we have no direct answer for is the giant stakes that pierce the bodies of the giants. However I have always maintained that these stakes are the works of thorn magic. If you look closely at the stakes, you can see that thorns have sprouted from them, and the Thorn Sorcerers are also very prominent in the surrounding area.

Perhaps there is a reason that Thorn Sorcerers are employed here, rather than elsewhere. Perhaps there is knowledge that the thorns are effective against Fire Giants because of how prominent a role it played in the war. Another potential clue is the fact we can actually find these stakes in the Fire Monk camps in Liurnia, again suggesting that these are tied to the Thorn Sorcerers – perhaps conjured by them?

As a whole, this gives new prominence to the Blood Star and its importance to the Fire Monks and the Erdtree regime. It implies that Marika has employed this punishment, and these powers, since the late Erdtree conquest wars at least. The god of the Golden Order and the Erdtree actively employ the powers of the Blood Star against Marika's enemies.

These spells must be a Glintstone Sorcery of some kind, because we know that Alberich's Robes have a resonance with the Thorn Sorceries. So, for some reason, the Blood Star and its magics manipulate the power of blood to animate thorns in an aggressive manner.

Why? Because thorns were likely one of the first elements that the Blood Star interacted with. Let's return to the Briars of Sin and just look a little closer at the description – it says that in the eternal darkness of the Guilty's blindness they "discovered" the Blood Star.



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I therefore think the Guilty, punished by Marika's regime, were the first people to encounter the Blood Star. If the Blood Star's first interaction with humans was with those who had been blinded with thorns, it would make sense that it would weaponise those thorns, granting the blind the ability to wield these thorns.

I want to discuss another player that is relevant to this story, someone we have mentioned a few times already: Alberich. We know Alberich was a Tarnished and once a member of Roundtable Hold, something we learn of via his robes:

"Alberich was an aloof yet disturbed heretical sorcerer said to have been driven mad by jeering tongues during his service to the Roundtable Hold long ago."

- Alberich's Robe

Before we talk about Alberich's history I want to focus on another word in this item description: heretical.

We have already seen how Marika's regime readily employs Thorn Sorceries, so would they really be considered heretical? I think it is more likely that it is considered heretical by the actual practitioners of Glintstone magic, the Carians and Raya Lucaria.

It seems as though Alberich was "driven mad by jeering tongues" at Roundtable Hold. He drops the

Taunter's Tongue, suggesting that this is indeed the tongue of someone at the Roundtable who used to taunt him. Why did they mock him? For his heretical belief in the Blood Star? It's all we have to go on.

There is another interesting detail about Alberich, however, that we need to take into account: Alberich's use of Cold Sorceries. Specifically he appears to use Glintstone Icecrag and Freezing Mist, and this has some *very* interesting implications.

Both of these spells refer to Ranni's relationship with the Snowy Crone, and I have often speculated that it was Ranni's tutelage under the Snowy Crone that helped her conceptualize the Night of the Black Knives and the cult magic necessary to transpose the Rune of Death into the blades. And, of course, conduct the ritual that split the

I have often speculated that it was Ranni's tutelage under the Snowy Crone that helped her conceptualize the Night of the Black Knives.





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effects of the Rune of Death between her and Godwyn.

So what is the relevance of Alberich knowing these spells? Did she teach him as well? We have to assume so, given she seems to be the source of such sorcery.

Does this mean she also taught him about the Blood Star, its secrets and about red Glintstone? Perhaps. After all Alberich seems to be one of the only individuals who is *not* blind and yet has knowledge of it. He is able to use the spells of the Guilty without having suffered such a terrible fate himself. So it would make sense to me that this mysterious crone, well-versed in the occult and the dark side of celestial bodies, has been the one to teach Alberich about the Blood Star.

I've always assumed that the Snowy Crone is likely located on the Mountaintops of the Giants, given she is the *Snowy Crone*; perhaps she is a remnant of the old astrologer community that lived alongside Fire Giants.

There is one cold sorcery that is *not* associated with the Snowy Crone, however: Zamor Ice Storm, the description of which calls the Zamor an ancient people that have an old enmity with the Fire Giants. My speculation is that the Zamor are the original creators of cold magicks, and it was later developed by human sorcerers like the Snowy Crone.

If that's the case, perhaps it is no surprise the Crone has knowledge of the Blood Star, given the corpses of the giants, skewered by thorn magic, found all throughout the mountaintops. Perhaps she even witnessed the war herself?

There is also another interesting observation that was made by a viewer who commented on one of my community posts, Monsieur Dorgat. They suggested there may be a connection to Alberich at Heretical Rise, a possibility I had never considered. The connections being made here are that Cold Sorceries likely come from the Mountaintops of the Giants and that the interior is possibly filled with red Glintstone.

This location has always been of great interest to me. It is a tower that has clearly been sealed by Raya Lucaria, as is evident by the seal blocking the door and the marionettes that are guarding the tower – inside and out.

It is called Heretical Rise, which is interesting as, again, Alberich was considered to be a heretical sorcerer, likely by Raya Lucaria. However the point of heresy does seem to be a Primeval Current sorcery, as you are rewarded with Founding Rain of Stars from this tower, not a Thorn Sorcery. Does this mean that Alberich didn't



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also look into the Primeval Current? Of course not. He could well have tried to research the Primeval Current to further understand the nature of the Blood Star.

Finally, as for the possibility of red Glintstone as mentioned by Monsieur Dorgat, there do seem to be clumps of dark stone here. They aren't as bright red as the Glintstone found on Alberich's Robes but perhaps this is red Glintstone in its pure form, before it is cut, shaped and buffed. I leave it for you to decide.

Alberich is a red phantom invader and we do have to question why he behaves like this. Perhaps he just seeks more blood for the Blood Star. Indeed he wields a scythe, a great bloodletting weapon. Or perhaps he wants revenge against the Roundtable – after all, that is where he invades, breaking the no-conflict rules of this sacred place.

Ultimately this is what we know about the Blood Star and how it interacts with its adherents. The Erdtree faithful seem to purposefully force convicts to have an interaction with it, by giving it the blood sacrifice it seems to crave. However, it seems that those with knowledge of it can circumvent the need to harm themselves, by harming or sacrificing others – so they can create red Glintstone to use the powers, whilst keeping their sight intact.

THE LORDS OF GRAVITY

Gravity in layman's terms is essentially a force of attraction between bodies of mass. When this is mutual attraction between certain bodies such as planets, stars etc. then it determines the motion of these bodies in a system of balance.

So it makes sense that gravity magic is just a Glintstone, or star sorcery that manipulates gravitational forces². Stars are celestial bodies and so it makes perfect sense that a being like Astel, a malformed star, can naturally manipulate gravity to redirect meteorites as it sees fit – especially when we consider that in this universe stars are connected to magics.

That being said, there are a lot of fascinating allusions that can be used to enrich our understanding of some of the symbolism found within the game. In turn this can assist our understanding of this curious field of magic and the mysterious beings known as the Alabaster and Onyx Lords, who are very closely associated with gravity magic.

We learn that the Alabaster and Onyx Lords are an ancient race that came to this world via meteorite, as their swords read:

"A weapon unique to the Onyx Lords, a race of ancients with skin of stone who

² The item descriptions for gravity spells tell us they are Glintstone sorceries, for example Collapsing Stars reads: "One of the glintstone sorceries that manipulates gravitational forces... A gravitational technique mastered by the young Radahn. 'I thank you for your tutelage, for now I can challenge the stars.'" - Collapsing Stars



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Stars are celestial bodies and so it makes perfect sense that a being like Astel, a malformed star, can naturally manipulate gravity to redirect meteorites as it sees fit.

were said to have risen to life when a meteor struck long ago.”

- Onyx Lord's Greatsword

This is a fascinating origin story for this alien race; specifically when it states they “were said to have risen to life when a meteor struck” the Earth. The language used implies they didn’t hitch a ride on the meteor but rather came into existence when the meteor struck the Earth. This then brings us to their “skin of stone,” and for me it makes sense that these are beings born of the meteorites themselves, born of the material found within a meteor.

Meteors come in three main classifications: iron, stone and stony-iron. I think it would be fair to say that most laymen would believe meteorites to be made of stone, hence the choice to describe them as “stony skinned” is to

lead us to conclude that these are beings born from the material found within the meteorites that struck the Earth.

Indeed if we examine their skin up close it looks as if they have mineral veins running through the stone skin – much like a stony iron meteorite might have.

Again I would remind you that gravity magic is the magic of Glintstone, which in turn is residual life energy of the stars. If I was to speculate on the precise nature of these beings, I would say they were formed of the meteorite and given life by residual star vitality.

There is evidence that shows us how closely connected to space they still are. Before confronting us, they seem to be physically absent before coming through a nebulous porthole, as if they can spatially displace themselves. Indeed, if they de-aggro from the player, they will actually return to where they came from, showing that this is an ability they can use at will. It is similar to the ability of Astel to blink in and out of space: these really are beings beyond our comprehension. We will discuss the significance of this momentarily and how it can connect to gravity magic.

They are called “lords” and I confirmed with Mirko that in the original Japanese they would be referred to as “kings,” suggesting that these beings would command some kind of authority



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in the Lands Between. This makes sense due to the sheer power they possess. Indeed this is directly stated to be the reason for their authority in the description of the Meteorite sorcery:

“The sorcery originates from the Onyx Lords, who had skin of stone, and were called lords in reverential fear of their destructive power.” - Meteorite

We witness some of the authority they enjoy over the so-called Starcallers, those being the miners in purple rags, whose name we get from the Gravity Stone Chunk. We see a group of these worshipping an Alabaster Lord in the Weeping Peninsula.

The very fact that Radahn went to Sellia to study under an Alabaster Lord suggests that this one at least enjoyed a position of some authority here:

“A gravitational technique studied by the young Radahn. His master was an Alabaster Lord with skin of stone.” - Gravity Well

This brings us to the Alabaster and Onyx variants of these beings that not only have different skin colors but also swords made from different materials. What is the relevance of this? Well this in turn brings us to the conflation that *Elden Ring* makes between magnetism and gravity, a subject that has been really well explored by YouTuber Quelaag³.

The idea of magnetic poles does seem to be reflected in the two designs of the lords that we get in-game, these lords being the main vectors for this magic in the Lands Between.

The general starting point for this discussion comes from one of the most famous wielders of gravity magic: General Radahn. As noted by Quelaag and others, the symbol found upon Radahn's swords is curiously not the symbol for gravity but is the one for magnetism or, more specifically, a magnetic field. Not only is this found on Radahn's swords but this is in general the sigil that appears when using gravity magic.

Indeed the idea of magnetic poles does seem to be reflected in the two designs of the lords that we get in the game, these lords being the main vectors for this magic in the Lands Between. I will return to the Alabaster and Onyx Lords momentarily as I believe they relate to something different.

The Onyx Lord's Greatsword is made from a “golden-hued meteoric ore” and



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the Alabaster Lord's Sword is made from a “blue-white meteoric ore⁴.”

What is interesting is that both of these swords provide contrasting effects – the onyx sword repulses and the alabaster sword pulls, almost as if individual variants of these lords are meant to represent the two magnetic poles and the two main effects of magnetism: repulsion and attraction.

We could go even further and speculate that in this fictional world, because their swords are made out of a different magnetized mineral, they have a different magnetic focus – this is sorcery after all. Is it even possible then that the lords themselves are formed of different minerals found within their individual meteor of origin, that determines their polarity and focus of gravity magic?

Their swords' inherent power would seem to suggest so, and yet the question remains why is it called gravity magic, and not magnetic magic? In determining the answer to this question I concluded that it is just an analogy or conflation.

To me the best analogy to this is the concept of Gravitoelectromagnetism,⁵ that being a formal analogy between the effects of gravity and magnetism.

In a way that is what I think is being done in *Elden Ring*. Magnetic principles are being used to analogously

illustrate the effects of gravity magic in this world: the effects of push and pull.

Yet I do think we are doing the subject a disservice if we just leave it at that. Yes, there are illustrative similarities in this magic that makes it analogous to magnetism. Yet I don't think magnetism can explain how the signature spell Meteorite works, nor how the lords and Astel are able to freely jump from the material world.

I believe that rather than seeing Meteorite, the spell, as a result of pushing or pulling, we should pay more attention to where the meteorites come from. If you look at the spell closely you can see little portals opening that let the meteorites through. Additionally, Astel seems to jump through a similar portal, and this brings us back to the lords being able to appear and disappear through a portal.

I suggest that these are no ordinary portals but are in fact wormholes, which are theorized by many to allow one to pass through from one place in space to another.

According to Einstein's Theory of General Relativity this could be possible if a black hole was connected to a white hole. Black holes are regions of superdense mass where the gravity is so strong that not even light or time can escape.

³ “Elden Ring Ramble – Metal, Magnets, God” - Quelaag

⁴ “Elden Ring Lore: Onyx Lords & Alabaster Lords are Aliens” - The Inhuman One

⁵ Reddit comment by u/GoliathVV from post “TIL the crest/symbol for gravity magic is an illustration of a magnetic field”: bit.ly/4bfnW1c



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White holes are the theoretical opposite regions of space: outward flowing areas of spacetime where everything is pushed outwards from the central point.

It would be easy to get drawn down a rabbit hole here, but I do think this is our best bet for understanding why there is an Onyx Lord for the black hole and an Alabaster Lord for the white hole. Together, the pull of a black hole and the push of a white hole would make a wormhole and I do think that these beings

of gravity mastery, such as Astel and the lords, are able to manipulate these forces freely to create these wormholes.

It is of course these effects that Radahn wished to wield for personal reasons, as his remembrance states:

“The Red Lion General wielded gravitational powers which he learned in Sellia during his younger days. All so he would never have to abandon his beloved but scrawny steed.”

- Remembrance of the Starscourge

So it appears his initial reasoning for learning this magic was so that he would never have to give up his horse, as he grew larger.

In the story cinematic and in our conflict with him, we can see he is still riding this comically small horse. Obviously it would have been crushed by Radahn’s great weight were it not for the gravity magic he employs.

However by the end of his tutelage it appears he had a different use for the magic, as we learn the following from the Collapsing Stars spell:

“A gravitational technique mastered by the young Radahn. I thank you for your tutelage, for now I can challenge the stars.”

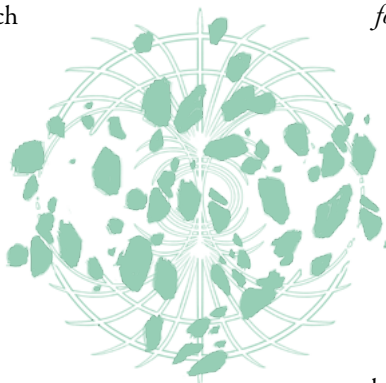
- Collapsing Stars

The stars themselves! And of course being able to manipulate pull and push magic would allow a being of sufficient power to repulse

the stars and lock them in place. As we know this has two main effects. First of all Radahn uses this power to keep the town of Sellia secure. We learn this from the Sword Monument in Caelid:

“The Starscourge Conflict / Radahn alone holds Sellia secure / And stands tall, to shatter the stars”- Sword Monument, Redmane Castle, Caelid

Radahn challenging the stars with his gravity powers is thus known as the



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Starscourge Conflict and is where he gets his epithet from: the Starscourge. But what was he challenging the stars for?

The threat may well be fairly direct. When you defeat the Starscourge, a falling star strikes the land nearby in the Weeping Peninsula, which of course causes major damage to the landscape. Perhaps a star like this was heading to destroy Sellia, and so Radahn, who had grown to love his place of education, could not bear to see this happen.

We can also look to some cut content for some more satisfying explanations. In a video by Zullie the Witch on Astel’s unused animations, they make the suggestion that perhaps it was that threat of these beings that prompted Radahn to utilize gravity magic. In this video Zullie explains how they were able to find an unused animation, similar to Radahn’s meteor attack, almost as if Astel was meant to plummet down from the sky and impact upon the earth.

The visual effects for the impact is the same as Radahn’s, and the travel distance is huge, suggesting a vast arena. Therefore Zullie suggests that the overlap and arena size point to Astel having once played a role in Radahn’s boss fight⁶. Perhaps after defeating Radahn, Astel would have dropped from the sky like a meteor.

Yet of course the other effect of having halted the movements of the

stars is that the fate of the Carian royal family was “arrested,” something we learn via Sellen:

“The stars alter the fate of the Carian royal family. And the fate of your mistress, Ranni. But long ago, General Radahn challenged the swirling constellations, and in a crushing victory, arrested their cycles. Now, he is the force that repulses the stars. If General Radahn were to die, the stars would resume their movement. And so, too, would Ranni’s destiny.”

- Sorceress Sellen

So in essence Radahn doesn’t just use the gravity magic he learned to repel dangerous stars, but literally uses the push and pull of gravitational movement to stop their movements altogether. This frustrates the fates of the Carians and specifically halts Ranni’s fate, so I suggest that this is the reason an Onyx Lord is imprisoned in the Royal Grave Evergaol at Caria Manor, as a sort of retribution against their kind. The damage to Ranni’s plan is only undone when we kill Radahn, potentially setting these very plans back for thousands of years.

This really illustrates the sheer strength of gravity magic. It can apply incredible force on a scale that is akin to the gravitational field of a planet or star. It is thus no surprise people referred to these powerful beings who mastered such forces as lords.

⁶ “Elden Ring – Where were they going to use this?” - Zullie the Witch



Chapter 4: The Rule of the Tree

With every new age, the Greater Will nominates certain individuals for potential godhood by marking them as an Empyrean. Following the pattern we discussed in an earlier chapter, Marika was elected as Empyrean, and received Maliketh. This is something we learn via Maliketh's remembrance:

"Maliketh was a shadowbound beast given to his Empyrean. Marika's sole need of her shadow was a vessel to lock away Destined Death. Even then, she betrayed him." - Remembrance of the Black Blade

Marika was elected from among the people known as the Numen. This is a connection we make through Marika's Hammer and the Black Knife Armor, but most specifically through the Numen's Rune, which outright says she is from Numen stock. The Numen are a fascinating race and their appearance preset in the character creator reads as follows:

"The face of the Numen, supposed descendants of denizens of another world. Long-lived but seldom born." - Numen Appearance preset



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Once more I turned to Last Protagonist for a translation to help us better understand the nature of this race. They provided a translation for the Black Knife Armor and noted that in the original Japanese the word "Numen" is not used. Instead these people are referred to as "Marebito".

Marebito is a word from ancient Japanese that is used in reference to a spiritual being that comes from a distant place, beyond the horizon. This of course ties in to the idea that the Numen are long-lived beings from a different world.

Shadow of the Erdtree finally answered some questions about Marika's people and her origins. Behind a statue of Queen Marika in the Shadow Keep of Messmer lies the Hinterlands, a beautiful region untouched by Messmer's flame.

The significance of the region is indicated by its protected status, hidden behind the strong walls of the keep and protected by two Erdtree Sentinels. The reason for this becomes clear when you crest a small hill and see a golden light emanating from a beautiful meadow, while a humble village sits in the background.

A softer version of Elden Beast's soundtrack plays, and a certain truth becomes apparent to us: This is Marika's home, Shaman Village. It explains the

lore of the Numen quite neatly; they are the descendants of the Shamans. They are beings from another world, and that world is the Land of Shadow.

Confirmation comes when we find two objects relating to Marika in this village: the Minor Erdtree incantation and the Golden Braid talisman, both of which name her directly. Minor Erdtree reads:

"Marika bathed the village of her home in gold, knowing full well that there was no one to heal." - Minor Erdtree

So something bad happened to Marika's people here: There was no one left to heal by the time she could unleash the healing power of the Erdtree.

As we explore the lore of the Land of Shadow we learn more of the Shamans. If you study the corpse of the grandmother found at the village, and the headless corpse of another Shaman at Bonny Village, you can see that both seem to be turning into trees. This strange arboreal tendency may help to explain how Marika manifests her godly power as a tree.

However, we later learn more disturbing truths about these characters' fates from the Whipping Hut at Bonny Village. Bonny Village is a place where the jars are created, a fact we learn from the Greater Potentates that wander around here.



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It is a Hornsent practice, as each of these potentates wear the Caterpillar Mask which has horns coming out the top, and is also the mask worn by the Hornsent of Miquella's companions.

Their knives, the Bonny Butchering Knives, read:

"Weapon of the greater potentates of Bonny Village. An outsize butcher's cleaver used to dismember human bodies in the making of the great jars stored in the gaols."
- Bonny Butchering Knife

Cutting up bodies is only half of the process, however. We learn of the other half by getting the Tooth Whip from the aforementioned Whipping Hut. It reads:

"Whip bestrewn with rotting, misshapen teeth. Filthy and seething with disease, the teeth are embedded in the whip and dose the victim with deadly poison upon each strike. As the wounds ripen they grow inflamed and ooze pus. The flesh of shamans was said to meld harmoniously with others."
- Tooth Whip

It is the Shamans, Marika's people, who are used as a central component of these jars. There is a ghost at the Whipping Hut who is seemingly addressing a Shaman who is suffering under the lash:

"For pity's sake, your place is in the jar. Nigh-sainthood itself awaits you within. For Shamans like you, this is your lot."
- Ghost at Bonny Village

Near Marika's village is the Finger Ruins of Dheo, an area from which Fingercreepers and Two Fingers arise. Ymir, scholar of the Fingers, tells us about Marika's long relationship with the Two Fingers:

"The conceits – the hypocrisy – of the world built upon the Erdtree. The follies of men. Their bitter suffering. Is there no hope for redemption? The answer, sadly, is clear. There never was any hope. They were each of them defective. Unhinged, from the start. Marika herself. And the fingers that guided her. And this is what troubles me. No matter our efforts, if the roots are rotten..."

- Count Ymir, High Priest

If one completes Ymir's questline we are led to a shocking revelation: The rotten roots which Ymir is referring to is Metyr, Mother of Fingers, another vassal of the Greater Will. Metyr is a tangled mess of fingers, and is the being which gives birth to the Fingercreepers and the Two Fingers.

Like the Elden Beast, Metyr was sent to the Lands Between by the Greater Will and Metyr's remembrance tells us that she was "the first shooting star" to arrive in the Lands Between, meaning she predates even the Elden Beast.

This makes sense given that Metyr and the Fingers were meant to act as the line of communication between the Lands



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Between and the Greater Will. However there is an issue here, best described by the Staff of the Great Beyond:

"The Mother received signs from the Greater Will from the beyond of the microcosm. Despite being broken and abandoned, she kept waiting for another message to come." - Staff of the Great Beyond

Does this mean that at some point the Greater Will cut off contact to Metyr? If so, have the Fingers been acting on instinct all this time, even when guiding Queen Marika?

Fellow content creator Kosmos made a great observation on X. They suggested that Gideon Ofnir may well have been aware of this fact all along. Kosmos pointed out the item description of Lord's Divine Fortification, which reads:

"Gideon gained true knowledge after his long exchange with the Two Fingers – discovering all had been broken long ago; that the trembling fingers, bent with age, and the Erdtree itself, were no exception."

- Lord's Divine Fortification

When telling Ofnir you intend to burn the Erdtree, he says:

"Go, if you would. Take no heed of cardinal sin'. The Two Fingers lost their purpose a long, long time ago."

- Gideon Ofnir

In hindsight, it seems almost a certainty that Gideon is referring to the fact the Two Fingers have not had genuine contact with the Greater Will for eons, and that in effect their word is worthless.

This also calls into question every single action of Queen Marika, who we had long assumed had been acting under the guidance of the Greater Will via the Two Fingers.

Whether the Fingers were in direct contact with the Greater Will or not, I think it is clear that they were the ones who guided her to godhood and gave her the tools needed to produce the Erdtree.

The Crimson Seed Talisman +1 reads:
"The Erdtree seed of this talisman was presumed to be an object of myth. This age-old artifact also depicts the Two Fingers, perhaps harking back to the birth of the Erdtree." - Crimson Seed Talisman +1



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The seed shown in this talisman is special, and its depiction alongside the Two Fingers is meant to illustrate the birth of the Erdtree. To me the interpretation is clear: the Two Fingers gave Marika the seed that would become the Erdtree. She then ascended to the Gate of Divinity and became a god of a new era.

The wars of the Erdtree would follow, and Marika's descendants and people would no longer be known as Shamans. They would now be the Numen, descendants of those from another world: the Shamans of the Land of Shadow.

I posit that the Nox are the Numen, but they are now defined by their allegiance to the Age of Stars. Rogier refers to the Black Knife Assassins as scions of the Eternal City, while the Black Knife Armor refers to them as Numen. In my chapter on the Eternal City and the Nox I discuss the branching off of the Nox in more detail, but just keep in mind that they share a common heritage; they have just developed into two distinct cultures.

So these are a long-lived otherworldly race who clearly have different biology to regular humans as they are "seldom born", but they also have supernatural life spans. This is particularly interesting, because we have two Numen connections that use

the term "eternal": the Eternal Cities and Queen Marika, the Eternal.

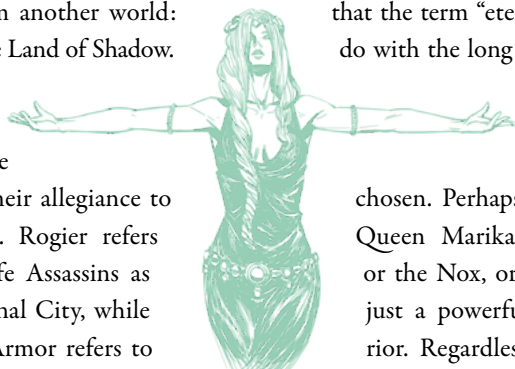
In both instances we can find explanations for their eternal nature, such as Marika being granted eternal life with her ascension to godhood, and the Eternal Cities being cursed to eternally exist beneath a false night sky. This is what I had previously suggested in my lore video "The Nox and Eternal Cities". But, as often happens, my position has somewhat shifted and I now can't help thinking that the term "eternal" has more to do with the long lifespans of these

Numen people. We don't know why Marika was chosen. Perhaps she was already Queen Marika of the Numen or the Nox, or perhaps she was just a powerful leader or warrior. Regardless, we know that the Numen are a remarkable race and therefore one among their number would make a very powerful god.

And being raised to godhood is far more than just a title here. Marika became a vessel for the Elden Ring itself:

"Queen Marika is the vessel of the Elden Ring, carrier of its vision. A god, in truth." - Finger Reader Enia

Queen Marika literally carries the Elden Ring, as we see when it appears in Radagon/Marika's body at the end of



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the day. It is clearly part of her; when she shatters the Elden Ring in the announcement trailer, she shatters herself. The Greater Will needed Marika to operate as its proxy, for the Erdtree would face great opposition, and it required a god of unshakeable power to cement its dominion over the world. And so Marika formed her alliance. As consort, she took Hoarah Loux, henceforth known as Godfrey, First Elden Lord.

This is evidently a calculated move and a necessary one given the times Marika lived in; she was aware that to cement her godhood and the Age of The Erdtree she would need martial might. As we have discussed, the arrival of the Erdtree will not have been viewed positively; it would have been seen as a threat.

As such, Godfrey was an excellent choice for Elden Lord at this time, and I believe both Elden Lords are a kind of sign of the times. Godfrey is the world's mightiest warrior at a time of great conflict, while Radagon is a man strong of belief in a time of waning faith. (We will discuss Radagon shortly.)

Joining Godfrey would be the Crucible Knights, and we learn of these warriors from the Crucible Axe Helm, which reads:

"Helm of the Crucible Knights who served Godfrey, the first Elden Lord. The

axe ornamentation is the knight Ordovis's mark, displayed also by his men. Holds the power of the crucible of life, the primordial form of the Erdtree. Strengthens Aspects of the Crucible incantations."

- Crucible Axe Helm

So these powerful warriors are an order of knights who still venerate the Erdtree's primordial form, and channel the power of the Crucible of Life. This makes them natural allies to the Erdtree forces; serving Godfrey was no doubt a result of respecting his undeniable strength.

With such might at her command, Marika would look to secure her new holdings as a god and brandish the very power of the Elden Ring against the most dangerous threat that existed: the Fire Giants. We know that the decision to make war upon the Fire Giants was a logical one. Not only were they a powerful race that worshiped a god that fell out with the purview of the Greater Will, but they actually posed a danger to the emergent tree. We learn this via the Surge, O Flame! incantation, which tells us that the Flame of Ruin was capable of burning the Erdtree – therefore making it one of the tree's few direct threats.

We know that people of the Erdtree faith, prophets, would have visions of the Flame of Ruin burning down the



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Erdtree throughout history. For example we hear of this dire prophecy via the Catch Flame incantation:

“Incantation originating from a sinister prophecy... The flame of ruin is anathema to the Erdtree. But prophets sometimes glimpse it within the faith all the same. Sadly when this occurs their sole reward is banishment.” - Catch Flame

This incantation describes the Flame of Ruin as anathema – a term, which means, when used in a religious or organizational context, something denounced or deemed an abhorrence. In other words, its very existence was in opposition to the Erdtree, and its allegiance to another god, the Fell God, meant it was something that could never be incorporated by the rising Order. Indeed, the Roar Medallion describes the Fire Giants as mortal enemies of the Erdtree and suggests they were most likely always destined to battle for supremacy of the Lands Between.

At this stage it is clear Marika fully believed in the mission of the Erdtree. She was strong in conviction, and utterly without mercy for her enemies:

“In Marika’s own words. Hark, brave warriors. Hark, my lord Godfrey. We commend your deeds. Guidance has delivered ye through ordeal to the place ye stand. Put the giants to the sword and confine the flame atop the mount. Let a new epoch begin. An epoch glistening with life.

Brandish the Elden Ring, for the Age of the Erdtree!” - Queen Marika via Melina

I find something of particular interest in the fact that Marika uses the term “brandish” in regards to the Elden Ring. The word brandish is usually used in reference to a weapon being wielded, suggesting therefore that the Elden Ring was seen as a weapon in this battle.

We hear a lot about Queen Marika without really knowing anything about her in her time as a god. We do see some powers directly from the Elden Ring, via the Elden Beast, Radagon and the Erdtree Avatars. Considering the immense power that Marika would have wielded at this time, I suspect harnessing the power of the Elden Ring is something we most likely aren’t meant even to comprehend. Regardless, with Godfrey, the Crucible Knights, the betrayal of the Trolls and the Zamor, Marika had tipped the scales of this war seriously in her favor.

The way in which she deals with the last surviving member of this race once again tells us a great deal about Marika’s ruthlessness when it comes to her enemies. The Fire Giant’s remembrance reads:

“The Fire Giant is a survivor of the War against the Giants. Upon realizing the flames of their forge would never die, Queen Marika marked him with a curse. ‘O trifling giant, mayest thou tend thy flame for eternity.’” - Remembrance of the Fire Giant



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I am not judging Marika for being ruthless – war is war. I admire Marika greatly and empathize with the difficult position she was in. Regardless objectively, her treatment of the last giant is a calculated one. Realizing there was no way to smother the Flame of Ruin completely, there was no benefit in killing the last giant. In fact, as we learn from Burn, O Flame!, killing him would have been a mercy, as it would free him from his never ending duty as a custodian of the flame. Instead Marika used this curse to her benefit, condemning the last giant to a life of solitary duty of tending the flame and in a practical sense serving as a mighty guard, an obstacle to anyone who attempted to access the power of the flame.

The war with the Fire Giants would have an everlasting and indelible effect

Queen Marika had defeated the giants. As told by the Sword Monument found on the mountaintops, this marked the beginning of the Age of the Erdtree.

on Erdtree culture, especially as it pertains to their perception of fire. This is something we learn about via the Spark Aromatic:

“Art of the perfumers who fought In [sic] the Shattering. Craftable with a perfume bottle... Though fire was prohibited to those who served the Erdtree, this rule was forgotten as the war drew ever on.” - Spark Aromatic

The fear of the flame, conjured by the conflict with the giants and the fear of their Flame of Ruin, would integrate itself into Erdtree worship as a forbidden tool. The burning of the Erdtree would, of course, become the first cardinal sin of the faith.

Regardless, the charismatic and powerful Queen Marika had defeated the giants. And, as told by the Sword Monument found on the mountaintops, this marked the beginning of the Age of the Erdtree. Through Marika the Greater Will had established a powerful foothold on the mortal plane, and soon the Lands Between would be dominated by the imposing light of the Erdtree. The first church of Marika would be established at the site of the Erdtree’s greatest victory, and in time many churches to the new god would be erected.

As a god with a human lord for her husband, Marika would have the first



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of her children, and these children born of Godfrey would become known as the Golden Lineage, to which we can connect Godwyn the Golden, Mohg, Morgott and eventually Godrick - although the latter is several generations separated from the rest.

What would follow is the golden Age of Plenty, an age that reinforced Marika's own belief in the Erdtree's grace. Let's examine this period now, as it will give us a good understanding of why so many are so dedicated to the Erdtree.

THE AGES OF THE ERDTREE

It is clear that the Erdtree has been the symbol of power in the Lands Between for a long time. It's also clear that the form of the tree itself has evolved several times. Early on, the worship of the Erdtree would have been almost pagan, with those of the Erdtree culture benefitting immensely from its bounty. Yet, in time, as these gifts dried up and the nature of the tree changed, faith would become more important, eventually leading to the more dogmatic fundamentalist ideals of Radagon.

Thanks to the work of YouTuber Tarnished Archaeologist¹ we do have a better understanding of these different eras. Tarnished Archaeologist dates them

by the three main groups of Erdtree related incantations: the Ancient Erdtree Era (Age of Plenty and the Crucible), the Erdtree Worship Era and the Golden Order Era.

The Age of Plenty and the Crucible is the earliest period of Erdtree history, a bountiful era that we hear of via the Blessed Dew Talisman:

"It was once thought that the blessed sap of the Erdtree would drip from its boughs forever – but that age of plenty swiftly came to a close, and with time, the Erdtree became more an object of faith."
- Blessed Dew Talisman

The incantations that display the Erdtree in its more wild and naturalistic form are deemed to be "Ancient Erdtree Incantations," such as Erdtree Heal, Blessing's Boon and Blessing of the Erdtree.

This is very much the Age of Plenty, as the Blessing of the Erdtree incantation reads:

"The Erdtree once flourished with abundance – yet it was only for a fleeting moment. Such is the course of all life."
- Blessing of the Erdtree

Yet it also shares the same sigil as that of the Crucible – so grouping it together, Archaeologist terms this earliest Erdtree era as the Ancient Erdtree period, the era represented by the natural tree.

Godfrey ruled in this era. We know this not only from his association with



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the Crucible but because he is also tied to the bounty of the Ancient Erdtree via the amber medallions. These contain the dried sap of the Erdtree, prized objects of Godfrey's rule.

Yet both the Blessing of the Erdtree and the Blessed Dew Talisman emphasize the fact that this period didn't last very long. Why is that? Once again, Tarnished Archaeologist provides a compelling theory, evidence for which is found in the very streets of Leyndell.

In Leyndell, even before we burn the Erdtree ourselves, there is a blanket of ash coating the streets with windows and doors having been sealed as ash piles up high around them. This is clearly a precaution by citizens to prevent ash from spilling into their homes. But the ash reaches the heights of Marika's chamber. As the Archaeologist says, there can be little doubt of the source of the ash, as there is only one object that looms over

the horizon sufficiently to distribute ash to the highest points of Leyndell. This is the Erdtree.

When we ourselves burn the Erdtree, we see Leyndell covered under a similar – yet deeper – blanket of ash. So if there was ash in Leyndell before we even arrived, it leads us to one conclusion: the Erdtree has been burned before.

The Archaeologist goes further, and states that they believe the Ancient Erdtree was actually a corporeal tree – and it came to the end of its bounty because the original arboreal tree was burned. In its place, the Elden Ring resurrected a golden phantom tree. This is only symbolically a tree and does not function as one.

Indeed in the Elden Lord endings, we spawn a new Erdtree and the hue is dependent on the configuration of Elden Ring we choose, implying the Erdtree is the source of this phantom. There is a clear difference between the Erdtree and



¹ "The 3 Creeds of the Erdtree" - The Tarnished Archaeologist



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the Minor Erdtrees; the latter are more real in appearance and still provide tangible benefits in the form of “tears.” The description of the Wondrous Physick describes this:

“Basins are placed at the feet of Minor Erdtrees throughout the Lands Between in order to collect their crystallized tears.”
- *Flask of Wondrous Physick*

Given this sounds very much like the Erdtree of the Age of Plenty, it again leads us to conclude that the Erdtree was once a more traditional tree, like its offspring.

The era following that of the Ancient Erdtree would be an era where the tangible benefits of the original arboreal tree were gone and faith would matter more. This would be when the miracles of the Erdtree faith would be developed, those marked by a sigil that shows a more stylized tree. With this new understanding in hand, certain dialogues of Marika begin to make sense, such as the following:

“I declare mine intent, to search the depths of the Golden Order. Through understanding of the proper way, our faith, our grace, is increased. Those blissful early days of blind belief are long past. My comrades; why must ye falter?”
- *Queen Marika via Melina*

This speaks of faltering belief in the wake of such a loss – the loss of the life-giving tree. Many must have felt bereft of the tangible benefits the tree

had once given, before being replaced with this pale imitation.

And this explains why there is such concern for the Minor Erdtrees found throughout the Lands Between, as in many ways they are the true successors to that original tree. When the Elden Ring is shattered, Erdtree Avatars spawn in order to defend the Minor Erdtrees. It’s as if the Erdtree itself recognizes that one of the Minor Erdtrees may need to succeed it.

Indeed an order of guardians is established through an ancient pact to defend the Erdtree, something we learn of via the Guardian Mask:

“Engraved golden mask. Worn by the guardians of the Minor Erdtrees. In accordance with an ancient pact with the Erdtree, it is said that their deaths led not to destruction, but instead to renewed, eternal life as guardians.” - *Guardian Mask*

It is as if these humans are so zealous in their belief that they give their bodies over to the Erdtree, and upon death are resurrected as part of the tree itself.

As for the burning of the first Erdtree itself and what even precipitated it? This is something we will discuss along with the Godskins. But in short, there is some tangential evidence that the Godskin Apostasy may be behind it all. Regardless of what you believe to be the source of the tree’s burning, witnessing such an



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event would have been apocalyptic in scale – and deeply traumatic for those who had lived in the Erdtree’s shadow for so long.

THE CRUCIBLE

Having spoken about the earliest era of the Erdtree it is only fitting that we speak about the Crucible, which we know to be the precursor to the Erdtree.

The Erdtree is the current beacon of the Greater Will’s influence. As we have already discussed, the Elden Ring came to the Lands Between long ago, and Placidusax was Elden Lord in the time *before* the Erdtree. As such, I suggest that the Crucible is a manifestation of the Greater Will’s power, hence its association with gold.

However, unlike the pure gold of the Erdtree, *red* gold is often associated with the Crucible. We learn this from the Gilded Greatshield which reads:

“The red tinge in the gold coat mirrors the primordial matter that became the Erdtree. The color of homeward yearning.”
- *Gilded Greatshield*

We also see this in the red gold of the armor of the Crucible Knights, and to me this red is a purposeful choice. After all, as content creator Hawkshaw reminds us in their “The Color Theory of *Elden Ring*” video, red is often associated with violence and bestial vitality.

The Age of the Crucible is one of horned beasts, chaotic life and violence, as is illustrated by those most associated with the Crucible: the Misbegotten, the Omen and beasts. In a podcast, my friend and fellow content creator Ratatoskr suggested that the Crucible is simply an analogy for the force of evolution in general and I am inclined to agree.

Evolution is a chaotic and violent process, with species going through different forms due to mutations, and in a way the Misbegotten almost appear as a personification of evolution itself. They are mismatched creatures with features of all different species, perhaps caught in some midpoint of the evolutionary process.

Prior to *Shadow of the Erdtree* we didn’t have much information on this besides the depictions found in Siluria’s Tree and Crucible Tree Helm, both of which show a chaotic tree which is meant to depict the Crucible. Thus for a long time many of us believed that the Crucible was itself a tree, one that was merely supplanted by the Erdtree.

However, with the additional lore provided by *Shadow of the Erdtree* we begin to understand that perhaps the representation of the Crucible as a tree is simply an analogy for its esoteric nature. It makes the Crucible easier to understand.



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For example the Hornsent of Belur-rat, an entire culture which flourished in the time of the Crucible, represents the Crucible as a *spiral* tree. The Spiraltree Seal reads:

“Sacred seal of soiled amber engraved with a spiral tree design... The majesty of the white tower, stretching to reach the gods, even inspired a secret faith in the invaders, the people of the Erdtree.”

- Spiraltree Seal

It becomes clear that what is important here isn't the tree but the spiral shape. The Crucible may be depicted as a spiral tree, but the spiral is present everywhere in Hornsent culture: the columns, staircases, curtains and candles of the Hornsent are all spirals. Enir-Ilim itself is

one massive spiral that reaches up to the heavens – up to the Gate of Divinity. Thus I feel the depiction of the Crucible as a tree is just a symbolic representation of an esoteric power that would be hard for mortal beings to comprehend. For the Hornsent, it is a graceful spiral tree that follows a current up to the heavens, manifesting in the Gate of Divinity and the Divine Beast from on high. To the warrior-like Crucible Knights, its power is seen as a chaotic tree, perhaps

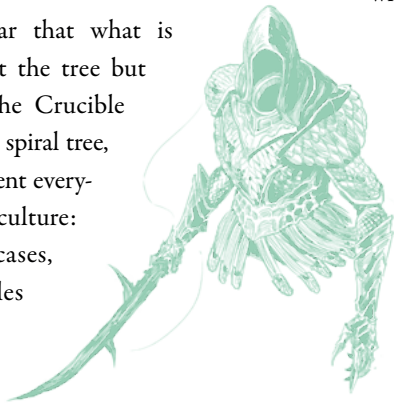
a reflection of the violent way in which they wield its power.

However, a nice bridge between the DLC and the base game is found in the Crucible Knights, as the tabards of the knights show a spiral shape, and the skill for Siluria's Tree is also a sort of spiral energy attack.

What else takes a spiral or double helix shape? DNA. And again this lines up with Ratatoskr's appraisal of the Crucible as an analogy for evolution. In terms of in-game lore, I see the Crucible as an esoteric power that often manifests as a spiral. The Hornsent incantation Spira reads as follows:

“Wrap one's arms together and hold them up to the heavens to summon a spiral of light that erupts at the enemy's feet... The spiral is a normalized Crucible current that, one day, will form a column that stretches to the gods.”

- Spira
I speculate that Enir-Ilim is a structure that traced one of these currents up to a point in space where the Crucible's energies coalesced – the Gate of Divinity, a well of power and energy where one can become a god. To me this is also why the gate is made of many



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corpses that are *blended together*; it is a location where the Crucible's power still manifests.

The currents of the Crucible permeate this world, and it is this current that encourages evolution and the trend towards diverse life. It's a force brought about by the Elden Ring's influence that divided the One Great. I believe that the Crucible has existed from that very moment.

The Aspect of the Crucible incantations read:

“This is a manifestation of the Erdtree's primal vital energies – an aspect of the primordial crucible, where all life was once blended together.” - Aspect of the Crucible: Horns

So this is the source of all life, and has existed since the beginning of diverse life in this world. The history of the Crucible dates back at least as far as the Ancient Era of *Elden Ring's* timeline, and that ties up with my hypothesis that it has existed since the splitting of the One Great. But how does this connect the Crucible to the Erdtree? In what way is this the primal precursor to the golden tree?

The Erdtree is essentially the age of order, conformity and regression. And so I speculate that it was the primal energies of the Crucible that were used to form the Erdtree when Marika ascended to godhood with the seed she was given by the Two Fingers.

Yet the primal energies of the Crucible would initially cross over into the Age of the Erdtree, and as such we would enter the age of the ancient Erdtree, the Age of Plenty.

THE NUMEN AND THE ETERNAL CITIES

I do not believe the Nox are the same as the Nightfolk, and I have studied their models extensively to prove this. The Nightfolk have silver eyes, light gray silvery skin, and are clearly linked to the silver mimics, a relationship that we will examine later. The Nightfolk are clearly their own separate race. The Nox have even darker ash skin and yellow eyes, and I believe them to be a group of corrupted Numen, which would explain their unique appearance. While this is my speculation, I do believe there is enough evidence to confirm it.

Let us start with the Black Knife Armor:

“The assassins that carried out the deeds of the Night of the Black Knives were all women, and rumored to be Numen who had close ties with Marika herself.”

- Black Knife Armor

The way in which I read this is that the assassins' close ties to Marika are because they are kin, so they are of the same branch of Numen as Marika.



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Then in turn we link the assassins to the Nox through a dialogue from Rogier, who says this of the Black Knives:

“You recall our conversation about the Night of the Black Knives, yes? They say the assassins who carried out the deed were scions of the Eternal City. A group entirely of women, arrayed in armor of silver under cloaks which fooled the eye.”
- Sorcerer Rogier

Rogier states that these women were from the Eternal City. This tracks, as they are similar to the dexterous sword maidens that we can face there. Therefore, it is almost certain that the Nox are a Numen civilization. Their armor describes them outright as Numen, but Rogier names them as “scions of the Eternal City,” i.e. children of the Eternal Cities, which means they are Nox.

If that isn't enough to convince you that the Nox are fallen Numen then I feel there is some environmental storytelling that can help link the Numen to the Nox, specifically through the Giant Ants we find in the game. The ants are interesting because of their eating habits. I believe they can actually confirm that the third destroyed Eternal City (found in the Deeprout Depths) was once inhabited by Numen, thus also confirming that the Nox and Numen are one in the same.

I would speculate that the Nox, before they were known as such, were originally Numen who, as we know, are descended from Marika and the Shamans.

In Ainsel River, near the Ainsel River Well Depths Site of Grace, there appears to be some kind of dumping ground for corpses, as evidenced by the coffins and sarcophagi that we see lying around. These corpses appear to land in the river and are carried downstream to the lair of the ants, who all feast upon them.

Then, further in, we find a swollen ant that, if we kill it, gives us a Rune. This bloated ant is clearly based on honeypot ants, those ants that gorge themselves on so much food that their abdomens expand massively. This leads me to speculate that these Giant Ants devour carrion, and thus the Runes we receive from them are likely the Runes once held by the carrion.

So let's apply this to the Giant Ants we find in the Deeprout Depths, next to the potentially destroyed Eternal City. In this nest there are numerous swollen ants,



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barely able to move after the feast they have clearly enjoyed. These particular engorged ants drop Numen's Runes exclusively and, given the destroyed city next door, it suggests that the ants have been feeding on the corpses of Numen (Nox) from that city.

For me this confirms that this was once an Eternal City of the Nox that faced destruction, before the scavenger ants came and devoured the corpses of those that died there. The fact their corpses yielded Numen's Runes confirms that the Nox are an offshoot of the original Numen stock from which Marika hails. We will return to the destruction of this city later.

So who are the Numen?

As mentioned earlier, the character creator has a “Numen” appearance preset that tells us of their long lives and rare births. They are long-lived people from another world, with the same type of fair hair as Marika herself. This information is also provided by two in-game items relating to the Numen: Marika's Hammer and Numen's Rune. Both of these items more or less say the same thing, that the Numen are from outside the Lands Between and are of the same stock as Queen Marika.

What picture can we construct with this information? I would speculate that the Nox, before they were known as such, were originally Numen who, as we

know, are descended from Marika and the Shamans. We know that this Numen community would, for a time, live under the rule of Marika and the Greater Will.

We know this because the Greater Will would be the force to banish them underground, as we find them in the game. We learn this from the Nox Monk Armor:

“Long ago, the Nox invoked the ire of the Greater Will, and were banished deep underground.” - Nox Monk Armor

By implication then, they once lived on the surface, subject to the Greater Will's authority, and so their transition from Numen to Nox is an interesting concept to ponder. Given what we see of the Eternal Cities, they must have developed their own culture, architecture and beliefs. It would be their commitment to the latter that would mark their transition fully into the Nox – and lead to their first act of treason against the Greater Will.

RISE OF THE NOX

The very name of the Nox hints at their core belief system: Nox is Latin for “night” or “darkness”. Given that the Nox society is focused on bringing about the Age of Stars, one assumes that their name followed the development of such beliefs.



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Yet before we examine their societal structure, culture and goals, let us first tackle the act that would result in their banishment. I would posit that this action was the slaughter of a Two Finger – for the item description of the Fingerslayer Blade reads:

“The hidden treasure of the Eternal City of Nokron; a blade said to have been born of a corpse. This blood-drenched fetish is proof of the high treason committed by the Eternal City and symbolizes its downfall. Cannot be wielded by those without a fate, but is said to be able to harm the Greater Will and its vassals.” - Fingerslayer Blade

This very item symbolizes the downfall of the Eternal City, and thus implies the event linked with this item is the reason for their banishment. Ranni needs this blade during the course of her quest in order to slay her own Two Fingers. However, it is heavily implied that the Nox already achieved this feat, as the description reads “blood-drenched.” It’s presumably already drenched in the blood of a different Two Fingers, as Ranni has not yet used this blade when we retrieve it.

Interestingly this act is named here as “high treason,” again suggesting that these people once lived under the auspices of the Greater Will on the surface.

Yet how were they able to produce such an extraordinary weapon? As we will discuss later on, it is clear to me that the Nox are

true innovators, and their science, beliefs and developments in some ways act as a precursor to a lot of Carian practices. Indeed I see Marika’s Hammer itself as a symbol that the Numen are craftsmen, something that combines with Nox alchemy to explain their general inventiveness.

With that in mind let us now consider the Fingerslayer Blade itself. We can see the blade was “born of a corpse”, both in its unholy appearance and from the description itself. There is another weapon in the game that shares such grave materials: the Sacred Relic Sword as wielded by the Elden Beast in the final fight of the game.

The Elden Beast forms this sword from Marika/Radagon’s body, and the description of the sword reads as follows:

“Sword wrought from the remains of a god who should have lived a life eternal. Thoughts on what the weapon portends are many and varied. Some consider it the mark of a great sin, or a sign of great devastation. Some think of it as the end of an age, while others, the beginning.” - Sacred Relic Sword

So there are a lot of incredible implications here that we can link back to the Fingerslayer Blade as well. This is clearly a perversion of the same practice.

The Sacred Relic Sword is clearly meant to be symbolic as well as being made to perform a certain purpose. To some this sword is clearly a mark of great sin and



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destruction, but it’s also meant to bring the end of an age or the beginning of a new one. Indeed, the Elden Beast wields the sword at the dawn of a new age, which follows directly after our clash with it.

We can see these facts also apply to the Fingerslayer Blade, as it too is a tool meant to bring great devastation: the death of the Two Fingers. In addition it is meant to bring about the end of one age and the beginning of another, for both the Nox and Ranni wish to use this tool to start a new age, the Age of Stars.

So we have established that these tools perform similar functions, but why is this important? It means the Nox have inverted or perverted the practice of corpse smithing used by the Elden Beast at the conclusion of the game. To me it’s clear that the level of craftsmanship shown by the Elden Beast is on another level, and one need only look at the level of elegance in the Sacred Relic Sword and compare it to the Fingerslayer Blade to understand that this is the work of the gods. And yet, it also speaks to the ingenuity and craftsmanship of the Nox that they were even able to attempt this. The description

of the Sacred Relic Sword seems to suggest that people are aware of and have heard about the Sacred Relic Sword.

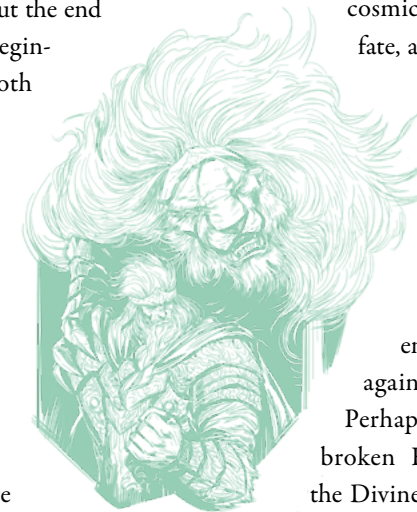
My speculation is that the Nox stole and inverted this process from the Greater Will, and built a sword from a corpse, and used occult practices, in order to bring about their new age.

Clearly these swords have some cosmic power connected to fate, and with them the Nox turned fate against the Two Fingers.

Which Two Fingers? Does it really matter? The blood upon the blade itself is proof enough that it was used against its intended target.

Perhaps it was one of the broken Fingers that exist in the Divine Towers. All of them? Or perhaps the Fingers of the Gloam-Eyed Queen? We will touch on her later, but I would speculate that, given she was also chosen as an Emphyrean, is it not possible that, like Ranni, she severed her own Two Fingers so she may act against the Greater Will.

Regardless of the reasons behind it, this act, this betrayal, this treason ended Nox society on the surface as we know it and confined them to the lands below.





Chapter 5: The Cities Eternal

Why are the Eternal Cities so named? And why do they have a false sky over their heads?

Returning to the description for the armor sets of the Nox, we can see that it reads:

“Long ago, the Nox invoked the ire of the Greater Will, and were banished deep underground. Now they live under a false night sky, in eternal anticipation of their liege.” - Nox Swordstress Armor

I think this makes it very clear that the Greater Will is the force behind the Nox’s current living conditions.

That word “now,” following on from the description of the treasonous acts of the Nox, suggests a causal link.

Nokstella and Nokron both exist underground, and we can indeed see that they have a fake starry sky above them – perhaps a creation of the Greater Will, placed there to taunt the cities with the Age of Stars they are destined never to see. Instead, these cities are made to wait in “eternal anticipation,” a truly cruel punishment.

We get further evidence on this state of affairs from the spell Night Maiden’s Mist:



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“Below Sellia, the Eternal City of Nokron sleeps. This sorcery originates from the maiden of that place.” - Night Maiden’s Mist

It’s my belief that, beneath that false sky, the Nox are limited in what they can do. They have their fate arrested due to the curse put upon them. Therefore, every action they take is an attempt to break this curse.

We know of three Eternal Cities of the Nox: Nokron, Nokstella and an unnamed city that has been destroyed. Interestingly, Iji describes Nokron and Nokstella as twinned cities:

“I take it you’ve heard of the Eternal City of Nokstella? Well, it has a twin, known as Nokron. The other Eternal City. After years of expeditions, we’ve determined the location of Nokron.” - War Counselor Iji

Twins are a common occurrence in *Elden Ring*, and this suggests that even the Eternal Cities fall within the rules of the Lands Between. If the game loves twins, maybe the unnamed third city was always doomed to fall? But more on that later.

We now have to consider if the Eternal Cities were built underground by the Nox or whether by some force they were literally teleported underground. I almost always go with the more mundane explanation for things, and this case is no different: the cities seem to have been

intelligently built around the unusual topography that one would find underground. This includes inverted spires that allow the Nox to use the cramped space more effectively by building on the roofs of the caverns.

That being said, there are some compelling arguments to be made that the cities were literally pushed below the surface. A stunning observation is made by Tarnished Archaeologist in their “Leyndell’s Hidden History” video essay. They argue that if you overlay the underground map with the overground map, you can actually see where the Eternal Cities would sit if they were on the surface¹.

This space lines up almost perfectly with areas on the overworld where it looks like land has slid away: in the abyss between lower Leyndell and the outer wall for the third lost city, in the northern part of collapsed Liurnia for Nokstella, and in the western gap of Liurnia for Nokron.

Either way, after being banished the Nox chose to build their new cities amongst the bones of an even more ancient civilization. This makes sense, as there will be foundations and flat land in these areas to build upon. The Nox seem to have adapted well to their new habitat, building dams where necessary and somehow training the local giant ants as mounts.

¹ “Leyndell’s Hidden History” - The Tarnished Archaeologist



The Cities Eternal

As we discussed previously, the ancient civilization that comprises Mohgwyn Palace, Uhl and Uld Palace is clearly modeled on the architecture of classical Greece and Rome. In contrast, one can see the Noxian architecture is far more modern, with sharp gothic edges and pointed arches – and, of course, the windows.

In Chapter 2 we talked about the Claymen of these ancient civilizations and how they are likely the warped remains of once human priests. However, there is another possibility: Maybe they are artificial life-forms created by that old society. They are of clay after all, and perhaps always have been – and they are also mindless in their behavior. All of this leads me to conclude that these are artificial life-forms that, in the absence of their masters, have turned into mindless automatons that infest their old civilization's ruins without any real purpose.

Their presence is significant to me, however, because they are a form of artificial life-form clearly created from some combination of alchemy and magic. The Nox are masters of alchemy and the manipulation of life, and therefore I find the Claymen's proximity to the Nox extremely interesting too.

Is it possible that the Nox derived some of their science and technology from the dregs of this ancient society?

We will soon turn to this subject. Before that, I would like us to examine the structure and nuances of Noxian society itself.

Despite being exiled from the surface, the Nox have managed to develop a robust, rich and advanced community that is a testament to the strength of these peoples. We can see from the way in which their towns are built that these were real communities, with churches, houses and open spaces. As we will see in the next section, and as we have already discussed, the Nox were inventive people making the best of their new environment. Innovations included the use of Ghostflame for street lamps, and the Nox also developed really advanced elevators that far outstrip anything we see in the surface societies.

Around these solid foundations was built a religious society offering a dark reflection of the Golden Order. It presumably venerated the Black Moon of Nokstella, as we can see in black circular reliefs on their buildings. We also see allusions to this in the black marble backs of their chairs – the same marbling as the Black Moon fragments we see in the Memory Stones.

The Moon of Nokstella talisman describes the moon as a guide for stars. Most likely, the Nox believed the moon would guide the stars to them, helping bring about their Age of Stars.



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This clergy of the night is headed up by the Night Maidens, a fitting opposite to the Finger Maidens of the Greater Will. We learn of these women from their attire, for example their Twin Crown, the description of which reads:

“Twin crowns worn by the nightmaidens [sic] of the Eternal City. Indicates the highest clerical rank, and hides the eyes with silk.”

- Night Maiden Twin Crown

This is an interesting bit of lore. It confirms that these maidens are the top of the pile when it comes to Nox society, and clearly held in a position of great religious authority. Alongside hiding the eyes, another interesting aspect of this crown we have to consider is the fact that two points protrude from the headpiece.

Again, since twins are an important

cosmological constant in the world of *Elden Ring*, it is not a huge surprise that we see them represented here on a piece of religious iconography. Unfortunately we don't get a huge amount of additional information on what twinned concept this aspect of the crown is representing. It could likely be the twinned cities of Nokron and Nokstella or the counterpoint between the Order of Grace and the Age of Stars; the Order of Grace being Marika and those who exist under the rule of the Erdtree and Greater Will.

This hierarchy is then supported by a warrior female caste known as the Swordstresses, and their armor description reads as follows:

“Armor worn by swordstresses of the Eternal City. These women are the personal guards of the Night Maidens, and wear silk capes.” - Nox Swordstress Armor

So the Night Maidens are important enough to warrant personal guards from these extraordinary and nimble warriors. In my opinion the way in which these warriors move is indicative of the fact that the equally nimble Black Knife Assassins were drawn from their ranks – but more on that later.

Finally, we have the only male caste that we are aware of: the Nox Monks. Given we know the Nox Night Maidens are the top of the pile and the Swordstresses are their personal guards, we can assume that the

The Moon of Nokstella talisman describes the moon as a guide for stars. Most likely, the Nox believed the moon would guide the stars to them, helping bring about their Age of Stars.



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Monks fall further down in the hierarchy.

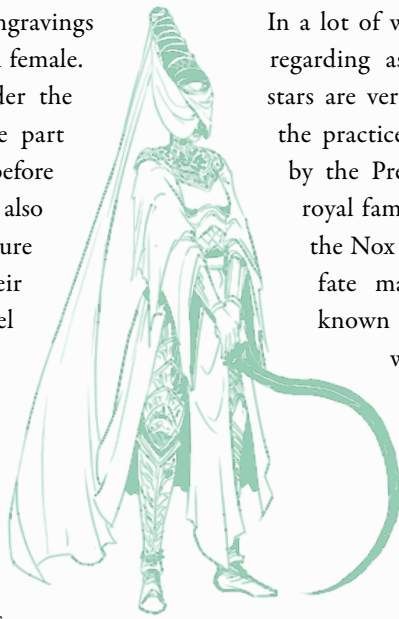
All of which leads me to believe that Noxian society is a matriarchy. The most obvious piece of evidence for this is the Night Maidens themselves: a female-only position which encompasses the most important religious and political power. Their personal guards too are an order of female-only warriors;

even the statues and engravings upon Nox chests are all female. One must also consider the fact that Marika, once part of this Numen society before they became the Nox, is also female, and was the figure chosen from among their number to be the vessel of the Greater Will.

Additionally, we can also consider the fact that the Giant Skeltons on the thrones are female. (These are important monuments which we will also discuss later.) Finally, the main beings chosen by the moon are also female: Rennala, Queen of the Full Moon and Ranni of the Dark Moon, suggesting that there is some connection between the female and the moon. This is a theme that has been superficially explored in the prior Souls games, but is made all the more explicit here.

So with a basic understanding of the make-up of this society, let us now examine some of the extensive and impressive innovations of the Nox.

SCIENCE OF THE NIGHT



In a lot of ways the Noxian beliefs regarding astrology, fate and the stars are very much a precursor to the practices that we see adopted by the Preceptors of the Carian royal family. For example, it was the Nox that first developed the fate manipulation technique, known to us as puppetry. This would later be revived by the Carian royals who we clearly see using Puppets to compensate for a lack of numbers during their conflict with Raya Lucaria.

We learn this is a Noxian practice from the item description of Starlight Shards, which reads:

“A prized item that was once used in the Eternal City as an ingredient in intoxicating draughts.” - Starlight Shards

This intoxicating drink is the draught that Seluvis later brews to enslave people



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as his Puppets. We can extrapolate that it is the fate latent within stars that is being manipulated to achieve this, by reading the Amber Starlight item description:

“If the stars command our fates, then amber-hued stars must command the fates of the gods. Such is the belief that inspired the use of these shards to prepare a most special draught.” - Amber Starlight

So by simple deduction, regular Starlight Shards must command the fate of ordinary beings, and through some unknown alchemy the drinker's fate becomes tied to whoever prepared the draught, making them puppets on a string.

Despite this, it does appear that each Puppet retains some individuality, something of themselves inside, since, according to Seluvis, controlling different Puppets feels different person-to-person:

“The soul of every puppet has its own ambience. You'll soon come to know, once

you possess a few. And once each's predilections are known to you, the better you'll be able to love them.”

- Preceptor Seluvis

Yet while Seluvis preys on unsuspecting or easily manipulated individuals for his source of Puppets, in the Nox culture they really didn't have any issue when it came to sourcing fresh candidates.

The description of the Nightmaiden & Swordstress Puppets reads as follows:

“These sisters, members of a cold-blooded race who wield flowing weapons, became puppets of their own volition.”

- Nightmaiden & Swordstress Puppets

So here we can see that Nox society is so fervent in its beliefs that the Nox will willingly sacrifice their own flesh and independence for the greater good of their goals. But why even do this? What does it achieve? Well, if you think about the way in which Puppets function, it essentially creates a pair of reusable soldiers.

Puppets work by having a body sequestered elsewhere, and then by being able to summon a blue phantom of them at any given time: a phantom that, when defeated, can simply be resummoned over and over again.

The Noxian skill for alchemically altering the fate within the stars is also highlighted by another creation of theirs: the Celestial Dew, a concoction that seems able to turn back fate,

It was the Nox that first developed the fate manipulation technique, known to us as puppetry. This would later be revived by the Carian royals.



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effectively curing any type of antagonistic relationship. Their innovations do not end with puppetry. Indeed, it seems as though the Nox developed all sorts of procedures, no doubt in an attempt to gain power against the Greater Will and finally bring about their Age of Stars.

Another example of this is the Dragonkin Soldiers. The three we encounter are all situated in and near the Eternal Cities and therefore are clearly creations of the Nox. This is confirmed by the Frozen Lightning Spear incantation:

“Incantation that channels the power of the Dragonkin Soldiers... The Dragonkin were born in the Eternal City, where they knew no true sky, nor true lightning. Instead, ice lightning was their weapon.”
- Frozen Lightning Spear

So not only are they a product of the Eternal Cities but their skills and abilities are a product of their environment.

We learn more about the creation of these Frankenstein beings from the Dragonscale Blade:

“A weapon made by sharpening a Gravel Stone scale, thought to be the source of ancient dragon immortality, into an unclouded Blade. Alas, the Dragonkin Soldiers never attained immortality, and perished as decrepit, pale imitations of their skyborn kin.” - Dragonscale Blade

Again, the innovative, if grotesque, science of the Nox never ceases to amaze

The Nox are looking to wield the power of these Ancient Dragons by essentially creating their own hybrid dragon warriors. But why?

me. Much like Aldia and the Dragon Scale cultists of *Dark Souls II*, the Nox have tried to recreate the power of the dragons in an artificial sense.

As with *Dark Souls*, the immortality of the dragons seems to be linked to these stone scales. To get a further understanding of it, I would like to point you to the description of the Lightning Strike incantation, which reads:

“One of the incantations of the capital’s ancient dragon cult... Ancestors of the modern dragons, the ancient dragons had scales of Gravel Stone and wielded lightning as their weapon. It is said that once they attacked Leyndell, the Royal Capital.”
- Lightning Strike

This creates two different classes of dragons. There are the immortal ancient dragons, such as the ones we see at Farum Azula, that exist beyond time and can wield lightning, with Lichdragon





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Fortissax among their number. Then there are modern-day dragons, which are of the type that we face numerous times across the Lands Between, such as Adula and Agheel – which of course look less stone-like and lack the ability to wield lightning.

The Nox are looking to wield the power of these ancient dragons by essentially creating their own hybrid dragon warriors. But why? Obviously, the dragons are powerful, once even ruling as the Greater Will's chosen vessels, and it is likely that those early Numen settlers witnessed their reign before one of their own, Marika, would take up the mantle of god. Yet there is more to it than this, and I believe we can get our answer from the description of the Ancient Dragon Smithing Stone, which reads as follows:

“Smithing stone made by polishing a golden Gravel Stone. A scale of the Ancient Dragonlord, and hidden treasure of Farum Azula... The Ancient Dragonlord's seat is said to lie beyond time. This stone lightly twists time, allowing the creation of a weapon capable of slaying a god.”
- Ancient Dragon Smithing Stone

Within these scales is literally the power to destroy a god, Marika. Given that the Nox are clearly aiming to end her rule, this would be a useful tool to have. Yet the Dragonkin are freakish

failures: powerful for sure, but they remain crippled abominations, unable to obtain true mortality and thus achieve their purpose.

But these Dragonkin are not the only life-forms we find among the Nox of the Eternal Cities. We must, of course, discuss the phenomenon known as the Silver Tears. The Silver Tears seem to inhabit the Eternal Cities alongside the Nox – and in my opinion these life-forms are, again, artificial creations of the Nox themselves.

More on that later, but for now we need to speak of another product of the Nox: the Chair-Crypts.

THRONES OF THE NOX

Chair-Crypts are a difficult subject because there is no direct lore in the game that even acknowledges them. The only thing we clearly understand is that these are of massive import to the Nox.

Let's look at what we can see of these thrones. There is one each in Nokron and Nokstella that seems to be occupied by a giant skeleton. There are also a few empty ones, most significantly one found in Sellia, Town of Sorcery, which is guarded by a Nox Monk and Swordstress.



Grace Given

Let's return to Sellia shortly, and keep focused on the thrones for now. Interestingly, each of the big thrones that seats a skeleton also has a chest underneath – a chest containing Ghost Glovewort, which according to the item description is used to comfort heroic spirits, and is a tribute to those who died heroic deaths. We know that these thrones are called Chair-Crypts thanks to a Site of Grace at Sellia.

So how do we explain these thrones and giant corpses? What follows will be my own speculation, but I believe it all comes back to the society-wide aim of the Nox and the description of their armor. Remember that the Nox are banished and have nothing more to hope for than the coming of the Age of Stars and their Lord of Night. We have seen that the Nox have attempted several experiments to bring this about. Could it be that these giants were attempts at creating an artificial Lord of Night, an artificial god?

This is what I believe. The thrones are symbolic of lordship, and the Glovewort is left underneath as tribute to the failed experiment – an experiment that would have died a hero trying to free their people.

I think this explanation can also put to rest another quandary: the petrified people that we see in Nokron and

Nokstella. To me these people have always been reminiscent of the messengers from *Bloodborne*, albeit crossed with the petrified people of Pompeii. However, even more closely linked to these people is the area in *Bloodborne* called Yahar'gul, specifically the second time we visit this place after the moon is beckoned.

At this point we see that the School of Mensis is performing its ritual to summon the One Reborn, and something new has been added to the environment: petrified people, frozen as if they have been caught in waves of some cosmic cataclysm as a result of the School of Mensis' meddling.

Each of the big thrones that seats a skeleton also has a chest underneath – a chest containing Ghost Glovewort, which is used to comfort heroic spirits, and is a tribute to those who died heroic deaths.



Grace Given

Think of it. The Nox are trying with all their power to beckon the Age of Stars: through rituals, through experimentation and religion. And in a way they do remind me of the School of Mensis in *Bloodborne*. To me it seems as though these petrified remains are the result of one of the many Nox practices that we have examined. The fact they are almost growing out of the ground suggests they are some cosmic life-form that was being summoned while this unknown process began.

So. We have covered the thrones, and yet there is one anomaly among them, one that exists on the lands above. Why is there a throne in Sellia? Let us now explore the Noxian links outside of the Eternal City.

SELLIA

Outside of Raya Lucaria there is only one other center for learning magic, and that is Sellia, Town of Sorcery, in Caelid. Sellia is most well known for its association with Radahn and gravity magic and we have discussed Radahn's tutelage under the Alabaster Lord of Sellia in the "Lords of Gravity" section.

While this may be a laudable achievement of the Town of Sorcery, there is certainly a darker association

hidden beneath the surface. This darkness is aptly illuminated by the item descriptions of the so-called Night Sorceries. And just by the name alone, you may already know where this is going.

It becomes clear that Sellia is a center for developing these sinister Night Sorceries, and we quickly learn the purpose behind such surreptitious practices. For example, from the Night Shard sorcery:

"The Sellian sorcerers were assassins, and it is said that they often hunted their fellows." - Night Shard

Of course the most prominent example of these magics we see being utilized is the Night Sorcery called Unseen Form:

"Makes the caster semi-invisible. While on horseback, effect extends to cover the mount... The Sellian assassins considered every option that aided their dirty work." - Unseen Form

So these Sellian sorcerers use the power of the night to obscure and assassinate, and their forms are only revealed when right up close. Does this sound familiar?

As always the Nox seem to be the innovators. They clearly developed this magic and will have improved upon it in Sellia before it is eventually used by the Black Knife Assassins, who can obscure their form from another's vision.

Indeed the link between Sellia and the Nox is confirmed by the Eternal



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Darkness spell and, more importantly, the Night Maiden's Mist:

"One of the night sorceries of Sellia, Town of Sorcery... Below Sellia, the Eternal City of Nokron sleeps. This sorcery originates from the maiden of that place."
- Night Maiden's Mist

What's interesting about this is that the proximity of the Eternal Cities seems to be a relevant factor, as if the Nox have ties with the town due to this. And given the arresting nature of their eternal curse, it makes sense that the Nox would try and form ties with the closest population center.

The architecture of Sellia is different to the Eternal Cities, but they are close enough that you can imagine them being built under the influence of the Nox. We have dis-

cussed the migration of these people from the Mountaintops of the Giants to the lands of Liurnia. Sellia only has two true Nox, and is mainly populated by Glintstone sorcerers. While the Night Sorceries of Sellia are a focus in this chapter, let us not forget that it is also the home of gravity magic.

In my conversations with Lokey, he suggested that Sellia was the result

of contact between these migrating astrologers and the Nox, and that while the town is mainly populated by the astrologers, it remains heavily influenced by Noxian culture.

This in turn raises questions about Ordina, Liturgical Town, which also matches this architectural style, but we will get to that later.

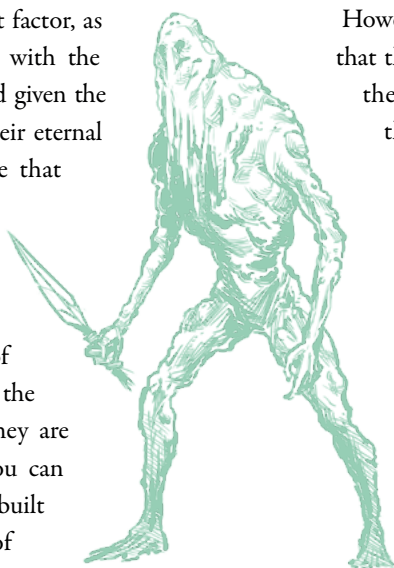
However another NPC suggests that there is more to it, and that the Sellians are actually Nox themselves. After all, once you provide Millicent with the Unalloyed Gold Needle as per Gowry's directions, he states:

"As thanks, I vow to impart to you my knowledge of the lost sorceries of the Sellians, descendants of the Eternal." - Sage Gowry

This suggests that Sellia is an offshoot colony of the Nox.

And again, this makes sense given its proximity to the Eternal City itself. It also means that Sellia is directly hiding its roots, given it presents itself as a sister school to Raya Lucaria. The only true aspects of Nox culture are hidden behind a seal – but more on that later.

With this in mind, the town's connection to the cosmos, the Alabaster



Grace Given

What is ironic about this connection is that Radahn would take this magic and halt fate – and ultimately stall the progress of the Age of Stars. But in doing so, he saves the town itself.

Lord and gravitational magic make sense: The Nox are always looking upwards for their power. What is ironic about this connection is that Radahn would take this magic and halt fate – and ultimately stall the progress of the Age of Stars. But in doing so, he saves the town itself.

We do have to wonder: What is the aim of the Nox here? Why influence Sellia and even go so far as to have a presence here? Clearly this center of learning is important to the Nox, as evidenced by the Silver Tear balls and the Nox Monk and Nox Swordstress who are physically here protecting their interests.

It's clear that the Nox use their overworld colony as a research station for these new types of magic, especially

gravitational magic. Clearly the Nox had some sort of relationship with an Alabaster Lord who helped them develop their gravitational magics. This idea becomes even more fascinating when we consider the Sellia Crystal Tunnel nearby, where Gravity Stones are mined by the kilo and a Fallingstar Beast has made its lair. This means that Sellia is literally well placed to help the Nox develop further magics related to the cosmos.

Another consideration is the opportunities afforded by training a town of mage assassins. Again, this will be speculation territory, so hold on to your Glintstone crowns.

This relationship with Sellia gives the Nox influence in the Lands Between, and as we know Sellian sorcerers assassinate people, is it possible the Nox are choosing targets to eliminate their enemies and weaken the forces of Grace? Rest assured it is no doubt these types of techniques that have been refined by Sellia and that would have been utilized by the Scions of the Eternal City during the Night of the Black Knives.

Then there is of course the throne. Consider a note passed to us by Gowry, titled "Sellia's Secret", which reads:

"The Town of Sellia hides the source. Light three flames atop the candle towers to break the seal." - Sellia's Secret



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So the town itself is hiding something known as the “source.” Given the fact that the Nox and their throne are neatly tucked away behind a seal, I would suggest that this source is most likely the Noxian throne. Therefore, the town’s relationship with the Nox is a secret to the public at large.

If we follow my theory regarding thrones this far, then it seems as though the Nox are eager to use Sellia as another testing ground for their artificial lords. And, given that Sellia has taken this as its own symbol, the town is fully on board.

Interestingly, this particular Chair-Crypt holds the Staff of Lusat, a powerful Sellian native, and this item is also guarded by two Nox. But are they guarding the staff? I would argue they are more likely guarding the Chair-Crypt itself, given its importance to Nox society. But, given that Lusat is an important figure from their community, it would also make sense they would venerate and protect his relic.

Lusat himself is a good example of the bridge that Sellia has created between the Eternals and the wider

world, and it is to the subject of further Eternal influence that we turn next.

INFLUENCE OF THE NIGHT

I don’t think we can truly appreciate the influence the Nox have had on the Lands Between without touching on their impact on the Academy of Raya Lucaria. Some of this influence comes from the relationship that

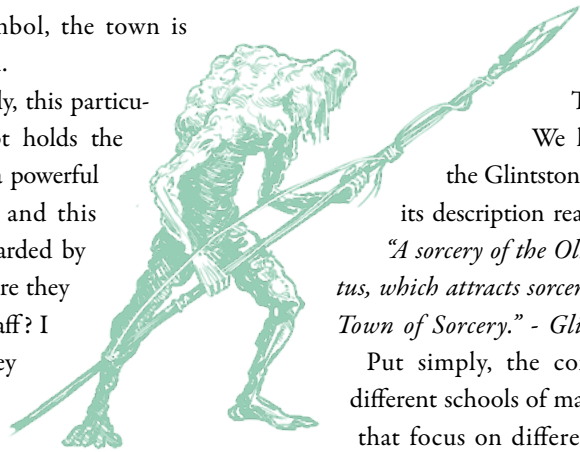
the academy has with the Town of Sorcery.

We learn this from the Glintstone Stars spell, for its description reads:

“A sorcery of the Olivinus Conspetus, which attracts sorcerers from Sellia, Town of Sorcery.” - Glintstone Stars

Put simply, the conspectuses are different schools of magic scholarship that focus on different practices of sorcery. What is interesting is that this school was founded by Lusat, the primeval sorcerer, for the Olivinus Glintstone Crown has a description that reads:

“The lineage of the Olivinus Conspetus began with the sorcerer Lusat, and its adherents continue his study of meteors.” - Olivinus Glintstone Crown



Grace Given

Lusat is a native of Sellia, as we learn from Sellen in the course of her quest:

“After his expulsion from the academy, I heard that Master Lusat returned to his home. A place called Sellia, in the eastern Caelid Wilds.” - Sorceress Sellen

So despite the fact Lusat that would turn his studies towards the Primeval Current, it seems as though he was a sorcerer focused on the more gravitational side of things. And this makes sense, given he is from the home of gravitational sorcery. Of course a school focusing on gravitational magic and founded by a Sellia native would then attract scholars from Sellia and thus subtly increase Nox influence within the academy itself.

The connection between the two centers of learning is cemented by the presence of Raya Lucarian scholars here, who seem to be mastering the obscuring techniques of Sellia, and the Avionettes, tools of the academy used as soldiers and guards. Nox influence runs much deeper than we may first assume.

Of course, the main connections between the academy and the Nox is due to a common obsession with the stars and the cosmos, an obsession that is quite clearly shared by the Carian royal family as well.

Rennala and Ranni are heirs to this belief and in a way are the heirs to

the Nox. We know from the Stargazer Heirloom that the fate latent within the stars was what led Rennala to her destiny: the moon. It was the moon that would then form the basis of Rennala’s rule. The academy is mainly focused on the study of Glintstone, and yet Rennala’s encounter would lead her to bring her lunar influence to the academy as well, granting her esteem before establishing her own family as royalty.

It seems as though the Carians represented the moon while the academy represented the stars, as suggested by the description of Carian Retaliation. In turn, this reliance upon the moon was something that would be passed down to Ranni, as we learn from the description of the Drawstring Freezing Grease, which reads:

“The women of the Carian royal family look to the moon to guide their fates. Ranni’s is a moon dark and blanketed with rime.” - Drawstring Freezing Grease, cut item

It seems to me that Ranni’s moon, the Dark Moon, was associated with the lost moon of Nokstella. We learn this from the talisman of the same name:

“This talisman represents the lost black moon. The moon of Nokstella was the guide of countless stars.” - Moon of Nokstella



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I believe that the moons encountered by Ranni and her mother are different moons, and thus their respective moons led them down different paths. Both are referred to by different titles. Rennala's is the Full Moon and Ranni's is the Dark Moon, and if we look at the two images they are certainly both different – Rennala's bright and white, Ranni's dark and blue.

We do actually see these different moons in the game. If we see the moon in Liurnia it is a bright moon – the Full Moon of Rennala, most likely. And, as keenly observed by Saint Riot on his X account², one can briefly see Ranni's Dark Moon hanging above Radahn's arena right after his defeat and just after Ranni's fate has been released.

However as most will have noticed, you can observe the fact these are two different moons most keenly at the Moonlight Altar, where they both appear in the sky simultaneously. This for me reinforces the fact that these are not normal celestial bodies. Rather they are a force or being of some kind – and most likely outer gods themselves. As the Moon of Nokstella talisman tells us, the Black Moon was a guide for stars, and indeed the moons seem to guide their chosen towards their own goals. Clearly, then, Rennala's moon and Ranni's moon have different aims.

This is reinforced by evidence that the Black Moon of Nokstella was destroyed, or at least is no more, a piece of lore we can uncover when we read the Memory Stone item description:

*“Said to be a fragment of the black moon that once hung above the Eternal City.”
- Memory Stone*

That once hung above the Eternal City, and hangs there no longer. The fact that it is no longer there is reinforced by the moon talisman, which refers to it as the lost moon. Given that shards of it are now being used in necklaces, one can assume that the moon was shattered and destroyed.

Thus the Nox will have lost the guidance Ranni now enjoys, and no doubt this is what will have led them to the desperate measures we have already examined.

Yet this wouldn't be the final disaster that would befall the Nox. It is now time for us to examine their second cataclysm: the coming of Astel.

STARS OF DARKNESS

The Nox looked to the stars to seize power and bring about the Age of Stars and their Lord of Night. They tried all means: creating the Dragonkin Soldiers, the Fingerslayer Blade and the Puppets



Grace Given

Thus the Nox will have lost the guidance Ranni now enjoys, and no doubt this is what will have led them to the desperate measures we have already examined.

to name a few methods. So when we learn of Astel's attack upon the third unnamed city of the Nox, it is my instinct to see it as a self-inflicted wound. Surely the Nox did something to beckon Astel to the city in their attempts to overthrow the Greater Will.

V-Limit provides an interesting narrative in his Astel lore video “Who is Astel?”³ suggesting that the Nox created the creature, by taking a Fallingstar Beast as a template and twisting it in the image of the giant skeletons found in the Eternal Cities. This was an attempt to craft another weapon against the Greater Will. It was to be a creature able to challenge the Elden Beast. One could call this the “Astel Project”.

There is a lot that is very compelling about this theory. It would explain the humanoid details found on Astel's body, as well as its similar size when

compared to the giant skeletons found in the Eternal Cities. One cannot deny the thematic harmony of the struggle between the stars and the Erdtree, the Nox and the Greater Will, and the Elden Beast and Astel.

“Naturalborn” is another term used in place of “bastard”, giving us the impression that Astel is a malformed or unwanted being, spawned from the cosmos. Being a bastard or an unwanted consequence⁴ would align quite neatly with V-Limit's theory. Astel literally is an unwanted consequence of the meddling of the Nox in this narrative, a bastard born not naturally but of experimentation. You could then argue that the other Astels we find elsewhere are other variants of this same project, or even spawn of this first Astel.

I can't really argue against this theory. Even so, let me instead offer an alternate explanation as to how Astel came to the Eternal City – an explanation that still points an accusing finger at the Nox.

In V-Limit's video he points out the Eternal Darkness spell:

“Creates a space of darkness that draws in sorceries and incantations... Originally a lost sorcery of the Eternal City; the despair that brought about its ruin made manifest.” - Eternal Darkness

So apparently this sorcery is a manifestation of whatever brought about the

² X post by Saint Riot: bit.ly/4gigsXj

³ “Who is Astel? | Elden Ring Lore” - V-Limit

⁴ This specific phrase was from a translation provided to me by Mirko, a translator who works with famous Italian YouTuber Sabaku no Maku. Mirko interpreted Astel's Remembrance in the following way: “Also, in the original it's not called ‘Naturalborn of the Void,’ but 暗黒の落とし子: 暗黒 is just ‘darkness,’ while 落とし子 is otoshiko, a term often used for unwanted children, but also for unwanted consequences.”



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ruin of the Eternal City. V-Limit likens this to the eye of Astel, which would make this piece of lore fit in with the “Astel Project” theory.

However, this is where I disagree. I see this not as Astel’s eye but as an event horizon, a black hole – a phenomenon which could be described as “eternal darkness” for black holes devour light.

Again: Black holes are regions in space where gravity is so strong that everything, including light, is unable to escape its pull. One need only look at the effect of the spell to see that it is most likely representing a black hole. It draws in sorceries and incantations much as a black hole would.

So. What if a black hole heralded the end of this Eternal City? We must assume that Astel fell upon the city, as he is described as “a falling star of ill omen”. Yet how did he leave and steal the sky of this Eternal City? Indeed we see that the destroyed Eternal City is the only one of the three absent a fake starry sky – and yet Astel’s lair has a fake sky, suggesting he somehow moved it there.

We have already discussed how I believe masters of gravity magic, such as Astel and the lords, can create wormholes to move from one point in space to another. The Astel we face in Yelough Anix Tunnel has such a mastery over gravitational magic that he is able to

summon multiple others of its kind.

Just as light is sucked into black holes, and magic is pulled into the Eternal Darkness spell, perhaps the sky was sucked through Astel’s black hole, and he and its materials were deposited in his new lair. The narrative I suggest is this: Astel fell upon the city, unleashed his meteorites to reduce the city’s structures to ruins and then summoned his black hole to take himself and the sky to his new location.

So if I believe Astel came to the city fully formed and was not an experiment of the Nox, then what is he?

Astel’s remembrance states that he was “born in the lightless void,” not that he was created in the Eternal Cities. This means that, despite being a “malformed” variant of a star, his species is not the result of direct human experimentation. Indeed there may be evidence of a natural life cycle for this Astel race.

An interesting discussion on Astel’s form was started by Zullie the Witch on X where they compare Astel’s various clones⁵, pointing out that the clones summoned by the Astel in Yelough Anix Tunnel are of the gray discolored variety. They are cocooned malformed star variants, distinct from the mature full-colored one. In this discussion, user Sin⁶ compared the life cycle of Astel to

⁵ X post by Zullie: bit.ly/3KqhVg8

⁶ X post by Sindraen (since deleted)





Grace Given

that of antlions – where the Fallingstar Beast is the larval form of this species, and Astel is the adult form.

Antlions are insects who actually share a lot of similar features with Astel and the Fallingstar Beast. I think that this beast is already naturally linked to the Astel lifecycle, rather than something that is tampered with by the Nox. This feels especially true when you consider the Astel head's prominence on the Full-Grown Fallingstar Beast, which suggests the humanoid skull isn't the result of human tampering and is naturally part of the physiology.

The insect larvae of antlions are very reminiscent of the Fallingstar Beast. These grubs quite often feast on ants, which are also very prominent in the areas where we find the Astel creatures⁷. The

Astel fell upon the city, unleashed his meteorites to reduce the city's structures to ruins and summoned his black hole to take himself and the sky to his new location.

antlion cocoon phase could be represented by the malformed star found throughout the underground rivers, though I think we can also see a likeness to the cocoon stage already in the Fallingstar Beast: The rock formations upon its skin could easily be compared to the cocoon structures built by the antlions.

In a nutshell, the suggestion is that these stellar creatures are their own species, and the Astel we meet is not an individual but one of many, which is why we can find so many of these beings throughout the Lands Between, in all three stages of life. But there is still a little more to be unpacked here. Returning to the posts on the antlions, Sin also makes the point that antlions are blind and that they use pheromones or vibrations to detect prey. This makes me think of the waves of darkness that we cannot only make from Astel's remembrance but which are also a technique used against us.

These are like dark pulses that Astel sends out. Perhaps this is an extension of how he communicates with others of his kind? Indeed Astel's eye sockets are empty and we aren't really sure if the blue rolling eye operates in any way similar to a human eye. It is very reminiscent of Lusat's Glintstone Crown, which took the place of his brain. Perhaps, then, this performs a similar function as a cognitive

⁷ X post by Sindraen (since deleted)



center for these beasts as well as a focus for Glintstone-related abilities.

There is something else to Astel's various epithets that may also fit with the explanation that Astel is a fitting punishment for Noxian meddling. In his remembrance, he is referred to as a "falling star of ill omen."

In Quelaag's video titled "The Elden Ring Keeps Me Up at Night", she discusses Chaldean astrology, which is a blend of astrology and astronomy⁸. Part of Chaldean astrology dealt with omens that could be read in the stars and celestial bodies. Quelaag then goes on to say that stars of ill omen were usually a sign that divine forces were upset. Everything the Nox do is unnatural, from forming the Dragonkin Soldiers, to creating the Mimic Tears. However, in particular the Nox are known to fiddle with the fate latent in the stars, distilling it into Puppet Draught and the Celestial Dew.

Perhaps this "malformed star" came to the Eternal City because of Noxian meddling with fate. Perhaps the Nox have played with fate in a way that is against nature and in this way Astel is their ill omen. Perhaps the prevalence of malformed falling stars across the Lands Between are a result of all the upsets that keep happening to the natural

order: the fettering of fate, the halting of the constellations, the confinement of Death, the killing of a Two Fingers, the spread of Deathroot and of course the shattering of the Elden Ring.

In one of Quelaag's videos she speaks on the ideas of "gravitational waves." In short these are waves of spacetime that would carry with them information about their origins. Given what we have already discussed on how antlions hunt via vibrations, you probably see where I am going with this.

Quelaag then compares these cosmic waves to the Ripple Blade, a sword that is modeled after the origins of the Albinaurics. Quelaag suggests that the event that created the Albinaurics, at

I think one of the countless experiments undertaken by the Nox is what attracted Astel to their location. The Black Moon was destroyed and the sky of the third city was stolen.

⁸ X post by Zullie: bit.ly/3KqhVg8



the hands of the Nox, resulted in one of these gravitational waves that passed through time and space, attracting the attention of none other than Astel. You know, an antlion that cannot see but senses its prey through vibrations. I do think Quelaag is on to something here: that something the Nox were working on attracted Astel to the Eternal Cities, and he destroyed them.

We know from Memory Stones that the Black Moon of Nokstella was destroyed at some point, but that it used to hang over Nokstella. The Moon of Nokstella talisman further elaborates on the nature of this moon:

"This talisman represents the lost black moon. The moon of Nokstella was the guide of countless stars." - Moon of Nokstella

I believe this moon to be similar to the Dark Moon of Ranni and the Full Moon of Rennala – a celestial body that acts as a guide for those who follow the way of stars. What if the Black Moon guided the wrong star? Either way I think one of the countless experiments undertaken by the Nox is what attracted Astel to their location. The Black Moon was destroyed and the sky of the third city was stolen and taken to Astel's new lair. This would certainly fit the definition of an "unwanted consequence." It was a consequence of Noxian meddling.

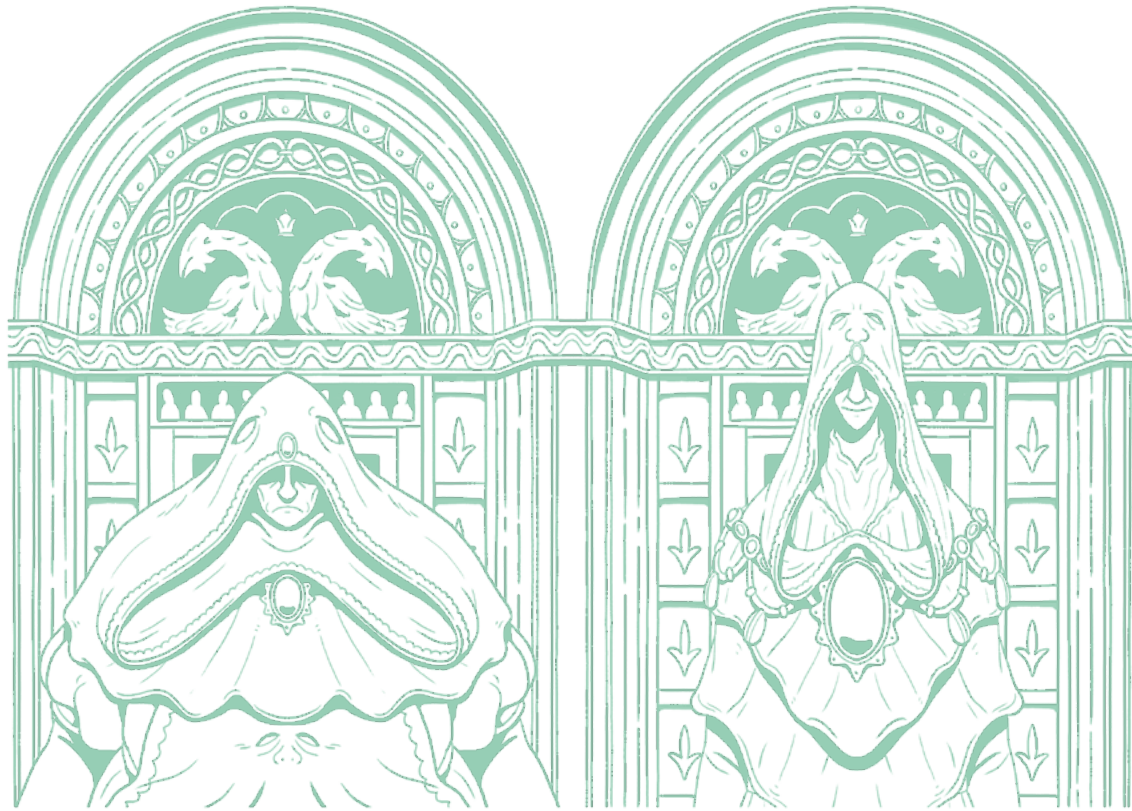
FURTHER CONSPIRACIES?

In the past I have always treated the Godskin Apostasy and the Night of the Black Knives as two very separate events. Yet a few things have gnawed away at me. There is the nature of Iji's death. Much like Blaidd, there are Black Knife Assassins surrounding him, again suggesting they are the hand behind his murder.

But there is another detail. Iji is burning in the Black Flame, and this is clearly indicative of the Godskins, heavily implying the two groups are working in concert.

I have come to the conclusion that there are enough implications involving the Nox in this event that we have to talk about it. I believe that the Godskins must be some form of created life, much like the Albinaurics of Silver Tears, and thus without even looking much deeper we already have connections between the Nox and the Godskins.

This, of course, raises questions about the Gloam-Eyed Queen, suggesting she was one of the Nox or perhaps related to them? Perhaps through her mother? These are some of the questions that we will dig into in the next chapter.



Grace Given

Chapter 6: The Gloam-Eyed Queen

The identity of the Gloam-Eyed Queen has always been something of a mystery. Personally, I like the room to speculate, and the fact that several theories can all ultimately fit together. The fan-favorite theory is that Melina is the Gloam-Eyed Queen, for example. However, others have postulated that she could well be connected to the Eternal Cities. Both ideas could be correct.

With that said, let us unpack these possibilities. First I want to look at the potential connections between the

Gloam-Eyed Queen and the Eternal Cities. To that end, I'd like to start by examining the very nature of the Gloam-Eyed Queen and what she perhaps represents.

In the Collins Dictionary, "gloom" is defined as "twilight or the darker part of twilight." It is synonymous with dusk, and so the removal of the reference to a Dusk-Eyed Queen in one of the game's patches doesn't really hold much significance. What does hold significance is the already existing connection between dusk and death: for example, the game ending that relates to Those Who Live

in Death and Godwyn is called "Age of the Duskborn."

This makes sense when connected to the Gloam-Eyed Queen, given that she was once linked to the Rune of Death, the artifact responsible for the creation of the Prince of Death and Those Who Live in Death. The connection between dusk – or gloam – and death in a metaphorical sense is pretty easy to understand too. Dusk is the end of the day and death is the end of one's life. Indeed, the term "gloom-eyed" could also be a reference to the queen's purpose – to bring death to Marika and her godkin, heralding the twilight of the Age of the Gods.

In a way, if we consider the time in which we are suggesting her rise takes place – the Age of Abundance, or the Age of the Crucible – the Gloam-Eyed Queen's domain is very much an inversion of this. The Age of Abundance and the Age of the Crucible indicate a period brimming with vitality, after all. A great observation about this thematic mirroring was made by content creator Quelaag on X¹, who said:

"Enia refers to the rune of Destined Death as the 'shadow' of the golden order. [sic] 'The Rune of Death goes by two names; the other is Destined Death. The forbidden shadow, plucked from the Golden Order upon its creation...' Which makes sense as it's inverted from marika's [sic] crucifix."
- Quelaag, via X

I think this is a really powerful observation by Quelaag: the Gloam-Eyed Queen's rune very much represents an inversion of Marika's. This is the literal shadow of Marika's rule.

Indeed, the Rune of Death could actually be a shadow to a "rune of life," the central rune in the Age of Abundance. The reasoning for this comes from a post by content creator Sekiro Dubi, who highlights that in version 1.00 of the game, the Icon Shield – a shield that depicts the Age of Plenty we are speaking of – mentions a "rune of life."

Whoever the Gloam-Eyed Queen was, it is clear that her power and her Godskin Apostles are channeled via her signature weapon, the Godslayer's Greatsword, the description of which states that it was not only her weapon but that:

"The black flames wielded by the apostles are channeled from this sword."
- Godslayer's Greatsword

Last Protagonist makes some interesting observations in regards to this sword², highlighting that its double helix structure is not dissimilar to the Sacred Relic Sword, a weapon made from the body of a god. Perhaps this sword was itself made through a similar process; we know, after all, that the Nox have experience in making weapons from corpses.

Despite the nightmarish concept of making a person into a sword, we know



The Gloam-Eyed Queen

that such swords do hold important power. For example, the Fingerslayer Blade seems to be the only blade capable of harming a Two Finger. The Godslayer's Greatsword is fairly similar in shape to the Sacred Relic Sword and the Fingerslayer Blade as all three have two twisting blades.

The Fingerslayer Blade and the Godslayer's Greatsword have a similar purpose of channeling the power of the Rune of Death and bringing Death to the gods. Thus we can assume that this particular form and shape is specifically chosen to conduct Destined Death's power, whether forged from corpse or steel.

Another fascinating detail is that the shape of the Godslayer's Greatsword, the signature weapon of the Gloam-Eyed Queen, exactly matches the shape of the Rune of Death, with its downwards facing hilt guard. Perhaps it takes this shape to reflect the being it once was.

Either way, not only does it seem to have been forged in the shape of the Rune of Death, but it also seems to display a swirling flame – no doubt evoking the black flame it is used to channel. (This very fact that it channels the flame suggests again that it was purpose-made for the Gloam-Eyed Queen's power. However, I do leave the matter of the sword up to you to decide.)

Let's now consider who this person may be. I've heard many people make the argument that they have to be related to

Marika. If we consider the other existing Empyreans, this does make some sort of sense – Malenia and Miquella are direct offspring of Marika. Depending on your viewpoint, Ranni is the daughter of Marika's other personality and so at the very least is Marika's step-daughter.

However, we have to remember that at one stage Marika herself was chosen as an Empyrean, and we aren't sure of the situation surrounding her selection to godhood. As a result, we can't be certain when nailing down the prerequisites to Empyrean status. Even so, if I were to go out on a limb, I would say that Empyrean status can be a combination of both blood relation and a person's potential.

With that said, I can't help but think the Gloam-Eyed Queen would fit well thematically within the Eternal Cities. The connections between the Nox, the Numen and Queen Marika herself are well known at this stage. The Black Knife Armor tells us that the assassins are Numen and kin to Marika, whilst Rogier also describes the assassins as scions of the Eternal Cities, never mind the Numen's Runes found in the bellies of ants who have consumed the dead of the destroyed Eternal Cities.

Whatever you believe about the Eternal Cities and the Nox, it is clear that this is a divergent Numen society that is opposed to the Greater Will. Just note their armor set description:



Grace Given

“Long ago, the Nox invoked the ire of the Greater Will, and were banished deep underground. Now they live under a false night sky, in eternal anticipation of their liege. Of the coming age of the stars. And their Lord of Night.”

- Nox Swordstress Armor

The Nox are a people who have acted directly against the Greater Will leading to their banishment underground. I believe this must have been a separate event from the Godskin Apostasy, as the Godskin movement isn't an attack against the Greater Will so much as it is an attack against Marika herself. Additionally it seems as though the Gloam-Eyed Queen was supported by the Greater Will, as she is an Empyrean chosen by a Two Fingers.

When looking at the possible connections between the Gloam-Eyed Queen and the Eternal Cities, I'd like to look at one of my favorite lore items in the game, the Godskin Swaddling Cloth:

“Sacred cloth of the Godskin Apostles, made from supple skin sewn together... The Gloam-Eyed Queen cradles newborn apostles swaddled in this cloth. Soon they will grow to become the death of the gods.”

- Godskin Swaddling Cloth

This has always been a striking image to me, of the Gloam-Eyed Queen who “cradles newborn apostles.” This makes

it abundantly clear that the Godskins are not regular humans, nor are they recruited. From the moment they are “born” they are cradled by the Gloam-Eyed Queen. Not only that but we learn that “soon they will grow to become the death of the gods.” This suggests some kind of accelerated growth. Combined with the fact they are apostles from birth, it leads me to conclude they are artificial life-forms raised up by the Gloam-Eyed Queen herself.

There is of course a race which is very familiar with creating an artificial life-form: the Nox of the Eternal Cities. Let us look at these creations in light of the Gloam-Eyed Queen.

One of the most obvious examples of Eternal City tampering are their Dragonkin Soldiers, artificial abominations which we have previously examined. While crude, these tortured failures are evidence of the Eternals' proclivity for tampering with life. If we consider the Noxian interest in alchemy, illustrated by the Celestial Dew and the Puppet Draught, the sky's the limit.

We can of course see Nox alchemy culminating in the Silver Tears and possibly the Albinaurics, the latter of which are potentially tied to the



The Gloam-Eyed Queen

Eternal Cities via cut dialogue from Thops. So with this in mind, let's look at the actual physiology of the Godskins themselves. They are pale-skinned, much like the Albinaurics and Silver Tears. And they are all identical in appearance, like clones. Also, like the Silver Tears and the silver weapons of the Nox, the Godskin Apostles appear malleable, able to stretch and contort in an unusual manner – again reinforcing the notion that these are not natural beings.

There is of course the lore of the Swaddling Cloth which we have already looked at, suggesting that the Gloam-Eyed Queen rears every single one of these creatures from birth. I hope that even if you don't buy the Eternal City connection, we can agree that these are not natural beings.

There is another potential connection between the Godskin Apostles and the Eternal Cities: the death of Iji. Upon the near-completion of Ranni's quest, her vassals are assaulted by the Black Knife Assassins. Both Iji and Blaidd have the corpses of Black Knives surrounding them, and yet curiously Iji is burning in the Black Flame.

Some have argued that this may be a mistake and it is meant to be the red flame, yet I feel that would have been corrected in a patch if so. So what does this actually mean? Well, if they are both connected to the Eternal Cities, then

We can see Nox alchemy culminating in the Silver Tears and possibly the Albinaurics, the latter of which are potentially tied to the Eternal Cities.

perhaps this is a hit squad, taking revenge against Ranni for leaving them high and dry after the Night of the Black Knives.

There are other loose connections that can lead us to determine that the Gloam-Eyed Queen is of the Nox, or at least pre-Nox Eternals. One of these we have already discussed: the Eternal race is a matriarchal one. There is also the fact that Marika is herself a queen, suggesting she enjoyed an important position within this society. In addition, there is the idea that the moon, an important facet of Nox society, is overwhelmingly associated with the feminine.

Ranni and Rennala, the two most important lunar figures in the game world, are women as well, and this is a long-standing concept within Souls games if we consider Gwyndolin from *Dark Souls*, who was raised as a woman because of his strong affinity for the moon.



Grace Given

So it isn't hard to conclude that the Gloam-Eyed Queen could once again be a "queen" of Numen/Noxian tradition, much like Marika herself once was.

There is one other interesting concept I would like to consider before we start talking about a specific candidate, and that is the concept of serpents³. The matter of serpents was actually brought to my attention by a viewer, commenting on one of my community posts, who stated that they believed that the Gloam-Eyed Queen was a serpent.

This is of interest when we consider that the Godskins have serpentine tails and when we recall the following description from the Duelist Set:

"The snake is viewed as a traitor to the Erdtree, and the audience delighted in seeing these bronze effigies beaten and battered." - *Duelist Helm*

The snake was very much the focus of gladiatorial combat. Not only are there snakes on the helmets and the limited armor of the Duelists but there is also the Coil Shield, a snake shield designed for gladiatorial combat. Why is the snake so hated even at this time? We know that gladiatorial combat is a practice dating back to the days of Godfrey. So surely this is all long before Rykard would become the Serpent of Blasphemy, and bring his blasphemous war against the Erdtree.

Indeed, if we look at the Serpent-Hunter spear, it gives us some interesting food for thought:

"Thought to have been used to hunt an immortal great serpent in the distant past, it manifests a long blade of light when facing such a creature." - *Serpent-Hunter*

This suggests that there have been serpent crises in the past, and at least one of them was an event so dire that the people of Godfrey's realm would make it the main nemesis in their gladiatorial combat.

I had always just assumed that the serpent was viewed as an enemy because the God-Serpent Eiglay must have attacked in the past, but perhaps there is merit in tying this together with the story of the Gloam-Eyed Queen. While I don't necessarily agree that the queen is herself a serpent, she could at least take on a serpent form, which would explain why some of her children have serpent-like features. However, a more compelling notion to me is a sort of alliance between the Gloam-Eyed Queen and a great serpent, possibly the God-Serpent Eiglay itself.

To me the text from the gladiatorial set suggests obvious links to the Bible. The serpent is thematically always seen as the enemy of the Erdtree, much as the serpent in the Garden of Eden is seen as an enemy in Genesis. The image of the

³ This was an idea brought to my attention by a viewer who commented on one of my community posts; The EpicH88 stated that they believed that the Gloam-Eyed Queen was a serpent.



The Gloam-Eyed Queen

serpent in the tree in the garden is too similar to the imagery on the Drawing-Room Key of Volcano Manor⁴.

Could it be that it was a serpent – a being that already hated the Erdtree – who first whispered to the Gloam-Eyed Queen and set her on her path? Could it then have aligned itself with her, helping her imbue the power of the serpent within her apostle children?

In turn, does this then explain why a Godskin Noble has aligned itself with Rykard and the Serpent of Blasphemy? Is this an old alliance rekindled, so that it may assist in creating and leading a new serpentine warrior class, allowing Rykard to succeed where earlier forces failed?

Perhaps. I have always wondered where this ancient enmity against the serpent came from, and at the very least we have the tails of the Godskin Nobles to tie these themes together. I will leave it to you to decide.

So after all that, what am I saying about the Gloam-Eyed Queen? Let me summarize. I believe that she was a queen of the same people as Queen Marika, and that she was potentially related to Marika. And I believe she was chosen as an Emphyrean. The Emphyreans' rune was an inversion of Marika's Rune of Death, and as the Age of Plenty came to a close this Emphyrean plotted her takeover to replace Marika as the next god.

To channel her power, the Gloam-Eyed Queen forged her signature sword and created an artificial lifeform meant to wield this power – the Godskins. In addition, it is possible that she was assisted by a great serpent, cementing serpents in general as an immortal enemy of the Erdtree.

There is one other matter regarding the Gloam-Eyed Queen's allies we should talk about, and that is the issue of her Shadow.

As Ranni states, each Emphyrean is granted a Shadow, tailor-made to serve them. Ranni had Blaidd and Marika had Maliketh. Given that the Gloam-Eyed Queen would be defeated by a Shadow, it certainly would have been useful to have one.

We discussed Vargram and his desire to become the Shadow of the Gloam-Eyed Queen in the section "What About Vargram?" There is the possibility that the queen's Shadow was killed in this conflict or met some unknown fate.

When it comes to her actual identity, what do I believe about her? I have already presented some pretty interesting theories. She was a serpent, a serpent-woman, or even the Godslayer's Greatsword itself. However, if I were to put money on it, I'd be rather boring and say I do believe that Melina was once the Gloam-Eyed Queen.



Grace Given

A first, small piece of evidence for this is that her incantations, which she casts as a summon during the Morgott fight, share the same Ancient Erdtree Era spell sigil as Maliketh's Black Blade. It would therefore suggest that she too dates from this era, a shoo-in for my suggested date of the Godskin Apostasy.

I have established that I believe the Gloam-Eyed Queen was Numen kin – i.e. Marika's people – and Melina seems to tick these boxes also. When summoned, she uses the same combat techniques as the Black Knife Assassins, who themselves are described as Numen and kin to Marika – suggesting that Melina is of this same culture.

Melina also refers to her "mother inside the Erdtree":

"Me, I'm searching for my purpose given to me by my mother inside the Erdtree long ago, for the reason that I yet live, burned and bodiless." - Melina

This of course has to be Marika, and as such it would lend a nice thematic link: another Emphyrean being a relative of Queen Marika.

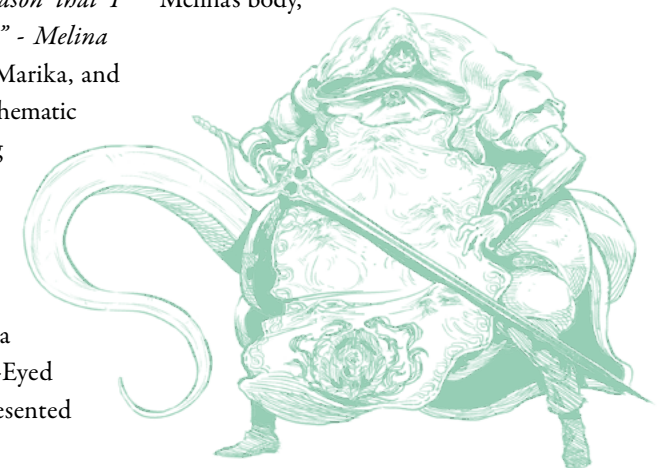
Melina is also very familiar with Destined Death, which would again certainly make sense if Melina had once been the Gloam-Eyed Queen, a being literally represented by the Rune of Death.

Indeed, we will see in due course that Melina's understanding of the method needed to burn the Erdtree could be very telling of her experience with the Black Flame.

Of course what many see as the nail in the coffin is the sealed eye of Melina, which is left open at the Frenzied Flame ending of the game. This eye could very easily be described as "gloom colored," and, among the ashes of a ruined world, Melina states that she will bring you Destined Death. How will she do that? How does she possess such power?

So let me present my speculation on who Melina is now, what her purpose is, and why I think she was once the Gloam-Eyed Queen.

She claims she is burned and bodiless, and ultimately is confused why she is still alive. Indeed, we do see burn scars all over Melina's body,



⁴ "Elden Ring Archaeology: The Serpent and The Erdtree" - The Tarnished Archaeologist



The Gloam-Eyed Queen

suggesting that in her corporeal life she was burned. We know the effects of the Rune of Death manifest as a flame, whether that be the black and white flame of the Godskins or the red and black flame of Maliketh. Would it not be a fitting punishment for the Gloam-Eyed Queen to be burned in the flames of Death by Maliketh, the new wielder of the Rune of Death?

In addition, again: Melina's eye is sealed, and is only unsealed at the ending of the Frenzied Flame. Why? Consider that in most endings Melina dies before Destined Death or the Rune of Death is unsealed by the Tarnished. After defeating Maliketh, we free this rune, and release its power back into the world. Lo and behold, Melina's eye is now open in the only ending where she is still alive as this happens. I think her gloam-eye is literally tied to the Rune of Death. It's a manifestation of the rune's power, and when it was sealed, her eye was sealed. So when we free the rune, her eye is also freed from its bond.

Returning to the idea of being "burned and bodiless," there is one other character who is in a similar position: Ranni. Both Melina and Ranni are able to disincorporate themselves in a puff of blue sparkles, an observation made by Ziostorm in his video on Melina⁵.

This suggests they are in a similar state, and indeed we know that Ranni slew her own body, thanks to her speeches

and the description of the Cursemark of Death. Ranni's bodiless state came about through the manipulation of the Rune of Death, and her mummified corpse does also look burned.

If I am right about Melina being burned in Maliketh's flame after her defeat, then perhaps she too was only killed in body, as a punishment or so Marika could later bend her erstwhile daughter to her will. Or perhaps she simply couldn't bring herself to have Melina killed, and thus took a half-measure by having her rendered bodiless.

Talking of Maliketh, let us return to the potential theory regarding the Gloam-Eyed Queen's Shadow. When we first meet Ranni, she hands us the Spirit Calling Bell and says that she was asked to give us this by "Torrent's former master."

When the Elden Ring DLC was announced, we were provided with a single image: Miquella riding Torrent in the Land of Shadow.

As a result, many people suggested that Torrent's former master has to be Miquella. If true, this would have some serious implications, mainly that Miquella has been helping us from the very start of our journey. This isn't too hard to believe, given Miquella ultimately required us to defeat Radahn at the festival to advance his own plans in the Land of Shadow.



Grace Given

However, we get no direct confirmation of this in the DLC, and it is worth considering that Melina was also Torrent's former master, given she is riding Torrent during the introductory segment of the game.

If she is the former master being named by Ranni, it means that she was the one who wanted Ranni to pass on the spirit ashes of the wolf pack.

She could have been the prior owner of the three wolves, and the description of the Lone Wolf Ashes reads that they were "chased from their pack." In Farum Azula there is a statue of what appears to be a female figure surrounded by three wolves, and this is also where we find Maliketh – the one responsible for overthrowing the Gloam-Eyed Queen. Is it possible this shows Melina and her Shadows? Her wolves who, upon her defeat, were driven away or, to quote their ash description,

"chased from their pack?" I am unsure about this one. It is certainly a possibility, but ultimately I believe we simply don't know who her Shadow was, and there is also the possibility that Miquella is the former master of Torrent and it is he who is depicted in Farum Azula.

This is all my speculation, but this is how I see Melina: she is the once-Gloam-Eyed Queen who, upon defeat at the hands of Maliketh, was burned and yet was denied true death. Now that Marika is in a dire situation, imprisoned within the Erdtree, she calls upon her last resort, Melina, the disembodied spirit of her old enemy and daughter, and bids her to help the Tarnished. Perhaps it is even Marika who encourages her to once again unleash Destined Death – though Melina makes it clear that, no matter her mother's plan, it is Melina herself who has decided that once again the world needs death.

I think this is thematically neat. Marika once denied Destined Death and the Gloam-Eyed Queen, yet now she is relying on them both to free her from her eternal imprisonment.

We will return to Melina and her views on life and her actions near the end of the game later, as I do feel they also fit neatly with the narrative I am presenting. With that said let us move on to the Gloam-Eyed Queen's followers, the Godskin Apostles.

Would it not be a fitting punishment for the Gloam-Eyed Queen to be burned in the flames of Death by Maliketh, the new wielder of the Rune of Death?

⁵ "Elden Ring's Biggest Mystery is Still Unsolved" - Ziostorm



The Gloam-Eyed Queen

THE GODSKINS

The artificial nature of the Godskins stands in stark contrast to ideals of the Age of Plenty. This was an age of vitality and beasts. Artificial life represents a subversion of these concepts.

Of course we know that the Albinaurics are completely artificial beings thanks to the Albinauric Bloodclot. It emphasizes that artificial beings are seen as impure because they are not connected to the Erdtree and grace.

Is it therefore not quite fitting that an Emyprean in distinct opposition to this system would wield artificial beings? Here we have a thematic parallel to the system of life which they oppose.

Regardless of your take, it is fascinating to imagine these infant beings swaddled in Godskin cloth by the Gloam-Eyed Queen. These beings are raised for a single purpose, and it does seem as though the queen herself imbues them with the power of the Black Flame, for the Black Flame's Protection incantation description reads:

"The Apostles were all embraced by the Gloam-Eyed Queen, and the black flame was their armor within."

- Black Flame's Protection

To me, this suggests that part of the queen's raising of these children was to imbue them with her Black Flame: their

armor within. This of course makes more sense if they are artificial beings raised for a single purpose – to wield the Black Flame and be its vessel.

Despite their artificial nature, these beings do seem to possess some culture, and they even have views in regards to their own hierarchy and role within the world. Let us consider that they are referred to as Godskin *Apostles*, suggesting the Godskin creed is a religious one to its members.

This is reinforced by the existence of a Godskin Prayerbook, and the fact their powers are faith-based incantations. This is not a political movement, in other words. This is a religious crusade – with the Gloam-Eyed Queen as their messiah figure.

This of course makes their "skinning" of the gods far more terrifying. It is not psychological warfare but rather a zealous religious practice, the practice of a religion that worships death and views the death of the gods as their holy purpose. The Noble Presence incantation description positions their actions as a "god hunt," and for me this is their specific crusade. No doubt such a movement would have struck absolute terror into the hearts of the gods.

Within this movement there is a hierarchy. I am referring to the Godskin Nobles, who we learn of via the Godskin Noble Set:



Grace Given

"Nobles are the most ancient apostles who are said to have assimilated inhuman physiology. Not unlike the Crucible, the Erdtree in its primordial form."

- Godskin Noble Robe

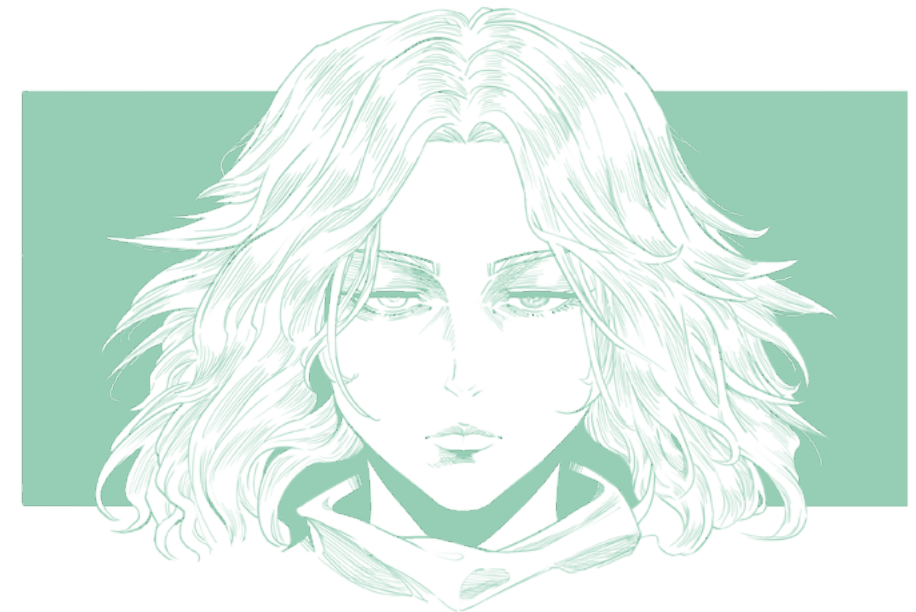
These beings are the "most ancient" of their kind, and thus are nobles among their race. And there does appear to be a sort of classist superiority among these members. As the description of the Godskin Stitcher states:

"The nobles possess skill with the sword unmatched by any lowborn. Despite its size, successive attacks from this weapon are swifter than the eye can follow."

- Godskin Stitcher

This suggests that they see the regular apostles as "lowborn." Combined with Nobles being the "most ancient" of their kind, perhaps they were born as the first wave, or via a different process. Whatever the truth, it's clear that these ancient beings are not above pride. (The Nobles' robust size also could be interpreted as an aesthetic choice, for in days past physical size was often seen as an indicator of wealth and position. As such, a privileged lifestyle would manifest in a richer diet and in general could be seen as a sign of prosperity, success and nobility.)

Overall, the picture we get of this sect is that they aren't just mindless





The Gloam-Eyed Queen

automatons. They are a singular people with a singular purpose, but they do have their own beliefs and their own morals.

With that said, let us look at their adornments, weapons, jewelry and associated symbolism. I want to start with one of the most important parts of their aesthetics, and that is the symbol that is cast when the Godskins appear and when they use their Black Flame incantations – the same shape that forms the Godslayer’s Seal.

I have long pondered what this image is, given that the other schools of magic or incantation have a symbol linked to their associated themes. I went back to basics and asked myself: what is most important to the Godskin Apostles? And of course the answer is the Gloam-Eyed Queen – emphasis on the “eyed” part. If you were to turn this symbol on its side, it could well look like a very stylized eye.

I would also suggest that the gems found on the outfits of the nobles and apostles are most likely representative of the Gloam-Eye as well: protective or empowering talismans that have gems in the twilight shade of purple.

To me it makes sense that all associated symbolism for these people is representing the most powerful image

of their faith and power. Now with that covered let’s look more at the robes and weapons of Godskins.

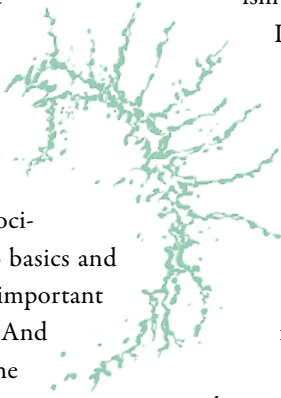
When we talk about the circular symbols found on the robes of the Godskin Nobles, I would suggest that it is meant to evoke the Black Flame. I find this knotted symbol to be very reminiscent of those found on the Godslayer’s Greatsword. As for the other symbolism found on the apostle’s robes,

I would suggest these are also stylistic representations of Death and godslaying Black Flames.

The noble’s robes also have another interesting design choice, as the description of the chest piece for the noble reads:

“Worn by Godskin Nobles, known for their seven-face aprons.”
- Godskin Noble Robe

So the descriptions of both the apostle and noble robe make it clear that they are indeed made of skin, and their very name would suggest this is god skin. In my video titled “The Godskin God Hunt and Destined Death,” I doubted the veracity of this, given it would take a hell of a lot of god murder to fuel such a textile industry. However, I am now more willing to consider that these could well be made of god skin.



Grace Given

In the game’s text files this set is described as being made from “tanned” god hide.

Let us look at the article by Bandai Namco that was released alongside the *Elden Ring* story trailer back in December 2021. In this article the writer expanded upon some of the lore explained in the story trailer. Regarding the Night of the Black Knives, they said:

“One grim night in the depths of winter, a flock of unknown assassins stole across the Lands Between. In a coetaneous attack, this foul covenant snuffed out the lives of many of the God-Queen’s kin throughout the empire, too numerous and too scattered for her godly protection to save.” - *A look into the history of ELDEN RING’s lands between: the Age of Gods*, Bandai Namco

The picture we get of this sect is that they aren’t just mindless automatons. They are a singular people with a singular purpose, but they do have their own beliefs and their own morals.

This illustrates a mass slaughter of “many” of Marika’s kin, really making it clear that there are far more gods than the main cast of characters – a point reinforced by the nameless demigods found in the Wandering Mausoleums. Perhaps the gods could encompass a wide-reaching family tree, with anyone even distantly related to Marika counting as some of her kin as a part of the godly royal family.

So if the Black Knife Assassins killed “many” gods, aside from Godwyn himself, who is to say that the Godskins didn’t hunt down countless gods to make their signature skin?

However, I do want to add a caveat by acknowledging that there is at least one instance where a Godskin appears to gather human skin: at Dominula, Windmill Village, a village on Altus Plateau, where it seems as though the villagers are having a merry old time, celebrating a festival. We hear of this festival via the item description of the Festive Hood – the set that they wear:

“Hood worn by dancers at the festivities in Dominula, the village of windmills. Decorated with many-colored flowers.”
- Festive Hood

These flowers on the hood are conspicuously gloam-colored, and when we start to look closer we notice some bizarre details. Firstly, there are no men, only women, and they all seem to have a slightly manic aspect



The Gloam-Eyed Queen

to them. They are all very well armed, and one is licking a butcher's blade while standing over the corpse of a male.

The explanation for all this comes via a ghost NPC at the entrance to the village, who implies that a constituent part of this festival is the skinning of the townspeople. Lo and behold we find a Godskin Apostle at the top of the village, ready to take his tithe of skin. My take is that this Godskin Apostle has manipulated the people of this town to create a "skinning festival" that the Godskins now use as a source of skin for their robes.

Whether human skin or actual god skin, the effect is quite clear. This is a horrifying type of psychological warfare upon their enemies, who would look upon the screaming and tortured faces on the robes of these apostles and imagine a terrifying fate of being flayed alive.

Yet there is more than this. The skinning of your enemy and keeping them as a trophy, or using the skin as a material for mundane purposes, is the ultimate domination and humiliation of your opponent. For example there is the account of the Roman emperor Valerian who was captured by a Persian king called Shapur, following the battle of Edessa in 260 A.D. According to a later account given by a writer called Lactantius, Valerian would eventually be flayed alive with his skin stuffed and kept as a trophy, a fearful humiliation for a once mighty Roman emperor.

This is of course quite significant when we consider the targets of the Godskins' ire: the gods themselves. To me, their purpose in wearing god skin is to send a message: We do not respect your authority, we do not respect your divinity and we will tear down your empire and skin you like beasts, wearing you as our clothes.

As such, their weapons are essentially meant to function as skinning implements; the Godskin Peeler by its look and item description is clearly meant to peel the skin clean off, while the Godskin Stitcher, the weapon of the Nobles, is more like a sewing needle, meant to tailor and pull the robes together. In a way you can see this division of labor as another division between the two classes. The Apostles have to get their hands dirty doing the actual skinning, whereas the Nobles get the more refined tool.

With that said, let us look now at the Godskin God Hunt, its ultimate conclusion and its legacy.

THE GOD HUNT

The term "God Hunt" is fitting when we consider the power that the Gloam-Eyed Queen and her apostles wielded. Let us revisit the description of the Scouring Black Flame, which reads:



Grace Given

The skinning of your enemy and keeping them as a trophy, or using the skin as a material for mundane purposes, is the ultimate domination of your opponent.

"The black flame could once slay gods. But when Maliketh sealed Destined Death, the true power of the black flame was lost."
- Scouring Black Flame

At this stage, when the Scouring Black Flame was utilized, it could literally slay the gods, and possessed a metaphysical power that it no longer does. The flame channeled the power of the Rune of Death. But the threat of this flame could have been even more dire. And in a very astute observation, V-Limit hypothesized in their "The Flames of the Gods" video⁶ that the Black Flame was actually a threat to the Erdtree as well, not just the gods.

V-Limit highlights a cut dialogue from Enia that happens during the burning of the Erdtree cutscene, suggesting that it could have once been the Black Flame that was meant to

burn the Erdtree. This alternate dialogue would have said: "The Rune of Death is unbound. Black Flames have devoured the Erdtree, and the Lands Between are shrouded by Death's dark fate."

Tarnished Archaeologist builds on V-Limit's premise by saying that this is almost a certainty given what we see in game⁷. To quote Tarnished Archaeologist directly, "What is the Black Flame but a combination of Flame and the power of Destined Death?"

This is the combination we procure to burn down the Erdtree, unleashing the Flame of Ruin followed by the Rune of Death: flame and death combined. This makes perfect sense, and it also lends further credibility to Melina being the Gloam-Eyed Queen. For Melina knows exactly the combination of materials required to burn down the Erdtree, as if she once wielded it herself in a different form.

With these ideas in mind, it is easy to see why the Fire Monks of the Mountaintops would abandon their charge. Monks who had been bewitched already by the power of flame would no doubt have seen the Black Flame as something even greater: A flame touched by the power of the Rune of Death. So they hastily dye their robes and their beards and lend their power to the Gloam-Eyed Queen and the Godskin Apostasy.

⁶ "The Flames of the Gods" - V-Limit

⁷ "Elden Ring Archaeology: The Serpent and The Erdtree" - The Tarnished Archaeologist



The Gloam-Eyed Queen

It is impossible to say how successful this apostasy actually was, but given the sheer amount of tortured faces found in the robes of the Godskins, I would hazard that they at least killed a few and struck fear into the hearts of the gods. Marika would fear her Gloam-Eyed Queen to the point that she would entrust Maliketh to deal with this particular threat.

It was at this stage, I believe, that Maliketh imbued his sword with the power of Destined Death, which we learn of via his armor set and the Black Blade incantation. The latter of these has the symbol of Tarnished Archaeologist's Ancient Erdtree Era, again suggesting that the events of the Godskin Apostasy and Maliketh's response took place in this era.

Now we know from the description of Scouring Black Flame that the true power of the Black Flame would eventually be lost with the sealing of Destined Death – and we know from Maliketh's remembrance that he would be the vessel that it would ultimately be sealed in.

In the past, I had thought that Maliketh imbuing his sword marked this so-called confinement of the Rune of Death, and the later sealing of it within his own flesh was just an extra precaution. I now acknowledge that Maliketh imbuing his sword with Destined Death is not the same as him sealing it and becoming a vessel for it.

The murder of Godwyn, and many of Marika's kin, is a far more catastrophic event that could have been the motive for the sealing of Destined Death. As Gurranq, Maliketh really does have a sole purpose – confinement of the Rune of Death – hence why he not only binds it within his own flesh but also hides his true identity.

However, at the time of the Godskin Apostasy he was a different being. He was Death made manifest. He didn't hide or confine Death, he wielded it. And this is why, when he unseals it during his fight with us, he reverts to his Maliketh form once more.

To tidy up the timeline a bit: At the time of the Godskin Apostasy, he was Death incarnate: Maliketh. But following the slaughter during the Night of the

As Gurranq, Maliketh really does have a sole purpose – confinement of the Rune of Death – hence why he not only binds it within his own flesh but also hides his true identity.



Grace Given

Black Knives, he became Gurranq, the secretive prison of Destined Death – and again, thanks to Tarnished Archaeologist for making this distinction much clearer to me.

With his sword wreathed in the power of the Rune of Death, he could fight fire with fire, and both the Godskin Apostle Robe and Godslayer's Greatsword item descriptions imply that it was Maliketh who personally defeated the Godskin movement, queen and all. This suggests that he decimated their ranks and personally defeated the Gloam-Eyed Queen, ending this rival's claim on behalf of his god. His total domination over the Godskins and mastery over Death is emphasized by the description of Gurranq's Beast Claw:

"Long ago, Gurranq was a beast of such terrifying ferocity that his former name meant 'Death of the Demigods.'"
- Gurranq's Beast Claw

No longer did the Gloam-Eyed Queen hold the threat of death over the demigods. It was Maliketh, Marika's henchman, who wielded its power, a not-so-veiled threat for any of those who would try to defy her rule in such a manner again. This description also attests to Maliketh's ferocity, an account backed up by his armor set:

"Maliketh, Queen Marika's loyal half-brother, bore a blade imbued with

Destined Death, and there was not one demigod who did not fear him."

- Maliketh's Armor

Maliketh's reputation is clearly a result of him smashing this Godskin movement and laying low the Gloam-Eyed Queen. As we have discussed, I believe that Melina was that queen and she was burned in the red flames of death, leaving her burned and bodiless, and yet somehow preserved by Queen Marika, an ace in the hole.

LEGEND OF THE GLOAM-EYED

Yet what is the last legacy of the Godskins? Well, their low numbers attest to their destruction at the hands of Maliketh. Following the events of the Night of the Black Knives, their Black Flame would be gutted of its true power.

As such, the prospects for the Godskin movement seems dire, and yet they remain formidable combatants, purpose-built killing machines that they are. The placement of the Godskin NPCs throughout the world is a masterly example of environmental storytelling, in my opinion, as each of their locations has a story purpose. Each hints that the Godskins have not given up and still relentlessly pursue their initial aims.



The Gloam-Eyed Queen

There is a Godskin at the base of the Divine Tower of Caelid, defending their most holy of relics, the Godslayer's Greatsword itself. Then of course we have the Godskin found at Dominula, who we have already discussed: A figure who has manipulated an entire community to provide his creed with fresh skin.

Then there is the Godskin Noble at the Divine Tower of Liurnia, acting as a barrier between us and Ranni's Curse-mark of Death. Perhaps this Godskin is here to claim this fragment of the Rune of Death, so they once more can imbue their flame with its godslaying properties.

Similarly we can find the menacing Godskin Duo in Farum Azula, shockingly close to the Rune of Death. Their purpose here is quite clear. They are here for the Rune of Death that is currently locked away within Maliketh. Had they reached him and killed him before us, who knows what may have transpired?

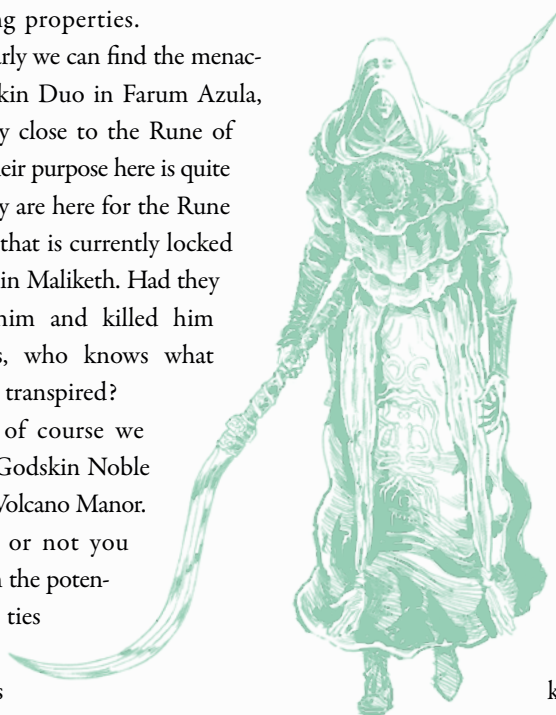
Then of course we have the Godskin Noble found in Volcano Manor. Whether or not you agree with the potential deep ties that the Godskins

could have to the serpents, the presence of the Noble here also makes sense. In the most basic reading, Rykard and the Godskin Noble want the same thing: the destruction of the Erdtree.

And thus, both benefit. Rykard gets a powerful ally, who potentially has knowledge of forming artificial life. In return, the Godskin can help Rykard champion the downfall of the gods whilst the description of the Albinauric Mask and Daedric's Woe – both items found here – could imply that the Godskin gets to practice his skinning ways on the prisoners found within

Prison Town.

Their legacy clearly goes beyond the surviving Godskins themselves, as we find the Godskin Prayerbook within Stormveil Castle. Godrick is desperate to destroy his demigod rivals and return to the land of his blood. It should therefore come as no shock that he would look to the rituals of those who once made god-killing their creed.



Grace Given

Perhaps the Godskins' greatest legacy is the one found littering the streets of Leyndell, in the form of the ash that blankets its streets.

We discussed Tarnished Archaeologist's theory regarding the first burning of the Erdtree – a traumatic event that brought a bountiful age to a close. The arboreal physical Erdtree is reduced to a withered stump. Yet who was responsible for this first burning?

As Tarnished Archaeologist suggests in their "The Serpent and the Erdtree" video, the vitriolic hate for the serpent and why it became the focus of gladiatorial games is a mystery. But perhaps it is well earned. Perhaps it is this alliance of serpent and gloam that is responsible for the Erdtree's greatest calamity.

And should Melina be the Gloam-Eyed Queen, she is a pale shadow of her former self, her true destructive power sealed behind her eye, as the Rune of Death is sealed beneath Maliketh's skin.

Her final purpose is fitting, however. Instead of leading a coup against a god, she has been tasked by that same god to bring an end to suffering and an end to stagnation. And so she does what she knows: she burns. She burns herself and burns the Erdtree – so that you, the player, may bring Destined Death back into the world.

Yet should you choose a different path – should Melina abandon us and not burn herself in the Flame of Ruin – then perhaps the Gloam-Eye will once again be unlocked alongside the Rune of Death.

Her opposition to the Lord of Chaos shows the true nature of the Gloam-Eyed Queen. She is not a force of evil. Rather, she is the natural death that all systems need, a balancing force in a world that has fallen far out of sync. Even so, she remains a cog in the machine of order. She does not wish for all life to be extinguished, but rather that the Destined Death of each individual should be administered properly.

Indeed it is Melina who begs the Tarnished to stay away from the path of chaos, from the path of true destruction:

"However ruined this world has become, however mired in torment and despair, life endures. Births continue. There is beauty in that, is there not? If you would become Lord, do not deny this notion. Please, leave the Frenzied Flame alone." - Melina

And should we choose such obliteration, such chaos, then it is the Gloam-Eyed Queen, the wielder of Death itself, who will stand as life's final champion.

"Lord of Frenzied Flame... I will seek you, as far as you may travel... To deliver you what is yours. Destined Death." - Melina



Chapter 7: Albinaurics

The Erdtree is seen as the nexus for the vast majority of the world, the focal lens through which we can observe the cycle of natural life. However, there are some exceptions, outcasts of the current Order. There are Those Who Live in Death, those touched by the Crucible, and there are beings made by the hands of humankind.

In the depths of the Eternal Cities we find the pitiable abominations known as the Dragonkin Soldiers, an unnatural attempt by the Nox to recreate the power of the dragons. There are the Silver Tears/

Mimic Tears, a result of Nox alchemy that exists to mimic natural life. But of course the most common and wide-spread artificial life are the Albinaurics, a race of humanoids of two generations who are found throughout the Lands Between.

The Albinaurics are a fascinating case in the lore, not only because of their artificial nature but because of the wide-spread persecution that they face from a myriad of different factions. The question of their origin and purpose is a study in the themes of alchemy, life and destiny all in one. Let's get into it.



Grace Given

At their core, the Albinaurics are an alchemical trope, an experiment to achieve the machinations of a faction. And yet in the course of this experiment, a new race has been born. It's a race full of hope and desires, yet mercilessly persecuted for its disconnection from the Erdtree and its cycle of life.

By examining these fascinating people, we can learn more not only about the nature of life within the Lands Between but also about the beliefs and prejudices of those within it. It is one of the greatest stories told in *Elden Ring*, one that enriches our understanding of life within this world and simultaneously tells the genuinely emotional story of a people who deserve so much more.

I think it is fitting that we start this discussion with the greatest lore item in the game, an item that holds a special place in my heart. I'm speaking of the Albinauric Bloodclot:

"The thick, coagulated blood of the Albinaurics. Material used for crafting items. Albinaurics are life-forms made by human hands. Thus, many believe them to live impure lives, untouched by the Erdtree's grace." - Albinauric Bloodclot

So the core of the identity of Albinaurics is defined by two key components. They are artificial, and they are not connected to the world of the Erdtree.

Let's look at these components in turn. Besides being artificially created, the Albinaurics may initially appear a mystery in terms of where they actually come from. But we do get hints when we begin to unpack the related lore items.

We have previously discussed the Ripple Blade, a weapon wielded by the Albinaurics themselves:

"Unique weapon wielded by young Albinaurics, this sword is modeled after the ripples that are thought to be the origin of their species." - Ripple Blade

This is a somewhat abstract description of the origin story, but the idea of ripples is employed to make us think of a liquid origin. Indeed we may get further evidence of this from the Blue Silver Mail Armor, the set worn by the Albinauric Archers:

"Chainmail hood crafted with blue silver. Worn by the wolf-riding Albinauric archers. Blue silver is a metal born from the same mother as the archers themselves, and provides protection from magic and frost." - Blue Silver Mail Armor

According to this piece of lore, the Albinaurics are born from the same source of metallurgy as the Blue Silver Mail Armor. With the "ripple" description in hand, we can conclude that they are born from some kind of liquid silver.

This also seems to match up with the actual look of the Albinauric Bloodclot,



Albinaurics

and the silver liquid they bleed. This can lead us to a fairly basic conclusion: they are a human-made experiment born of alchemy.

However, we can dig a little deeper if we dare look at some cut content and cut dialogue, which, as always, we will take with a grain of salt, and consider if it was cut for lore reasons. With that last point clear, I would first bring your attention to a cut dialogue from Thops, who at one stage would have said the following additional line after telling us about the Glintstone Key:

“Oh, one more thing... Beware the Albinaurics... Accursed souls born of a forbidden rite of the Eternal City. The curse withered the legs of the old, and silenced the tongues of the Frogs. And now they hold deep grudges for anyone left untouched.”
- Thops, cut dialogue

So it appears it would have been made extremely clear as to where the Albinaurics originated from – the Eternal Cities.

The reason that the Nox are a solid fit for the Albinauric’s creators, even before this dialogue from Thops, is because of the Nox’s proven aptitude for experimentation, alchemy and life manipulation. We know from the Nox armor sets that they were banished underground for conspiring against the Greater Will, and it seems that most Nox experimentation is an attempt to overthrow the Greater Will and raise up their Lord of Night.

The first example of this is the object that I assume led to their banishment in the first place: the Fingerslayer Blade.

This blade is a bizarre product, and is needed to kill a Two Fingers, suggesting it’s quite special. As we discussed earlier, it is a blade formed from a corpse, and thus I see this as an example of Noxian ingenuity.

As we previously discussed, the Noxian penchant for experimentation, science and alchemy is further expressed through their experimentation with hybrid and artificial creations, such as the Dragonkin Soldiers. The Nox are no strangers to life manipulation via science, and this can be further explored through their work on puppetry. The alchemical brilliance of the Nox is also reflected in the Celestial Dew, which is a fate manipulation potion distilled from starlight shards. Given the name of this formula and what we have already discussed regarding Nox science, it is again highly suggested that it is a formula created from the stars.

The point of going over this so carefully is that it really gives us the sense of a people who are capable alchemists, and thus the perfect candidates for the creation of the Albinaurics.

To further reinforce the likelihood of this, there is another potential form of artificial life we must consider: the Silver Tears. The Silver Tears are fairly



Grace Given

mysterious, but they also appear to be both a substance and a living creature, a substance that again looks very much like the liquid silver blood of the Albinauric people.

So now we will examine the potential motive behind the creation of these beings, and what it can potentially tell us about the origin of the Albinaurics.

TO MAKE A LORD

As for what exists in current in-game lore, there is no direct evidence that the Silver Tears are man-made.

We can learn of these Silver Tears from their larval cores:

“Core of a creature of mimicry known as a silver tear. As much a substance as it is a living organism. Material required by the amber egg cradled by Rennala, Queen of the Full Moon, to birth people anew.”
- Larval Tear

There’s lots of interesting information here. Let’s start with the look of the core itself, which is meant to be reminiscent of an organ. This shows that in some way these are living beings. Yet they are not only living organisms, but a substance as well – a substance used in the smelting of weapons.

So how did this living substance come to be? I believe the answers can come

from the character creation screen. When Silver Tears transform into human warriors, they take on the appearance of the so-called Nightfolk. The Nightfolk are one of the preset character models we can choose for our Tarnished, and the description reads:

“Few in number, they were said to bleed silver long ago.”
- Nightfolk, Character Preset

So given that the Tarnished can be Nightfolk, I believe they are separate beings from the Silver Tears we face in the Eternal Cities. The fact that they “bleed silver” – and the default human appearance they choose – leads me to conclude that the blood of this race was somehow used in the process for creating this life-form.

It is just speculation, but I certainly believe that the Nox had a hand in alchemically creating these beings through the use of the silver blood of the Nightfolk and the essence of the stars. I see this as being similar to the process of the Puppet Draught and I suspect that these sacred chalices are essentially the original test tubes.

Whether you believe they are natural or genetically altered, what is clear is that the Nox have managed to harness not only a sophisticated and dangerous life-form but also a versatile substance from which they create their unusual weapons.



Albinaurics

For example, the item description of the Nox Flowing Sword states:

“A grim weapon wielded by swordsmen of the Eternal City, this shotel has a blade as fine as a needle. Forged from the liquid metal of a Silver Tear, it is thoroughly tempered until hardened.” - Nox Flowing Sword

So the materials that form their weapons are unique, having been formed by this signature substance. Once again: I think the Nox are exceptional craftsmen and alchemists, and were capable of handling and forging a living substance into weapons that are both solid and supple simultaneously.

Yet this is small potatoes compared to what these beings are actually capable of. We know the sentient balls that guard the Eternal Cities are in fact a form of Silver Tear, given the fact they all drop Larval Tears when killed. Their forms are malleable and they can mimic any life form: They can twist their shapes into offensive and defensive weapons. Or they can completely transform their beings into new forms, becoming humanoids or even trolls – any form that suits their particular purpose at that time. It’s as if the core is the organ at the center of this substance, and it’s the agent responsible for molding the living substance into the form most suited to its purposes.

The reason I believe this to be the case is because of the way in which Rennala

uses the Larval Tears: she uses them as an agent for change to rebirth beings. This organ has the power of change and transmutation. There are even Silver Tears that exist out in the Lands Between, pretending to be other beings before transforming into something more dangerous and attacking you when you break their disguise. It’s almost as if these mimics are taking the role of an infiltrator. Their utility is therefore very clear: they can be weapons, warriors, monsters or spies.

No matter the manner of the creation, whether they were born naturally of Nightfolk blood or the Nox had some hand in genetically altering the blood to form these beings, it is clear these beings work with and serve the Eternal Cities.

Yet there are even greater implications for the role of these Tears within Nox society. Remember the true objective of the Nox: to place their Lord of Night upon a throne.

One has to consider the purpose of these creatures and why they exist solely within the Eternal Cities.

The Silver Tear Husk can possibly hint at why this is:

“A hardened husk shed by a formless life form known as the Silver Tear, found in and around the Eternal City... The Silver Tear makes mockery of life, reborn again and again into imitation. Perhaps, one day, it will be reborn a lord...” - Silver Tear Husk





Albinaurics

It's almost as if these mimics are taking the role of an infiltrator. Their utility is therefore very clear: they can be weapons, warriors, monsters or spies.

The end of this statement is very pointed. It refers to the mimetic ability of the Silver Tears in the hope that they will one day take the form of a lord. Again, this harkens back to the overarching goals of the Nox. To remind you, the Nox Swordstress Armor description states:

"Now they live under a false night sky, in eternal anticipation of their liege. Of the coming age of the stars. And their Lord of Night." - Nox Swordstress Armor

To me, the implication is that the hope here is that a mimic will one day assume the form of the Lord of Night. If this is their purpose then it would track that they were purpose-made by the Nox for this explicit reason.

While on its own this is highly speculative, it is further reinforced by a piece of cut content, that being the Quest of Asimi – the mimic who would be lord¹.

In short, in this content you would meet a sentient mimic called Asimi who would latch on to you in a sort of symbiotic relationship. She would provide you power, while she would also slowly copy your form. The finale would see Asimi leaving you after mimicking your form, with the intention that you would become Elden Lord and her Sovereign Eternal. Instead, however, you would seek Asimi out and defeat her.

As part of this quest, Asimi would ask the player to visit the Eternal Cities to find the source of her kind. This dialogue would go as follows:

"My lord host, great lord host. May I ask something of you? A chalice is close by, the cradle of my kind... Would you mind finding it for me? Mm, you should find the chalice...and drink it dry. Ahh, my lord host. I am terribly parched. The chalice will quench my thirst, rejuvenate my flesh, and allow me to grant you further strength. Please, my lord host. It is my only desire. My lord host, great lord host. A tear chalice lies in these lands, too. A tear chalice lies in these lands. Our mother chalice. Please, search out this most sacred chalice. It's suffused with the blessed wonders of the stars... It will allow us to become a perfect whole." - Asimi, Cut Dialogue

This dialogue is obviously a huge piece of information, and while I can't see where it clashes with existing lore, I



Grace Given

imagine it was cut because it was simply too much of a direct lore dump, or because the quest was too complex for the development team, or possibly because they weren't happy with what Asimi's quest line could mean for the ending.

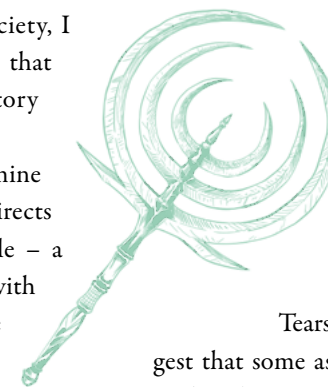
Regardless of this, given that the Silver Tears are still strongly associated with the Eternal Cities, and how closely the Sovereign Eternal aspect of her dialogue chimes with the Silver Tear Husk and the aim of Nox society, I have little reason to believe that this isn't the intended backstory to the Silver Tears.

With that said, let us examine what Asimi says here. She directs us to the cradle of her people – a "mother chalice" suffused with the blessed wonders of the stars. Given what we have already seen of the Nox's fate manipulation, it makes sense that this fate is manipulated to give a malleable substance – life. This mother chalice no doubt contained a liquid, a formula that had been used to create her people, the Silver Tears. So when looking at the Albinaurics, we can see they have prior form when it comes to creating artificial beings – artificial beings of silver.

With this understanding we can now turn our attention back to the Albinaurics, who themselves bleed a

silver substance. And if we take the cut dialogue at face value then it leads us to conclude that the Albinaurics were made by a similar process.

The aim of the Nox, to bring about an Age of Stars and a Lord of Night is, to me, the driving force behind all of their creations. The Dragonkin and Puppets give them new weapons to wield against the Greater Will, the manipulation of fate gives them an edge and, of course, a new life-form in the hope of artificially creating a Lord of Night – a Sovereign Eternal.



There are enough links between the Silver Tears and Albinaurics to suggest that some aspect of the former was used in the creation of the latter. They are both of the Eternal City, both have a pale pallor and both have white blood. But also we have the intriguing lore found in the item description of the armor that the Albinauric Archers use. The description of the Blue Silver Armor reads:

"Blue silver is a metal born from the same mother as the archers themselves, and provides protection from magic and frost." - Blue Silver Mail Armor

So this blue silver is born from the same mother as the archers. Whatever

¹ "Asimi Questline Restored – Cut Content" - Nullrinn



Grace Given

this mother is, it has a connection to silver, an element that creates the Albinaurics and also makes a silver material. A coincidence? I think not. Alongside the other similarities and links to the Nox, this leads me to conclude that there is some connection to the Silver Tears in the origins of the Albinaurics' birth.

It is clear that the Albinaurics are beings of magical origin, meaning that the arcane was used to create them. We learn of this via the Albinauric Staff:

"The Albinaurics harbor a secret; they cast sorcery using their innate arcaneness."
- Albinauric Staff

To me their "innate arcaneness" is no doubt linked to the alchemical, magical and fate manipulation techniques we have already seen the Nox employ to create and manipulate life.

In essence it is hard not to see the Albinaurics as connected to the line of work that resulted in the Silver Tears, especially given their silver blood and artificial nature. Indeed, even item placement may hint at a kinship between the two beings, as we can find the Larval Tear of a Silver Tear in amongst some corpses at the Village of the Albinaurics.

Zullie the Witch makes this connection as well, and highlights a previous item description for the Silver Armor, which refers to the Albinaurics by a different name: the *Children of Silver*².

In conclusion, the Albinaurics are the Nox's homunculi, an alchemical experiment made as an attempt to create the perfect being. Much like the Silver Tears they are born of a liquid formula.

One of the "laws" of alchemy is the notion of the three primes, a theory developed by an alchemist named Paracelsus in the 16th century. The primes refer to three materials: salt, mercury and sulfur. There was also a spiritual element to this. Salt represents the body and anything solid, mercury represents the mind and anything fluid, and sulfur represents the soul – anything that combusts.

In the case of the Albinaurics we would analogously compare the silver blood that makes up the Albinaurics to mercury. Given the proposed purpose of the Nox in creating the Albinaurics, it makes sense that there is such a strong association with liquid silver, and by extension with mercury. Every being was thought to have aspects of all three of the primes, mind, body and soul. Yet for the Albinaurics, they have body and mind, but do they have a soul? Perhaps this understanding of the three primes will lend us a greater understanding of why the Albinaurics are seen as impure.

With that said, there is one further aspect of the alchemical formula we must touch on – the primordial dew mentioned in the Albinauric Shield item description.

² "Elden Ring – Suffering a wretched fate" - Zullie the Witch



Albinaurics

Realistically, this could just be a flowery way of describing the formula from which the Albinaurics are formed, but that would be wilfully ignoring the other mentions of dew we get: the dew of the Age of Plenty, referred to in the Blessed Dew Talisman and the Icon Shield. This dew was literal life energy that dripped from the boughs of the Erdtree. Perhaps this dew, combined with the mercurial substance, was what gave the Albinaurics two of the three prime elements – life or form from the dew and mind from mercury.

I think that this is the most sensible explanation of the formula behind the Albinaurics, as well as a neat illustration of why people would view them as impure beings, missing the third prime element – the soul. We will return to this subject and the “mother” mentioned in the Blue Silver Set later, when we return to Latenna and the Towering Sister.

So why were the Albinaurics created?

Given all we have said on the Silver Tears and their probable connection to the Albinaurics, the likely explanation is that they are just a further line of experiments to create an artificial Lord of Night to bring about an Age of Stars.

So far we have made a particular focus on Noxian alchemy, and this is justified given the Nox products like the Celestial Dew, Puppet Formula and Silver Tears. Alchemy is particularly important when

it comes to understanding what the Albinaurics symbolize and why they would be created in the first place. It is no great revelation at this stage to say that the themes and particulars of alchemy are present throughout many facets of *Elden Ring's* stories. Of course, the most prominent example would be the idea of the *Rebis* – the perfect melding of male and female in a single body, as represented by Marika and Radagon.

Something I have always found interesting is that there are only *young* female first-generation Albinaurics and only *old* males. Is this proof that these beings are hermaphrodites? Is it possible that they are female when they are young but become male when they age?

As briefly mentioned above, there is a concept in alchemy called the homunculus, which is the alchemical pursuit of creating a perfectly formed miniature person. As pointed out by Zullie, there is actually a Magic: The Gathering card “Artifact Creature – Homunculus” that very much looks like a second-generation Albinauric. In one of Ziostorm’s discovery videos³, he makes the observation that Magic: The Gathering is very much an inspiration for various *Elden Ring* motifs, and so this connection seems all the more probable.

The alchemical process of creating a perfectly formed human being seems like



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the ideal solution for a society that wants to find their Lord of Night by any means necessary. So it was that the Nox tried to create their own perfect being – their Lord of Night. And instead they ended up with the Albinaurics, flawed yet sentient creations.

The very nature of the Albinaurics is an interesting thing to consider as well, and it brings us back to that holy grail of lore items, the Albinauric Bloodclot, which makes it clear that the main reason the Albinaurics are treated like dirt is because they are not natural and, specifically, they are “untouched” by the Erdtree.

The very existence of the Albinaurics is antithetical to the Erdtree, a fitting creation for a civilization directly opposed to the Greater Will. Everything about them thematically fits with them being a Nox creation, and an attempt at creating a Lord of Night to oppose the Order of Grace.

Now it is time for us to take another consideration into account. Did the sorcerers of Raya Lucaria have any hand in the creation of the Albinaurics?

THE LIURNIAN CONNECTION

I want to preface this section by saying that I am in no doubt that the Nox are a better fit for the creators of the

Albinaurics. However there are some interesting connections to the Liurnian people that could suggest they had a hand in further developing this area of experimentation.

My two main reasons for bringing this up are their prominence in Liurnia, and the prior item description for the Silver Armor.

Let’s start with the latter. Thanks to Zullie’s Albinauric video we have access to a previous version of the Silver Armor’s item description⁴:

“These maids constructed in Raya Lucaria headed to the Paling Tower to enter Miquella’s Service.” - Blue Silver Armor, Pre-Release Description

So obviously a lot has changed in the lore – there is no “Paling Tower,” and these life-forms are no longer known as the Children of Silver; they are the Albinaurics. So we could just discount this in totality and move on. However, I do think cut content can sometimes be useful in trying to understand the intentions behind the lore – especially since there are still connections to Raya Lucaria and the Carians.

Much as the location of Silver Tears is used by me to justify the origins of the Albinaurics, others look to the proximity of the Albinaurics to the academy as evidence of their creation.

Indeed, the description of the Albinauric Shield outright states that the main

³ “Elden Ring | 8 More Epic Discoveries!” - Ziostorm

⁴ “Elden Ring – Suffering a wretched fate” - Zullie the Witch



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enemies of the Albinaurics are sorcerers, perhaps because they were created in Liurnia and have essentially been a blight on the lands ever since.

There is further evidence that the Albinaurics could have been created by sorcerers rather than Nox alchemy. It's something I cited earlier, the description of the Albinauric Staff, which talks about their innate arcaneness. While I linked this to the fate manipulation of the Nox, it could quite easily be tied to the arcane practices of Raya Lucaria.

In a lot of ways the Raya Lucarians overlap with the practices and beliefs of the Nox, the main difference being that they are not out-and-out opponents of the Greater Will – and in fact would later be married into the Erdtree Order. Regardless, they clearly share some similar DNA. Both study the power latent of the stars, both are concerned with the relationship between fate and the stars, and both have factions that are interested in bringing about an Age of Stars.

We even get evidence of Noxian impacts upon Liurnian culture, for example the Church of Vows. This is a church lined with Noxian statues, and its main font is a basin where the Celestial Dew is used again to alter fate and restore bonds once thought completely broken:

“Radagon once cleansed himself with celestial dew, repented his territorial

aggressions, and swore his love to Rennala. The Order of the Erdtree and the fate of the moon were conjoined, and all the wounds of war forgiven. This miracle blesses the church to this day.”

- Miriel, Pastor of Vows

In addition, Seluvis, preceptor to the Carian royal family, continues research into puppetry, and even seeks to take the teachings further by ensnaring a demigod himself. Rennala's son, Radahn, would go to Sellia to learn Gravity Sorcery, Sellia essentially being a colony of the Eternal Cities.

“You've been a saint, through and through. As thanks, I vow to impart to you my knowledge of the lost sorceries of the Sellians, descendants of the Eternal.”

- Sage Gowry

The description of the Albinauric Shield states that the main enemies of the Albinaurics are sorcerers, perhaps because they were created in Liurnia and have been a blight on the lands ever since.



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Finally, Ranni of course has some contact with the Eternal Cities when she conspires with them to commit the Knight of the Black Knives. So it is not unthinkable that it was the sorcerers of Liurnia who replicated the Albinaurics, building upon the work of the Nox, with whom they had close contact. Indeed we do see a number of first-generation Albinaurics serving the Carian royal family, such as Pidia and possibly even Loretta herself, a Carian knight who may well be the most successful attempt at harnessing the potential of the Albinaurics. She's a mounted bow-wielding knight, no less.

So what is the truth behind their creation? Did the Nox create these creatures, or was it the work of Raya Lucarians? Well, both could be true. My belief is that the work originated with the Nox, as an experiment to create a Lord of Night, but that the Raya Lucarians may well have piggy-backed off it, in an attempt to create warriors and servants. Given the description of their shield, their location in Raya Lucaria, their innate arcaneness and the original description of the Silver Armor Set, I do give a lot of weight to this explanation. And that isn't even considering the connection to Royal Knight Loretta, whom we shall discuss in more depth later.

Either way the results were the same. Human hands created these flawed beings, and whatever purpose they hoped to

harness these beings for has clearly not come to pass. The Albinaurics are now in direct conflict with the forces of Raya Lucaria.

So let us now examine the current state of Albinaurics and their plight in the Lands Between.

BLOOD OF SILVER

However it happened, the Albinaurics were created. But they are no mere tools, as was probably intended. Instead, they have developed into their own people, with their own desires and beliefs. And the main distinguishing feature of the Albinauric people is their two distinct generations: the first, more humanoid generation and the frog-like second generation.

We learn that these are two generations of the same people via the Albinauric Ashes:

“A strapping duo of cartwheeling spirits who wield ripple swords and spew freezing breath. Both are second-generation Albinaurics, with dumpy heads that resemble those of frogs.” - Albinauric Ashes

The second generation could of course mean two different things for an artificially created people. It could be that the first-generation Albinaurics are able to reproduce but their offspring are radically different from them, or the second generation of Albinaurics could be an



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updated product, an attempt to fix the faults of the first generation.

We know one of the main faults of the first generation is their failing and fading legs, as described to us by Old Albus:

“My legs will soon fade, and with them, my life. Alas, this is the immovable fate of all Albinaurics...” - Old Albus

Why do their legs fade? Given the alchemical and magical origins of the Albinaurics, it would make sense that this is an alchemical failing. The legs don't only fail, they literally fade, as we can see from the shadowy remnants attached to the older Albinaurics.

So, while my first instinct was that the second-generation Albinaurics were “born” from the first, one could see the functional legs of the second generation as a purposeful upgrade – an attempt to rebalance the formula that birthed the first generation.

There are other points of interest of the first generation that need covering, of course, such as the unbelievable skill with which they wield their magical bows. Latenna's spirit ash confirms that they are magical archers, which explains why their arrows literally track moving opponents. Their ability to do this must again be a result of their innate magical ability, and I see this as evidence that Loretta is one of their number. She too is able to summon magical homing arrows, but

without a bow, possibly showing she is more potent in this regard.

Moving on, the second-generation Albinaurics, while without the weaknesses of the first generation, obviously come with their own flaws. Aside from being more monstrous looking than their more human first generation, they cannot speak.

This again is explained in the cut Thops dialogue, which states that the “frogs” have silenced tongues. I have no reason to doubt that this is still true, given we don't ever hear them speak, and even their death knell is very animalistic. Indeed it could explain the vast difference in culture between the second generation and the first. The first generation seems far more sophisticated, far closer to a human society in terms of community structure, building and craft.

In contrast, the armor and nature of the second generation portrays the Albinaurics as far simpler, but of course far more physically adept as warriors. While we don't see any direct interactions between the groups, it is most likely that the Albinaurics share a kinship, even if their lifestyles are vastly different.

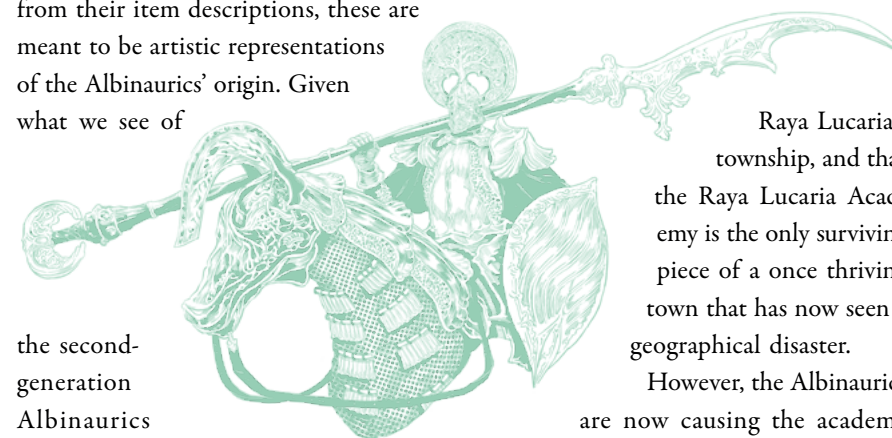
I've commented upon the apparel of the second-generation Albinaurics, how its crude nature reflects the more bestial nature of that generation. And while this meshes well with the huge clubs of the larger Albinaurics, it clashes quite harshly



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with the other adornments wielded by the second generation – the Silver Mirror-shield, Ripple Blade and Ripple Crescent Halberd. These seem finely crafted, to a degree beyond even human capabilities.

Indeed, not only is the form of these weapons sophisticated, but the lore bended within its metals is also extremely sophisticated. As we can see from their item descriptions, these are meant to be artistic representations of the Albinaurics' origin. Given what we see of



the second-generation Albinaurics and the stark differ-

ence between their chain mail and weapons, I would suggest these weapons were supplied to them by the first generation. That is my own speculation, but given the care taken in forging these weapons to represent Albinauric mythology, I believe it to be a sensible conclusion.

The first generation, as mentioned, appears to be closer to what we would consider a normal human society. The second-generation Albinaurics, while still sentient, move in roaming gangs,

and are most likely the generation who have seen far more conflict.

Their location around the crumbled ruins of the Academy Gate Town is interesting for a number of reasons. Were they responsible for its downfall? Probably not physically, as it does seem like a natural disaster befell the town, that erosion led to a collapse of land that once surrounded the

Raya Lucarian township, and that the Raya Lucaria Academy is the only surviving piece of a once thriving town that has now seen a geographical disaster.

However, the Albinaurics are now causing the academy serious issues and completely control the flooded remains of the town. And who can blame them, given the persecution that has been faced by their people?

One of the best sources to understand the type of hatred the Albinaurics face is the Albinauric Pot, a weapon that can be made from the blood of the Albinaurics:

“The Knights of the Cuckoos do declare. Behold, thy defiled blood. Unlike any humor that flows in our grand realm.” - Albinauric Pot



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This basis for the Cuckoo forces' hatred of the Albinaurics ties in with what is said in the Albinauric Bloodclot. People hate the Albinaurics because they are not natural, and, in essence, this seems to be the basis for a lot of their mistreatment.

This unnaturalness can even be seen in their name, incidentally. "Albin" most directly means white, but can also mean "without color," and "auric" means gold. So the most likely meaning for the Albinaurics as intended is "without gold." These are pale beings absent gold, absent the touch of the Erdtree. This does make sense given our proposed purpose. They were created to be a Lord of Night, and thus contain everything antithetical to the Erdtree.

The Knights of the Cuckoos are the knights that are contracted on behalf of Raya Lucaria, and these forces have a pretty sinister reputation. We learn this via the Raya Lucaria Soldier Ashes:

"The soldiers of Raya Lucaria were also known as the Cuckoos. They were given free rein by the academy to wage war as they pleased, and they were infamous for their rapacious ways." - Raya Lucaria Soldier Ashes

The cruelty of these soldiers lends well to the narrative described by the Albinauric Pot. They hunt the Albinaurics because of their "defiled blood" and yet, given their reputation, it wouldn't be hard to imagine the Cuckoo forces visiting atrocities upon a people with little justification.

This also simultaneously explains the description of the Albinauric Shield, which states that sorcerers were their main enemies. The clashes with Raya Lucaria are most likely driven by hate and territory; after all, they occupy Raya Lucarian land.

Yet aside from the conflicts with the second generation, the first-generation Albinaurics seem to have made a life for themselves in Liurnia, in the Village of the Albinaurics. They seem to have built a community and they even have their own myths and goals.

Even so, this village is the site of an atrocity, the most stark example of how poorly the Albinaurics are treated in the Lands Between. When we first arrive in the village, we are greeted by the corpses of Albinaurics hanging, while piles of bodies burn on the ground: genocide.

Nepheli's haunting words only add to the atmosphere that awaits us:

"The oppression of the weak. Murder and pillage unchecked. A waking nightmare, made by men." - Nepheli Loux

The goons we find in this village, fallen perfumers, are Gideon Ofnir's men, muscle in his pursuit of knowledge. We know this because he is aware of Latenna, and is seeking half of the Haligtree Secret Medallion. When we have half, he directs us towards Latenna, already showing an awareness of the relationship she has with the medallion.



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"...Allow me to tender some advice, in regard to the half of the secret medallion you possess. Find the Albinauric woman. She hides in a cave to the west of the Laskyar Ruins which jut from the mist-shrouded lake of Liurnia. She knows the location of the medallion's counterpart, I am sure." - Sir Gideon Ofnir, the All-Knowing

And later we get confirmation that it was Gideon who caused all this, when Nepheli confronts her adoptive father about the event, and he banishes her.

Why does Gideon do this? Well, he does it for a pretty petty reason: Gideon is obsessed with knowledge and with his legend of being the All-Knowing. In essence, he guides us to find the answers to questions he doesn't have.

When we are inducted properly, Gideon proudly shares all the knowledge he has gathered on the remaining demigods. But it is clear that the missing demigods irk him. Not because this compromises the supposed mission of Roundtable Hold, but because it affects his ego. Indeed he does let his frustration show when provided with information regarding Miquella's location:

"So. The Haligtree, now but a husk... I heard speculation Miquella embedded himself in the Haligtree, but before he could finish, someone cut the tree open and absconded with his infant form. Indeed, it seems those words held weight.

How vexing. That the All-knowing didn't have the full story..."

- Sir Gideon Ofnir, the All-Knowing

These concerns surrounding knowledge are vastly more important to the All-Knowing than the lives of an entire village. Granted, Ofnir is a cruel man anyway, but no doubt the lowly position of Albinaurics and their status as artificial life meant that Ofnir had zero qualms with putting an entire village to the sword.

The scant regard given to the lives of these beings is echoed in Praetor Rykard's treatment of them. In essence, Rykard uses the Abductor Virgins to bring people to this Prison Town, where evidently he experimented with life-forms as part of his greater aim in overthrowing the Erdtree. We learn via the Man-Serpent Ashes that the "birth" of the Man-Serpents happened after Rykard was devoured by the God-Serpent Eiglay.

The very fact that there is a temple to Eiglay, a temple to the great serpent, and the taking of the serpent as his emblem, shows that Rykard clearly saw the serpent as something truly great. It was emblematic of his aims. The Devourer's Scepter tells us that it is "the very symbol of the Lord of Blasphemy," as it reads:

"Scepter in the shape of a serpent devouring the world. This weapon will one day become the very symbol of the Lord of Blasphemy... A vision of the future briefly



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seen by Rykard in his final moments before being devoured by the great serpent.”

- Devourer’s Scepter

Rykard’s soldiers were initially inspired by the audacity of his aims... until he became a serpent:

“Praetor Rykard’s ambitions, though blasphemous, marked him a worthy sovereign. But they were reduced to gluttonous depravity, once he gave himself to the serpent. Whatever that thing is, it is no longer Praetor Rykard. Someone must kill him.” - Volcano Manor Spirit

So it makes sense that Rykard would look for soldiers made more in his image, the Man-Serpent. Armed with this knowledge the environmental storytelling of the Prison Town makes sense: the heaps of bodies, the abductions and Abductor Virgins all fit. This is a center for experimentation.

This is where we find a large population of Albinaurics in terrible circumstances, as they fill the halls of the ironically named Guest House in various torture devices, including the Black Dumpling.

Most interestingly, this is where we find the Albinauric Mask, located on another torture device. The description of the mask has a very clear implication: This is a mask made from the real skin of an Albinauric, skinned by a Godskin no less.

This does make sense too, given the placement of the Godskin Noble within

Volcano Manor. To some, this may seem like a random placement. But I think it’s more precisely done. Firstly, both wish to overthrow the gods and are thus allies of convenience. Secondly, they both get something out of the arrangement. As already shown by the skinned Albinauric, the Godskin Noble gets access to plenty of subjects for skin, much as the Godskin Apostle of Dominula manipulates their festivities to get access to fresh skin. Rykard, meanwhile, gains the Godskin Noble’s knowledge of blending life, bearing in mind the Godskin Noble Set description reads:

“Nobles are the most ancient apostles who are said to have assimilated inhuman physiology.” - Godskin Noble Robe

Indeed, it is important to note that the Godskin Nobles have assimilated serpentine features, namely a tail, adding it to a mostly human physiology.

So we understand now why the Godskin Noble is here. But why are the Albinaurics?

Well, because they too are artificial beings, and for someone like Rykard looking to craft weapons to overthrow the Erdtree, why would he not start with the creations of the Nox?

This is my speculation, based upon what we see from the environmental details. Ultimately it isn’t hugely important for our current subject matter. What



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Human-on-human conflicts are memorialized in Sword Monuments, but Albinaurics appear to be beneath notice – treated as though they aren’t living beings.

is important is the further illustration of the senseless harm that is inflicted upon the Albinaurics. Human-on-human conflicts are memorialized in Sword Monuments at the least, but Albinaurics appear to be beneath notice – treated as though they aren’t really living, thinking beings, rather just a material to be harvested or an annoyance to be exterminated.

The dehumanization of the Albinaurics is one of the most brutal stories of the Lands Between. And the core of it, the cause of it, is once again found in the Albinauric Bloodclot.

These beings are lesser as they are untouched by the Erdtree. They are outside its narrow definition of life and thus find themselves as outcasts for the crime of existence – an existence manufactured by the very hands that persecute them so harshly.

These examples we have gone through are only scratching the surface of the barbarism the Albinaurics face, in an almost casual fashion. For example, we find strung up Albinaurics in the hideout of Necromancer Garris, and we can only assume he too has used them as a subject for his experimentation. Cast away and brutalized, it is little wonder that the Albinaurics are outsiders who must eke out a living in a cruel and unforgiving world.

While Liurnia is the main hub of Albinauric activity, we do find them in a couple of different locations. One of the more interesting locations is in the Mohgwyn Palace, where they appear to be in service to the Lord of Blood. I find the story of these wayward Albinaurics particularly interesting, because it can tell us a lot of the Albinauric people both in a physical sense and in terms of their mindset.

The Mohgwyn dynasty presents itself as one of love and acceptance, a safe haven for those who have no place in the World of Grace:

“Abh, it is trying, but we must be patient. One day, you will be elevated, deservedly, basking in love. Right, my lambkin? Ha ha ha...” - White Mask Varré

And:
“Luminary Mohg has strength, vision, and of course, love.” - White Mask Varré

This is given legitimacy by the fact that Mohg himself is an Omen, a people



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unwelcome in the World of Grace. It is no wonder that a persecuted people may feel drawn to such a community, and indeed the placement of enemies within Liurnia hints at this.

The center of the Formless Mother's influence in Liurnia is of course Rose Church. Near Rose Church you can find a group of Albinaurics, staring at the church almost curiously, almost as if they are considering joining the Mohgwyn dynasty, or as if they are heeding the call of Mohg and the Formless Mother.

A lot of Albinaurics end up at the consecrated snowfields, the promised land that we will discuss later. And while most seem to seek the aegis of Miquella, others seem to find another path here – a certain blood-covered portal. At the area where this portal spits us out, on the cliff overlooking the blood blighted lands of Mohg, we get a really interesting scene.

We see a group of Blood Albinaurics, patrolling a group of regular Albinaurics, and to me this story couldn't be clearer. These are new inductees that are being guarded before they too are accepted and inducted. When watching this up close, it genuinely broke my heart a little: The exhausted look of the regular Albinaurics, of a people who have been persecuted and hunted their whole lives, finally thinking they have some kind of sanctuary. And while Mohg does preach "love", it is clear

he cares as little for the Albinaurics as the rest of the Lands Between. For if one looks carefully at the environmental details in Mohgwyn Palace, we are confronted with a horrific scene. Albinauric corpses, strewn carelessly, left to rot and soak in the bloody bogs with no dignity or burial.

It is apparent that not all Albinaurics who make it here will survive, whatever induction process they must undertake. The despicable treatment of the dead speaks volumes. Mohg cares only for these beings as shock troops, and I think this really highlights the sad reality of the second-generation Albinaurics. They are simple, trusting beings, and while we cannot blame the Albinaurics for seeking refuge here, it is clear that Mohg abuses that trust.

Side-by-side, the stark contrast between the two groups is clear. Not only do the Blood Albinaurics have bright red skin but, as I note in my Mohg chapter, like the Sanguine Noble, these Blood Albinaurics also have the Omen horns poking through their skin. This again suggests that those Albinaurics that become bound to the dynasty have also had Mohg's Omen blood injected. The radical nature of their transformation is interesting. We can see the effects on humans are more subtle and more like a corruption or infection, whereas it seems like a palette change to these Blood Albinaurics.



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This makes sense when we consider the alchemical origins of the Albinaurics that we discussed earlier. I see the Albinaurics as being malleable. They are still formulaic in a way, and by adding a new element to the formula it drastically alters the Albinaurics, including their color. We also have to consider the words of the Albinauric Staff: Albinaurics are innately arcane, and as such their bodies may be affected differently by Omen blood than the body of a more mundane creature would be.

This is not the only instance of this formula change. In certain parts of the Consecrated Snowfield, we can find golden-eyed Albinaurics who can wield the Discus of Light incantation of Miquella the Unalloyed. We don't know for certain which material could have affected them in this way, but an educated guess would be Unalloyed Gold, given they are in the lands of Miquella, and the promised land of their people.

It is to this promised land that we turn next, along with Latenna and Loretta – heroes of the Albinauric people.

THE PROMISED LAND

In the face of so much persecution within the Lands Between, it is little

wonder that the Albinaurics have come up with a classic promised land myth, one that we can hear from the mouth of Old Albus himself:

"A chosen land awaits us Albinaurics. The medallion is the key that leads to the city. It's only a quaint treasure, for we who cannot make the journey. But for dear Latenna, it is needed. To fulfill her purpose."- Old Albus

Yet this isn't a mere myth, as it seems as though the village has placed their hopes with Latenna, a young female Albinauric whom Ofnir has already beaten and interrogated in his quest to find Miquella. Upon meeting Latenna, once we show her we have half the medallion and earned her trust, she asks for our help in reaching Miquella's Haligtree – the promised land that Old Albus mentioned to us.

This of course brings us to Loretta, one of the fabled knights of the Carian dynasty, and apparently the only person moved by the plight of the Albinaurics. We learn that Loretta was once a personal guard to the Carian royals themselves, a fact reflected by her spirit's continued presence in Caria Manor. However we also learn that she sought to find a new land for the Albinaurics. We learn of this via Loretta's Mastery and her armor, the latter of which has a description that reads:



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“Loretta, once a royal Carian knight, went on a journey in search of a haven for Albinaurics, and determined that the Haligtree was their best chance for eventual salvation.” - Royal Knight Helm

And thus the rest is history. Loretta replaces her Glintstone with Unalloyed Gold and becomes a defender of the Haligtree rather than Caria Manor; word reaches the Albinaurics of this promised land found for them and many Albinaurics make the pilgrimage, such as the Golden Albinaurics we previously discussed, and the wolf archers who protect passage to the Haligtree.

For all intents and purposes this is a happy ending. Loretta has found somewhere for the Albinaurics to hide out safely.

They are in Miquella’s lands, the lands of an Emyrean who is well-known to take in the outcasts of Grace society, as is told to us in the description of the Sacred Crown Helm, which reads:

“Who is it that Miquella shall bless, if not the low and the meek?” - Sacred Crown Helm

Indeed we have to assume that, like Loretta, these Albinaurics owe some loyalty to Miquella, guarding passage to the Haligtree in exchange for being allowed to settle here. This is evidenced by the Golden Albinaurics, and by the very fact that Albinaurics are our main obstacle in reaching Miquella’s seat of power, the Haligtree.

But did Loretta find this safe haven because she is a human who has a greater empathy than her fellow Liurnians? Or does she have a deeper, more personal



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reason for helping the Albinaurics? This is hinted at via her shield description:

“The shape is said to imitate that of a sacred drop of dew, which inspired the absurd rumor that Loretta herself was an Albinauric.” - Silver Mirrorshield

Is this an absurd rumor, though? We don’t see beneath Loretta’s visor and she is always mounted, and could be in a similar situation where she is entirely horsebound. And as an Albinauric with innate arcane powers, it would explain her exceptional magical prowess – although in general the Carian Knights are renowned for their magical skill, so who knows?

However I will point out that Loretta’s magic is specifically a magical bow and arrow, a connection to the magical wolfback archers I alluded to earlier. At the end of the day, we will probably never know the truth, but I am of the opinion that Loretta is an Albinauric. She has a similar name to Latenna, she wields magical arrows, she is never seen off horseback, and she is determined to save the Albinaurics. The lore of her shield is almost a direct prompt to this conclusion.

Either way, it was Loretta who finally paved the way for a better chance at life for the Albinaurics. But there is even more here than just a safe haven. There is perhaps a future.

Albus impressed upon us the importance of Latenna making it to the promised land, and if this happens, we can witness one of the happiest moments of any Souls game.

“Oh young yet towering sister of ours. Let the birthing droplet in. And create life. For us. For all the Albinaurics.”

- Latenna

When we first enter the consecrated snowfields Latenna states that:

“We have reached the land of Miquella’s Haligtree, where Lobo and I began our travels. It’s entirely thanks to you that I’m so close to home. These great snow-laden lands stretch far to the north. And beyond the ancient bowers, and the liturgical town of Ordina, lies the place to which I must return.” - Latenna

Latenna has been here before and, given that she is of the archer archetype, this makes sense, as this is the only area in the game in which we see them. That means that Latenna knew of her Towering Sister and came to Liurnia, to the Albinauric village to get *something* and then return to the Towering Sister.

This explains why Gideon specifically targets Latenna. He knows she has come from the Haligtree and thus must have a way back. But what has Latenna come for? She evidently came for the item that she passes on to the Towering Sister, the item she calls the



Albinaurics

“birthing droplet,” which, if imbibed, would apparently allow the Towering Sister to bring new life to the Albinauric people.

I think the implication is quite straightforward. This birthing droplet will allow the Albinaurics to give birth and to reproduce as a new, independent race.

It is a quiet moment, but to me it is beautiful.

But what about the details of what is happening here? Why is the sister so huge? What is the birthing droplet and where did it come from?

Regarding the sister, we do have a name for this character. If you are horrendous enough to kill Latenna, she cries out a name: Phillia, a Greek word which translates to “love.”

Phillia is the love of her people, she is the hope of her people and she is evidently the vessel through which they hope to bring about a new generation of Albinaurics. But why is she large, and why is she special? To try and provide some kind of answer to this question, I would once again refer us to the Blue Silver Mail Armor, this time paying special attention to the semantics:

“Blue silver is a metal born from the same mother as the archers themselves, and provides protection from magic and frost.”
- Blue Silver Mail Armor

When talking about the origins of the Albinaurics, I skipped over the mother allusion to focus on the alchemy. But it is curious to note that the term “mother” is used. Does this imply that there was a mother Albinauric, an original creation that was used to spawn the rest? One of the key facets to Homunculus theory was that one was to create a perfect “miniature” human being, before increasing its size.

Perhaps an Albinauric like Phillia was used as the template or queen that gave birth to the Blue Silver – the mother described in the Blue Silver Mail Armor. Now Latenna calls Phillia young, implying that she is newborn or created, so perhaps she is a recreation of that first mother.

Indeed, perhaps the “primordial drop of dew” mentioned in the description of the Albinauric Shield was similar to the birthing droplet used by Latenna here – except that this time the Albinaurics are in control of the process and their destiny.

That is obviously my speculation. At the very least, what is clear is that Phillia is the new mother to the Albinaurics, and will bring new Albinauric life, but this time for the Albinaurics themselves. (I have heard that Loretta’s shield being found here suggests that she is the Towering Sister, but I don’t think that’s true,



Grace Given

given that she fights us in her corporeal form in Haligtree Town.)

In regards to the birthing droplet, we have already spoken of how the Albinaurics are alchemical in nature, and that by adding or introducing something foreign to their forms it can radically alter their makeup. This brings us back to our earlier discussion of the original Albinauric formula and the three primes, where I posited that the Albinaurics were created from a combined formula of mercury, suffused with celestial essence and a primordial dew from the Erdtree. Here it seems the Albinaurics are repeating the same process but on their own terms.

So what would happen to them if an essence of life was added to their form, to their alchemical makeup? In theory it would make them more like natural beings that can naturally reproduce. And as to this mysterious droplet, I think there is only one sensible place to examine. Look to the dominant feature of the skyline, the Erdtree.

The Erdtree is synonymous with life, and indeed it is the lack of connection to the Erdtree that has led to the Albinaurics being viewed as impure. Let us look at some surface-level facts. We had previously discussed the Age of Plenty, an era that is very much associated with bountiful life.

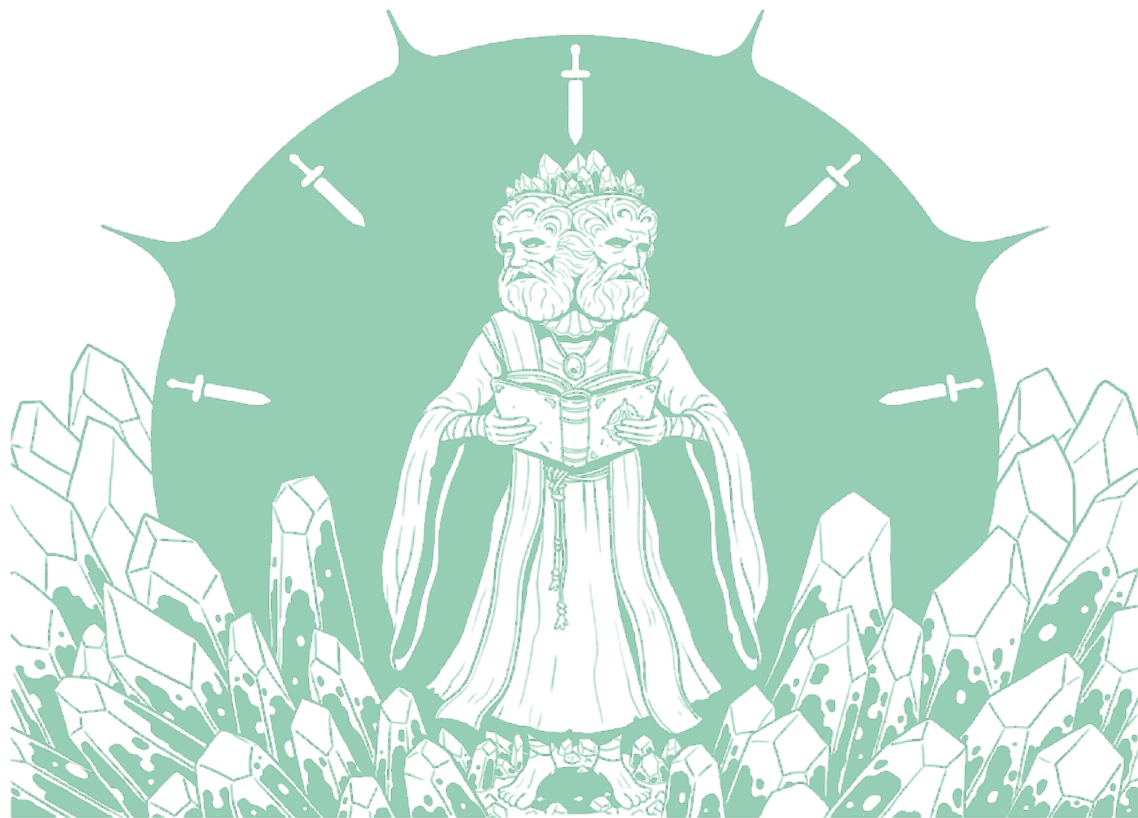
The connection between the Erdtree and life is most easily seen via its amber which is described by the Amber Medallions as containing “primordial life.” This connection between the sap of the Erdtree and life is further expressed by Sellen, who says the following when trying to describe Glintstone to us:

“Glintstone is the amber of the cosmos, golden amber contains the remnants of ancient life and houses its vitality, while Glintstone contains residual life. And thus, the vitality of the stars. It should not be forgotten that glintstone sorcery is the study of the stars and the life therein.” - Sorceress Sellen

The most-used item in the game, the Flask of Crimson Tears, is said to have once contained a “tear of life,” and it is most likely this that gives the chalice its life rejuvenating qualities. The sap of the Erdtree is life, and I have absolutely no doubt that the birthing droplet carried by Latenna and granted to her Towering Sister is sap from the Erdtree.

Thus we come full circle with the Albinauric Bloodclot. The Albinauric people are persecuted because of their disconnection from the Erdtree and its rigidly defined and controlled cycle of life. How fitting is it that it is the essence of the Erdtree that gives the Albinaurics a chance at true life, a chance at a brighter future?





Chapter 8: Raya Lucaria and the Carians

Ln the section “Vitality of the Stars” we discussed the fledgling astrologer community found on the Mountaintops of the Giants. We know that Rennala was still a member of said community when she was young, as is evident from the description for the Stargazer Heirloom:

“The young astrologer gazed at the night sky as she walked. She had always chased the stars every step of her journey. Then she met the full moon – and, in time, the astrologer became a queen.” - Stargazer Heirloom

We are told by her remembrance that she charmed the academy in her *youth*. The fact that this happened in her youth tells us that, despite the fact that Rennala was still an astrologer, some of her kin had clearly long developed into Glintstone sorcerers and founded Raya Lucaria.

The conclusion that we draw is that Rennala and her tribe or family were some of the last astrologers to give up that way of life, whereas others had clearly descended from the mountaintops in years long passed – trading astrology for the study of Glintstone.



Grace Given

I believe that the location where the Carians finally put down roots and where Rennala may have met her moon is Moonlight Altar.

At the conclusion of Ranni’s quest we come to a high cliff, previously inaccessible, that overlooks the whole of Liurnia. As dramatic as the view is, it is nothing compared to what looms over our head here: both the Full Moon of Rennala and the Dark Moon of Ranni hang low, surrounded by blue streaks of fallen stars.

Even at a quick glance the implication is very clear: the cosmos has a deep connection with this location, and by unpacking some of the archaeological evidence here we can learn much of the Carians’ early history.

In this region there are four main sites of interest: the Cathedral of Manus Celes, the Moonfolk Ruins, the Lunar Estate Ruins and the Three Sisters statues.

Let’s try to uncover this mystery by determining who once lived here.

The Cathedral of Manus Celes itself is the same architectural style as the Church of Vows¹ – that was a building constructed by the Carians, and thus I do not think it is revolutionary to say that this cathedral was also built by the Carians. As an aside, we will also return to the connections to Eternal City statues later.

Let’s talk about the Carians, then, and why this whole region obviously has some strong connections to them. This

part of Liurnia is on the western bank, a side which the map description implies is more strongly associated with the Carians. This makes sense as Caria Manor is also located on this side of Liurnia².

The history of the Carians is interesting. First of all, we know that in general the Glintstone sorcerers of Liurnia and Raya Lucaria are descended from astrologers – as is mentioned in the description of the Carian Preceptor’s Set:

“Large hat with the movements of the stars drawn on the inside of the brim. Worn by the magic preceptors who served the Carian royals... Glintstone sorcerers are the descendants of astrologers, a fact that the Carians remain aware of. Even if their fate has been long severed from the stars.”

- Preceptor’s Big Hat

And we know that the astrologers were once a community that lived on the Mountaintops of the Giants, living alongside the giants in peace, thanks to the description of the Sword of Night and Flame – hence the Stargazer’s Ruins that we can find up here. It makes sense that more primitive astrologers would go as high as possible – as if being higher up makes them “closer” to the sky.

Thus it seems as though the people of Liurnia, and the sorcerers of Raya Lucaria, are most likely descended from this clan of astrologers, and interestingly Rennala herself is described as an astrologer in the Stargazer Heirloom.

¹ “The Weirdest Location in Elden Ring” - Ziostorm

² “The Weirdest Location in Elden Ring” - Ziostorm



Raya Lucaria and the Carians

We find the hallmarks of an astrology community at Moonlight Altar – for example, the same stone astrological basins that we see in the Mountaintops of the Giants and at Caria Manor.

However, it was Rennala’s association with the moon that transformed her into the Full Moon Queen and raised the prominence of her family. The full extent of this rise is something we learn via her remembrance, which reads:

“In her youth, Rennala was a prominent champion who charmed the academy with her lunar magic, becoming its master. She also led the Glintstone Knights and established the house of Caria as royalty.”
- Remembrance of the Full Moon Queen

The moon is responsible for Rennala’s ascendance and it is suggested that this was really a new form of magic. It is mentioned as “heterodox” in the description of the Lazuli Glintstone Crown description and no doubt Rennala was able to “charm” the academy and establish her family as royalty due to this new found power.

In the period following her meeting the Full Moon, Rennala would build her power base and followers at Moonlight Altar. Then, of course, as we know from her remembrance, she would go on to “charm” those at Raya Lucaria.

We don’t get into details or specifics of how or when this happened; however,

she was young when she met the Full Moon and thus I suspect that it was when Rennala was young that she went to Raya Lucaria.

During the course of her studies, she would have wowed teachers and students alike with this unique and powerful magic. We know that this magic was unusual, thanks to the Lazuli Glintstone Crown, which represents the school that was founded to study Carian magic:

“Scholars of the Lazuli Conspectus study Carian sorceries – a heterodox pursuit that views the moon as equal to the stars.”
- Lazuli Glintstone Crown

I would therefore say it’s pretty fair to assume that the Lunar Estate and Moonfolk settlement would not be built until Rennala’s meeting with the moon.

For me that is the essence of the Moonlight Altar: the place in which Rennala first met her moon and then where she established her power base. This is complete conjecture, but given how clearly we can see the Full Moon and Ranni’s Dark Moon here, it isn’t a stretch. It does seem clear that there is a strong connection to the cosmic here.

The moons are closer and brighter – despite the Moonlight Altar not being that much higher than other places in the world. Indeed, blue streaks mark the sky as if the stars themselves are so close that they constantly fall and scar the sky



Grace Given

here. And yet we can’t see these marks from below the altar or the area around it, meaning there is some special significance to this region. This all leaves me with no doubt that this is where both Rennala and Ranni met their moons, both of which we still see clearly in the sky.

So this brings us to the Lunar Estate and Moonfolk Ruins. The Lunar Estate I would suggest to be the estate of the Carians, as the term “estate” is usually a reference to land owned by an aristocratic family. Perhaps this was their original estate when Rennala came to power, and only later they would establish Caria Manor.

Caria Manor commands a better location to rule over Liurnia and it would make sense if it coincided with the collapse of the central lands. This collapse would have left the Moonlight Altar fairly isolated and thus Caria Manor would be a more logistically sound location.

Indeed, later Rennala would become more closely tied to the Erdtree people

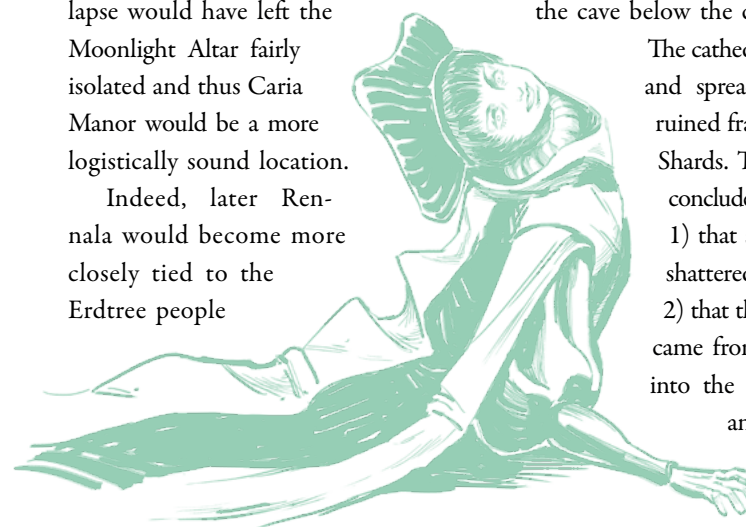
via Radagon, and thus she may have over time began to distance herself from her moon and original Lunar Estate.

I would also suggest that the “Moonfolk” of the ruins of the same name are people who lived on the estate of the Carians, owing their fealty to the Full Moon. Overall I see this whole region as a former power base of the Carians that was eventually abandoned.

The Cathedral of Manus Celes was no doubt built as a cathedral to the moon, in my opinion – the fact that it has the hallmark Carian architectural style to me suggests it was built by them in the time that the Carians ruled from this region.

As for the name? In short “manus celes” is either “heavenly hand,” “hand of god” or the “hidden hand.” This could be a reference to the Two Fingers found in the cave below the cathedral.

The cathedral itself is shattered, and spread throughout these ruined fragments are Starlight Shards. This has led many to conclude two different things: 1) that some kind of starfall shattered the cathedral, and 2) that the Fingers themselves came from the stars, crashing into the earth like a meteor and causing the hole in the floor of the church.





Raya Lucaria and the Carians

However, while I agree the cathedral itself was damaged by starfall, there are issues with the Two Fingers crashing down through the roof. None of the holes in the roof align directly with this crater, and neither is the crater a straight shot down into the cave where we find the Fingers. Instead let me offer an alternate speculation.

I think the cathedral was deliberately built on top of the Fingers after their arrival, whether that arrival was via meteor or manifestation. The cathedral is called the “manus celes,” after all. Would this not be fitting if it was literally built over the hand of a god?

Ranni would later come to despise her connection to her Fingers, but perhaps at the time it was a cause of celebration for the Carians: one of their own being granted Emyrean status.

At Moonlight Altar we have the statues of Three Sisters, no doubt the same Three Sisters that are also represented by the towers of the same name at Caria Manor. As you will see in the Ranni chapter, I speculate that there were once three daughters of Rennala: Ranni, Renna and a third, unnamed sister whose tower would later be claimed by Seluvis. So if we have the Three Sisters represented at Moonlight Altar, as well as a Red Wolf of Radagon, Ranni’s father, it does

suggest that Ranni and her sisters were born at a time when Moonlight Altar was still relevant.

Also, if the Cathedral of Manus Celes is the same architecture as the Church of Vows, it would suggest that it was built at a time around the marriage of Radagon and Rennala and thus the birth of Ranni.

With that said let us also talk about one final point of interest regarding the Moonlight Altar: the way in which it illustrates the connection between the Carians and the Eternal Cities.

It’s hard to confirm whether or not the Eternal Cities were literally moved from the surface above or if they were built from scratch after the Nox people were banished underground. What is clear is that the Nox have existed underground for a long time, and lo and behold, there is a connecting path from Moonlight Altar to Nokstella. Indeed this is how we access the Moonlight Altar in the first place, by passing through Nokstella and past Astel’s den.

So we do need to ask: Why does this passageway exist? For me it is proof that the Carians and the Nox exchanged ideas and culture, and it would explain why we see Noxian statues in both the Cathedral of Manus Celes and the Church of Vows. It goes even further



Grace Given

in the Church of Vows, where Celestial Dew is used at its main font – a font where Radagon cleansed himself of his aggression towards the Carian people before marrying Rennala.

So let me wrap up what I have to say about the Moonlight Altar in general. I think the Moonlight Altar was once the center of Carian power, possibly developing before Rennala took rulership over all of Liurnia and Raya Lucaria. These lands consisted of the Lunar Estate and the Moonfolk people, who served Rennala and her moon. I think that Ranni and her sisters were around when this region was still relevant, with the statues of these sisters being built here.

I would argue that the Carians and Nox had a rapport, building a pathway between the two cultures. I also think Manus Celes was built on top of Ranni’s Two Fingers not only to celebrate the Carians and the moon but also Ranni’s ascension to an Emyrean.

Finally I would argue this region simply fell out of relevancy: Between the wars that ravaged the country, the rebellion of the Cuckoos, the land falling away and Rennala aligning herself more closely with the Erdtree people via her husband, a myriad of factors could have contributed to the region’s current state.

RAYA LUCARIA

When we come to Liurnia, we are met with one of the most breathtaking vistas in the entire game. After leaving Stormveil Castle we come to a sheer cliff. Before us is a misty basin of water that stretches as far as the eye can see, punctuated by the cliffs that border it. Yet the star of that vista is the Academy of Raya Lucaria, which juts out distinctively from the center of the lake, making it clear to us that this is our ultimate destination in the region.

Lucky for us, a former member of the academy is nearby to give us the intel on how to gain access to the academy. Of course, I refer to Thops.

“After they declared they wouldn’t interfere with the Shattering, the academy cast repelling seals on the east gate leading to the Capital and the south gate leading here. As you might have guessed, the seals are still active, making entry to the academy impossible without a Glintstone Key... Why not find yourself a Glintstone Key? Without one, you can’t pass through the academy, and you’ll never reach the Erdtree Capital.”- Thops

Raya Lucaria is sealed and only those with a Glintstone Key are able to pierce the seals that barrier its entrances.

With that in mind, let us read the item description for the key itself:



Raya Lucaria and the Carians

“Key to the seals binding both gates to the Academy of Raya Lucaria. Activates warp magic bound within the seals. A glintstone key will remember its user, meaning once used it can never be passed on to another. The academy does not welcome the indolent.”

- Academy Glintstone Key

Obviously there is something pretty fascinating found here. The key will only function for its original owner, meaning you can't give a used key to your pal to let them in. They have to have one of their own.

The key also says “the academy does not welcome the indolent,” and this is where the elitist mindset of the academy comes into play. We know that the academy had very exacting standards for those who were allowed to study there, a fact that is illustrated through their Glintstone Crown system.

The item description of Karolos' Glintstone Crown reads:

“One of the glintstone crowns bestowed upon Raya Lucaria scholars whose pursuits were deemed worthy.”

- Karolos' Glintstone Crown

So the crown is a symbol – a symbol of a sorcerer who is deemed worthy to stand in the halls of the academy. Different versions of these crowns designate the chosen school of study, a subject in itself. Meanwhile, those that are deemed

“not talented enough” are denied a crown and a place at the academy. This is the fate of Thops himself, a scholar who studied at the same time as Sellen, but admits to being a “bluntstone.”

And the Thops' Barrier spell, the culmination of his study, does imply that he was basically laughed out of the academy:

“The lifelong pursuit of Thops the Bluntstone... Future generations will learn. They will know the foolishness of the sneering sorcerers who ridiculed this theory, little realizing that it was in fact a discovery worthy of a new conspectus of the Academy.”

- Thops' Barrier

We get examples of further dropouts via the Swift Glintstone Shard:

“Those unworthy of the stone crown typically end their brief journey into sorcery here.” - Swift Glintstone Shard

“Those unworthy of the stone crown”, a confirmation that those like Thops are separated from those “worthy,” who wear the crown. These dropouts or failed sorcerers are the wandering sorcerer enemies we can face throughout the Lands Between.

The Noble Sorcerer Ashes description reads:

“Spirit of a nobleman who once asked to be given a place at Raya Lucaria to learn glintstone sorceries. His talents were insufficient to be worthy of donning the



Grace Given

We know that the academy had exacting standards for those who were allowed to study there, a fact that is illustrated through their Glintstone Crown system.

stone crown, however, and he is only capable of using the most rudimentary sorcery.” - Noble Sorcerer Ashes

The description is again confirming that these sorcerers who are only capable of using lower level Glintstone sorcery are dropouts, unworthy of the stone crown. The hierarchy is so prominent, and so affecting, that those who fail as sorcerers may even be relegated to a life in the mines. The Shatter Earth spell reads:

“A Stonedigger sorcery used by the glintstone miners of the crystal tunnel. At the academy, use of this sorcery was a stigma that marked out failed scholars.”

- Shatter Earth

The point being that access to Raya Lucaria is closely guarded. It's an elitist establishment and it makes sense that an unused Glintstone Key would be worth a fortune.

So how do we receive our key? Most first-time players will come to the entrance to the academy at the sunken Academy Gate Town, and at this stage they will find Thops' words to be true – the gates are barred and there is no key. Yet right in front of the door there is a body, and on this body we find the Meeting Place Map, which reads:

“The man it came from surely desired one. The sole means of gaining entry into the academy: a Glintstone Key.”

- Meeting Place Map

When we get to the point marked on the map, we are met with quite the scene: Glintstone Dragon Smarag and a collection of corpses. One of these corpses has the item we seek, and it's the corpse of a Glintstone sorcerer clad in the robes of Raya Lucaria, wearing the stone mask of an accepted scholar.

The picture to me is clear: This was meant to be a black market deal set up between the man we find outside Raya Lucaria's gate and the Glintstone sorcerer. Clearly the latter is the supplier, an accepted sorcerer of Raya Lucaria, an insider who is able to procure a Glintstone Key.

Obviously the deal ends in disaster. We know from Smarag's Glintstone Breath that Smarag was “a devourer of sorcerers.” The sorcerer went to the meeting point to sell the key but Smarag pounced on



Raya Lucaria and the Carians

them and killed them, meaning there is a new shiny key for us if we defeat the dragon. Sadly for the original owner of the map, they died outside Raya Lucaria, denied entrance by Smarag; they can do nothing but stare wistfully at the gates.

Moon magic is unorthodox and it was no doubt this unique nature that led to Rennala becoming so prominent, to the stage where she is honored in paintings alongside other famous alumni and conspectus founders. We learn from Miriel that Rennala became the governor of the academy, the ruler of it for all intents and purposes.

Rennala and her brand of Carian magic claiming dominance over the academy had quite a few consequences. As we learn through the fact that the academy overthrew Rennala eventually, she clearly made some enemies.

It seems as if the ascension of Rennala is what led to the outlawing of the primeval sorcerers, given Sellen's personal enmity of the Carians:

"If you recall, I was exiled from the Academy of Raya Lucaria. It was for attempting to restore the primeval current of Glintstone sorcery. The toothless pedantry peddled by the Carian royal family can rot for all I care. I want Glintstone sorceries

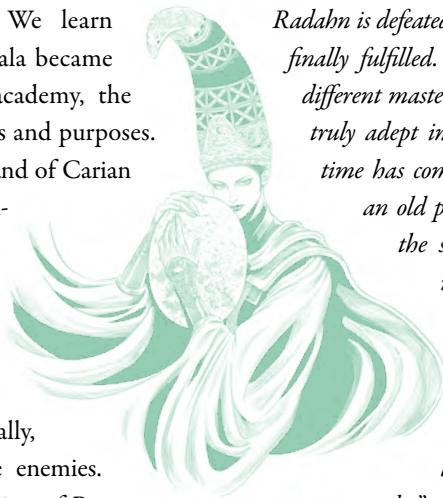
that open our minds, unbound by terrestrial taboos." - Sorceress Sellen

This is reinforced by the fact that Sellen is being hunted by Jerren, a retainer of the Carians – presumably the one responsible for chaining her up in Witchbane Ruins. This was done, no doubt, with Jerren intending to return the moment that the stars resumed their movements and she could be killed for good:

"Now the festival is over, and General Radahn is defeated... Jerren's duties are finally fulfilled. Though we served different masters, I could see he was truly adept in his role. Now the time has come to remind him of an old promise made. With the stars of fate set into motion, a certain sorceress is dispossessed of her immortality... Finally, we can be rid of a longstanding Carian weed..." - War Counselor Iji

It wasn't Sellen alone who was banished, it was also two founding Glintstone sorcerers: Lusat and Azur.

"I need your help, my apprentice. Master Lusat is another founding Glintstone sorcerer. And like Master Azur, he was banished from the academy. Now he languishes, imprisoned somewhere. My apprentice, can you find Master Lusat?"



Grace Given

With this Glintstone key, you should be able to cross the boundary that encloses him. I need him to restore the primeval current of Glintstone sorcery. He's nigh a child of the stars, such is his body now..." - Sorceress Sellen

Rennala's reasons for banishing this school of sorcery is never explicitly stated, but we are certainly able to speculate. The methods used by Sellen and her predecessors are exceptionally dangerous and extreme, especially when we consider how Sellen earned her moniker, the "Graven Witch." It's a reference to the so-called Graven Schools or Graven Mass, a horrifying abomination that we can learn of via the Graven-Mass Talisman:

"The primeval current is a forbidden tradition of Glintstone sorcery. To those who cleave to its teachings, the act of collecting sorcerers to fashion them into the seeds of stars is but another path of scientific inquiry." - Graven-Mass Talisman

We can find these horrifying abominations throughout the Lands Between, even a dead one in Raya Lucaria alongside Azur's Staff, suggesting he created one within the halls of the academy himself. I imagine bonding humans together into a Frankenstein ball, within the very halls of the academy, could well have caused a lot of discord and resentment.

The dialogue from Thops suggests that Sellen's expulsion from the academy was indeed tied to her "Graven" habits:

"Sellen was well known. The most promising sorceress in the history of the academy. I followed her at school, but there may as well have been an ocean between us. But Sellen was expelled from the academy. Accused of unthinkable treatment of certain sorcerers, under the name of the Graven Witch. I still don't believe the accusations. The illustrious Sellen would never do such things..." - Thops

This seems pretty straightforward. However, I do think that another consequence of exiling the primeval sorcerers is that Rennala got rid of some potential political opponents. Sellen describes both Lusat and Azur as "founding" Glintstone sorcerers, meaning these two characters helped found both the academy and the practice of Glintstone sorcery in general.

This seems more or less certain when we consider the Karolos' Glintstone Crown, which names this school as the oldest, and it was founded by none other than Azur. So we really are talking about the old guard here.

To reinforce their prestigious position we can look at their robes, which read:

"Since the grand masters Azur and Lusat were driven from the academy, no one has achieved their formerly-held rank." - Azur's Glintstone Robe



Raya Lucaria and the Carians

So Azur and Lusat were “grand masters,” a position which hasn’t been held since they were expelled. This would make sense if it coincided with Rennala taking control as governor, because the ruling structure changed from an oligarchy to an effective monarchy.

Raya Lucaria thus transformed under Rennala, her school of magic would become its own conspectus – the Lazuli. Sellen describes Carian magic as “toothless pedantry,” a reflection of the fact that under Rennala’s rule there was no research into the Primeval Current, which people like Sellen see as the end goal of Glintstone sorcery.

THE CARIAN CHIVALRIC CODE

Aside from consolidating her power over the academy, Rennala would also declare her family as royalty and claim dominion over Liurnia, a fact we saw in her remembrance. Since it’s Rennala who declares the family’s new status, some of the lore is quite unusual here. Why does Ranni refer to Rennala as the last queen of Caria when she is in fact the only queen of Caria?

I discussed this point with Lokey, who has a good explanation. Ranni’s choice of words here is a reflection of

her view of the Carian monarchy and her place within it. Lokey points to the ghost found in Caria Manor, whose dialogue implies that there was a certain expectation among Carian retainers that Ranni would take the throne:

“Lady Ranni, we have long awaited you. I pray for your house’s swift revival. May the full moon shine upon Caria.”

- Caria Manor Spirit

Overall this could be seen as an indication that she has no intention of becoming the queen of Caria. She has her own path, and there is only one true queen of the Carians.

We can assume that Caria Manor would have been built as the royal residence, and Rennala would have consolidated Liurnia’s military. This would have been headed by the legendary Carian Knights. And there aren’t many of them, as we learn from the Carian Knight’s Sword:

“These knights’ swords could serve as catalysts, letting them wield sorcerous battle skills. Despite numbering fewer than twenty, this power made them a match for even the champions of gold in battle.”

- Carian Knight’s Sword

So these knights are few in number but elite, and the council chamber seen at the top of Caria Manor suggests that they served as a sort of advisory group as well. Interestingly, the Carian Knights



Grace Given

also welcomed trolls into their ranks, as evidenced by Bols, Carian Knight and the unnamed Troll Knight found in Caria Manor.

This is a marked difference from how the majority of trolls are employed in the Lands Between. As degenerate cousins of the giants, hated enemies of the Erdtree realm, they are usually used as slaves. However, the Troll Knight’s Sword highlights just how differently the trolls are treated under the Carians:

“Called into service when the Queen invoked an oath they swore, the trolls are treated as true knights of Caria, and fight arm in arm with their human comrades.”

- Troll Knight’s Sword

This makes sense, since the Carians would not have the same enmity for trolls that the Erdtree royals would. Indeed, if we remember the Carians’ origins as astrologers, they once coexisted peacefully

These knights are few in number but elite, and the council chamber seen at the top of Caria Manor suggests that they served as a sort of advisory group as well.

with the Fire Giants. And so, culturally, the Carians would likely have a more even-handed view on giants and their kin.

On the flipside, the Carians also amass very powerful allies. Warriors like Bols are one thing, but the Carians also gain the guidance of the likes of Iji. We learn via the Hammer item description that the art of smithing originated from the giants, which explains why Iji is such a skilled smith himself: another powerful asset in the Carians’ arsenal.

Rennala gathered some other allies to her side at this stage – again an observation made by Lokey in his discussions with me on this subject. Lokey pointed to the “summons” Rennala makes during her stage two, in which she is restored to her former glory by Ranni. (I assume this part of the fight is essentially a result of Ranni’s magic.)

During this stage, Ranni summons spirits of those who have sworn an oath to her, saying “Oath-sworn” in regards to a giant, a dragon and some wolves.

“Come, Oath-sworn giant! Come, Oath-sworn dragon! Come, Oath-sworn beasts!”

- Rennala

Oaths seem to be an important part of Carian society, in contrast with the Erdtree Order, which relies on conquest instead. It’s kind of fitting, when you consider the symbolic allusions between the moon and the sun, or yin and yang.



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The moon is generally seen as more passive, while the sun, symbolized here by the Erdtree, is seen as more aggressive.

But I digress. What is interesting about these Carian oaths is that we can hear more about them in certain item descriptions. For example there is the description of Greatblade Phalanx:

“One of the sorceries of the Carian royal family. Used by the enchanted Troll Knights. They were the comrades of the young Rennala, bound by oath.”

- Greatblade Phalanx

This description also highlights that these events took place when Rennala was young. I would assume that means this was not long after she discovered her Full Moon.

The term “oath” is also used in regards to another Carian vassal, Castellan Jerren, ally to General Radahn. We can learn of this via the Eccentric’s Armor:

“Jerren preferred a nomadic existence, but after spending time as a guest of the Carian royals, he became a guest commander for General Radahn. And for the first time, the restless tumbleweed would be bound by honorable oath.” - Eccentric’s Armor

These oaths are described as “honorable,” and they seem to have the effect of creating real ties of loyalty, especially when you consider what Jerren went through to achieve his oath of killing Sellen. He stood by the degenerating

Radahn for an awfully long time, and even assisted in putting him to final rest, all the while keeping Sellen’s body imprisoned for the moment when he could fulfill his oath.

There is another rather interesting oath between the Carians and a different ally, the Crystalians, something we can learn of via Magic Downpour:

“One of the sorceries of the Carian royal family... Said to have been taught by the Crystalians to mark the swearing of the old concord.” - Magic Downpour

As to the details of this concord, we can only guess. Beyond the fact that Carians were granted a deeper insight into magic directly from these unusual beings, we can also find them present in Moonlight Altar alongside dragons. Again, this implies that Rennala established these concords early on in her rise to power, before building Caria Manor.

Ranni, as a Carian princess, seems to continue this tradition with her own Shadow. Despite already being bound to her, he was required to swear an oath himself. We learn this from the Royal Greatsword:

“In defiance of the fate he was born to, Blaidd swore to serve no master but Ranni. As proof, the sword was imbued with a cold magic at the moment the oath was sworn.”

- Royal Greatsword



Grace Given

Indeed, Blaidd’s story underlines the type of loyalty the Carians inspired. Blaidd literally defies his own nature in favor of his loyalty to Ranni.

The Carians are even able to bind dragons to their will, as is evidenced by Adula – also bound by oath to Ranni specifically. Rennala is able to summon an oath-bound dragon during her fight, and we can assume that this must be one of the many guard dragons found at Moonlight Altar.

The Carians even incorporated Albinaurics into their service, as evidenced by Pidia and other Albinauric servants found there.

All told, we can see why the Carians would have been such a formidable force when the Erdtree forces invaded. Not only were they led by the most powerful sorcerer of all time, but they had loyal elite knights, trolls, Crystalians and the resources of the academy itself. Liurnia had developed into a real power. Thus the stage was set for the conflict that would become known as the Liurnian Wars.

THE LIURNIAN WARS

It is difficult to establish when the Liurnian Wars took place. My assumption has always been that they did not unfold during the

Erdtree Conquest Era, this being the era that culminates in the War of the Giants and an established Erdtree primacy. The monument found in the Mountaintops of the Giants confirms that this victory was what marked the start of the Age of the Erdtree. With that in mind, we can look to Godfrey’s armor set, whose description details the various wars he fought in:

“The Age of the Erdtree began amongst conflict, when Godfrey was lord of the battlefield. He led the War against the Giants. Faced the Storm Lord, alone. And then, there came a moment. When his last worthy enemy fell. And it was then, as the story is told, that the hue of Lord Godfrey’s eyes faded.” - Elden Lord Armor

The Liurnian Wars are not mentioned here, and so it’s easy to assume they had not happened yet. However, they actually take place before Godfrey is hounded out of the Lands Between, because Radagon is merely a champion at this point, and only became Elden Lord after his marriage to Rennala.

The fact that Godfrey isn’t mentioned in the conflicts with Liurnia, and the fact that Radagon is said to have led the Erdtree forces, suggests that this is the time period in which Godfrey had moved away from his more bloodthirsty impulses, vowing to conduct himself more as a lord. Hence a champion is sent in his stead, while Godfrey remains far from the frontlines.



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Finally, we also have a miracle from these conflicts that can help us roughly date it. Barrier of Gold:

“One of the incantations of Erdtree Worship... This incantation was used by the champions of the Erdtree in the First and Second Liurnian Wars, during which the red-haired Radagon joined the heroes’ ranks.” - Barrier of Gold

So this was a period when Radagon was just a “champion” of the Erdtree forces. Notably, this incantation is of the “Erdtree Worship” school, not the “Ancient Erdtree,” suggesting the war took place far into Godfrey’s reign and after the Age of Plenty³.

While the Erdtree forces were clearly the dominant military force in the Lands Between, the Liurnian army was able to fight them to a standstill over two conflicts. We learn this via the Sword Monument:

“The Second Liurnian War, No victory for the golden, nor for the moon, No prize but atonement; the birth of a vow.” - Sword Monument, Church of Vows, Liurnia of the Lakes

We can imagine that the Carians were able to hold back the much larger Erdtree armies through a few distinct advantages. There’s Rennala herself, who at this stage will have been the most powerful sorcerer in the Lands Between. There are the elite spellcasting Carian Knights, and finally

there’s the defensive advantage. The battle wasn’t one-sided of course. Radagon in particular is noted as performing well on the battlefield. The Sword Monument for the first war states:

“The First Liurnian War, Radagon’s glory burns red as his hair.” - Sword Monument, Bellum Church, Liurnia of the Lakes

Then, of course, Rennala and Radagon eventually made peace on behalf of their respective houses, and in the most permanent way possible – marriage:

“Radagon once cleansed himself with celestial dew, repented his territorial aggressions, and swore his love to Rennala. The Order of the Erdtree and the fate of the moon were conjoined, and all the wounds of war forgiven.” - Miriel, Pastor of Vows

Before we go any further, I do think there is something interesting in this dialogue. Miriel states that the Order of the Erdtree and the fate of the moon were conjoined. The fact he specifically talks about both Order and fate is fascinating, and makes me rethink some of my prior assumptions.

The Telescope item description reads as follows:

“During the age of the Erdtree, Carian astrology withered on the vine. The fate once writ in the night skies had been fettered by the Golden Order.” - Telescope

I had always assumed this was a reference to Radahn halting the movement



³ “The 3 Creeds of the Erdtree” - The Tarnished Archaeologist



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of the stars. However, this dialogue from Mirial, speaking of Order and fate being conjoined, makes me think that the union was something more than just a marriage between Rennala and Radagon – that fate was also married to Order, and was somehow restricted by Order being imposed upon it. It is little surprise that many sorcerers would eventually rebel against Rennala’s rule, perhaps resenting this union.

I love the lore significance of the Church of Vows. Miriel tells us that it was constructed at a specific point within Liurnia in order to have sight of both Raya Lucaria and the Erdtree: the moon and the tree. The marriage was prefaced with an old Noxian practice, the cleansing of oneself with Celestial Dew.

I do think it is important to analyze what happened here, as it isn’t merely a symbolic gesture. There is a power to this ritual.

We know that the Nox experimented with alchemy. We know that stars are tied to fate, and thus both the Puppet Draughts and the Celestial Dew likely manipulate fate latent within the stars. Puppet Draughts shackle the fate of

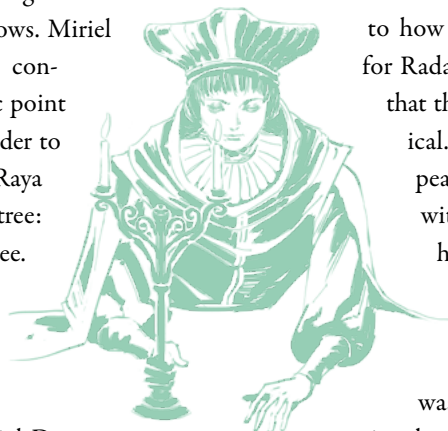
those who imbibe, and in the case of the Celestial Dew, fate is rewritten and animosity forgotten.

For example, if I attacked Blaidd and killed him to get a specific dialogue, he would resurrect and permanently be aggroed at me. However, if I cleansed myself with the Celestial Dew, it would be as if he had forgotten our previous conflict. Our fate has been realigned and it is as if the enmity no longer exists.

I wonder if this contributed to how strongly Rennala felt for Radagon, because it’s clear that the relationship is political. In history, a pact of peace was often solidified with a marriage between houses, and *Elden Ring* is clearly no different. However it is apparent that there was some genuine affection between the two. Miriel

describes how Radagon declared his love for the beautiful Full Moon Queen, and given how heartbroken Rennala was following Radagon’s departure, she must have cared very deeply for him too.

Once they’re married, we get to one of the most interesting points of lore within the entire story: the implication that Rennala knew the truth of Radagon’s identity, that he is Marika.



Grace Given

I believe that Radagon was already Marika at the time of his marriage to Rennala. The main item of relevance to this argument is the Mask of Confidence:

“Mask with the mouth sewn shut with gold thread... When Radagon married Rennala, he ordered the Carian magic preceptors to don these masks. To make it clear that all of their matters were to be kept strictly private.” - Mask of Confidence

I know that others have argued that the Preceptors are just keeping matters of state private. But when we are talking about Radagon, there is really only one elephant in the room.

There is also the fact that Radagon gave Rennala a fragment of the Elden Ring as a parting gift when he left her. How would a mere champion gain access to the Elden Ring, taking one of its runes? The answer is that he couldn’t, unless he was also Marika, the god of the age, who bore the Elden Ring.

It is quite interesting that the golden masks of the Preceptors are not part of their original outfit. Rather they are an affectation born of the Carians’ association with the Erdtree royalty. This also means that Seluvis was potentially privy to the greatest secret of an era – a neat little consideration for you.

This means that when Radagon and Rennala had children, the offspring were true demigods, not just by virtue

of Radagon’s later marriage (although this would serve Marika politically as an excuse to give Rennala’s children demigod status without raising any further questions).

In this time, we can assume things were generally positive for Rennala: She was happily married to Radagon and three strong Carian heirs were produced. My assumption is that Rennala leading Ranni to meet her Dark Moon would also have happened in this time period before Radagon left.

But happy as things were in this instant, they would not stay that way.

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CARIA

Radagon’s ascension to the position of Elden Lord had some profound implications. While Golden Order fundamentalism is perhaps his most obvious legacy, there was another consequence of his second marriage: the collapse of the Carian royal family. This would have a profound effect on Ranni, no doubt forming the root of her animosity towards the Golden Order and Greater Will, and driving her away from her Empyrean destiny.

I presume that her meeting with the Dark Moon took place while Rennala and Radagon were still together. After Radagon



Grace Given

Others have argued that the Preceptors are just keeping matters of state private. But when we are talking about Radagon, there is really only one elephant in the room.

leaves, Rennala appears to be completely broken, and thus I would think she would be incapable of introducing Ranni to the Moon. I would also assume that Ranni's meeting with the Snowy Crone would also take place after this.

And I believe this for a couple of reasons. There's the Snow Witch Set:

"Once worn by the Snowy Crone who the young Ranni encountered deep in the woods. She was a witch, and well versed in cold sorceries. It is said that the doll that houses Ranni's soul was modeled after her. That old witch was Ranni's secret mentor."

- Snow Witch Robe

And then Freezing Mist:

"The Snowy Crone taught the young Ranni to fear the Dark Moon as she imparted her cold sorcery." - Freezing Mist

So this mysterious witch became Ranni's mentor, and part of my reasoning

for this taking place after Rennala's fall is because Ranni was maybe in need of a new mentor, a new mother figure even. It is clear that this woman was important to Ranni, and perhaps that's because she was there for Ranni when she needed someone.

The Freezing Mist description also tells us that it was this Snowy Crone who taught Ranni more about the secrets of the Dark Moon. Again, this suggests to me that this took place some time after that initial meeting with the Dark Moon, organized by Rennala when she was still *compos mentis*.

Perhaps the fall of Ranni's house, and her father's abandonment of her mother in favor of the Erdtree Order, was what led Ranni to choose a different path. After learning the secrets of the Dark Moon, she would pledge herself to the Age of Stars and set herself on a journey that would have lasting consequences for the Lands Between.

We now need to talk about the main event that really heralded the end of the Carian house as a serious power: Radagon's departure.

We know from Miriel that Radagon's departure left Rennala personally devastated:

"The great and beautiful Full Moon Witch. Sadly, her heart was broken when Lord Radagon left her. And then, when the



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academy rebelled against the royals, she was locked away in the grand library. In the end, Lady Rennala was left alone, cradling the amber egg Lord Radagon bequeathed her. Now she devotes herself to it through forbidden rite; the grim art of reincarnation. You would do well to remember... Severing a vow, strongest of bonds, has consequences ever more dire.” - Miriel, Pastor of Vows

Indeed, this is how we see Rennala now, broken and kept in a sort of delusional slumber by the lullabies of her sweetings. As to why she creates such beings, it is again left to our speculation. There is the possibility that it is just loneliness, and that these beings give her comfort.

I know people have speculated that Rennala is trying to recreate Ranni, because Ranni ostensibly died during the Night of the Black Knives and disappeared during the Shattering. I can certainly see this point of view. Ultimately, I will chalk it up to something she is doing out of grief and loss, holding on to the one thing left behind by her beloved Radagon.

The second consequence of Radagon’s departure is also mentioned here by Miriel: The rebellion of the Raya Lucaria Academy and their Cuckoo Knights. The reason for this rebellion is elaborated on by the Queen’s Robe:

“When Rennala, head of both the Academy of Raya Lucaria and the Carian

royal family, lost her husband Radagon, her heart went along with him. And then, those at the academy realized. That Rennala was no champion, after all.”

- Queen’s Robe

In short, it was a moment of weakness that was exploited by those of the academy. Here was the ruler that had dominated Liurnia and Raya Lucaria for years, broken and weak.

The relationship between Raya Lucaria and their soldiery, the Cuckoos, is described by the Raya Lucaria Soldier Ashes:

“The soldiers of Raya Lucaria were also known as the Cuckoos. They were given free rein by the academy to wage war as they pleased, and they were infamous for their rapacious ways.”

- Raya Lucaria Soldier Ashes

The academy had a hands-off approach to controlling their armed forces, and indeed this may be due to the fact that the relationship between the academy and the Cuckoos was closer to that of a mercenary force rather than fealty. The Scholar’s Armament spell description reads:

“Taught to the Knights of the Cuckoos by the academy as payment for their contract.”

- Scholar’s Armament

And as such they were given free reign to wage war against the Carians – a



Grace Given

brutal war, we can assume, given the rapacious reputation of the Cuckoo forces and a ghost which implies the Carians unleashed puppets in large numbers upon the Cuckoo forces in response.

This war culminated in the siege of Caria Manor. The relevant Sword Monument reads:

“The resting place of the contemptible Cuckoos, Lost in the siege of Caria Manor.”

- Sword Monument, Caria Manor, Liurnia of the Lakes

In a dialogue, Iji confirms that a large contingent of the Knights of the Cuckoos were essentially slaughtered during the siege on Caria Manor, thanks to the magical traps – and no doubt a result of the defensive advantage and any remaining Carian Knights. Indeed, we see Cuckoo soldiers still being used by Pidia as puppets, a new defensive system for the manor they once assailed. Despite this, the Carians’ power was clearly long since broken by this rebellion, as Liurnia is controlled by the Cuckoos now. Rennala is locked away and any remaining Carian forces are penned up in Caria Manor. Dialogue from Rogier suggests that the Carians have been largely absent – only recently returning to the Manor:

“I have some idea of Ranni’s potential whereabouts. There’s a manor to the north of the Academy of Raya Lucaria. It is the familial home of the Carian royals from

whom Ranni descends. There’s been talk of the old royals’ vassals gathering there in recent years Ranni’s whereabouts since the Shattering are a well-kept secret. She hasn’t been seen even once. But I suspect she might have returned to the manor in which she was born...”


- Sorcerer Rogier

This suggests that the Carians were effectively defeated, despite the bloody toll that final siege reaped upon the Cuckoos. Rule under the Cuckoos would certainly be a brutal wake-up call for those of Liurnia, especially for the Albinaurics. As the Albinauric Pot description reads:

“The Knights of the Cuckoos do declare. Behold, thy defiled blood. Unlike any humor that flows in our grand realm.” - Albinauric Pot

The description of the Raya Lucaria Soldier Ashes and the Cuckoo Knight Helm suggests that the Raya Lucarian sorcerers have just left them to plunder this once great kingdom. And so Liurnia is now in a terrible state. The sorcerers are holed up in their academy, the Cuckoo Knights are reaving and pillaging, whilst the Albinaurics essentially hold the fallen lake lands around the academy. The splendor of Academy Town that surrounds Raya Lucaria is now a sunken memory, abandoned to the roaming bands of silver beings.



PART II:
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HISTORY
AND
IDEOLOGY



Grace Given

Chapter 9: The Erdtree Unification Wars

By the time we enter the Lands Between, the skyline is completely dominated by a singular object: the Erdtree. It casts a golden halo far across the world before us. It is the single most important landmark in this world, too, for it is a symbol of Marika's authority and the home of the Elden Ring itself.

The Erdtree is the center of the universe and all roads lead to Leyndell. It is a destination that always remains

in our eye line, lest we forget. This is the Age of the Erdtree, the ruling authority for all those who would exist under its light.

Despite the Erdtree's overwhelming dominance in the current age, its early years would be marked by massive resistance from all corners. It had many enemies, and these enemies included the Giants and the Storm Lord.

We learn of this in the description of Protection of the Erdtree:

"In the beginning, everything was in opposition to the Erdtree. But through countless victories in war, it became the embodiment of Order." - Protection of the Erdtree

Given this hostility, it would make sense that the Greater Will would need a vassal to enforce the Erdtree's dominance over the Lands Between. Marika, a member of the Numen race, who came from another world, was chosen as Empyrean to one day take the mantle of god.

With Marika in charge, the Erdtree crusade was poised to begin. Yet Marika would not wage this war alone. She would take her first consort with her, a man who would go on to become the first Elden Lord: Hoarah Loux, aka Godfrey, "lord of the battlefield."

The early wars of the Erdtree are dominated by Godfrey and his warriors, as we learn from Godfrey's armor set:

"The age of the Erdtree began amongst conflict, when Godfrey was lord of the battlefield. He led the War against the Giants. Faced the Storm Lord, alone. And then, there came a moment. When his last worthy enemy fell. And it was then, as the story is told, that the hue of Lord Godfrey's eyes faded." - Elden Lord Armor

In other words, the Age of the Erdtree was brought about through a period of immense bloodshed, and Godfrey is at the center of it.

Not only is Godfrey important for the Tarnished, but in some ways he is one of the most important figures in Erdtree mythology. He is treated with a reverence and respect far beyond that extended to other characters. And there is a good reason for this, as, in some ways, alongside Marika, he is the founding and uniting figure of the Erdtree Era.

Let's talk about this era in a little more detail, so we can understand the forge that tempered the man who would become the first Elden Lord.

The remembrance of Hoarah Loux reads:

"After the Long March of the Tarnished came to an end, Godfrey divested himself of kingship, becoming a simple warrior once more." - Remembrance of Hoarah Loux

That term, "becoming a simple warrior once more," tells us that not only was Hoarah Loux his persona when he became tarnished, but that he was also Hoarah Loux before he became Godfrey. This persona of Hoarah Loux, as we see from our fight with him, is a vastly different person to the stately Godfrey.

The axe and Serosh upon his back are not there to enhance his power; rather, these act to curtail the man of exceptional violence who lies beneath. This is of course partially communicated by Hoarah Loux's behavior and his



The Erdtree Unification Wars

mentality of “might makes right.” It’s a classic trope used to display a barbarian culture, and in Loux’s eyes a crown is warranted by strength, and strength alone.

Godfrey, meanwhile, is a symbol: A symbol of a new era of civilization, order and controlled lordship. Godfrey’s name even means “heavenly peace,” a clear indicator of what he represents. This is in stark opposition to Hoarah Loux, who was possessed of an unceasing bloodlust, and was a warrior of unmatched rage and power – coupled with a distinct lack of restraint.

We do get a glimpse into this man in the second stage of his fight with us, when he unleashes his earth-shattering power with his bare hands. And we get further evidence of what this barbarian warlord stood for via the Champion Headband, which describes “badland” culture, a tribe he established following his tarnishing:

“Headband reserved for the badlands’ bravest. Proof that the wearer has slaughtered countless foes. Following the example of their chieftain Hoarah Loux, the brave warriors of the badlands shun excess adornment.” - Champion Headband

All of this grounds Hoarah Loux in the era that he is most associated with, that of the Crucible. It’s a period of war, bestial vitality and competition, and it is a far cry from the civilized Erdtree and

Golden Order Eras. So let’s do a quick assessment of the era in order to better understand Hoarah Loux.

We know the nature of the Age of the Crucible thanks to the descriptions of it. For example the Crucible Scale, Crucible Feather and Crucible Knot Talisman descriptions read:

“A vestige of the crucible of primordial life. Born partially of devolution, it was considered a signifier of the divine in ancient times, but is now increasingly disdained as an impurity as civilization has advanced.” - Crucible Scale Talisman

This ties the Crucible to the Misbegotten and the Omen, given that the Knot Talisman is dropped by an Omen-killer and visually represents the knotted horns that cover their bodies.

Indeed, both the Misbegotten and the Omen are examples of overflowing, almost cancerous life. Here are beings with wild vestigial growths that aren’t the result of careful evolutionary design, but rather seem to be representations of something wild and uncontrolled.

This is all further emphasized by the description of the Aspects of the Crucible:

“This is a manifestation of the Erdtree’s primal vital energies – an aspect of the primordial crucible, where all life was once blended together.” - Aspects of the Crucible: Horns



Grace Given

This is quite clearly painting the picture of an era of excessive chaotic life. This chaos extends to the artistic representations of the Crucible seen in Siluria’s Tree, where it appears as a jagged tree. No wonder this all comes under that term “Crucible” itself, signifying not only a vessel in which things are blended, but a place of desperate competition, governed by the survival of the fittest.

Again, the Crucible Era itself was an era of beasts, violence, life, energy, chaos and barbarism, and in many ways these are all encapsulated by a simple piece of iconography: the lion rampant of Godfrey.

This becomes the sigil of the Golden Lineage as we see it upon the armor of Godrick’s men, visible at Stormveil and the Fortified Manor. These locations are associated with Godfrey’s early rule, and in order to understand this specific period, we have to try and understand the beast that inspired this imagery.

And we know the identity of this beast thanks to the Tree-and-Beast Surcoat worn by Godrick’s men:

“The surcoat depicts the distant Erdtree and the beast regent, an emblem of the golden lineage. Both are symbols of glory now past.” - Tree-and-Beast Surcoat

The Beast Regent is also known as Serosh, a fact confirmed to us via the Godfrey Icon item description. “Regent” in his

title denotes his submissive and advisory position to Godfrey, yet this creature was once a lord in his own right, something we learn via the Beastclaw Greathammer:

“The black nails protruding from golden fur are said to represent Serosh, Lord of Beasts, who went to become King Godfrey’s Regent.” - Beastclaw Greathammer

This is a fascinating piece of lore. It suggests that Serosh was once the lord of his own people, the beasts. We know from the likes of the Grafted Blade Greatsword and Godfrey’s declaration of strength befitting a crown, as well as his list of victories in his armor set, that Godfrey was a great conqueror who rose from this age of violence as a victor over many clans and rulers. As such, it would make sense that Serosh’s transition from lord to Godfrey’s regent was also the result of Godfrey defeating Serosh’s beast civilization and binding them to his will.

I am sure many have noticed that lion iconography is very prevalent in both Farum Azula and the Bestial Sanctum. This, of course, has to be Serosh, Lord of Beasts. Serosh’s potential importance to beast society is tied to the idea of their intelligence. We have already looked at the item description of Bestial Sling, which speaks of the Beastmen first gaining intelligence as they evolved from feral beasts to a society that began to use stone tools.



The Erdtree Unification Wars

As we have discussed in Chapter 2, the “five fingers” of beasts is a symbol of their emergent intelligence, artistically represented by the Cinqueada.

This is important, because there is another reference to five fingers, and that is from the Beastclaw Greathammer that we have already looked at.

Is it possible, then, that Serosh was among the first beasts to gain intelligence? Could Serosh have actually been the first?

Perhaps not. Even so, the reference to the five claws in the Beastclaw Greathammer and its relevance to Serosh seems important to me. At the very least, I believe it shows that, among the beasts, Serosh is representative of that intelligence. Hence his lordship.

Serosh would have to be a beast of great intelligence, as the importance of his mind is reflected by the Golden Beast Crest Shield:

“The beast depicted is Serosh, aged counselor who guides the golden lineage.”
- Golden Beast Crest Shield

The picture here is of Serosh as a wise being who could be relied upon for sage advice. This does thematically fit in with his role in Godfrey’s lordship, where his presence makes Hoarah Loux less of a beast and more of a lord.

The submission of Serosh may well be symbolically represented by Godfrey’s axe¹,

Serosh is a wise being who could be relied upon for sage advice. This does fit in with his role in Godfrey’s lordship; his presence makes Hoarah Loux less of a beast.

a suggestion originally made by Reddit user Kurenai_Jack. Kurenai_Jack’s basis for this suggestion derives from the design similarities between the Axe of Godfrey and the Beastman’s Cleaver, in regards to reliefs upon both and the material used, perhaps indicating Godfrey’s axe was once Serosh’s.

The other interesting detail from this Golden Beast Crest Shield description is that Serosh is described as “aged”. This could potentially be taken as evidence that Serosh is an ancient being who dates all the way back to the Farum Azula civilization. Maybe he was lord among his people even if his people were subservient to the dragons.

Whatever the truth, Serosh would be the ideal opponent for the man known as Hoarah Loux, and they no doubt operated under similar maxims: only the strong



Grace Given

survive and only one can be dominant. These are the rules of nature.

It would be simple enough to leave it there, agreeing that Serosh was a lord among beasts and that Hoarah Loux defeated the Beastmen in one of his many conquests. However, there is a final consideration when we speak of the culture of the beast and Farum Azula. That is the rather interesting connection with Stormveil and the Fortified Manor.

We can find hawks in both Farum Azula and Stormveil, as well as the lion rampant of Serosh. Of course, one of the connections between the two locations is the presence of the Banished Knights, who exist not only in Farum Azula and Stormveil – evidence of their armaments is also found in the Fortified Manor. These knights clearly have some connection to the dragon civilization. Not only are they present in each location, but they also use Dragon Communion Incantations and they bear the dragon upon their helms.

If Stormveil and Fortified Manor were originally offshoots of a bestial society that was later co-opted by Godfrey, this would explain the ties to Farum Azula, the original beast society.

A further interesting fact about the Banished Knights is that, in the original Japanese, the two Banished Knights Ashes, Oleg and Engvall, are referred to as the

“Wings of the Storm Lord” rather than just “Wings of the Storm².” This makes it far clearer that these knights once had an allegiance to the Storm Lord and that Godfrey would later bind these warriors to his will after defeating their lord.

Thus these Banished Knights, with their dragon-topped helms and association with Farum Azula, could well have been draconian humans who served the dragons in years past. Indeed, the dragon decorations on the flame cannons found in Stormveil could be further evidence of Stormveil’s proud ancient heritage. This is speculation, but it would help explain the rather hodgepodge society found in Stormveil. And rather than believing it was a fortress of Serosh specifically, I would more likely concede that this was an outpost of the Storm Lord and that society in general.

So it could be that the original Norman³ structure of Stormveil was built by the Storm Lord’s people, hence the stone hawk imagery that is baked into it. And then it was taken and repurposed by Godfrey and later his descendant, Godrick. This in turn is when we get the golden ornamentation and banners almost grafted on top of the castle to represent its new master⁴.

Stormveil also seems to be quite closely associated with the hawks and the Stormhawk King, who could have ruled the roost

¹ Reddit comment by u/Kurenai_Jack from post “Isn’t this another aspect of the crucible? (axe of Godfrey)”: bit.ly/4aO0sbT

² Translation via “Fear the Old Lore - The Storm Lord - Elden Ring” - Last Protagonist

³ “The History & Architecture of Stormveil Castle” - The Lore Hunter

⁴ “Elden Ring Lore: The Golden Lineage” - Eredin (unlisted)



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here on behalf of Godfrey. The importance of the hawk to Stormveil is made clear via the Hawk Crest Wooden Shield:

“Adorned with a long-forgotten crest of Stormveil, ancient in design.”

- Hawk Crest Wooden Shield

I have long clung to the idea that the Stormhawk King, the ruler of the hawks, once ruled over this perch and, like Serosh, the king’s defeat was pivotal in the development of Godfrey as a great conqueror. The ash description reads:

“Ashes of a hawk revered by all others as sovereign back in the days when Stormveil’s winds still raged like no other. This ancient monarch is proud however, refusing to answer anyone’s summons.” - The Stormhawk King

This would explain the presence of hawks throughout Stormveil and how the Banished Knights utilize the wind power of Stormveil. Two bestial enemies, defeated by a man who operated in an animalistic way.

I would therefore speculate that after Godfrey defeated the Stormhawk King, he constructed the mighty Stormveil Castle and even indentured the surviving hawks.

As the Warhawk Ashes description reads:

“Spirit of a Stormveil warhawk, the talons of which have been sliced off so that razor-fine swords could be grafted in their place. With its lord vanquished, and its wings wounded, the hawk perished as it solemnly gazed at its former home. The storm is a warhawk’s cradle.” - Warhawk Ashes

To me this suggests that the hawks, so broken by the loss of their king, submitted to Hoarah Loux and his men, having blades and fire breathing devices grafted onto them and serving Stormveil as the equivalent of guard dogs. Indeed, their enslavement is more or less confirmed by the chains found on their backs – a stark contrast to the free and natural hawks found in Farum Azula.

In turn, hawks would continue to be an important symbol to Godfrey over the years, showing how much he respected his conflict with them. Dialogue with Nepheli Loux, for example, shows that Godfrey’s later Badlands clan would use hunting hawks:

“Still, this ash... It reminds me of my first hawk. Thank you.” - Nepheli Loux

This is underlined by Nepheli Loux’s weapon of choice, the Stormhawk Axe –



Grace Given

which of course recalls the power of the hawks of Stormveil in the first place.

This is a lot to process, and there is some interesting lore to chew over here, most obviously that the hawks are still important to Hoarah Loux even in his exile, far removed from the Lands Between and Godfrey.

One final point to ponder regarding Stormveil is a painting found there. This painting shows the Divine Tower of Limgrave itself, but there is no castle and there is no Golden Light of the Erdtree here⁵. This does make me wonder if Stormveil was more of a naked roost ruled over by the Stormhawk King and his hawks before Godfrey took it from them and built the castle himself.

Whether you believe that Stormveil was built by the Storm Lord’s people or whether you believe it was built by Godfrey following his conquest, it is clear that the final castle is a melange of Godfrey’s hawk and beast ideology – an architectural bit of carbon dating for the clash between Godfrey and beastkind. Ultimately I believe that the castle is partly built by Storm Lord and then later expanded upon by Godfrey and his descendants.

The heritage of Stormveil as both a keep of the hawks and later as the keep of Godfrey is evidenced by Nepheli’s ascension to the throne, which she

only does after accepting the ashes of the Stormhawk King. Being the blood of Godfrey and in possession of the ash of the old Stormhawk monarch gives Nepheli the legitimacy she needs to rule over Stormveil as Lady Nepheli.

THE ROUNDTABLE

In their “Godfrey and Serosh” video, Tarnished Archaeologist likens Godfrey to King Arthur, the legendary unifying British king. Even aside from the obvious roundtable parallels, there are plenty of connections to be made here. With this imagery in mind, let us take a look at the Roundtable Hold.

The Fortified Manor is of course the original manifestation of the Roundtable Hold that we as the Tarnished now utilize in our pursuit of lordship. This is fitting, as there is a good chance that the ancestors of the Tarnished most likely made up the warriors who once stood around the roundtable.

We know that the Fortified Manor was associated with Godfrey thanks to the lion rampant banners, and in general it is very similarly outfitted to Stormveil. The very concept of a roundtable also lines up with what we know of Godfrey, a man who believes in strength and martial prowess.

⁵ “Elden Ring Lore: The Golden Lineage” - Eredin (unlisted)



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Having a council of warriors, where all are considered equal in terms of their voice, would be very fitting for his earlier days.

This is the concept seen in Arthurian legend, where Arthur's council was made up of his trusted and legendary knights. When they stood at that table, no one voice was valued more than the other. By proving your valor in battle you had earned the right to speak freely.

Godfrey's early focus on warrior culture is reflected in the design of the Fortified Manor. In stark contrast to the opulent design of higher Leyndell, the Fortified Manor is very spartan, clearly a functional defensive outpost⁶. The inside is extremely basic, with rooms dedicated to storage, blacksmithing, arming, and a council chamber. One could easily imagine it as a warrior's hold. The archaeological evidence here and in Stormveil tells an interesting story of this early roundtable culture, too. The first thing to note is the symbology used both here and in Stormveil: the lion rampant.

We have already discussed the history of Serosh, but it is interesting when we consider the later livery of the Golden Lineage, represented by Godrick. This livery is balanced between what is now considered to be the two symbols of Godfrey's rule, the lion Serosh and the Erdtree. The very fact these constructions

use only the lion part of this two-part livery shows that this was very early on in Godfrey's rule, before he was associated with anything more than Serosh.

The prevalence of not only Banished Knight Armor and weapons again makes the connection with Stormveil. To me it is further evidence that the Banished Knights served under Godfrey, whether you believe them to originally be warriors of the Storm Lord or not. To me this is not only the heritage of Godfrey but of the Tarnished, of our own character. The Tarnished are mockingly referred to as a warrior people by the likes of Margit:

"Well, thou art of passing skill. Warrior blood must truly run in thy veins, Tarnished." - Margit, the Fell Omen

Later we hear that Godfrey isn't tarnished and banished alone; rather it is he and his warriors. Godfrey's axe states he led his tarnished kinfolk out of the Lands Between, and in Marika's speech she makes it clear that those being tarnished are the warriors of Godfrey:

"My Lord, and thy warriors. I divest each of thee of thy grace. With thine eyes dimmed, ye will be driven from the Lands Between. Ye will wage war in a land afar, where ye will live, and die."

- Queen Marika via Melina

So when we are looking at this early roundtable and early culture from



Grace Given

Godfrey's rule, we are really looking at the heritage of the Tarnished and their original warrior culture as it was before their exile. Keep this in mind when we return to speak of the Tarnished later.

In essence, I see Roundtable Hold, Castle Morne and Stormveil as early Hoarah Loux strongholds, either built by him or captured and modified. They are all functional buildings built in a time of warriors, with Stormveil later being adapted to look more grand and ceremonial. Hoarah Loux's early conquests were a product of the time, an aggressive era of survival of the fittest that was in line with what we know of the Crucible. In time he and his warriors would come to venerate and be associated with that emergent Erdtree. The earliest sign of this is his Crucible Knights, who we learn are associated with the warrior king, via their gauntlets:

"Gauntlets of the Crucible Knights who served Godfrey, the first Elden Lord."
- Crucible Gauntlets

We can even see tree iconography appearing in certain forms throughout Stormveil and the Fortified Manor, and more importantly the gardener statues that we believe to be strongly associated with the Crucible itself.

My assumption is that the Banished Knights, who were representative of the older era of beasts, would become less

important and would be partially usurped by these newer Crucible Knights, as Godfrey began to emerge and become more associated with the new rising Order surrounding the Crucible and Erdtree.

We can only speculate as to when Hoarah Loux became Godfrey and when he took that vow to become a lord. But I would imagine it would have come with his marriage to Marika and his ascension to Elden Lord – the transformation from a warrior king with his roundtable councilors to a more traditional monarch figure.

Tarnished Archaeologist points out that this nuance is illustrated by Roundtable Hold itself. In one room we see the level playing field of the roundtable, which stands in stark contrast to the small chamber off the roundtable, which is essentially a throne room for a lord. One represents a warrior culture of equal voices, and the latter represents a traditional monarchy, the opposite of a roundtable philosophy and a place where one voice stands far above the others. So we can assume that, even after his ascension to Elden Lord, Godfrey's old holds still continued to be used. Given that there is an Elden Throne in both Stormveil and the Fortified Manor, this is very much implied.

It does appear clear that Leyndell was built sometime after these buildings, due to the more grand design and the clearer, more

⁶ "The secret story behind the Crucible" - The Tarnished Archaeologist



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purposeful ties to the Erdtree. Even then, given Godfrey's origins, I like to imagine him as a man who would have still preferred his more functional holds – so he would have continued to hold court from Fortified Manor and Stormveil.

The throne room in the Fortified Manor also has seats for a small council arrangement, possibly suggesting that Godfrey didn't fully give up on having some kind of advisory group. It's just that the paradigm has now shifted to a point where there very much is a head of the table.

There is one final symbol of this transition. Again, credit to Tarnished Archaeologist for pointing this detail out. Look at the weapons plunged into the roundtable. Standing starkly among these swords is a single axe, and as we know Godfrey took his iconic double-headed axe at the moment he vowed to conduct himself as a lord.

We know what is expected of a lord thanks to the description of the Ruler's Mask:

“Such a mask illustrates the qualities of an ideal lord: Chiefly, wise and possessing a certain defanged geniality. One at the center of society often finds these qualities most expedient.” - Ruler's Mask

Hoarah Loux and his warriors are the opposite of these ideals, yet Godfrey the lord, a man who speaks with respect and has his heedless bloodlust curtailed by

Serosh, certainly does cleave closer to this description, and very much closer to the idea of being “defanged.”

So perhaps these swords embedded in the table are a further defanging – a symbolic moment of laying down the sword, giving up the warrior culture and taking up the symbols of lordship. Godfrey embedded his old functional battle axe into the table, marking the end of his days as Hoarah Loux, before picking up his lordly axe and taking Serosh upon his back.

THE TARNISHED

As is already suggested by Marika's speech – and as we have alluded to several times – the Tarnished are descended from those warriors who served beside Godfrey. This is confirmed by Miyazaki himself during an interview with IGN:

“So, the Tarnished, you could call them tarnished individuals who have lost grace. And this was a long time preceding the setting of the game, a long time before. The ancestors of the characters that are present in the world were banished and exiled from the Lands Between, these Tarnished.”

- Miyazaki, via IGN

So the original Tarnished are literally Godfrey's warriors, a fact that we are made aware of by the description of the Axe of



Grace Given

Godfrey and by Marika's speech, which describes Godfrey leading the march of the Tarnished. Specifically the Tarnished are referred to as “his kinfolk” in Hoarah Loux's remembrance. They are his people, his warriors, his tribe.

So with that said let us talk about their exile. We know that the Tarnished and Godfrey were “hounded” from the Lands Between, thanks to dialogue from Miriel:

“However, when Godfrey, first Elden Lord, was hounded from the Lands Between...” - Miriel, Pastor of Vows

They were hounded or chased out because of the way in which the people of grace view those who are Tarnished. This is something we can see in the disgusted way that Margit refers to us:

So perhaps these swords embedded in the table are a further defanging – a symbolic moment of laying down the sword, giving up the warrior culture and taking up the symbols of lordship.

“Foul tarnished, in search of the Elden Ring. Emboldened by the flame of ambition. Someone must extinguish thy flame.” - Margit, the Fell Omen

Also, look at the way in which Kenneth initially reacts to us, in regards to being tarnished and wanting to help him:

“Ah, you've come to lend me your aid, have you? Well, that's very kind, but, um... No, no. Th-the help is very much appreciated. Even from a Tarnished. Despite appearances, nobility is no prerequisite to serving the true Order.”

- Kenneth Haight

And of course there would have been the cut NPC Viscount Shanehaight. The viscount was a noble of Leyndell who would have made it clear that the Tarnished do not belong in the world of grace and indeed are lesser for having lost grace.

Lesser, lost. This is what it means to be tarnished. It is to lose luster, to become less valuable, less respected. All of these are relevant when it comes to the Tarnished of *Elden Ring*. Not only have they lost the luster of gold from their eyes, but they have lost value in the eyes of those in the world of grace. One of the only characters to speak to us with respect, in terms of our tarnished status, is Godfrey. And he was one of us.

And so the Tarnished were chased out of the Lands Between. Where did



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they go? We know they eventually left for new lands by sea. The Rusted Anchor tells us this:

“A rusty anchor wielded as a weapon. Each of its four flukes is thick and sharp, enabling piercing attacks. When the Tarnished left the Lands Between with their Lord, one boat alone was said to have been left behind.” - Rusted Anchor

As is pointed out by Eredin in his Golden Lineage lore video⁷, there is a good chance that they left from the southern tip of the Lands Between, setting off from Castle Morne, one of Godfrey’s strongholds. There are many wrecked ships here, suggesting it was something of a port. And in terms of that lone boat left behind? We may not need to imagine the terrible fate that awaited those particular Tarnished. In one of VaatiVidya’s secrets videos, he highlights the crucified people found throughout Limgrave⁸. He notes that they are wearing the Guilty Hood, which had a cut item description which would have read:

“Garb of spurned Tarnished who were forced into slavery in the Lands Between.” - Guilty Hood cut item description

This is pretty much what we would expect to have happened to anyone left behind, then: slavery and brutality.

As for the Tarnished that did leave? They would go on to establish societies

that existed beyond the boundaries of the Lands Between. This is why there is such a diverse choice of background for our Tarnished, a choice that shows they lived in different lands and developed different cultures over time. But this was preceded by what is referred to as the Long March of the Tarnished. We learn of this in Godfrey’s axe description:

“Weapon of Godfrey, Elden Lord. It was broken in a battle fought as leader of the Tarnished during the Long March.” - Axe of Godfrey

We actually get a lot of information from a brief line here. We learn that Godfrey led his people on a long trek, no doubt through lands unknown, to find a home for a people. (A lot of people see an analogy to Moses in this, who led his people on a long march through the desert.) We also learn that the Tarnished and Godfrey saw combat on this long march, to such a degree that Godfrey’s legendary axe was shattered in intense battle. This is speculation, but I imagine the battles that Godfrey and the Tarnished took part in pitted them against the forces of people whose lands they were crossing or indeed invading.

Then, Godfrey settled in an area we know as the “Badlands.” And when the long march of the Tarnished came to an end, Godfrey became Hoarah Loux



Grace Given

once more, as is told to us by his remembrance, which reads:

“After the Long March of the Tarnished came to an end, Godfrey divested himself of kingship, becoming a simple warrior once more.” - Remembrance of Hoarah Loux

Godfrey shed his pacified persona, and was no longer a lord. However, one notable difference from the Hoarah Loux we experience in the game is Serosh. We can see Serosh on his back in the opening cinematic where he is chieftain of the Badlands, and Serosh is only killed and removed in our fight with him. So while he is Hoarah Loux again, he still retains some of his leadership abilities. Serosh would still be draining his ceaseless bloodlust, and would have continued as his advisor.

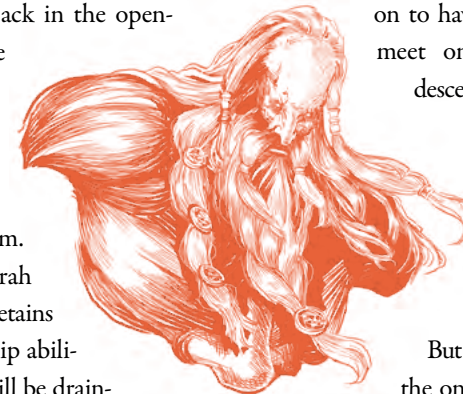
As we have already stated, Hoarah Loux imported some of his ideals from the Lands Between, including the hawk, which is seen through his Badland kinsfolk wielding Stormhawk Axes and using hunting hawks. But what of the Badlands themselves? Nepheli Loux suggests that they are quite similar to Stormveil:

“This land is much like the one from which I hail.” - Nepheli Loux

This explains why hawks were present here, and perhaps it explains why Hoarah chose to settle in such a place: Because it reminded him of one of his old holds. Indeed, Badland culture, as described by the Champion Set, appears to be a simple barbarian one – where strength is key to leadership. This suits Hoarah Loux rather than the more refined Godfrey.

Hoarah Loux evidently went on to have more children. We meet one of his Tarnished descendants, Nepheli Loux, whose lineage is evidenced by Kenneth Haight as supporting her claim to the Stormveil seat as ruler of Limgrave.

But the Badlands were not the only resting place of the Tarnished. The starting classes tell us that much. There are Tarnished warriors from the Land of Reeds if you would choose the Samurai class or the Land of Reeds appearance. There are Tarnished who were once of the Numen people – Marika’s people – if you choose the Numen appearance. There is also a nomadic clan of warriors which seem to include Tarnished members – a nomadic tribe which upholds the water flowing techniques of the Blind Swordsman, not only in their combat style



⁷ “Elden Ring Lore: The Golden Lineage” - Eredin (unlisted)

⁸ “15 Marvelous Secrets in Elden Ring!” - VaatiVidya



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but in their transitory way of life. Such are the Tarnished who choose the warrior class.

What is also interesting is that some of the Tarnished people seem to still worship the Two Fingers and grace, something that we learn of via the Confessor Set:

“The churches outside the Lands Between, dedicated to the teachings of the Two Fingers, send confessors out to follow the guidance of grace. The confessors are loyal servants to the Two Fingers, ready to hunt down and quietly dispose of their enemies.” - Confessor Hood

It is unclear whether people outside of the Lands Between already worshipped grace and the Two Fingers, or if it was an export brought with them by the Tarnished. I am more inclined to believe the latter – not only because it is more interesting, but because the Tarnished have a very strong relationship with the Two Fingers, as we will soon see.

The point is that the Tarnished evidently dispersed throughout the world, and came in all shapes and sizes. The fact that Miyazaki describes the original Tarnished warriors as our “ancestors” gives some nice roleplaying possibilities, because the passing of time plausibly allows for Tarnished people to spread far and wide and develop within diverse cultures.

But, as we know from Marika’s speech, the Tarnished would one day be

required to return to the Lands Between. Far from Tarnished lands, the Lands Between would go through a tumultuous period: the Shattering.

The Elden Ring would be destroyed and Marika’s demigod offspring would battle for supremacy in a manner so brutal that no one would emerge truly victorious. Their failure to herald a new Order would lead to their abandonment by the Greater Will, as told to us in the introductory segment.

GODFREY, FIRST ELDEN LORD

Things change dramatically for Godfrey and the wider world when Marika looks to bring about the primacy of the Erdtree. We know from Maliketh’s remembrance that Marika was once an Empyrean and thus must have been elected as such during the same era as Hoarah Loux’s conquests. From Ranni’s dialogue, we know that Empyreans are potential gods chosen to usher in a new era.

As a young Empyrean, Marika and her Erdtree would face an uphill battle to become the dominant power in the land. The Protection of the Erdtree incantation reads:

“In the beginning, everything was in opposition to the Erdtree. But through countless



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victories in war, it became the embodiment of Order.” - Protection of the Erdtree

The Erdtree is so obviously the center of power in our current era that it is hard to imagine it as anything else, yet as this description so clearly states, the Erdtree earned its primacy through bloodshed.

No doubt as a newly minted god Marika would have had significant power granted to her. However, if her new Order were to subdue the various cultures and rivals around her, she would need warriors and generals.

This is why Marika married Godfrey and why he was elevated as first Elden Lord of the Erdtree Era – as by this stage Hoarah Loux would have been a renowned warrior chief in his own right. We have spoken about his victories and the development of his roundtable culture, but what is not clear is which victories Hoarah Loux garnered prior to becoming Marika’s husband and which are attributed to the Erdtree conquest wars.

However, as we have already speculated, I would argue that Hoarah Loux became Godfrey at the precise moment he was to become Elden Lord, meaning his roundtable would also have laid down their axes at this moment. This theory would therefore imply that Godfrey and his men would have had various victories prior to this point. After

all, Marika’s choice would make sense if he was already a man of great renown.

At this point, the roundtable would be folded, and Godfrey would instead rely upon advisors and ultimately answer to Queen Marika, to whom he was consort. Godfrey was becoming part of something bigger. His strength had warranted a crown, but now he would need to wear that crown and conduct himself as a lord alongside his godly wife. Thus he would pick up his axe and take Serosh upon his back to help contain his endless blood rage.

Yet Godfrey hardly took a step back from being a warrior. Rather he would just conduct himself in a more lordly manner, acting less like a beast and more like the noble warrior of legend.

Again this is where Tarnished Archaeologist’s belief that Godfrey is analogous to the unifying King Arthur makes sense. For it was in this time that Godfrey would defeat all opponents to the Erdtree and unify the lands, creating a new united kingdom under the aegis of the Erdtree and Marika. As we already read in Protection of the Erdtree, eventually, through countless victories, the Erdtree would become the symbol of Order.

No doubt there are countless tribes and minor societies that we don’t know about who would have been brought to heel by



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Godfrey in his quest for unity, but let's talk about some that we are aware of.

The Siege of Morne gives us some insight into one of these battles. Let us look at the Grafted Blade Greatsword:

"The storied sword of Castle Morne. A revenger's weapon, it is burdened with oceans of anger and regret. One of the legendary armaments. A lone surviving champion from a country now vanished was so determined to continue fighting that he claimed the swords of an entire clan of warriors." - Grafted Blade Greatsword

This suggests that the original wielder of this sword is the sole survivor of a lost country, and that revenge was on their mind. As a result they symbolically forged a single sword out of all swords of a lost clan. When we view this through the lens of the Sword Monument found at Castle Morne, we get the full picture:

"The siege of Castle Morne / A lone hero fights for his vengeance / Only to fall at the hand of Lord Godfrey."
- Sword Monument, Weeping Peninsula

This shows us that the revenge is directed against Godfrey, implicitly suggesting that it was Godfrey who destroyed the country in question. Again we are unsure of when this took place, but given it is an entire nation I would speculate that it was a people who were brought to heel during Godfrey's unification wars as Marika's Elden

No doubt there are countless tribes and minor societies that we don't know about who would have been brought to heel by Godfrey in his quest for unity.

Lord; just one culture among many defeated by the rising power.

I would suggest the following chain of events. Godfrey conquered this land in the name of Marika and then from the ashes would come this revenger, wielding the collected swords of his people and attacking Castle Morne, before being felled by the lord of the battlefield himself. However, as we have often seen, Godfrey would not discard the revenger's weapon. Rather, his beast seal would be grafted upon it, and it would become yet another relic of the Golden Lineage, still held by Godfrey's men to this day.

The Storm Lord's rule at Stormveil seems to have created what's almost a successor kingdom to that of the dragons. It is tied to the storms, much like the dragons, and it was once ruled by the Stormhawks who also hail from Farum Azula.



Grace Given

Additionally, both Farum Azula and Stormveil are inhabited by the banished knights, who wield Dragon Communion incantations and wear a dragon upon their helm. To me these are some of the first Dragon Communion warriors, and we know this was a cult established by Placidusax himself, thanks to the Shadow of the Erdtree expansion.

As incredible as the Ancient Dragons and their civilization are, they did not last forever.

Placidusax was mortally wounded by Bayle the Dread, and while Placidusax fended off Bayle and sent him fleeing, he lost two of his heads and was forced to enter a catatonic sleep.

The literal destruction of Farum Azula's masonry came at the hands of a meteorite, something we learn via the Ruins Greatsword:

"The ruin it came from crumbled when struck by a meteorite, as such this weapon harbors its destructive power."
- Ruins Greatsword

So at some point the temple in the sky was struck by a meteorite. It was this event that led to the scattering of the shards of Farum Azula throughout the land and the ruin of the capital itself.

However I do not believe that this was the event that led to the fall of the dragons. Rather, I believe this occurred

after their fall, when the temple was in the sky, and therefore after it had been frozen in time.

With all others defeated, Godfrey and his men would take on Marika's final rivals: the Fire Giants who controlled the mountaintops and the Forge of Ruinous Flame.

THE WAR OF THE GIANTS

The giants were instant enemies to the Erdtree and posed a huge threat to its reign. We learn the extent of the enmity from the Roar Medallion:

"In ancient times, the giants were mortal enemies of the Erdtree." - Roar Medallion

Indeed we know that the giants' defeat was what established the reign of the Erdtree proper, and so we can assume the giants were hostile to the Erdtree at its very conception.

We learn from various sources, as well as our own in-game experience, that the Flame of Ruin poses a direct threat to the Erdtree. One of the better sources of this is Surge, O Flame!:

"The Giants' Flame is the flame of ruin, capable of burning the Erdtree. And so, following the War against the Giants, its ruinous blaze was sealed, and



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guardians were appointed to watch over it.” - Surge, O Flame!

There does seem to be a prophecy predicting that one day the Erdtree would burn, and we learn of this prophecy from the incantation called Fire’s Deadly Sin:

“Incantation originating from a deeply ominous prophecy... The prophet despaired, looking up at the Erdtree, for soon the kindling would burst into flame, bringing ruin. The burning of the Erdtree is the first cardinal sin. That is not the domain of mere men.” - Fire’s Deadly Sin

So it was sensed by perceptive individuals that the Flame of Ruin would have something to do with the Erdtree’s eventual destruction. This act would become the first, and therefore most reviled, cardinal sin of the Erdtree faith.

Now, admittedly, this exact rendition of the prophecy as said by Fire’s Deadly Sin may well have been closer to our time, given it says that soon the kindling would burst into flame, in a reference to Melina’s sacrifice. However I do think it is clear that this is a prophecy that has existed since the early days of the Erdtree – something I believe is reinforced by the fact this is the first cardinal sin of several.

In addition we get further evidence that this prophecy is repeatedly witnessed by those in the faith. The description of Catch Flame reads as follows:

“Incantation originating from a sinister prophecy... The flame of ruin is anathema to the Erdtree. But prophets sometimes glimpse it within the faith all the same. Sadly when this occurs their sole reward is banishment.”

- Catch Flame

So this is a prophecy that will be seen and presented by many different prophets time and time again. Incidentally, if you choose the prophet starting class, it is heavily implied that you are one of these people who foresaw the burning of the Erdtree. For if we look at the Prophet Blindfold, its description reads:

“Blindfold of exiled prophets who foretold misfortune – and were persecuted and driven from their homes as a result. Why hesitate, if the path leading to the future is clear?” - Prophet Blindfold

This neatly ties up with the lore from Catch Flame. It shows that the event of burning the Erdtree is destined to happen and is so deeply written into the timeline that it is viewed by multiple people – including the player character, if this origin is chosen.

Whether by prophecy, direct instruction from the Greater Will, or by a logical conclusion, the burgeoning ranks of the Erdtree faithful would turn their ire towards the Fire Giants, led by



Grace Given

Marika and Godfrey themselves. And so the epic war of legend would begin: the war that decided the fate of the Erdtree and the Lands Between. The Fire Giants are mighty, far mightier than those who would assault their mountain – besides Marika and Godfrey, of course. Yet despite their apparent power disadvantage, the forces of the Erdtree would be far more prepared and far more cunning in their approach to this conflict.

First of all, the warriors of the Erdtree were equipped to face the threat of the Giants, as we learn from the description of Smithing Stone [7]:

“Stone used to smith a variety of armaments. Found in a polar region, it is semi-vitrified... Thought to have been used to hone the weapons of the champions of the War against the Giants at the birth of the Erdtree.” - Smithing Stone [7]

So their weapons were specially honed with stones found in cold polar regions to counteract and harm the Fire Giants. In addition, the warriors of this age bore incredibly large hammers to smash the bones of their foes, as we learn from the Giant-Crusher hammer:

“A hammer made from a boulder, used in the War against the Giants. One of the heftiest weapons in the entire Lands Between. After the giants were quelled, and man turned against man in violence, this weapon was all but forgotten. Man has grown feeble in comparison to his forebears.” - Giant-Crusher

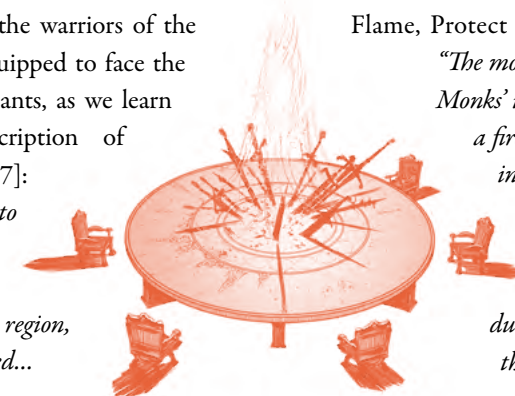
It was not just their attack that was strengthened, but also their defense, as we see in the description of the Flame, Protect Me incantation:

“The most ancient of the Fire Monks’ incantations. Creates a fire within that greatly increases fire damage negation. It is said that this incantation was used during the War against the Giants long ago, during which it protected the champions of the Erdtree.”

- Flame, Protect Me

So an incantation that would actually go on to be a founding incantation of the Fire Monks was devised at this time to give the soldiers a great defense against the fiery power of the giants.

Both of these last two pieces of evidence should be a testament to Marika’s cunning, and combined with Godfrey’s raw strength, we can begin to see that





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the giants had a formidable challenge ahead of them.

Yet the scales would tip even further in the Erdtree's favor when the Knights of Zamor, bitter rivals of the giants, clearly jumped at the opportunity to finally destroy their age-old enemies. We learn from their armor set that they would become decorated heroes of this war, and one can only imagine that the powerful ice incantations of the Zamor would have been a great boon to Marika's arsenal.

Adding to the balance of power is the fact the Giants were betrayed by their own kind, by those we now know as the trolls. This is something we can learn about from the Sword Monument in this area, which reads:

"The War against the Giants, / Champions battle, trolls betray, / Fire vanquished, the era of the Erdtree begins." - Sword Monument, Mountaintops of the Giants

However, it appears that the trolls were in fact once giants. Pay attention to the Troll's Hammer item description, which reads:

"Trolls are descended from the giants, and these were supposedly once used as ceremonial smithing tools. In the distant past, smithing was considered divine." - Troll's Hammer

I see them as a lesser form of giant that has devolved or descended from the giants over the years. They are even interchangeably

referred to as giants in the item description of the Troll's Golden Sword:

"Sword given to the lesser giants who fought for the Erdtree during the War against the Giants long ago." - Troll's Golden Sword

We can see the trolls as former giants who chose to betray their Fell God and side with the Erdtree, even going so far as to be armed with these golden swords by Marika's forces to help in their battle.

It is at this point that I wish to revisit their physiology. As I said earlier, I find it interesting that the trolls have a massive cavity in the place where the Fell God's face would sit, and so my speculation is that, when renouncing the Fell God and their Fire Giant brethren, the presence of the Fell God was either removed or disappeared. I would also speculate that this is the cause of their devolution into what we now know as trolls, having had a core part of what made them Fire Giants in the first place removed.

The decision to betray the Fell God may not have been the wisest in the long term for the trolls, as these versions of the once-proud giants are reduced to little more than pack mules for humans. Indeed, the Troll's Golden Sword item description implies that they have lost their minds over time along with everything else.



Grace Given

I think that this wretched race of betrayers get their best, second chance under the service of the Carians. They have their dignity through serving as knights, as we learn from the Greatblade Phalanx:

"Used by the enchanted troll knights. They were the comrades of the young Rennala, bound by oath." - Greatblade Phalanx

We also see that Iji is welcomed into the inner circle of Carian royalty, as he was Ranni's childhood companion and war councilor. This is a fairly lofty position for a member of this discarded race. It does make sense that the Carians would treat trolls a bit better, given they would not have the lingering distrust of giant-kin that those of the Erdtree would.

Regardless, with all of this stacked against them, is it really any wonder that the giants were utterly broken by Godfrey and Marika's forces?

This said, I believe we can learn more about this conflict and the specifics of who actually brought down the giants if we examine the bodies of the giants themselves. I would preface the following by saying this is clearly my own interpretation based upon the environmental storytelling of this area.

We can see the Fire Giants are completely frozen solid and, while this clearly isn't the main cause of death, one could choose to see it as the effects of Zamor

magic. These giants are frozen to such a degree that there are icicles hanging off them – although I admit this could quite easily be just a post-mortem effect of the environment they are in. However the wounds upon the Fire Giants' bodies, the blackened bits of skin, do look extremely similar to the symptoms of frostbite in real life.

What is undeniable is their actual cause of death: the massive staffs piercing the giants' bodies, which have then grown into bushels of thorns that break apart these bodies from the inside. The growth of these briars is so violent in some cases that giants are literally losing limbs and their bodies have split open.

So what are these thorny staffs? Initially I wondered if these were man-made staffs. However, you can clearly see these thorns seem to be shooting up from beneath the earth. To me, this must be a form of powerful Thorn Sorcery. Thorns are important to the Order of Grace, as in modern society they are used to mark the Guilty. Radagon, a leading member of the Golden Order, manipulates the power of thorns to seal off the Erdtree from all trespassers.

We will talk more of the thorn magics of the Thorn Sorcerers and their origins later, but I do believe this to be kin to these sorceries. The Briars of



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Punishment spell likewise pierces from below the ground. Further evidence linking it to these Thorn Sorcerers is the fact that not only are these thorny stakes found in the battlegrounds of the giants, they are also found in Liurnia, in the camps of the Fire Monks. Given these camps are more recent, having been erected in the hunt for Adan, it leads us to conclude that it must be the work of sorcerers, as they are present at both unique locations where these staffs exist.

An opposing theory that I often see mentioned is that these thorns are the death blight. I would first of all like to disprove this before moving on to the thorns explanation. Death blight wouldn't have existed at this point in time, as it is symptomatic of Godwyn's murder and the Golden Order. On top of that, these thorns simply do not look the same as those associated with the death blight. If you examine the thorns of death blight closely, you will note that, rather fittingly, the spines are actually fly wings. This is very in-keeping with the morbidity of death blight. Yet the thorns protruding from these giants are quite clearly traditional spines, which brings us back around to the thorns of the Guilty. We are possibly looking at the origin of this type of punishment.

There is more to say about thorns in the future. For now, let us turn to the

one last giant who was not impaled by the great thorns: the Fire Giant that we do battle with. The giants were utterly defeated in battle, and according to the One-Eyed Shield, Marika even slew the one-eyed god itself.

This may just be a mythology constructed by the victors to present a myth of complete victory to the rest of the world. However, whether she slew a physical form of the Fell God or not, we know that the Fell God was not entirely destroyed, given the lore we have previously discussed found in the description of Flame of the Fell God, which tells us that a Fell God exists within the Fire Giants.

So we know that the Fell God isn't an ordinary being that exists within one place.

So we know that the Fell God isn't an ordinary being that exists within one place. He exists within his spells, he exists within his giants and he exists within his Flame of Ruin.



Grace Given

He exists within his spells, he exists within his giants and he exists within his Flame of Ruin. So even if Marika did slay a physical form of this one-eyed god, then the result was the same: the Fell God's power would still exist within the Fire Giants and by extension the Flame of Ruin.

Marika would come to realize this terrible truth, and that her victory would never be complete. We see her reaction to this in the remembrance of Fire Giant:

"The Fire Giant is a survivor of the War against the Giants. Upon realizing the flames of their forge would never die, Queen Marika marked him with a curse. O trifling giant, mayest thou tend thy flame for eternity."

- Remembrance of the Fire Giant

What's interesting to me about this remembrance is the term "upon realizing," which reinforces the idea that Marika and her followers believed that they could put an end to Flame of Ruin by destroying the giants and their god. Yet at the war's close it became clear that the Ruinous Flame would never stop smoldering, and so the new plan to deal with it became one of containment.

The Fire Giant we fight is the sole surviving member of his race, and we can see that he is wounded and battered. We even end up taking advantage of his leg injury in his battle with us.

We just looked at the Remembrance of the Fire Giant, and if we re-read it we can see that, upon realizing the flame would never die, the giant would be spared. Marika would mark him with a curse – this curse being that the giant would be forced to tend and watch over the flame forever. Part of it is spite: Marika refers to the Giant as "trifling." This language implies that she believes the giant is now beneath her and so, as a cruel and ironic punishment, she ensures that he will remain here serving his precious flame alone among his kind and without the ability to utilize its power.

However, this is not a curse that Marika would even need to inflict upon the giants. They were already cursed to do this, as we learn from the Burn, O Flame! incantation. The cruelty of Marika's actions is simply that she has left the giant to suffer his eternal fate, while his brethren have been freed through death.

I would also hazard that Marika has simply left the giant here to guard the flame, meaning that anyone who would wish to use the Flame of Ruin against the Erdtree must first contend with the Fire Giant. With the Fire Giants obliterated to the point where the Flame of Ruin is just smoldering ashes, it makes sense to leave the last giant alive.



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Marika's foresight in sparing this giant does seem to have been wise, for here we find the giant dutifully tending to the smoldering flame and he attacks as soon as we attempt to approach. In the midst of the battle we also get to witness the power of the Fell God. As the Fire Giant offers his sundered leg as a sacrifice, the Fell God awakens and unleashes the full awesome power of the flame. This is a beautiful and tragic last gasp of the Fell God's greatest servant; this battered and worn Fire Giant is no match for the Tarnished, and he falls to our blade – finally freeing him from his curse of servitude.

Yet the legacy of the Fell God does not end here, as the Fire Giant would not be the only measure that Marika left in place to secure her interests. Now would come the order of the Fire Monks, an order that both guards and worships the the Flame of Ruin.

THE ORDER OF FLAME

With the conclusion of the war, Marika and her people would leave the slopes and start on the foundations of their new era, building Leyndell around their new idol. Yet as we know, the Flame

of Ruin would still be a danger, and so these lands were declared forbidden. This is why Malekith commands his followers, the Vulgar Militia and the Black Blade Kindred, to guard the route.

On the mountain itself an entire religious order would be established, dedicated to containing the flame at its source. We learn of this new order from the Surge, O Flame! incantation:

"The Giants' Flame is the flame of ruin, capable of burning the Erdtree. And so, following the War against the Giants, its ruinous blaze was sealed, and guardians were appointed to watch over it."
- Surge, O Flame!

This is an order of monks specifically. Yet these monks are also a militant faction. Each monk is a stoic and powerful warrior, well armed, well trained and well versed in powerful fire incantations. Their reach is very broad for a faction not connected to one of the demigods, and they possess various strongholds, such as the Guardians' Garrison just below the forge itself. Given its position and the fact that the Chief Guardian is located here, we can assume this is their main base. There is also the Giant-Conquering Hero's Grave, which seems to be a fully functioning stronghold for the monks, and finally there is the newly conquered Fort Laiedd in the Altus Plateau.



Grace Given

This is an order dedicated to the containment of the fire, and at the beginning I am sure that this was their sole motivation. At this early stage we can imagine the Fire Monks as adherents of the Erdtree, fearful of the fire's power and dedicated to repelling it. If you have any doubt about the order's commitment and connection to the Erdtree Order, then you need only look at the banners within the Fire Monk stronghold at Giant-Conquering Hero's Grave. These banners quite clearly have the symbol of the Two Fingers upon them.

The training and spiritual fortitude of these monks, as well as the challenges they faced, is well illustrated by the Fire Monk Ashes:

"Spirit of a stout monk who monitored the Giants' Flame. Versed in fire incantations, and himself steeled against fire. Though he was charged with keeping watch over the Flame, after many years of solemn duty, he has succumbed to its allure." - Fire Monk Ashes

Yet we learn that this methodology and belief system would clearly not last. We are told this via the incantation Whirl, O Flame!:

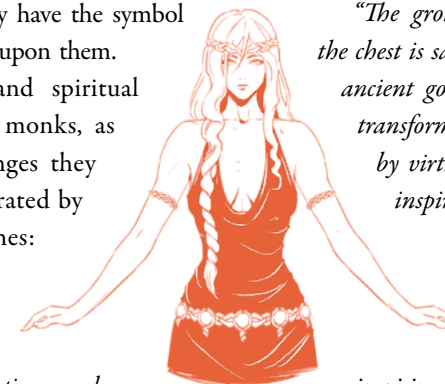
"Fire beguiles those who gaze into it. And so the guardians of the Flame are also its worshippers." - Whirl, O Flame!

The very power within the flame, whilst causing fear, would also come to mesmerize them, and the current state in which we see them is partway between veneration and containment. We can see that this worship of the flame would become so central to the monks' identity that they would even take the visage of the Fell God himself upon their armor. The description of this item details their dual relationship with the flame:

"The grotesque face sculpted on the chest is said to depict the corrupt ancient god of the flame. Taboos transform into lasting obsessions by virtue of the fear that they inspire." - Fire Monk Armor

From a psychological perspective, fear is often one of the greatest tools for inspiring awe, and it is no wonder

that these monks would come to venerate the flame's power and incorporate its strength and symbolism into their structure. We can watch the Monks becoming the people we see today, their robes covered with the Flame of Ruin imagery, their weapons shaped like flames. They have fashioned fearsome flame chariots that take on the visage of the giants. (If you are confused at how we know these chariots are the creations of the Fire





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Monks, then you need only read Note: Flame Chariots, which names them as a Fire Monk invention.)

As this device shows, the monks clearly respected the power of the fallen giants, and no doubt saw themselves as their successors. The Fire Giants once tended to the flame, and is that not a role now undertaken by these monks?

However, it should be made clear that the intent of the Fire Monks is still to contain the flame. The flame is very much something to be feared. I think that this is a point well illustrated by the description of Flame, Cleanse Me:

“One of the incantations of the Fire Monks. Creates a fire within that burns away toxins. Alleviates poison and scarlet rot buildup and cures these ailments. This incantation leaves the caster with subtle burns – a reminder that they must fear the flame.” - Flame, Cleanse Me

This incantation is a manifestation of the monks’ beliefs. If one uses its power, one should not walk away unscathed, lest the monks forget the reason behind their duty. Indeed, it is the duty of the Fire Monks to walk this fine line, to never forget the danger and cost of their charge. And so incantations such as Flame, Grant Me Strength are forbidden by their order:

“Superior incantation of the Fire Monks. Creates an invigorating fire within that

enhances physical and fire-affinity attack power. This incantation does not burn the caster, and so it is considered forbidden by the guardians of the Flame.”

- Flame, Grant Me Strength

We can see here that the incantations ratified by this order are only those which hurt the wielder, for power without consequence is a slippery slope that can lead to the abandonment of duty.

To that end, it is the duty of the upper echelons of the order to safeguard the greater secrets and manifestations of the Fell God, considered too dangerous even for the greater population of the Fire Monk order. These leaders are the Fire Prelates, “prelate” being a word for a bishop or abbot. These are not only incredible warriors but are also the most devoted and stalwart members of the order.

We learn the basics of the Prelates from their armor set description:

“The weighty frames of the Prelates symbolized the onus of their grave vows as guardians of the flame. Etch this sight upon thine breast. Of my thunderous gravity.” - Fire Prelate Armor

This makes it clear that these are the members who serve the order with the most clarity, and in turn those who are less likely to lose themselves within the allure of the flame. A lot of symbolism associated with them involves weight, to



Grace Given

It is the duty of the upper echelons to safeguard the greater secrets and manifestations of the Fell God, considered too dangerous even for the greater population.

symbolize their burden and the importance of their duty. This explains their literal weight and bulky armor, and it’s reinforced by their weighty hammers:

“Colossal hammer with the appearance of roiling flames. Weapon of the Prelates who lead the Fire Monks. Its heft represents the weight of their guardianship.” - Prelate’s Inferno Crozier

They are the most stoic and steady of their Fire Monk brethren. They know the greater secrets of the flame but they do not forget the responsibility they have in containing it. One only needs to look at the story of Birac to see how devoted these members are, and to understand the important role the Prelates play in making sure the order remembers its duty. We learn of this interesting character from the description of the Cranial Vessel Candlestand:

“Candlestand used in worship of Birac, the most hallowed Monk Prelate of the Giants’ Flame. Concerned over the lazy arrogance with which the monks treated the Flame, Birac severed his own head as a lesson to the others, intending it be used as a candlestand. His faith yet smolders from within the cranial vessel.” - Cranial Vessel Candlestand

So this Prelate, Birac, was so concerned with his brethren’s lack of diligence that he beheaded himself. We have touched on this type of arrogance previously: the fine line a monk walks can lead to his becoming too beguiled with the flame and forgetting the danger it poses in the first place.

Birac is also a good illustration of the levels of devotion, knowledge and power that these Prelates hold. Indeed the Candlestand literally houses his head, for if you look closely you can see his red beard sticking out. The Candlestand is another example of the Prelate’s distinctive helmet designs, which seem to replicate the smoldering forge itself.

So let’s look closer at these helmets:

“It is said the cauldron perched atop the head was originally furnished with embers, and would surge into flames when the wearer’s faith reached its zenith. The fire of this cauldron has since died out, however.” - Fire Prelate Helm



The Erdtree Unification Wars

This description explains how the devotion – and, clearly, knowledge – that a Prelate has regarding his guardianship of the flame literally powers the cauldron. When it erupts, we can see it has a very similar effect as the powers of the Fire Giants. The Fire Monks, specifically the knowledgeable and devout Prelates, are able to wield the power of the Fell God in ways we simply never could. Our lack of focus and devotion to the flame is exactly why, if we own the helmet, we cannot reproduce such results.

Yet despite the best intentions of the order, and their stalwart Prelates, the power of the flame is so bewitching that it can easily cause one to become enraptured. To a degree, all monks venerate it, but we get examples of Fire Monks who completely forget their duty and this fear and become singularly obsessed with the power that flame can grant. This concept is explained through the Blackflame Monk Set:

“The Blackflame Monks, enthralled by the god-slaying black flame, became traitors, abandoning their posts as guardians. The seduction of a taboo is never easily spurned.” - Blackflame Monk Armor

This is why we see the rise of the Blackflame Monks, who have traded their duty for power, seeking the strength of what they saw as a mightier flame – the god-slaying Black Flame.

It is this type of fall that the Prelates oversee. Through their stoicism and commitment they seek to keep their brother monks in line. I think this idea of religious shepherding is reinforced by another weapon that some among them wield, the Thorned Whip:

“Hefty whip covered in crimson thorns. Weapon of the Prelates who lead the Fire Monks. A device of fearsome religious encouragement, it is fashioned in the image of the Briars of Sin.” - Thorned Whip

I believe this tool, being an instrument of religious encouragement, is one of dominance and control to make sure that the monks and the Guilty never forget their charge. Having these whips formed in the shape of the Briars of Sin is no mistake, given that it is a tool utilized by the order in the pursuit of guardianship. We will talk more on this in a moment.

It is this vision and clarity of the Prelates that also gives them access to the darker and more dangerous secrets of the Fell God. These are the incantations that draw power directly from the power of the Fire Giants, one such incantation being Flame, Fall Upon Them:

“One of the incantations that draws directly from the power of the Fire Giants... There is no record of this incantation in common prayerbooks. Only a



Grace Given

select few prelates know of its existence.” - Flame, Fall Upon Them

The spells that draw directly from the Fire Giants and that unleash the full unadulterated power of the Fell God are not trusted to the hoi polloi of the order. Only the Prelates are grounded enough to comprehend the knowledge and use it responsibly.

The greatest of these incantations is the Flame of the Fell God, in which is thought to reside the Fell God himself. This spell is so dangerous that it is personally guarded by the leader of the Fire Monks, Chief Guardian Arghanthy, and this is something we learn from the item description of the incantation itself.

We also learn that, in a dramatic turn of events, the spell was stolen by Adan. Adan is known as the Thief of Fire. He’s aptly named, given he has taken the Flame of the Fell God right from under the Chief Guardian’s nose. Interestingly, he seems to be partially wearing Prelate armor, suggesting he was either a Prelate himself or disguised as one.

I would go with the latter option, mainly because the armor looks ill-fitting on him, almost to a comical degree. I like the idea of him creeping about the Fire Monk base looking for this spell. Regardless, after his theft, he fled to the lands of Liurnia before being imprisoned

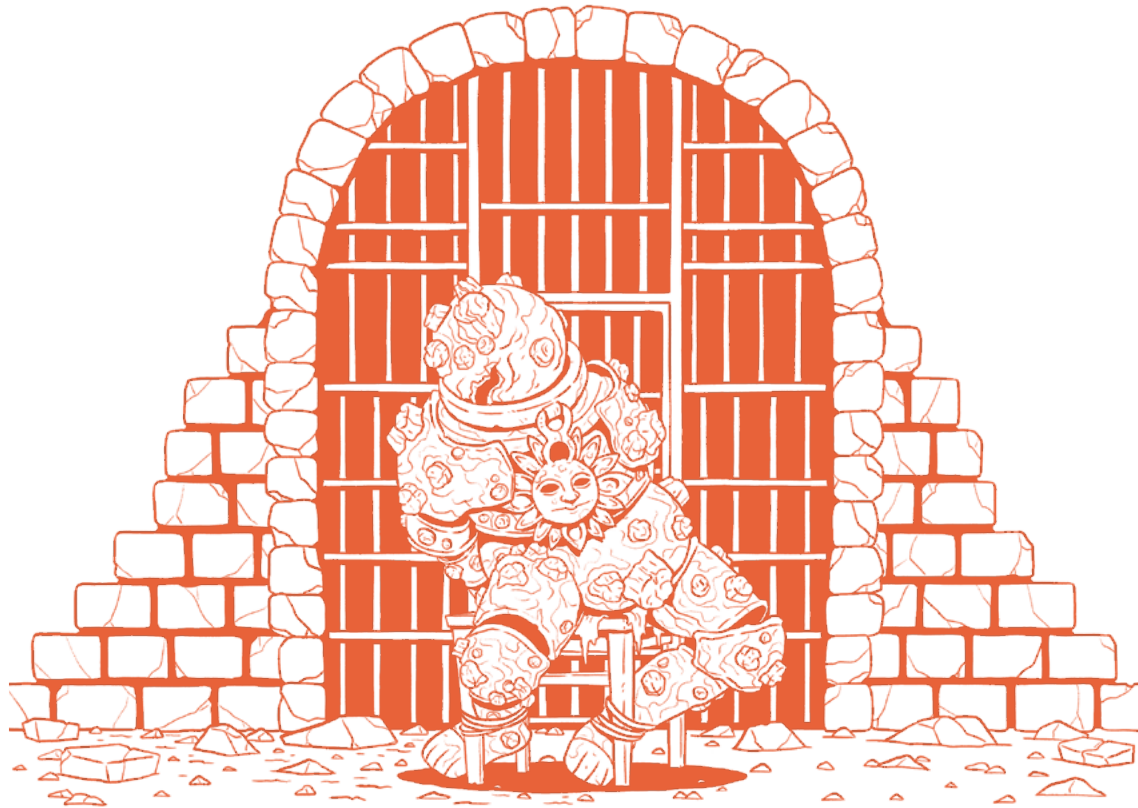
in an evergaol. Yet the Fire Monks do not know his location or fate, and he is the reason a large contingent has invaded Liurnia. We learn this from the Monk’s Flameblade:

“The monks came to the land of Liurnia in pursuit of a fugitive who stole their fire.” - Monk’s Flameblade

For any readers left in doubt about how seriously the monks take their duty, you should take note of the resources that they commit to recovering this lost relic. They have even attacked a capital fort, Fort Laiedd, slaughtering all of the soldiers and taking it as a base of operation. I take this to be the story here, at least, as the only Prelate we see outside of the Mountaintops of the Giants is at Fort Laiedd.

So the monks are a fascinating bunch, a religious order that venerates the flame but also acts as its protector, guarding its power and secrets from those who could irresponsibly use its power. And yet the monks do not work alone, for besides them, there are the Thorn Sorcerers, the Guilty who have been confined here, in exile, to assist the monks.

It’s a clever political move by the Golden Order, to repurpose dangerous and dissident members of society into a useful tool, whilst also removing them far from Leyndell.



Chapter 10: The Omen Curse

An omen can be a portent of good or evil. Translator Lokey states that the Kanji used for “omen” in *Elden Ring* could be translated as “abhorred” or “taboo” and I quote Lokey now:

“Most ‘omen’ are an ‘omen child’ (忌み子) which would typically refer to an unwanted kid, [the] adjective meaning to be unlucky, abhorred, taboo, etc.”

- Lokey, author of Abyssal Archive

These are unwanted children: children of both the regular human variety and those who belong to the royal family.

They are humans touched by the Omen condition, which sets them apart from their regular human kin. In the time of grace, this is not a good thing.

To those of the Golden Order, the Omen are a stain on the world of grace, their accursed blood polluting the Erdtree’s purity.

Part of this hatred toward them comes from the fact the Omen are relics of an earlier era, an uncomfortable and inconvenient reminder of a more primitive period of worship. With their gnarled horns, brutish forms and



accursed blood, it may be easy to see why such beings are treated with disdain. Yet the truth is far more complex than that. The Omen are not simply brutish monsters needing to be culled. There is a complexity to their condition.

There is a humanity to them. Indeed, one of the most intelligent and arguably admirable characters we meet in *Elden Ring* is an Omen, albeit an Omen who has not allowed the curse to define or control him. Conversely, there are those who wallow in the darker aspects of the Omen curse. Those like Mohg, Lord of Blood, who delights in his corruption, and Dung Eater who, despite being human, emulates the Omen form. These are twins who perfectly encapsulate the duality of the Omen condition.

The Omen subject is a challenging one to dissect, because the truth of their blood and their curse is warped by prejudice and eroded by time. So now let’s examine the Omen, the Crucible to which they owe their heritage, the Dung Eater, and whether there is some reality to the fear that they inspire in others.

The first thing of note is that the Omen aren’t their own species; rather, they do seem to be humans who have been afflicted by the Omen condition. We get hints of this firstly from the Crucible Scale, Crucible Feather and

Crucible Knot Talismans, and given the features of each we can almost certainly assign the Knot Talisman to the Omen. Now again let us read the item description:

“A talisman fashioned from a bony knot that embodies the aspects of various creatures. Said to have grown on the human body long ago.” - Crucible Knot Talisman

“Grown on the human body long ago.” Again, these knots are reminiscent of the knots from which the Omen’s horns grow and this is dropped by an Omenkiller of all things. We get further proof that Omen are born from normal reproduction through the Omen Bairn items. Firstly the the regular Omen Bairn:

“Doll of a curseborn bairn... Omen babies have all their horns excised, causing most to perish. These fetishes are made to memorialize them. Please, don’t hate me, or curse me. Please.” - Omen Bairn

So these children are referred to as “curseborn bairns” – “bairn” being slang for “child.” These are children born, and then cursed. They are not a distinct species.

These Omen Bairns are based on the real-life Jizo. The Jizo are stone statues that play a role in the practice of *Mizuko kuyō*, or water child memorial service, in which Jizo are carved to memorialize a child who died as a result of a miscarriage or other means.



The Omen Curse

This is reflected in the two most famous Omen in the mythos: Mohg, Lord of Blood, and the grace-given Lord Morgott.

Mohg and Morgott were born of the Golden Lineage, both demigods, and they were still able to be born afflicted with this condition. While it is not stated directly, I believe these two to be born directly from Godfrey and Marika. This is because of the way in which Godfrey interacts with Morgott: He's almost gentle, acting in a manner we do not see elsewhere.

There are plenty of other royal Omen, too. We learn of this via the Regal Omen Bairn:

"Doll of a curseborn bairn from the Erdtree's royal line... Omen babies born of royalty do not have their horns excised, but instead are kept underground, unbeknownst to anyone, imprisoned for eternity. These memorial fetishes are fashioned in secret." - Regal Omen Bairn

We will return to the social ramifications that are highlighted in this when we later examine the persecution faced by the Omen.

When it comes to the unique physical form of the Omen, I think the reason is fairly straightforward. As we know from various sources, the Crucible was a cauldron of life, where all life was blended

together. In essence, I see the Omen as crucibles themselves: humans that have taken on elements of various other species, in a way that makes them look inelegant compared to regular humans.

One of the many interesting points that Hawkshaw makes in their lore video "The Color Theory of Elden Ring" is the relevance of an item description found in version 1.00 of the game, the Turtle Neck Meat¹. In the current version of the game, it has a very uninteresting description, but back in version 1.00 it read:

"Turtle meat is said to boost virility, but none in the Lands Between seem to have much appetite for it these days. In Lands Between, the urge to reproduce has waned long ago."

- Turtle Neck Meat, version 1.00

My surface level takeaway from this is that it may be a combination of the Golden Order's views on refinement, seeing mating as a more bestial activity, and a mirroring of the medieval church's views on sex and conservatism.

However, what if it was, in part, also a practical solution to the Omen problem? For if the Omen can only come about by natural births, then cutting out that process could very easily solve that issue. Indeed, the births of Omen could have served to reinforce the Golden Order's conservative ideas on reproduction,



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The Crucible was a cauldron of life, where all life was blended together. In essence, I see the Omen as crucibles themselves: humans that have taken on elements of various other species.

the Omens themselves proving that reproduction is a backwards practice.

While not all natural-born life is despised, it isn't hard to see that a recycling of life through the Erdtree may feel more "pure" for those of the Golden Order who want to remove themselves from the bestial and less sophisticated practices of the Crucible Era. In the age of Erdtree burial, perhaps life is instead recycled through the Erdtree, absorbed by its roots and then reconstituted.

The puritanical view is that life should be connected through the Erdtree, and of course we see this in the Albinauric Bloodclot:

"Albinaurics are lifeforms made by human hands. Thus, many believe them

to live impure lives, untouched by the Erdtree's grace." - Albinauric Bloodclot

Now, of course, Albinaurics are very different from the Omen. No one is claiming that the Omen are artificial life-forms – far from it. However what this does highlight is a particular type of hatred, a racial prejudice if you will, for beings untouched by the Erdtree's grace, and disconnected from its systems. I believe this is at the very core of the hatred for the Omen.

But what makes them an Omen? I think it is connected to this idea of not being touched by the Erdtree, in fact being disconnected from it. There is something darker to the Omen that we get glimpses of through small pieces of lore, something that explores the ideas of soul and a lack thereof.

The Misbegotten and Crucible Knights also receive less than stellar treatment in the current era. The Crucible Knights, once the foremost champions of grace, are forgotten and reviled and found at the fringes, even alongside Misbegotten in some cases. The Misbegotten are also treated like dirt, a slave class, to the point where Edgar, the castellan of Castle Morne, cannot even fathom why his abused slaves would "want" to rebel, and a noble ghost of this castle is horrified at the prospect of

¹ "The Color Theory of Elden Ring" - Hawkshaw



The Omen Curse

being eaten by a Misbegotten. This is not because of death itself, but because of the ignoble fate of being eaten by such a lesser being.

Yet there is a special fear reserved for the Omen, as suggested by their very name. And so I think Hawkshaw put this across very aptly in their video “Perfumers and Omenkillers Deep Dive”: While we may focus on the brutal and unjust way in which the Omen are treated, we need to ask whether there is any validity to the fear surrounding the Omen.

I think the answer is yes, and this is best explored through a certain despicable character. So let us take a look at the Dung Eater and the Omen Curse.

THE DUNG EATER

The Dung Eater is a curious fellow. I believe he is the best vessel through which we can understand the Omen condition. In basic terms he is one of the Tarnished, like us, and he is listed in the roster of heroes in the introductory slides, alongside Fia, Hoarah Loux and Gideon Ofnir.

What is apparent from these slides is that he is not a very well-liked individual – especially since he is introduced as the “loathsome” Dung Eater. Like some of

the other Tarnished, at one point he had died. But unlike Hoarah Loux, who died in battle, or Gideon, who seems to have been laid to rest, Dung Eater seems to have met his end at the hand of society – hanged for some crime.

Even now the Tarnished’s true form is imprisoned in Leyndell, though we will discuss why the Dung Eater is actually imprisoned here later. Either way, his cellmate Blackguard is absolutely terrified of this man:

“Does all sorts of shit to their corpses, to keep ’em cursed, forever. I ain’t seen nothin’ more disgustin’ in all my years. I ain’t never been more scared, neither. Rooted to the bloody spot... While ’e did all that, to my friend...”

- Blackguard Big Boggart

Why does he do this to people?

His motive can be somewhat distilled from his distinctive armor set, which happens to be one of my favorite in any Souls game. It is fittingly named the Omen Set and it has two key bits of lore, one from the unique chest piece and one from the rest.

Let us look at the description of the helmet first of all, which reads:

“Malformed helm resembling an Omen with its horns cut off. Worn by the Dung Eater, their form is a vision of the landscape of his mind, and of his appearance



Grace Given

as he wished to see it. The heart of an omen without the body to match; could there be any crueller existence? What does it matter, then, if the curse claims at all?”

- Omen Helm

And now let us read the chest piece so we can unpack it all together:

“Worn by the Dung Eater. The heavy, sun-shaped medallion represents both the guidance he once saw, and the ring to which it will one day lead.”

- Omen Armor

In very basic terms it seems as though the Dung Eater is someone who sees himself as an Omen – it is “his appearance as he wished to see it,” to quote the armor. He is an Omen in his heart despite not actually being an Omen, and thus he has fashioned his armor to mimic their form – an Omen with its horns trimmed, to be precise.

This seems to be a singular purpose to the Dung Eater, for when his corporeal form is locked within its jail, he is so frustrated that he repeatedly headbutts the wall, letting us know his desires to curse the living. What is interesting is that there does seem to be some degree of separation between Dung Eater’s

corporeal form and his phantom form. For one thing, the spirit form seems more in control and at peace; indeed it is in his phantom form that he develops his plan to form the Mending Rune. For another, his corporeal form doesn’t even recognize you when you release

him, despite you having already

met his phantom. If I were to speculate on the specifics of what is happening,

I would suggest that he can separate himself into a red phantom, and in this

form he is far

more collected

than his more

singular coun-

terpart. Maybe he

even locks away his

corporeal form while he

thinks and plans.

Dung Eater hates the

living, and loves the Omen Curse;

the helmet is said to reflect the “vision of the landscape of his mind.” This marries well with the lore found in the chest piece which we looked at previously, describing the fact it carries a huge sun medallion.

Now, firstly, Souls fans will recognize that the Sun Medallion is evidently a homage to the first *Dark Souls* game





The Omen Curse

and Solaire, where the exact same sun symbol was used to represent Solaire's search for his very own sun. In a way, the sun symbol on the Dung Eater's armor represents the same thing, except it represents his quest to find a way to curse the world.

Specifically, the sun is said to represent the ring he saw in some vision of guidance. Funnily enough, this isn't the only time this sort of a vision is expressed by a sunlike image. Indeed, someone who has very different aims from the Dung Eater experiences a similar vision.

Goldmask, the enigmatic scholar, also experienced a sunlike vision, and his mask's description reads as follows:

"A mask designed to resemble a blazing golden halo... Its striking design represents both the brilliant inspiration that once shone upon him, and the vision of a ring that he will surely find at the end of his pursuit." - Radiant Gold Mask

These are both individuals that will eventually provide a Mending Rune, and this is no doubt the "ring" that is referred to in both of these item descriptions. The similarities between both the design and the description of their visions are striking. This does of course lead us to ask the question: Why? Why do both of these Tarnished receive a vision of the Mending Rune that their respective paths lead to?

It is heavily implied that they were inspired by an outside force that influenced them and gave them a vision. This does seem likely since both saw a similar things – both of their icons representing a sunlike image that is both the Mending Rune and the source of inspiration.

To me, the most likely candidate for this guidance is the Greater Will. It is clear that the Greater Will cares not which form Order takes, only that the Elden Ring is repaired, and again I would recommend Ratatoskr's video "The Greater Will Doesn't Care About the Golden Order." The Greater Will has many irons in the fire to help repair the world; it put its faith in the demigods, and now the Tarnished of all stripes, including the Dung Eater, have had grace returned to them.

Perhaps in both the Dung Eater's and Goldmask's cases, the Greater Will saw an opportunity for the Elden Ring to be repaired and a new Order to take hold.





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Perhaps in both the Dung Eater's and Goldmask's cases, the Greater Will saw an opportunity for the Elden Ring to be repaired and a new Order to take hold. At the end of the day, the Dung Eater is Tarnished, and has had grace extended to him, resurrecting him from the death by hanging that we see in the opening cinematic. This means that the Greater Will saw some value in the Dung Eater, no matter what we feel about the acts he commits.

Much like Goldmask, the Dung Eater is personally invested in bringing about the future he glimpsed in the vision: A world where the curse spreads to everyone, their children and their children's children.

This brings us back to the question of his method, and why he is so loathed.

When we find the corpses of those defiled by the Dung Eater, we can already tell that it is a fairly gruesome crime. They are usually tied to a chair with blood over them, suggesting torture has been involved. This process is referred to repeatedly as "defilement" by the Dung Eater himself:

"I can kill you and defile your corpse. Then the pox will truly be your own."
- Dung Eater

And the term "defile" is also present in the item description of the Seedbed Curse. "Defile" is a powerful word. We get the impression that what the Dung Eater does to the body is so horrific that even the game won't give us any specifics. The horror in Boggart's testimony that we read previously, really does a fantastic job of hammering home the trauma he has from even witnessing the Dung Eater in action.

While the game refrains from giving us the specifics of what the Dung Eater does, we can get some of the answer by looking at the item his process produces, the Seedbed Curse:

"Curse grown on a corpse killed and defiled by the Dung Eater. A tender pox afflicted with omen horns. The Dung Eater cultivates the seedbed curse on corpses. By doing so he prevents dead souls returning to the Erdtree, leaving them forever cursed. One of the most loathsome things found in the Lands Between."
- Seedbed Curse

This has to be one of the most significant lore items in the game. It links the condition of defilement to the Omen curse, due to the Omen horns that sprout from this seedbed. Aside from that, it tells us something quite dramatic: The process by which the Dung Eater achieves these growths is by preventing souls from



Grace Given

returning to the Erdtree – again invoking the disconnect between the Omen and the Erdtree that I alluded to earlier.

The taking of a victim's soul, combined with his name Dung Eater, has led to some in the community coming up with a fairly satisfying answer as to what his process is.

Unfortunately the original Reddit user responsible for this post has deleted their account, but in an excellent post they tie the Dung Eater's name and modus operandi to Japanese folklore². They explain that there is a concept known as the Shirikodama (尻子玉). This is a hard ball, found within the anus, that contains one's soul. In this same folklore, there is the Kappa, a mythical goblin creature who seeks to steal this ball and thus the person's soul via the behind. To me this is the most satisfying tie in to all we know about the Dung Eater. Dung eater, soul eater.

It would explain his unfortunate title. It would also explain the sheer horror expressed by Boggart. To those skeptical about this connection, I would point out that this is not the first time that FromSoftware has alluded to this concept. Indeed they do so a bit more directly in *Sekiro*. There are a type of spirit enemies known as the Headless, and one of their grab attacks involves

extracting a hardened stone from Sekiro's rear.

So it is as if the Dung Eater is stealing people's souls and consuming them, denying them from returning to the Erdtree. Roderika seems to imply that these souls are still connected to Dung Eater. They are tortured spirits he has devoured that are denied rest:

"He's back. The Dung Eater. Again. I can hear them; the spirits as they howl and lament in fear of the curse. And worse than ever, the reverberation of the twisted malison itself." - Roderika

Perhaps by devouring these cursed souls, he hopes to take on the Omen curse himself.

Either way, this is all very interesting because the concept of a soul isn't mentioned much at all in Elden Ring, and yet it is used repeatedly in the story of the Dung Eater. The removal of a soul from a human in this manner results in these seedbeds, seedbeds that have Omen horns growing from them. So from soulless corpses, Dung Eater literally cultivates a little Omen curse, directly tying the Omen condition to the idea of soullessness.

Yet this is a drop in the ocean. Dung Eater is only one man and his labor would take generations. Eventually he realizes that the guidance he

² Reddit post "The Japanese origins of the Dung Eater": bit.ly/4e3R3zV



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has received is the ultimate answer to his quest:

"Give me your blessing. Defile my flesh with the seedbed curse. Again and again. Until it is done. Until a cursed ring coalesces, that may one day defile the Order itself. Countless, I have killed. And countless, I have defiled. And soon the fruits will be borne. Hundreds will be reborn cursed, and they'll bear thousands of cursed children, who'll bear tens of thousands more. A few of those will be born just like me, and they'll kill, and defile, and bless in my stead! The rotten fools. My fate was the grandest, most brilliant of them all! My corporeal flesh lies in the sewer gaol beneath the Capital." - Dung Eater

He will no longer be an instrument of defilement, rather the vessel for it. A more cosmic and wide reaching curse will be gestated within him.

We will return to the Dung Eater and his Mending Rune later, but for now let us discuss the Omen and the matter of a soul.

There is a power to the Omen. Both Morgott and Mohg have power within their blood. Mohg's power seems to have

been intensified by his contact with the Formless Mother, and Morgott's is unleashed when we push him to the brink in our battle for the Elden Throne.

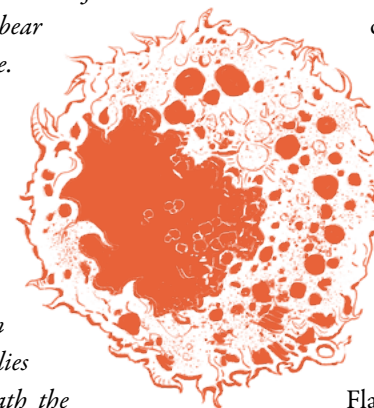
The Omen horns also seem to be tied to their power, to their curse. Specifically, Omen horns grow in the seedbed curse, implying these horns are directly tied to the curse itself. It

is only the horned Omens that can utilize their more advanced powers.

By this I am referring to the regal Omen's ability to breathe cursed fire, release their curse bombardment and wreath their swords in this brown black Omen Flame. This is an ability that is not used by the trimmed Omen.

The color used by these powers is unique and yet shares a similar hue with the death hex magics. This does suggest a connection to the element of death, which makes sense if we consider that the Omen may be soulless.

More interesting, however, is that this color of flame is utilized by another enemy type, the Revenants and Wraith Callers. The Wraith Callers are the hunched-over beings who ring the





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bells that fire cursed projectiles at us. Their bell, the Wraith Calling Bell, has a description that reads:

“Bell used by worshippers of revenants. Ring bell, using FP to summon prowling wraiths... Wraiths are said to be the vengeful spirits of those who died when cursed.” - Wraith Calling Bell

These are the same powers produced by the Omen Bairns as well, which also describe these projectiles as “wraiths.” The Wraith Calling Bell describes these as, “spirits of those who died when cursed,” once again strongly hinting that the curse is tied to soullessness, to being denied a return to the Erdtree. These spirits died when cursed and now they are vengeful and restless.

The Royal Revenants that these Wraith Callers worship are also described as cursed by the associated note, soulless beings that died when born, though we may only speculate on how their grafted form came to be. So I do think it is clear that the Omen and the cursed exist in a state of unrest, souls unreturned to the Erdtree. Perhaps this is how the Omen are able to tap into their powers, like the Wraith Callers. Perhaps they call upon the restless souls that have been touched by their curse and unleash them in an aggressive fashion.

I do think it is clear that the Omen and the cursed exist in a state of unrest, souls unreturned to the Erdtree. Perhaps this is how the Omen are able to tap into their powers.

Roderika senses a maelstrom of restless souls surrounding the Dung Eater; perhaps the Omen too are connected to these spirits. Indeed we do get an inkling that the Omen are in fact haunted by these restless, cursed spirits.

The Omensmirk Mask description reads:

“Bears the smirking face of an elder, twisted in wicked delight. This visage is carved in the image of the evil spirits that haunt the Omen in their nightmares.”

- Omensmirk Mask

I had long pondered what these spirits were. Having now untangled the connection to the spirits of the Wraith Callers, I believe that the spirits that haunt the Omen are the very same as the spirits of those who died when cursed: spirits that can be manipulated as the brown-black



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energy via the Wraith Calling Bells, or innately by the Omen themselves.

I would suggest the Omen are connected to those spirits – they surround them much as the maelstrom of those the Dung Eater has cursed surrounds him, and in their sleep they see these spirits, the angry spirits who haunt them.

I have always found it interesting that when we fight the Omen duo Fell Twins on the outskirts of Leyndell, we are pulled into an abyss-like arena, after reaching the corpse of a Leyndell soldier. Perhaps this is the corpse of a cursed person who died, and is thus a sort of trap that pulls us into this inbetween space where the vengeful spirits reside.

We are of course veering into wild speculation territory, but I think the conclusion is clear. The curse of the Omen is real. It is a state of soullessness, where the spirits of the cursed are denied returning to the Erdtree, and these same spirits follow the Dung Eater and haunt the Omen.

This is pretty terrifying. I had long assumed that the treatment of the Omen was mainly prejudicial, and of course some of it is. But props to Hawkshaw for stimulating the discussion on the Omen and making me reassess their position.

But this still leaves us with questions. What has this got to do with the

Crucible? And where does it fit into this narrative?

I would like to suggest a pretty simple answer. If the Omen are touched by the Crucible and connected to it, then they simply cannot be connected to the Erdtree. And in an era where the Erdtree is the nexus of life and Death, the Omen find themselves outside of this Order and disconnected from its power.

It is a very similar position to Those Who Live in Death, beings who simply are not part of the current Order and similarly cannot find peace in death. They are from the Era of the Crucible where Death was Death, but perhaps in the Era of the Golden Order, a time where Death is confined, the Omen are one of the many who fall between the cracks of its refined logic, unable to die and unable to return to the Erdtree. Cursed.

PERSECUTION & PERFUMERS

My reexamination of the Omen curse was spurred on by Hawkshaw’s excellent video on the Perfumers³, in which they present a fascinating theory regarding the persecution and hunting of the Omen and how it relates to the history and development of the perfumers.

³ “Perfumers and Omenkillers Deep Dive” - Hawkshaw



The Omen Curse

This theory is generally anchored by two key items, Perfumer Tricia's ashes and the Omensmirk Mask.

From the Perfumer Tricia's ashes, we learn of at least one perfumer who was trying to help the Omen. Hawkshaw suggests that this should not be seen as an isolated case, and that it instead illustrates what may have been the initial response by the apothecaries of the capital. They viewed it as a sickness to be cured, and the Omen as their patients.

Hawkshaw presents the possibility that the perfumers have knowledge about the spirits that haunt the Omen. As part of an ongoing treatment, the Omen may have conveyed this as a symptom to the perfumers, their doctors. After all, the first of the Omenkillers was a perfumer, Rollo. How else would he have the knowledge to craft the Omensmirk Mask?

While we may initially view the Omenkillers as psychotic fiends, the details of Rollo paint a rather different picture. Rollo's ashes description reads:

"Spirit of Rollo, known as the first Omenkiller. Once a famous perfumer,

Rollo imbibed a physick to rid himself of emotion, thus enabling him to enact his nightmarish labor, hunting the Omen."

- Omenkiller Rollo

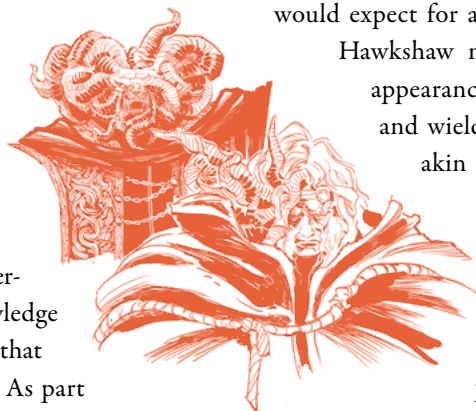
This is actually quite far removed from a cold-blooded killer. Rollo needed to take an emotion-removing potion so he could do what needed to be done. The description even refers to this as "a nightmarish labor," far from what we would expect for a merciless monster.

Hawkshaw makes note of their appearance, wearing an apron and wielding massive cleavers akin to that of a butcher.

The killing of these Omen is not a pleasure but rather a labor undertaken by a professional – indeed the word "butcher" is used in the description of the Omenkiller Robe. This seems to be accurate, as Lokey translates the Kanji for "killer" in "Omenkiller" as "butcher" or "slaughterer."

The impression that all this gives to me is one of a doctor, seeing a disease that cannot be cured and must be excised, doing what needs to be done, despite how horrific a task it may be.

I think that the suggestion of a doctor-patient relationship between the



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perfumers and the Omen is a pretty solid one, as it would explain a few other things. Take the cutting of Omen horns. Perhaps this is a surgical procedure. As we have already discussed, this may actually have a practical effect: the curtailing of their powers. It may have been discovered during the course of treatment.

However, as Tricia's ashes suggest, there is no cure, and the best she can do is help the Omen to pass peacefully. But those who had the stomach for it followed in Rollo's footsteps: enacting a great slaughter – seeing it as the only permanent and true solution.

Then it seems the establishment took a less direct but no less cruel route. Those who were born Omen of common blood would have their horns excised in brutal surgery to curb their powers and unseemly appearance. Those "lucky" enough to survive would be indentured and collared as shock troops, with their swords being charmed to disintegrate. They were not even trusted to surrender their arms when the fighting was done.

Yet this presented a dilemma for the royal house, as they had skin in this game. Two of the Golden Lineage itself were struck by the curse: Morgott and Mohg. It was clear that these barbaric rules should not apply equally, and so it was decreed that any Omen of royal

birth would be permitted to live in the sewers of Leyndell – henceforth known as the Shunning-Grounds.

Morgott and Mohg were given shackles, as if extra care was made that these two would not escape. We can either see this as something that was done for all the royal Omen, or for these two in particular because of their power and the potential embarrassment they could cause to the Golden Lineage.

I think it's fairly clear that this hatred for the Omen certainly will have happened in the Age of the Erdtree – the Crucible Scale, Crucible Knot and Crucible Feather Talisman make it clear that the Omen were in fact seen as divine back in the time of the Crucible. And if my theory about their condition is correct, I believe their curse, a curse which prevents true soul death, would not have been possible back in the Crucible Era, an era in which people could actually die.

Indeed Godfrey's reverential treatment of Morgott stands out. Nowhere else aside from perhaps with Tricia do we see such compassion in regards to the Omen. This again fits with everything we have said, because Godfrey is a man of the Crucible, and thus wouldn't have seen them as a threat or impure – but in fact probably saw them as divine.



AGE OF DESPAIR

This brings us back to the fate of the Omen, the Mending Rune and the Dung Eater. While different in presentation, I see the Dung Eater's quest as analogous to Fia's in what is actually achieved with the Mending Rune. Both represent groups that fall outside the current Order, both are groups of spirits disconnected from the Erdtree and denied proper rest. Both of these groups are unrepresented by the current makeup of the Elden Ring – and thus both Mending Runes seem to want to incorporate these lost souls into a new Order, a new Elden Ring.

However, in both cases I do not believe this will cure their condition. Rather, I believe it will incorporate them as is, merely giving their people strength and legitimacy in the era to come. For example, in the case of the Mending Rune of the Death-Prince, we read:

“Formed of the two hallowbrand half-wheels combined, it will embed the principle of life within Death into Order.”
- Mending Rune of the Death-Prince

“It will embed the principle of life within Death” – it will not restore mortality as it was before. Rather, this Age of the Duskborn is the age of life within Death and the Prince of Death.

With that said, let us now look at the Mending Rune of the Death-Prince, and how it is gestated in the first place. We had previously discussed the fact that the Dung Eater realized that he was to be the vessel for a new Blessing of Despair, and so he urges the player to feed him the Seedbed Curses that have grown upon his victims.

What's interesting is that when the Dung Eater decides upon this path and begins to formulate the birth of his Mending Rune, the spirits around him seem to conform to this new Order, as Roderika says the following:

“But after all this time, I've started to grasp it now. I can hear, in the malison, another fearsome Order.” - Roderika

It is almost as if the cursed spirits that surround the Dung Eater are

The Dung Eater realized that he was to be the vessel for a new Blessing of Despair, and so he urges the player to feed him the Seedbed Curses that have grown upon his victims.



connected to the changes within him. As he begins to form the Mending Rune of the Fell Curse, perhaps even these cursed spirits form part of the rune itself upon completion, for when the deed is done Roderika says:

“But it isn't like last time. I'm almost certain... the spirits have escaped their confinement. Did you... have anything to do with it, I wonder?”

- Roderika

The Dung Eater then seems to reach a critical point where the curse gets so saturated in his insides that the rune is formed

from his body, killing him in the process. This is a rune literally made of the curse, a rune saturated in it. Even this eldritch object has horns protruding from it.

The item description itself reads:

“The reviled curse will last eternally, and the world's children, grandchildren, and every generation hence, will be its pustules. If Order is defiled entirely, defilement is defilement no more, and for every curse, a cursed blessing.”

- Mending Rune of the Fell Curse

So I think the effect is quite clear. Order itself will become cursed and spread out into the world. The Elden Ring governs the rules and laws of this universe, and so if it itself is defiled by the curse, it makes a sort of sense that the curse will permeate all life.

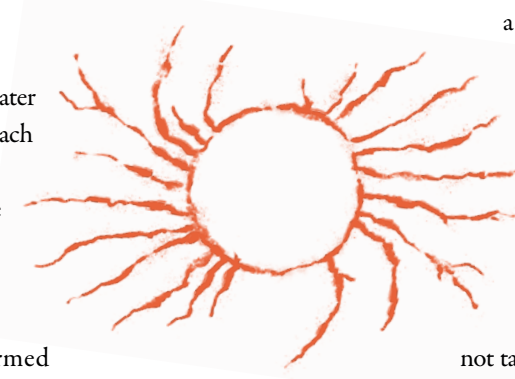
Up until this point the Dung Eater had been spreading the curse the good old-fashioned way, one murder at

a time, hoping he could spread it far enough that more and more children would be born cursed.

However the realization he came to was: why

not tackle the issue at the source? If Order itself is defiled then defilement will become Order, spreading to every life form, uniformly. As the rune aptly says, at this stage, when everyone is defiled, defilement is defilement no more; its existence is normality.

And while this is a fairly horrific concept, given what we have seen of the curse itself, I guess the one benefit would be that the Omen would be Omen no more. They would be simply men, men of a new age, the age of the blessed curse.





Chapter 11: Cults and Tribes



While the dragons were defeated, they were not dishonored by their foes – quite the contrary. One of the mightiest heroes on the side of the Erdtree was Godwyn the Golden, whose exploits we hear of via Sword Monuments, but most importantly via the Lightning Spear incantation:

“Long ago, Godwyn the Golden defeated the ancient dragon Fortissax, and befriended his fallen foe – an event that gave rise to the ancient dragon cult in the capital.” - Lightning Spear

Godwyn’s defeat of Fortissax is no mean feat, for as we learn from Fortissax’s Lightning Spear, he was one of the most powerful and renowned among his brethren. Yet he was treated with respect in defeat and, as a result, one of the most legendary friendships in history was established. The alliance of Fortissax and Godwyn would inspire the people of the capital to also respect their defeated foes.

This is the greatest legacy of dragon-kind. It was the adoption of their ways and powers, wielded by the knights of the new



Grace Given

Order who passed their teachings to their inheritors with some legendary heroes like Vyke and Kristoff arising from the cult – the latter being powerful enough to defeat and bind the demigod Godefroy.

The easy integration of dragon worship into worship of the Erdtree may seem surprising for an Order that would eventually become known for its intolerance. However, it is easily explained by the Gravel Stone Seal, which reads as follows:

“The worship of the ancient dragons does not conflict with belief in the Erdtree. After all, this seal, and lightning itself, are both imbued with gold.” - Gravel Stone Seal

These beliefs do not conflict because they are both tied by gold. They are both servants of the Greater Will.

It wasn’t just Fortissax that helped in inspiring this new Order. His sister Lansseax took on a human form and communed with Dragon Knights in person, as we learn via Lansseax’s Glaive:

“Lansseax was the sister of Fortissax. It is said that she took the form of a human to commune with the knights as a priestess of the ancient dragon cult.” - Lansseax’s Glaive

To this day Lansseax still guards the Erdtree capital, showing how close her bond is with her one-time enemies.

One of her greatest adherents was the Roundtable Knight Vyke, something we learn via Vyke’s Dragonbolt:

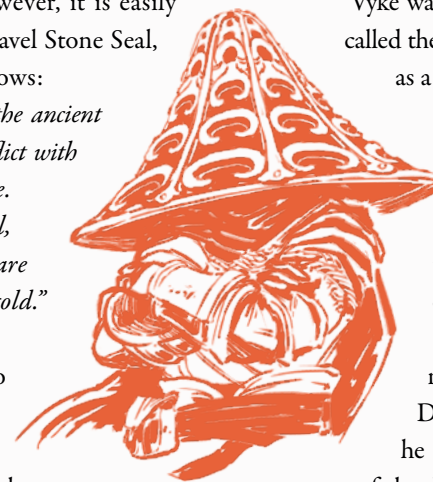
“Of all the knights, Vyke the Dragonspear was the one Lansseax loved the most.” - Vyke’s Dragonbolt

Vyke was loved by Lansseax and called the Dragonspear, no doubt as a result of his iconic spear and his mastery over Dragon Incantations.

We learn from Vyke’s armor set that he was the Tarnished who came closest to achieving lordship, undoubtedly as a result of those powerful Dragon Incantations. Had he become lord, the legacy

of the dragons could have gone even further. This makes me wish that we could have allied with Lansseax to become a Dragon Cult Elden Lord.

Even the sentinels of the Erdtree, guardians of its rule, were inspired by the might of Gransax and his fellows. So much so that they too incorporated their power into their get-up, as we can see from the Draconic Tree Sentinels, who are in essence modified versions of the regular





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Tree Sentinels. They believed that only by imitating Gransax's power could they be strong enough to protect the Erdtree.

Then of course there are the ancient dragons' distant kin, the modern dragons. These take on a far more bestial and traditional "draconic" form, having long lost their immortality and stone scales. They are so far removed from their regal ancestors that the Gravel Stone is anathema to their existence, as we learn from the Dragonwound Grease. I won't be covering the modern dragons here; however, I would highly recommend Ashen Hollow's video "Every Dragon Explained," as he covers each dragon in great detail.

Yet the legacy of the ancient dragons does live on in these beasts, for their hearts still bear the Gravel Stone scales. These hearts are a prize for some, for there is a more sinister group that covets the powers of the dragons: the Dragon Hunters who seek communion.

Where the dragon cultists of Leyndell are more aligned with the learning and study of the ways of the ancient dragons, the Dragon Hunters are more concerned with stealing the raw power of the modern dragons.

We can learn of these practices via Yura, who says the following:

"That heart you brought back, it's used in Dragon Communion. If you

should find yourself overcome by hunger for the heart, yearning for its strength, then seek the decrepit church, on the little island off the western coast. You must not forget though. Those who partake in Dragon Communion will one day shed their humanity. Their hunger for dragon, their yearning, only worsens. Until the floodgates burst, unleashing eternal torment. The strength of a mighty dragon. Magnificent, but deadly. It's no surprise that Dragon Communion is ruinous."

- Bloody Finger Hunter Yura

Indeed, the Dragon Hunters slay modern dragons, and take their hearts before consuming them in rituals at the sites of Dragon Communion. In doing so, they take the powers of the slain for

The dragon cultists of Leyndell are aligned with the learning and study of the ways of the ancient dragons; the Dragon Hunters are more concerned with stealing the raw power of the modern dragons.



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themselves; the powers they gain are basically a manifestation of the specific dragon whose heart they have consumed. It is as if the dragons themselves live on in the hearts that are consumed. Given the heart's item description says that they are covered in the Gravel Stone scales of immortality, this could well be true.

The sites of Dragon Communion are clearly religious sites, both of which have the corpse of an ancient dragon. Is it possible that these were once sites of the Dragon Cult and that the Dragon Communion was born out of the cult? Was this a perversion of its teachings, led by those greedy and too impatient for the powers of the dragon?

That is certainly my speculation, given the presence of the ancient dragons at these sites and the weathered dragon statues. These suggest this was once the site of a more respectful cult, and the mistreated and unkempt nature of these statues speak volumes.

While Dragon Communion works by almost instantly transferring the power of the dragons to the consumer, there is a price, as warned by Yura. It begins subtly at first: an unquenchable thirst that leads the afflicted to consume more and more of the hearts. It transforms from a want of the dragon's power to a desire to become a dragon themselves.

In time, the effects begin to show, first with dragon eyes, before finally the hunter will become an abomination, a pitiful mockery of the dragon form: a Magma Wyrn.

We learn of this ultimate fate via the Magma Wyrn's Scalesword:

"It's said these land-bound dragons were once humans, heroes who partook in dragon communion, a grave transgression for which they were cursed to crawl the earth upon their bellies, shadows of their former selves." - Magma Wyrn's Scalesword

The idea of being cursed to crawl on the earth is a biblical one. In Genesis 3:14 God curses the serpent and his kind for his role in misleading Adam and Eve:

"So the LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.'"

- Genesis 3:14, New International Version

The Magma Wyrms are in the same boat; they have transgressed the natural law of the world. Men aren't meant to be dragons. The Dragon Cult respectfully learns the skills and incantations of the dragons, but they do not take their power.

While the dragons are majestic beings of power and grace who can soar through the skies, the Magma Wyrms are dreadful serpentine shadows, with mocking wings that have no hope of lifting their



ungraceful bodies into the skies. However, they are still dragons, because when we kill them we do receive a dragon heart; it's just that they are a degenerate form of dragon, due to the unnatural way they are born.

It is a lesson that has been taught to us through all myth and religion since time immemorial. Greed is a transgression, and while you may get what you want, it may not be what you expect.

The time of the dragons is over, and the world is much bereft of their regality and power. There are those who respect it, those who worship it and those who covet it. In all cases the dragons will forever be a symbol of power and majesty, the first chosen of the Greater Will. One can't help but wonder: perhaps they were the most fit to rule, and the world has just been on a downward spiral since their collapse.

Yet they still have a role to play in the great conclusion of our story. For within Roundtable Hold exists a blacksmith, working tirelessly towards a singular goal: to craft a weapon capable of slaying a god. It's an impossible task, if one is to believe Gideon Ofnir, for man cannot kill a god.

But perhaps a god can be affected by time? Perhaps they can be moved right to the end of their life in an instant, having been struck by a weapon that slightly twists time – a weapon bolstered by the scale of the Ancient Dragonlord.

SHABRIRI AND THE NOMADIC TRIBES

One of the most interesting stories in *Elden Ring* is found below the Shunning-Grounds of Leyndell, in the Frenzied Flame Proscription. In this dark tomb we see evidence of a horrifying crime. The corpses of an entire people litter its halls.

Let us assess the tomb itself. Evidently we must assume that it is very old, given that the god buried here is referred to as "ancient." But is it older than Leyndell or was it built alongside it?

The answer is impossible to know for sure, but I believe it is pretty clear that some of the architecture surrounding the Frenzied Flame Proscription must have been built around the time of Leyndell. The Shunning-Grounds, for example, appear to be a sewer system clearly built for the massive city above.

I would also argue that the church that actually acts as a seal to the entrance to the Frenzied Flame Proscription, the arena in which we fight fake Mohg, is at most from the early Erdtree Era because it has the same architecture as other catacombs we find around the world. I am referring to the skeleton statues and the stairway down to the church floor, elements which are reflected in many catacomb designs.



The reason these must be at least from the Erdtree Era is that the purpose of these catacombs is to facilitate Erdtree burial, something we learn via Root Resin:

"The roots of the Greattree were once linked to those of the Erdtree, or so they say, and it is for this reason catacombs are built around Greattree roots." - Root Resin

It tracks that these catacombs are an Erdtree Era construction, meaning that the underground church must also be. This does make sense, as it is directly connected and built into the wall of the giant cistern that makes up the central hub of the sewer network.

However, behind the moveable altar lies the Frenzied Flame Proscription, the tomb of the Three Fingers. This could be older than Leyndell, and I would suggest that it at least existed before the church. Firstly the architecture is different from that of the regular catacombs, or at least it doesn't have the same furnishings that would align it with them. And given this church seems to have been built with the express purpose of sealing and hiding the tomb, it must have come afterwards.

The timeline in *Elden Ring* isn't clear, and so while this tomb houses an *ancient* god, the founding of Leyndell

itself could also be considered ancient. We can't really use that terminology to determine when this tomb was built.

I would guess that this tomb was built independently of Leyndell, and was later sealed by those of the Erdtree behind the false altar that we find in Shunning-Grounds. We know that the royal family must have been responsible for its sealing because of Morgott's seal, showing that

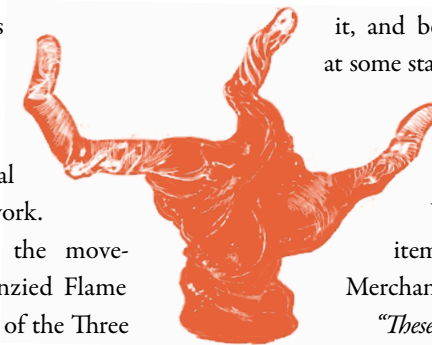
he at least was familiar with it, and because we learn that at some stage the Great Caravan of the Nomadic Merchants was sealed in the tomb.

We learn this from items like the Nomadic Merchant's Chapeau:

"These merchants once thrived as the Great Caravan, but after being accused of heretical beliefs, their entire clan was rounded up and buried alive far underground."

- Nomadic Merchant's Chapeau

This also suggests that perhaps it was at the time of the Great Caravan being buried that the tomb was actually sealed the way we find it. There are no definitive answers, but personally I believe that the tomb was a separate construction most likely built before Leyndell, first as a tomb and then later as a sealed dungeon for the Frenzied Flame.





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This makes sense to me given it was once the “tomb of an ancient god” but later would become known as the Frenzied Flame Proscription. This suggests two stages in its existence: first as a tomb for a god and then later the location of something dangerous, a sealed dungeon to keep the forbidden Frenzied Flame safe and hidden. I admit its location beneath Leyndell itself could very well be used as a counter that the tomb was built before Leyndell. Indeed it could be that it is below Leyndell because it was specifically built by the people of that city, to bury and seal this dangerous force.

Whatever the order in which things were built, the location of the tomb is significant. Indeed, in a cut content line from one of Kalé’s brothers, NPC 802 mentions the tomb “below those Omen even.” We are able to access these lost dialogues thanks to the fantastic work of Sekiro Dubi who has recreated the Nomadic Merchant quests in two excellent videos.

I find the emphasis on the Frenzied Flame existing even below the Omen to be a pretty symbolic choice. On the surface we have Leyndell, the pinnacle of what was considered to be holy and right. Then below that we have the Omen, beings considered external to the refined sophisticated ideals of the Golden Order.

Then, even further below that, we have the Three Fingers, the complete antithesis to Leyndell. The developers specifically chose to have the Three Fingers beneath Leyndell rather than in a random tomb elsewhere.

This seems more certain given that this tomb is repeatedly referred to as being deep underground, such as via Note: The Lord of Frenzied Flame, the Nomadic Merchant’s Chapeau and the cut dialogue we have analyzed. Those who are proponents of the Golden Order or the Erdtree, like Morgott, would certainly view the Frenzied Flame as the devil, as heresy.

And speaking of heresy, it is now time for us to look at the propagation of the Frenzied Flame itself, how it first spread from the Three Fingers and took root amongst humanity.

WHAT IS THE FRENZIED FLAME?

I think a good place to start when examining the Frenzied Flame is the Fingerprint Stone Shield:

“A great stone shield with an intricately carved fingerprint design... Part of the tomb of an ancient god, the Readerless Fingers relayed their message through these imprints, said to be the very seeds from which frenzy first sprouted.” - Fingerprint Stone Shield



Grace Given

So these imprints, the fingerprint messages of the Three Fingers on stone slabs, are the “very seeds” from which frenzy sprouted. This suggests that the idea, message and philosophy behind the Frenzied Flame all came from these tablets. And as we will see soon, it appears as though the Frenzied Flame is manifested by certain beliefs and emotions.

The yellow coloring of the flame is not an idle choice by FromSoftware, especially given it is directly referred to as the “yellow” flame by Hyetta, and indirectly through the Eye of Yelough plant. This is most likely a reference to the motif of the King in Yellow, a fictional forbidden play which causes despair and madness in those who read it. Likewise we could see the words of the Three Fingers and

associated ideas in the same way. The spreading of these words, no doubt, is what led to the Frenzied Flame’s power taking root in the lands in the first place.

We also get another clue as to the spread of the Frenzied Flame from the Howl of Shabriri incantation:

“Releases a maddening shriek that causes madness buildup in foes nearby... It is said that the sickness of the flame of frenzy began with Shabriri, the most reviled man in all history.” - Howl of Shabriri

Shabriri is a central figure in understanding how the Frenzied Flame has managed to find purchase among the denizens of the Lands Between. We can learn more about this enigmatic character via Shabriri’s Woe:





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“Disturbing likeness of a man whose eyes have been gouged out. The corners of his mouth are upturned in an almost flirtatious manner... It is said that the man, named Shabriri, had his eyes gouged out as punishment for the crime of slander, and, with time, the blight of the flame of frenzy came to dwell in the empty sockets.”
- *Shabriri’s Woe*

Shabriri appears to have been a man at some stage, though it does seem that he is far more than that now. This man became reviled after he committed the “crime” of slander, for which he was punished, but the Frenzied Flame would come to inhabit his form.

Now given that “the sickness of the flame of frenzy” began with Shabriri, it presupposes that he was the first ever to suffer from frenzy, the first to have frenzy burn in his eyes.

In his lore video on Shabriri, Lore Hunter connects the description of the Fingerprint Stone Shield and Shabriri’s Howl and creates a compelling narrative¹. They posit that it was Shabriri who was one of the first to receive the message of the Three Fingers through these stone tablets, and thus became their first servant.

Lore Hunter goes further to link the slander mentioned in Shabriri’s Woe to the Great Caravan’s ultimate fate. This is due to some cut dialogue and quest lines that

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can be found in the text files, and again this is something that has been recreated in its entirety by Sekiro Dubi; I highly recommend you check that video out. In a nutshell, Kalé would try to locate the Great Caravan of his people, before finding the shocking truth deep below the capital. At this stage Kalé would say the following:

“Did you see? What they did to my ancestors? The whole clan, buried alive. Sick. Maddened. Husks of themselves. Have you heard their moans? They’re hardly human anymore. They think we worship the Three Fingers? That we called the maddening sickness down upon them? Well. If that’s what they expect from us, then that’s what they shall get from us! The world of grace and its people should have been content to see us sink between the cracks.” - *Merchant Kalé (cut dialogue)*



Grace Given

This dialogue is cut content so I would take it with a pinch of salt; however as Lore Hunter correctly states, this doesn’t contradict anything in the existing lore. The dialogue indicates that the nomadic caravan was imprisoned because of their perceived affinity with frenzy and their worship of the Three Fingers. However Kalé’s dialogue seems to indicate that this was not the case and that they were falsely accused, but have only turned to it now in despair and to spite those who would oppress them.

This is possibly backed up by the description of the Nomadic Merchant’s Chapeau, which implies they first came into contact with the Frenzied Flame because of their imprisonment.

Importantly, the Chapeau states that the reason they were imprisoned in the first place was because of “heretical beliefs.” This leads us to conclude that what Kalé says in the cut content is still very much the case.

Lore Hunter suggests that the slander Shabriri committed was this false accusation against the Great Caravan and his people. One can’t help but consider the smile in the Shabriri’s Woe talisman, described as almost flirtatious, despite his gouged-out eyes. It’s almost as if he knew exactly what he was doing and that it would lead to the further spread of the Frenzied Flame.

This is still just speculation. All we actually know is that Shabriri had his eyes gouged out, the flame of frenzy then came to nestle within his eyes and he would become patient zero for this new affliction.

Shabriri himself is an interesting case. Again, it is clear that he is now more than a man. He is able to possess Yura’s body. As we will discuss later on, the Frenzied Flame is able to take root in despair. We witness Yura’s despair at the end of his quest:

“Eleonora, it seems I am no match for you. But I’ve learned a thing or two myself, you see. I’ve sliced the finger off. Please, please, Eleonora, yield to the cessblood no longer. Do not stain the immaculacy of your sword, your flesh, your fire...”
- *Bloody Finger Hunter Yura*

And thus it is likely this moment of despair that allows Shabriri to enter Yura’s body, acting as an envoy for the Frenzied Flame to try and convince the Tarnished to take up the mantle of the Lord of Chaos. Shabriri is a vessel for chaos, a manifestation of it, which explains his ability to possess people. In his own words:

“Shabriri is chaos incarnate. I cannot die. Ahh, may chaos take the world!”
- *Shabriri*

The choice of his name may also hint as to what Shabriri is. A Shabriri is a demon in Jewish mythology – the

¹ “Don’t Fall for the Lie in ELDEN RING That Brought Chaos to the Lands Between” - The Lore Hunter



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demon of blindness who spreads blindness to the unsuspecting who drink of the water he inhabits.

So to me Shabriri is a demon of chaos, chaos incarnate and a manifestation of its will and a tool used to spread its influence. I would posit that perhaps Shabriri was never actually a man, and that even when he was the most reviled man in history, he was always just a demon in the guise of a man.

When the Frenzied Flame first took root within Shabriri, it settled in his eyes, and thus it makes sense that, when this “sickness” would spread, it would spread in the same way and manifest in the eyes of those who host it. It seems as though the flames, in time, melt the eyes as if to make the bearer closer to Shabriri, the first vessel.

“Oh, it burns... My eyes, my eyes, they're melting... Aaargh!” - Lightseeker Hyetta

Indeed the Shabriri Grapes themselves are eyes afflicted and melted by the Frenzied Flame, and should we choose to inherit the Frenzied Flames, our eyes take on a similar appearance.

So why did the flame settle in Shabriri's eye sockets in the first place?

Early in *Elden Ring's* release history, a really powerful piece of art circulated on X. It was the painting *Agony*, by the artist Miles Johnston, and while many believed this was a piece inspired by *Elden Ring*, it actually predates it by a number of years. *Agony* was displayed on Johnston's Instagram as far back as 2018. This does lead me to wonder if this piece of art helped inspire the symptoms of the Frenzied Flame. Even

if it didn't, the reasoning and themes that inspired it help us understand the nature of the Frenzied Flame, because they are both trying to convey the same thing: pain and despair.

In an Instagram post, Johnston describes the inspiration for this piece:

“I had just been looking at a Bouguereau painting, ‘The first Mourning’, and something about Eve with two hands pressed against her face felt so profoundly powerful and sad, like he has condensed all of humanity's collective grief into one gesture. I wanted to play around with some similar body language that felt inherently evocative and build from there.” - Miles Johnston via Instagram

Johnston makes it clear that, while inspired by another piece of art, he



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wanted to convey all of humanity's grief and pain in a singular emotion. Likewise I believe this is what is meant to be conveyed by the frozen agony of those suffering from the Frenzied Flame in *Elden Ring*. They too are holding their hands to their heads.

It is clear what this gesture is trying to convey: pain, grief, sadness. Hyetta takes on this exact same gesture after her eyes have been melted by the chaos flame, as does Shabriri when he takes over Yura's flesh.

This only becomes more clear as one progresses in the game. Those who fall victim to this sickness are those who have suffered, and those who have had enough of the pain that life can bring. Edgar, overcome by grief and revenge. The Great Caravan brutalized and treated unjustly. Yura lost in his grief over Elenora's fate. And the many nameless souls who wished they simply had never been born. All of them touched by the Frenzied Flame.

It seems as though those who suffer from the flame also wish life had never happened, as it is through sentient life that we are exposed to great hardships:

“Those who gave me grapes howled without words. Saying they wished they were never born. Become their lord. Take their torment, despair. Their affliction. Every sin, every curse. And melt it all away. As the Lord

of Chaos. No more fractures...no more birth...” - Lightseeker Hyetta

Despair is the unifying emotion. Despair at what these people have suffered during the course of their lives. This is also why the Eye of Yelough, a plant associated with the Frenzied Flame, is a pain-reliever; the entire philosophy behind this force is an end to pain and suffering.

This returns me to my original question, what is the significance of the eyes? I think that it goes back to that image by Miles Johnston and our innate understanding and recognition of despair, where the artist identified that this gesture portrays grief. We cry with our eyes and we witness the good and bad through our eyes. It is a common trope in tragedy that bad events make characters want to tear out their eyes.

For me, having the eyes of the afflicted melt in despair is thematically apt. And therefore eyes become important in general to the forces of chaos; even the plants born of the Frenzied Flame's touch, like the Eyes of Yelough, take the form of eyes.

Given the importance of sight, then, what is the importance of Hyetta's weak sight? It should be clear by now that this must have some relevance as to why Irina was chosen to be the vessel for Hyetta. Is it perhaps because she is not able to see the tragedy of the world, and is thus



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in a purer state of being, according to the frenzied? After all, Irina is spared the sights of the horrific and bloody Morne massacre and Hyetta is spared the truth of what she must ingest. Or perhaps a lack of sight is needed so that a potential maiden can see the “distant light,” rather than being distracted by the corporeal world. All speculation, but her lack of sight is clearly an important aspect to her becoming a Three Finger maiden.

With the symbolism aside, let us look at the spread of the flame itself. It seems it can be spread in two ways. It can be passed from one life-form to another like a sickness, and it can manifest in those who experience great despair.

It is of course referred to as the “sickness” of Frenzied Flame via the Howl of Shabriri. The Frenzied Flame Village in Liurnia seems to be an infection vector for this force as well. What are the chances that everyone here had the same beliefs, including the soldiers? Rather, it seems likely that the whole village was infected, and indeed a note seems to imply that we also may catch it should we go there. The Note: Frenzied Flame Village reads:

“South of the Grand Lift of Dectus lies the Frenzied Flame Village, inhabited by the sick. Stay well away.”
- Note: Frenzied Flame Village

Again it refers to this as a sickness, suggesting it can spread like one. And indeed it can, as we can suffer from the Madness of Frenzy if we are accosted by the afflicted, when the incantations of chaos are unleashed. The very fact that rats can be tainted by the Frenzied Flame should also indicate that this does spread, as it is doubtful that rats would manifest the flame through emotion. Rather they most likely get it through eating the corpses of those who carried the sickness too.

It seems as though this sickness can spread to other parts of nature, manifesting in a perversion of vegetation that could serve to further spread it should it be eaten by wildlife or humans. I refer to the Eye of Yelough:

“Grown in lands afflicted by frenzy, it’s used for its pain-relieving properties... Though it’s also known to be a dangerous intoxicant.” - Eye of Yelough

However, as I mentioned above, the Frenzied Flame can be manifested. We have already seen this with Shabriri. But it also seems to be how the Frenzied Flame came to afflict the Great Caravan, and again I read the description of their Chapeau:

“These merchants once thrived as the Great Caravan, but after being accused of heretical beliefs, their entire clan was



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rounded up and buried alive far underground. Then, they chanted a curse of despair, and summoned the flame of frenzy.”
- Nomadic Merchant’s Chapeau

So the Great Caravan was not sick, nor infected, but through the suffering it endured and the despair it felt the flame was summoned. Edgar is another figure who appears to have fallen victim to the Frenzied Flame, as we can loot a Shabriri Grape from him when we defeat him in his revenger form, suggesting in his despair and grief, he fell to its power.

In short, the flame can be summoned but can also be spread like an illness, making it very potent indeed, especially when a group channels it together as we see in the Frenzy-Flaming Tower in

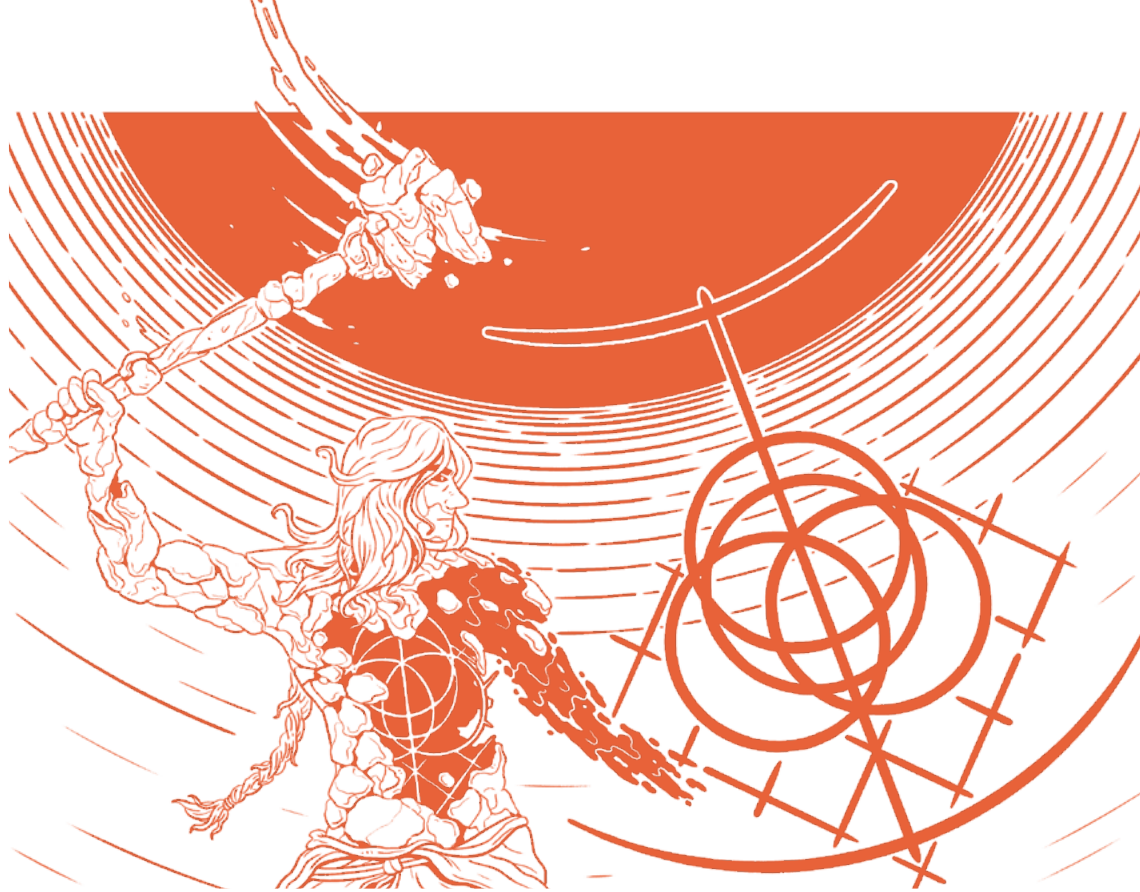
Liurnia, where the flame is so concentrated that it can afflict anyone who gazes upon it. The collective power of the flame also seems to be reflected in the donation of Shabriri Grapes to Hyetta, for she believes it is the collective sight of the eyes she devours that will eventually lead her to the Three Fingers, the distant light.

“My eyesight has been weak since birth, you see. I can’t tell which way I’m supposed to go next. But when I eat one of those grapes, I can feel a distant light in the back of my eyes. It will lead me, to my true duty, as a Finger Maiden.” - Hyetta

The outer god of Chaos may not be the outer god of despair but it makes sense that its power makes purchase within these people. The yellow flame offers a release from life itself, a cathartic vindication of their suffering as Order is burnt to the ground:

“Chosen Tarnished, and would-be Lord. Descend into the depths, far below the Erdtree Capital. Seek audience with the Three Fingers and the flame of frenzy. If you inherit the flame of frenzy, your flesh will serve as kindling and the girl can be spared... setting you on the righteous path of lordship. The path of the Lord of Chaos. Burn the Erdtree to the ground, and incinerate all that divides and distinguishes. Ahhh, may chaos take the world! May chaos take the world!” - Shabriri

Let us look at the spread of the flame itself. It seems it can be spread in two ways. It can be passed from one life-form to another like a sickness, and it can manifest in those who experience great despair.



Chapter 12: Radagon of the Golden Order



One of the interesting things about Radagon is how suddenly he appears in the lore, already in a position of prestige. The first instance of him appearing in the timeline is during the two Liurnian Wars. We know he took part in both, as the Barrier of Gold incantation reads:

“This incantation was used by the champions of the Erdtree in the First and Second Liurnian Wars, during which the red-haired Radagon joined the heroes’ ranks.” - Barrier of Gold

This was a hard-fought war between the royal Carian house and the royal house of the Erdtree. We know that the Carian Knights led a fierce resistance against the forces of Leyndell, as the Carian Knight’s Sword description reads:

“These knights’ swords could serve as catalysts, letting them wield sorcerous battle skills. Despite numbering fewer than twenty, this power made them a match for even the champions of gold in battle.” - Carian Knight’s Sword



Grace Given

This leads us to the inevitable question that Miriel himself asks: who is Radagon?

I believe that Radagon has never been an independent entity; as long as he has existed he has been part of Marika.

With that said, I acknowledge that two main theories are valid. The first is that Radagon was his own individual person, a laborer who was descended from the giants. The second theory is that he is a being created from Marika, and has always been a part of her.

But in both theories, I believe that, in the end, Radagon and Marika ultimately were one being, so that they could fulfill the role of a Rebus – a perfect vessel for the Elden Ring.

Let’s explore that first theory. The source of it mainly comes from one item, the Brick Hammer:

“Weapon made from an ordinary stone brick. Wielded by a laborer who led a rebellion, and later became a champion himself. Even among other bludgeons of its size, this weapon is especially weighty. The strength of a giant is required to wield it.” - Brick Hammer

This is clearly a reference to Radagon: a champion, a hammer and the strength of giants. Who else could it be? At the time of the Liurnian Wars, Radagon is called a champion by Miriel and by the Barrier of Gold, and is even

referred to as “heroic” in Marika’s Hammer’s weapon skill.

Then there is that hammer association – his other half also wields a hammer, and Radagon faces off against us with Marika’s Hammer in hand. (This could be used as an argument that they were one and the same, but more on that later.)

Finally, there is the reference to “the strength of a giant” – and again this makes us think of Radagon, thanks to the description of the Giant’s Red Braid.

So let’s put this together and present some kind of narrative that can plausibly explain Radagon’s origin, had he existed as an individual prior to being merged with Marika.

We’re told that he was a laborer with the strength of a giant, and indeed we know there are humans who are suspected to have been descendants of the giants. The Northerner appearance preset during character creation reads:

“A face found among the hard people of the unforgiving north. Some say they’re descended from giants.” - Northerner appearance preset

So we could accept that Radagon was one of these people, but his lineage was more vividly displayed by his red hair – the red hair of the Fire Giants. As described by the Giant’s Red Braid, Radagon supposedly hated his red hair and its clear



Radagon of the Golden Order

association with the Fire Giants. No doubt the giants were hated by the Erdtree people, as a great enemy of their past, and so Radagon's potential relation to them being on full display would easily have made him uncomfortable. Perhaps this is why he is reduced to being a laborer. We know that trolls, also descendants of the giants, were exploited following the war, so why not Northerners as well?

The Brick Hammer is found in Stormveil, a fortress of Godfrey's people, and perhaps Radagon began as a lowly laborer in this fortress under those who conquered and enslaved his giant ancestors. Thus Radagon of the red hair would lead a rebellion, and, with the strength of the giants, it would have been a very successful one. This would apparently result in him becoming a champion. But how? Perhaps his rebellion was able to reach Marika herself and an accord was achieved.

As we will explore shortly, I believe that he must have been part of Marika by the time of the Liurnian Wars and his marriage to Rennala – no later.

Radagon's Scarseal description reads: *"These seals represent the lifelong duty of those chosen by the gods."* - Radagon's Scarseal

Perhaps at this stage, then, the Greater Will or Marika herself chose Radagon to become her other half.

Thus Radagon would lead a rebellion, and, with the strength of the giants, it would have been a very successful one. This would apparently result in him becoming a champion.

This is all speculation, but there is a legitimate argument to be made that Radagon was a laborer, descended from the giants, who led a rebellion – and whatever form it took, he eventually was accepted by the Erdtree Order as a champion. And in my eyes, he became part of Marika. Thus he emerges as a new champion, once a laborer and now a general in the Liurnian Wars, and his prestige and mystery can be explained by his merging with Marika.

While I find this compelling, and the most exciting explanation, I do have to acknowledge that it is more likely that Radagon was never an individual and is simply the male aspect of Marika, a persona created upon her becoming a god, and a result of the Elden Ring's influence for which she is a vessel.



Grace Given

Again coming back to the Brick Hammer: there is of course the possibility that this hammer isn't a reference to Radagon at all, as it is found in Stormveil, a location that otherwise has absolutely no association with Radagon.

When I discussed this subject with Lokey, they suggested that the reference to giant-like strength found in the description of the Brick Hammer is less likely to be an allusion toward Godfrey himself and is more likely to refer to the strength of the people of his era. The Giant-Crusher description uses similar language when describing them:

"After the giants were quelled, and man turned against man in violence, this weapon was all but forgotten. Man has grown feeble in comparison to his forebears." - Giant-Crusher

So there is a good chance this hammer is merely referencing an unrelated rebel of this era when people were simply stronger.

In addition, the reference to a "champion" may not be as convincing as initially thought. Again I referred this to Lokey and in the original Japanese, the term used for "champion," "eiyuu" (英雄), is quite generic and is used over 128 times. It is used in relation to the Zamor, heroes of the giant war, the champions Margit fought via his cloak description, and in the Beast Champion Armor. So as a generic

term this hammer is likely just referring to an unrelated rebel hero of Godfrey's time.

I will leave it up to you to decide. But with that said, I would like to discuss my main theory: Radagon has always been a part of Marika, born from her soul due to the influence of the Elden Ring.

A good starting point for this theory is the Giant's Red Braid:

"Every giant is red of hair, and Radagon was said to have despised his own red locks. Perhaps that was a curse of their kind." - Giant's Red Braid

This implies that Radagon was aware of the Fire Giants, and if he hated being associated with them, he must have been close to the War of the Giants somehow. In my discussions with Lokey, they suggested that Radagon's hatred for giants might be secondhand, and would come from Marika, his progenitor and other half.

Indeed Marika clearly has a great hatred of giants, as is evidenced by her pre-battle speech:

"Put the giants to the sword and confine the flame atop the mount. Let a new epoch begin. An epoch glistening with life." - Queen Marika via Melina

We also see this in her cruel treatment of the final Fire Giant, as the giant's remembrance reads:

"The Fire Giant is a survivor of the War against the Giants. Upon realizing



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the flames of their forge would never die, Queen Marika marked him with a curse. 'O trifling giant, mayest thou tend thy flame for eternity.'

- Remembrance of the Fire Giant

Marika brutally slaughters the giants, leaves one alive among the graveyard of his people and reduces the trolls to slaves. Would it not make sense that Radagon's intense dislike of the giants come from his other half?

But is this when Radagon came into being? Again, my gut feeling is that Radagon was created when Marika became a god – when she became a vessel for the Elden Ring – and he is a product of its influence.

Indeed, we know that the end of the war of the giants heralded that Age of the Erdtree, and so it could be argued Radagon could have been formed around this time. In her pre-battle speech Marika talks of “brandishing” the Elden Ring, implying she is already wielding its power.

We will get into the specifics and science of Radagon's creation soon, but it is my speculation that Radagon has been a part of Marika for a very long time, even if we cannot specifically date the start. I also

want to begin this segment and theory by countering some other common theories, and this is not to say I am totally correct. Rather, I just want to lay a more solid foundation for this discussion.

The most common opposing theory is that Marika and Radagon became one when they married, or that they merged during the Shattering of the Elden Ring.

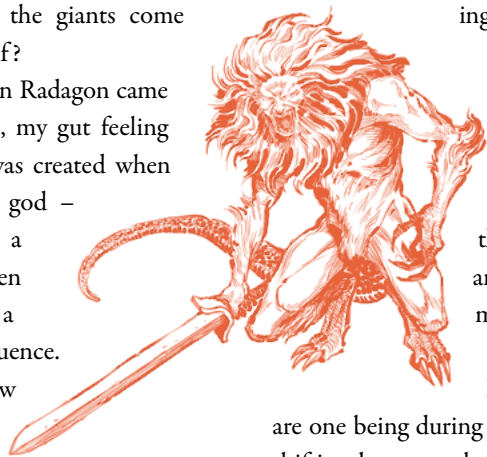
The argument that they became one during the Shattering is the one most easily dispelled. In the opening cinematic and in the announcement trailer we can already see that

Radagon and Marika are one being during the Shattering itself, shifting between their two halves, alternately appearing as Radagon and Marika.

We can learn what is happening here via the description from Marika's Hammer:

“The tool with which Queen Marika shattered the Elden Ring and Radagon attempted to repair it.” - Marika's Hammer

Again: even before the Elden Ring properly shattered, Marika and Radagon were in one body, able to shift between each form as they fought for control.



Grace Given

Many people who believe Radagon was a separate person, right up until the Shattering, often point to the dialogue of Marika that Melina recreates in her throne room:

“In Marika's own words. O Radagon, leal bound of the Golden Order. Thou'rt yet to become me. Thou'rt yet to become a god. Let us be shattered, both. Mine other self.” - Queen Marika via Melina

Many interpret the line, “Thou'rt yet to become me,” to mean that they were separate people who are soon to become one and the same. Yet those who argue this point conveniently ignore the line “Let us be shattered, both. Mine other self.”

Radagon is already her “other self” and the reason she says “thou'rt yet to become me” is because they are still two separate personalities, despite sharing a body. I think clarity can be found in the original Japanese as well, and thanks to Lokey we have access to it. In their translation of the speech, what I am implying is quite a bit clearer and I quote that translation now:

“Oh, Radagon, dog of the Golden Regulation. You are still not me. Still not God. Now, let us break it together! My other half!” - Translation via Lokey

“You are still not me” – implying that, despite sharing a body and Radagon having

gained power and influence, it is Marika who is the god form. Not Radagon.

I think that Marika and Radagon were one even before they got married, before Radagon became the second Elden Lord. My main reasons for believing this are the blatant hints surrounding the lore of his marriage to Renalla.

The first thing we need to consider is the very purpose of the marriage itself. The reasoning behind the union is given to us via the relevant Sword Monument, which reads:

“The Second Liurnian War / No victory for the golden, nor for the moon / No prize but atonement; the birth of a vow” - Sword Monument, Church of Vows, Liurnia of the Lakes

Clearly this war resulted in a stalemate – the mighty armies of Leyndell unable to break the defenses of the magically supported Carian forces. Instead, an alliance was formed, as is told to us by Miriel, who says:

“It is here, at the Church of Vows, that the great houses of the Erdtree and the Moon were joined. By the matrimonial bond between red-haired Radagon and Rennala, Queen of the Full Moon. And so, our church holds in view the monuments of both houses. The Erdtree of the Capital, and the Academy of Raya Lucaria.” - Miriel, Pastor of Vows



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What am I getting at here? Well, I have to give Lokey credit for making a keen observation in our discussions regarding this topic: “Why is Radagon representative of the royal house of the Erdtree?”

If he is a random champion, then how does his marriage to Rennala join these two royal houses? To me the reasoning is clear: Marika is Radagon, the most royal of blood. Lokey brought this nuance to my attention by suggesting that perhaps Radagon was presented as a cousin to Marika or another minor royal.

The point being, we don't get any reference to Radagon's relevance to the royal family, or his importance. He just *is*. He just appears at the head of the Leyndell army one day. Why? Who is this guy who is suddenly leading the forces of the Erdtree in an important conflict?

Aside from that, we also have to consider Miriel's account of how the Liurnian Wars came to a close:

“Lord Radagon was a great champion, possessed of flowing red locks. He came to these lands at the head of a great golden host, when he met Lady Rennala in battle. He soon repented his territorial aggressions though, and became husband to the Carian Queen.” - Miriel, Pastor of Vows

Radagon repented. What right does he, a mere champion, have to make such

massive political and military decisions? Why is he the one who decides that the war can end and that the royal family can incorporate these moon worshippers? Indeed, even Miriel questions the importance of Radagon:

“The mystery endures, to this day...As to why Lord Radagon would cast Lady Rennala aside... And moreover...why a mere champion would be chosen for the seat of Elden Lord...” - Miriel, Pastor of Vows

This question posed by Miriel is too pointed to ignore. It serves purely to make the player question Radagon's identity. If you believe that Radagon only became merged with Marika later then this question posed by Miriel would serve no narrative purpose at all.

The suspicion planted within the player is further inflamed by Miriel's following remarks:

“You know, it's said that Lord Radagon harboured a secret... A famed sculptor of the Erdtree Capital was once summoned to render Lord Radagon's likeness in giant stature. When he glimpsed the skeleton in Radagon's closet. And as such, it's said the great statue harbours his secret too.”

- Miriel, Pastor of Vows

This secret is obviously that Radagon is Marika – given that Miriel is referring to the statue in Leyndell that can shift form between Marika and Radagon. This



Grace Given

is the answer to why a mere champion was chosen to be Elden Lord: because Radagon was Marika.

There is a further source of potential evidence that Radagon was already Marika during his first marriage to Rennala: the Mask of Confidence, the masks worn by the preceptors of the Carian royals:

“When Radagon married Rennala, he ordered the Carian magic preceptors to don these masks. To make it clear that all of their matters were to be kept strictly private.” - Mask of Confidence

Preceptors, as we know from their armor set, are sorcerers and astrologers who attend the Carian royals. Their name of “preceptor” implies that they probably tutor younger members of the family, interpret fate and advise

I consider it more or less a fact that Radagon was already part of Marika at the time of his marriage to Rennala, which is why the Carian preceptors needed to keep silent.

the royals. And again, I find this a very unobvious nod to Radagon's great secret. Yes it could simply be a case of a leader wanting his political dealings kept private, but we do have to consider that it forms a pattern of Radagon being associated with a big secret.

One final piece of evidence leads me to believe that he was part of Marika, even at the time of his marriage to Rennala: the Amber Egg.

Again this artifact is something Miriel comments on:

“In the end, Lady Rennala was left alone, cradling the amber egg Lord Radagon bequeathed her.”

- Miriel, Pastor of Vows

The Rune of the Unborn is the Amber Egg and it is a rune from the Elden Ring itself, as the description of the Great Rune of the Unborn reads:

“Amber egg clutched by Rennala, Queen of the Full Moon. Great Rune of unborn demigods.”

- Great Rune of the Unborn

The question needs to be asked again. How did Radagon, a mere champion, manage to procure a fragment of the very Elden Ring as a parting gift? Well, the answer is obvious: this happened because Radagon is also Marika, who is the only person who could feasibly access the Elden Ring.



Radagon of the Golden Order

I consider it more or less a fact that Radagon was already part of Marika at the time of his marriage to Rennala, which is why the Carian preceptors needed to keep silent – for they would have seen Radagon transform into Marika behind closed doors. I believe that Radagon ultimately never existed as an individual person. That said, this doesn't mean that he isn't his own personality with own goals and aims. Both he and Marika are distinct personalities or halves of the same being, to constitute parts of an immortal Rebis. But what is a Rebis and what can it tell us about their story?

THE IMMORTAL REBIS

A big question when it comes to Radagon is: "Why?" Why was he made part of Marika? Lokey suggests that Radagon was made to spite Marika, after she thwarted the Godskin god hunts. He was a more reliable hound than Maliketh, designed to keep her in line. I am more of the belief that Radagon was formed so that Marika could become an alchemical Rebis, the perfect being and the perfect custodian for the Elden Ring. This is just my theory, and as you can see from Lokey's suggestion there are plenty of compelling arguments to be made.

As I mentioned, an immortal Rebis is an alchemical concept. It's the magnum opus of the field, a divine and perfect form.

To quote Wikipedia:

"Sometimes described as the divine hermaphrodite, a reconciliation of spirit and matter, a being of both male and female qualities as indicated by the male and female head within a single body." - Rebis, Wikipedia

Ultimately the Rebis is the reunification and reconciliation of opposing matter, including the male and female, to create the perfect immortal being. It's perfect in so much as it encompasses everything, spirit and matter. This sounds perfect for a being who would be a god and the vessel for the Elden Ring.

In basic terms, alchemy is often the process of combining and mixing elements, and much of it described allegorically.

In a video called "Elden Ring is an Allegory for Alchemy," Ziostorm makes a keen reference to the Red King and the White Queen, the two constituent parts of the divine Rebis. The relevance to Radagon the red-haired and Marika the white-haired should be obvious, so credit to Ziostorm for bringing my attention to that particular detail¹.

This concept of the Red King and White Queen is a well-known allegorical idea, and to quote an article from Learn Religions:

¹ "Elden Ring is an Allegory for Alchemy" - Ziostorm





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“The union of Red King and White Queen is often called the chemical marriage... their marriage that will eventually lead to an allegorical offspring, the Rebis. Descriptions of alchemical processes often describe the reactions of sulfur and mercury. The Red King is sulfur – the active, volatile and fiery principle – while the White Queen is mercury – the material, passive, fixed principle. Mercury has substance, but it has no definitive form on its own.” - Catherine Beyer, Learn Religions²

Ziostorm’s analysis goes further by looking at the analogous king and queen and how they can be used to assess the role of both Radagon and Marika. As you saw in the passage I just quoted, the White Queen is the more passive, fixed and material aspect of the equation, and of course is the female element of the Rebis.

This does somewhat match with Marika in her distant and cold manner of leadership. But also the White Queen is the material – the vessel – and ultimately that is Marika’s role, too: to be the vessel of the Elden Ring.

“Queen Marika is the vessel of the Elden Ring, carrier of its vision. A god, in truth.” - Finger Reader Enia

One of the alchemical symbols for mercury cleaves very close to the form of Marika’s rune. Sulfur, meanwhile, is seen as the more active and aggressive part of the Rebis, as well as the masculine element – it

is the element that causes change. We can see this in Radagon who, in general, seems to be far more involved in the world.

To go further I would like to quote another article from Catherine Beyer, who says the following on this alchemical relationship:

“While sulfur causes change, it needs something to actually shape and change in order to accomplish anything.” - Catherine Beyer, Learn Religions³

Radagon is the active sulfur in this particular metaphor and Marika is the mercury, the passive material that the sulfur will shape. Indeed, by the end of the game, devoid of her Radagon half, Marika is just that: passive material. She’s a hollowed-out husk that houses the Elden Ring.

Now, let us try to unpack the potential ramifications for Marika. As we had discussed earlier, we understand that Marika was a Numen who was elected Empyrean and that the Numen are an unusual race that we know very little about.

Although this is something we looked at previously, I just want to reiterate the esoteric nature of the Numen. In English, the Black Knife Armor names them as “Numen,” but when content creator Last Protagonist looked at the original Japanese, he noted that the term “Marebito” was used instead. Wikipedia, in turn, says the following regarding this term:



Grace Given

“Marebito is an ancient Japanese word referring to a supernatural being who comes from afar bringing gifts of wisdom, spiritual knowledge and happiness... The term refers to any one of a number of divine beings who were believed to visit villages in Japan, either from beyond the horizon or from beyond distant mountain ranges, bringing gifts.” - Marebito, Wikipedia

So these are potentially humanoid descendants of supernatural beings who come from another world, meaning that we don’t necessarily know what is the norm for these Numen. Perhaps they are all like Marika, perfect beings that are formed of two halves. Perhaps this is why they live long lives and rarely reproduce. I feel there is certainly a logic to this; however we don’t have any evidence that other Numen hold this dual nature as part of their identity. It’s not mentioned anywhere else, and the Marika and Radagon secret is treated as a unique situation.

Had it been the norm for her people, then I’m sure it wouldn’t be described as Radagon’s skeleton in his closet. Rather it would be an expected part of a Numen queen. Therefore I believe Marika’s status as a Rebis must be related to her godhood, and her fate as the vessel for the Elden Ring. We can see that Marika literally bears the Elden Ring within her at the end of the game, and we can’t imagine

that an ordinary being could bear such a cosmic force. Thus I speculate that the immortal Rebis was created upon her ascension as god. We know that the Age of the Erdtree began upon the defeat of the giants; perhaps it was at this moment, when her Order officially took primacy, that she was reformed by the power of the Elden Ring as the perfect being – a god to oversee a new era.

I also believe that Marika is the original being of the two. We learn far more about her, pre-godhood. She was of the Numen people and she was once an Empyrean. Aside from that, in regards to the alchemical allegory, she is the material and she is the substance – meaning she is the flesh and blood while Radagon is the active element that was added later.

Perhaps this also explains Radagon’s hair and its association with the Fire Giants. He was possibly born at the moment of her victory, an imprint of her final and greatest foe coming to life as a “normal” being.

I find it interesting that Goldmask, when attempting to complete a calculus that interprets the Elden Ring’s true nature, is confounded when Radagon’s name comes up in his reflections:

“The master’s reflections had heightened as we neared the Erdtree. While still a precise calculus, the rhythms grew

² “Marriage of the Red King and White Queen in Alchemy”

- Catherine Beyer, Learn Religions: bit.ly/4ggpZOP

³ “Alchemical Sulfur, Mercury and Salt in Western Occultism”

- Catherine Beyer, Learn Religions: bit.ly/3V2WlmG



Grace Given

So these are potential humanoid descendants of supernatural beings who come from another world, meaning that we don't necessarily know what is the norm for these Numen.

increasingly wild. Until he simply ceased. Now the master is facing quite the puzzle. The Golden Order is founded on the principle that Marika is the one true god. However... The name of Marika's second husband, King Consort Radagon, also appeared... Who exactly was Radagon?"
- Brother Corbyn

Marika and Radagon are very much an eldritch being, beyond our full comprehension – for what else could literally bear the Elden Ring within them? Not only does Marika/Radagon bear the Elden Ring, they are one with it. This is why Marika says:

"Let us be shattered, both. Mine other self!" - Queen Marika via Melina

This is why cracks appear along Marika's body as she shatters the Elden Ring in the story trailer; both Marika

and Radagon were broken alongside the Elden Ring.

Either way, Radagon isn't mentioned at all until the Liurnian Wars. These are wars I don't think took place until the later Age of the Erdree, because the Barrier of Gold incantation, which describes this event, uses the later Erdtree sigil rather than the ancient Erdtree sigil of the earlier Age of Plenty⁴.

As such I do believe that the Radagon personality was gestated when Marika was crowned as god, hence why we only hear about Radagon later.

In many ways Radagon's influence would grow over time, especially in later history, as is evidenced by the abundance of his statuary and by red hair being revered as a sign of pedigree among his children. So let us now talk about the history of Radagon, and his acts in the Lands Between.

THE CONSORT

Following the theory outlined above, Radagon would become the active component to the royal godly Rebus, and as such would lead Marika's forces in a major conflict: the Liurnian Wars. It is never specifically mentioned why Radagon repented his aggressions, but

⁴ "The 3 Creeds of the Erdtree" - The Tarnished Archaeologist



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I got the impression that he fell in love with Rennala and he also saw the value in the Carians after they had so fiercely resisted for two wars. Radagon certainly appreciated the Carian ways of sorcery and intelligence, as he took the opportunity, while married to Rennala, to become a more complete leader by studying their practices. We learn of this via the Radagon Icon:

“As the husband of Rennala of Caria, the red-haired Radagon studied sorcery, and as the husband of Queen Marika, he studied incantations. Thus did the hero aspire to be complete.” - Radagon Icon

This really is the first instance of Radagon developing as something more than just a champion of gold, and it sows the seeds for his interpretation of the Golden Order and, ultimately, his eventual disagreement with Marika.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Radagon’s marriage to Rennala is the children it produces: Rykard, Radahn and Ranni. Each of these figures would become massive players in the years to come, and if we consider that Radagon was already an aspect of the single-bodied god then their power very much makes sense.

I have seen people suggest that Ranni might not be a direct child of Radagon, but a child born of the Amber Egg.

I don’t buy this, mainly because her original form seems to bear the vibrant red hair of her father and we know how the naming conventions in this game work. Those descended from Godfrey often have a “God” prefix to their name. If we apply the same rule to Radagon’s children, we can see the “R” prefix for Rykard, Ranni and Radahn.

We unfortunately don’t get much information on the relationship between Radagon and his children with Rennala, but we know that his two sons seem to hold their lineage to him in high regard. We know from Radahn’s breastplate that he was a great admirer of Godfrey, first Elden Lord, but he was also equally proud of his father. The red mane became an iconic part of his imagery, as we see via the Redmane Knight Helm:

“The red plume is a symbol of Radahn’s pedigree as Lord Radagon’s son – the mane of the proud Red Lion.”

- Redmane Knight Helm

The Red Lion combines Godfrey and Radagon’s symbolism. Likewise, Rykard’s knights, the Gelmir Knights, also celebrate this pedigree – and I do think this is a good indicator of how well regarded Radagon was. He was seen so great that his sons would try to hold on to that lineage, as if his prestige would elevate theirs as well. No doubt claiming

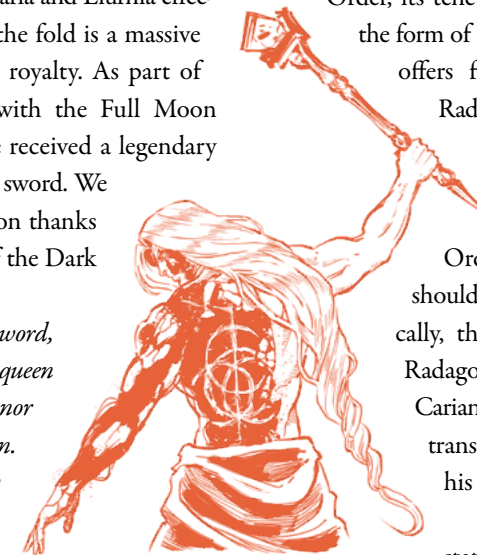


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lineage to him would also have helped legitimize their claims to the throne when the Shattering broke out.

One of the main results of Radagon’s marriage would be to bind the two royal houses together and incorporate the Carian household, along with their forces and ideals. Having Caria and Liurnia effectively brought into the fold is a massive win for the Erdtree royalty. As part of his marriage pact with the Full Moon Queen, he will have received a legendary sword – a full moon sword. We know of this tradition thanks to the description of the Dark Moon Greatsword:

“A Moon Greatsword, bestowed by a Carian queen upon her spouse to honor long-standing tradition. One of the legendary armaments.” - Dark Moon Greatsword



As this blade is given to us by Ranni of the Dark Moon, we can presume that Radagon will have received a “Full Moon Greatsword” from Rennala. This is what has led many to believe that the Golden Order Greatsword was once a Full Moon Greatsword:

“Greatsword made of light, modeled after the Elden Ring itself. Forged by King Consort Radagon to proudly symbolize

the tenets of the Golden Order. One of the legendary armaments. Telltale signs betray that this was once the greatsword bequeathed to him by his first wife, Rennala.” - Golden Order Greatsword

He seemingly transformed the sword to reflect his conception of the Golden

Order, its tenets made manifest in the form of the Elden Ring. This offers further evidence of Radagon slowly developing his own philosophy surrounding the Golden

Order and the form it should take. Even symbolically, this sword represents Radagon taking something Carian as a foundation and transforming it to serve his new ideology.

It cannot be overstated how important

Radagon’s time as a Carian consort was in terms of how it developed his philosophy and character. The Golden Order fundamentalists really are the ruling faction by the time we enter the scene and it is because of Radagon’s understanding of both faith and intelligence that their ideals would be codified. In the meantime, Godfrey’s time would eventually run out as Elden Lord – as a man of conflict, ruling



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over a period of peacetime, Marika would tarnish her husband and banish him and his warriors from the Lands Between.

“However. When Godfrey, first Elden Lord, was hounded from the Lands Between, Radagon left Rennala to return to the Erdtree Capital, becoming Queen Marika’s second husband and King Consort. Taking the title... of second Elden Lord.” - Miriel, Pastor of Vows

GOLDEN ORDER

As we discussed in the chapter “The Ages of the Erdtree,” faith was easy to come by in the Age of Plenty. This is no age for a warrior – one cannot slay a lack of faith with an axe – and so I see this as the era in which Godfrey and the Tarnished were banished. A new lord was needed: a thinker, a philosopher, a great unifier who could forge a new ideology to replace the loss of the Erdtree. Enter Radagon, Second Elden Lord.

Both halves, Marika and Radagon, clearly recognized that Radagon’s unifying theory of faith and sorcery combined could fill a much needed gap where the Erdtree once stood, and so he returned to the Erdtree capital and married his other half. This union would produce two children, Miquella and Malenia, both

greatly flawed and yet almost unmatched in power and intellect respectively. Perhaps Miquella and Malenia’s flaws are the result of this most unusual inbreeding – a literal single body providing both the male and female aspect.

Yet I can’t help but see them as reflections of the Red King and White Queen: Miquella with his father’s intellect yet his mother’s complexion, and Malenia with her father’s mane and battle prowess. Perhaps if they had been born as one being instead of two, they truly would have been the perfect child.

Yet Radagon’s greatest legacy and obsession is the Golden Order. The Golden Order was created when Death was confined, evidenced by the description of the Mending Rune of the Death-Prince:

“The Golden Order was created by confining Destined Death. Thus, this new Order will be one of Death restored.” - Mending Rune of the Death-Prince

I think this is an important moment to explore the differences between the Golden Order as a ruling body and Golden Order fundamentalism as an ideal. Rogier dates the Golden Order all the way back to when Radagon first made peace with the Carians:

“The battle art you’ve learned is of the glintstone family. They were conceived at the great Academy of Raya Lucaria, to the



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north of this castle. In the past, they obeyed laws which contravened the Golden Order, or so I’m told. Fascinating, isn’t it? That the Golden Order was pliable enough to absorb practices that contradicted itself in the past. With the Order broken, twisted, and in need of repair, such adaptability is more important now than ever.” - Sorcerer Rogier

Like Tarnished Archaeologist, I believe that the Godskin Apostasy, the destruction of the original Erdtree and the confinement of Death all happened at the end of the Ancient Erdtree Era, hence why Maliketh’s Black Blade has the ancient Erdtree incantation. In the aftermath of this event, with the Rune of Death confined by Maliketh, the phantom Erdtree would emerge. This was the start of a Golden Order. Radagon did not create the Golden Order per se; the Golden Order is both the ruling Order but also the form of the Elden Ring itself.

The Barrier of Gold incantation, an incantation used during this very conflict, does not bear the sigil of the ancient Erdtree. Rather, it bears the sigil of Erdtree Worship incantations, firmly placing it in Tarnished Archaeologist’s era of faith – the era following the Age of Plenty. I believe the confinement of the Rune of Death happened following the Godskin Apostasy, as evidenced by the description of the Godskin Apostle outfit. It makes sense,

after the destruction wrought by Destined Death at the hands of the Gloam-Eyed Queen and her apostles, that Marika would want the Rune of Death removed.

What Radagon developed is Golden Order fundamentalism. Lokey provides a translation of the original kanji used in place of fundamentalism and I quote them now:

“Fundamentalism literally ‘original logic doctrine.’ (原理主義) Logic refers to principles of the Universe...” - Translation via Lokey

It is scholarship, a pseudo-religious philosophy, that tries to understand the fundamentals of logic, Order and the rule of the universe. It concerns itself with the Elden Ring, Order and what Order is, hence the absence of the tree itself in any fundamentalist iconography.

Radagon took the intelligence-based studies of the Carians and blended them with Erdtree faith – thus spawning fundamentalism, a new ideology that could fill the void left by the physical destruction of the Erdtree.

Radagon’s age was very different from Godfrey’s, evolving from the primal combative era of the Crucible to one of refinement and a more ordered society. We see this in the shuttering of the arenas. These arenas are decorated with the lion emblem of Godfrey and with architecture that’s unsightly compared to



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that of high Leyndell. They were clearly relics of his warrior's age. Such barbarism and blood sport would not be welcome in Radagon's high culture, as the Ritual Shield Talisman tells us:

"A talisman patterned after shields used in ritual combat held to honor the Erdtree... The practice had died out by the age of King Consort Radagon, but remains of the arenas where ritual combat took place can still be found in every land."
- Ritual Shield Talisman

I often credit Hawkshaw and their excellent video "The Color Theory of Elden Ring" for refining my understanding of this transition towards a more genteel society, and I must do so again now. In that video, Hawkshaw highlights the Ruler's Mask and its importance for illuminating changing morals in terms of leadership:

"Such a mask illustrates the qualities of an ideal lord: chiefly, wise and possessing a certain defanged geniality. One at the center of society often finds these qualities most expedient." - Ruler's Mask

In general, Radagon's era was one of defanging the past. The closing of the arenas is just one aspect that was curtailed under his reign. Anything associated with the Crucible is now considered crude, barbaric and violent, and has no place in the civilized society of a scholar like

Radagon. At a philosophical level this can be explained by the core tenets of Golden Order fundamentalism, the Law of Causality and the Law of Regression. I need to credit Last Protagonist in refining my understanding of these laws, thanks to their excellent Golden Order lore video⁵.

To quote the Law of Regression, first it states:

"Regression is the pull of meaning; that all things yearn eternally to converge."
- Law of Regression

Last Protagonist likens this regression to the statistical phenomenon known as "regression towards the mean," where extreme variables in a data set get pulled closer toward the average in each sampling. The example Last Protagonist gives

In general Radagon's era was one of defanging the past. The closing of the arenas is just one aspect that was curtailed under his reign. Anything associated with the Crucible is now crude.



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is that if two parents who are taller than average have a child, then that child will most likely be shorter than they are. The child will regress towards the mean.

In regards to the Golden Order fundamentalists and their view on life, it means that life should be less chaotic and more uniform – hence convergence. A refinement of life, with less chaotic aberrance, as represented by the Misbegotten and Omen and even the sigil of the Golden Order itself, appears more refined than the chaotic arboreal tree of the ancient Erdtree. Again, credit to Last Protagonist for this summation of regression and Quelaag for unpacking the importance of the symbolic changes between the ancient Erdtree sigil and the Golden Order equivalent.

Onwards. When we last saw Radagon, he was at Liurnia, studying the works of the Carians and the academy in order to become a more balanced person; he comes from an order of faith, yet he is studying the other mysteries of the universe found in sorcery. However, it is clear that Radagon hadn't yet fully conceived of Golden Order fundamentalism when he came back from Liurnia, as we learn later of Radagon and Miquella working together on the incantations that would form the backbone of this way of thinking.

For example, we have Triple Rings of Light:

"One of the incantations of the Golden Order fundamentalists... A gift from the young Miquella to his father, Radagon."
- Triple Rings of Light

It's no surprise that Miquella would help his father round out the tenets of the Golden Order. Miquella is most likely one half of the perfect being, and his intellect is extraordinary. While Miquella would ultimately walk away from fundamentalism in search of his own answers, Radagon would become devoted to the Golden Order above all else. His fixation on its form can be found in the remaking of his own Golden Order Greatsword, the sword representing the Golden Order – a meld of Carian magic and Elden Ring faith.

This obsession with the Order and its supposed perfection would trickle down to his followers and create the Golden Order fundamentalist hunters – people like D. We know that these hunters of Those Who Live in Death are linked to the fundamentalists thanks to their associated incantations. Take Order Healing:

"One of the incantations of the Golden Order fundamentalists. Used by hunters of Those Who Live in Death." - Order Healing

This makes sense when you consider that Golden Order fundamentalism is breaking down the Golden Order to its

⁵ "The Greattree, the Crucible, Destined Death, and the Golden Order" - Last Protagonist



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most basic form, an Order that is absent Death. Those Who Live in Death are contrary to that belief, a stain on its purity of message, and thus these extremists use violence to expunge these errors. Radagon is no less extreme in his belief and defense of Golden Order fundamentalism. We see him come into conflict with his other half, who has some harsh words for her red headed reflection:

"In Marika's own words. O Radagon, leal bound of the Golden Order. Thou'rt yet to become me. Thou'rt yet to become a god. Let us be shattered, both. Mine other self."

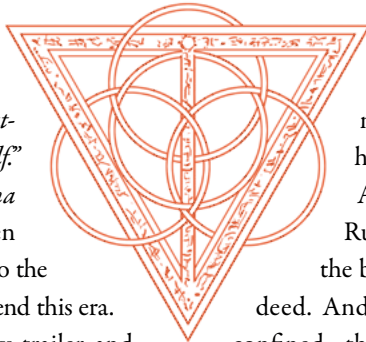
- Queen Marika via Melina
At this stage, Queen Marika has been pushed to the edge and clearly wants to end this era. The Bandai Namco story trailer and an accompanying article from December 2021⁶ make it clear that Marika is pushed to shatter the Elden Ring because of the slaughter of her progeny during the Night of the Black Knives.

To quote the Bandai Namco article:
"One grim night in the depths of winter, a flock of unknown assassins stole across the Lands Between. In a coetaneous attack, this foul covenant snuffed out the lives of many of the God-Queen's kin throughout the empire, too numerous and

too scattered for her godly protection to save. The assassins' targets were multifold, but none was as devastating a loss to the Eternal Queen as that of Godwyn the Golden. After his death, the Elden Ring was somehow shattered, and the order of the world broke with it." - A look into the history of Elden Ring's Lands Between: the Age of Gods, Bandai Namco

The loss of Godwyn was devastating to her. And to boot, it was the confinement of the Rune of Death, the creation of the Golden Order no less, that condemned her son to a gruesome fate. After all, it was the stolen Rune of Death that formed the blades that performed the deed. And had Death never been confined, this act would not have happened – at least not in the terrible way that it did.

I don't buy the theory that Marika planned the Night of the Black Knives. I believe it was the trauma of witnessing the denigration of her golden son that led her to conclude that the Golden Order was deeply flawed and that a reset was needed. Yet we can see that Radagon still loved the Golden Order. This is why he and Marika battle for control of his body during the announcement trailer and the



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intro slides. He is desperately trying to stop his other half, alternatively wresting control of their body and trying to repair the damage Marika has done.

Even in our current time he is working from behind the scenes to prevent us from resetting the Elden Ring in a new configuration. Enia makes it clear that it is not the Greater Will or the Two Fingers who have denied us access to the Erdtree:

"Well, you managed to return. You know what this means. The Erdtree has spurned you. The Fingers remain still. Shaken by this turn of events, they are busy consulting the Greater Will. When they are finished, the Fingers will once again offer their guidance." - Finger Reader Enia

But upon closer inspection the true culprit becomes apparent: Radagon. It is his crosshatch sigil that is branded on the vines that block our access. He is trying to hold on to his precious Golden Order and prevent us from rebuilding the Elden Ring in a new configuration. Moreover, I believe Morgott, the last king of Leyndell, has unintentionally interpreted the will of Radagon as the will of the Erdtree and/or Greater Will. Morgott accuses us and the other demigods of being traitors, usurpers:

"Abh... Godrick the Golden. The twin prodigies, Miquella and Malenia. General Radahn. Praetor Rykard. Lunar Princess Ranni. Wilful traitors, all. Thy kind are all

of a piece. Pillagers. Emboldened by the flame of ambition." - Morgott, the Omen King

In his final speech, Morgott shares with us what he interprets to be the will of the Erdtree:

"Tarnished, thou'rt but a fool. The Erdtree wards off all who deign approach. We are... we are all forsaken. None may claim the title of Elden Lord."

- Morgott, the Omen King
Morgott has spent his kingship as the bulwark against any usurper because he believes that is the will of the Erdtree. He has hunted people as Margit, he has clashed with demigods and he shielded Leyndell during the dark days of the Shattering.

Yet the Greater Will does want someone to replace Radagon and ascend to the Elden Throne, so in reality the only person Morgott has really helped is Radagon. (Although one could argue the Greater Will was happy for him to act as a final challenge for any potential lord.)

But there is another character who, in my mind, has been more deeply manipulated by Radagon post-Shattering. Ironically it's the person called the "all-knowing": Gideon Ofnir. After spending the game helping us open the way to become Elden Lord – and claiming to want to become Elden Lord himself – Ofnir pulls a somewhat surprising last-minute move to block us, by challenging

⁶ "A look into the history of ELDEN RING's lands between: the Age of Gods"
- Bandai Namco: bit.ly/3V6sOZa



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us to a fight. His words during combat give us some clue as to his motivation:

"I commend your spirit, but alas, none shall take the throne. Queen Marika has high hopes for us. That we continue to struggle. Unto eternity."

- Sir Gideon Ofnir, the All-Knowing

Gideon claims to know the mind of Marika herself and appears to believe that he is acting in her interests. But how? And why would he care in the first place?

The answer is given via his armor set:

"But when Gideon glimpsed into the will of Queen Marika, he shuddered in fear. At the end that should not be."

- All-Knowing Helm

Gideon has been accumulating knowledge, and we know from the Lord's Divine Fortification item description that Gideon has had long exchanges with the Two Fingers. And from the myriad of spells he rewards us with – and fights us with – we know he is someone who has sought knowledge from everywhere, forbidden or not. We can assume that in the course of his quest, he connected with the immortal Rebis. As we have clearly illustrated, the being that is Marika and Radagon is a cosmic entity that harbors the Elden Ring within its very body. Again: it is beyond our comprehension.

Marika clearly wants us to attain the Elden Throne, as there is evidence

that she wanted to end the current age and its stagnation, and so she helps the Tarnished to achieve this aim. The main evidence for this is Hewg.

We learn from dialogues that Hewg has been imprisoned by Markia at Roundtable Hold in order to forge the Tarnished a god-slaying weapon:

"Use my masterpiece to slay a god. That is all that I have lived for. And my promise to Q-queen Marika." - Smithing Master Hewg

This contradicts what Gideon believes Marika wants. I would suggest that Gideon didn't gaze into Marika's will but rather Radagon's. I doubt any words were even spoken. What Gideon experienced when connecting with the Rebis must have been overwhelming and terrifying.

Indeed, Hewg likewise describes his exposure to Marika as "sheer terror":

"My being a prisoner is no fault of yours. Besides, I don't mind smithing. Despite my differences, the weapons get stronger, all the same. Given time, technique never fails. Besides, it helps me forget. The sheer terror of her..." - Smithing Master Hewg

Gideon's aim to block us more easily aligns with Radagon's goals of preventing us from entering the Erdtree. It is he that blocks the entrance and it is he who fights us in one final showdown. Thus I think Radagon has bent Ofnir to his will – all in defense of his precious Golden Order.



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In the end, Radagon couldn't prevent Marika from shattering the Elden Ring – as she reminds him, she is the god form, not he. In his final battle with us, he may wield the power of the shattered Elden Ring, but the Tarnished too has been gathering the fragmented runes of the Elden Ring, and with Hewg's god-slaying sword in hand, Marika takes revenge on her rogue half.

THE MISBEGOTTEN

Before I get to my concluding thoughts on Radagon, I want to address the lore elephant in the room. We touched upon the fact that elements of the Crucible greatly suffered in Radagon's reign; the Omen were subjected to a brutal culling or banishment and the Misbegotten are clearly employed as slaves. The Crucible Scale and Crucible Feather Talismans are references to the chimeric forms of these creatures, and the description leaves us in no doubt that they were reviled alongside Crucible Knights and the Omen. However, there are some unusual connections to Radagon that we can't just ignore. In a video by Zullie the Witch called "Little mistakes," they reveal that internally, the Misbegotten are referred to as "Children of Radagon."

This is fascinating when we consider the bright red hair of the Leonines, as

well as the fact that one of their number, the Misbegotten Crusader, wields the Golden Order Greatsword – the personal weapon of Radagon himself. So what is happening here?

There are so many parts of the lore to love in *Elden Ring* and one of the regions I really love for its story elements is the Consecrated Snowfield and what it represents. It is the entrance to Miquella's realm and an asylum for the unwelcome and those who do not fit within the realm of grace. This is why we find Albinaurics, Misbegotten and even Black Knife Assassins hiding out in these lands.

One of the best illustrations of this idea is the Cave of the Forlorn. This cave tells a story, and that starts with the name of the cave itself. Forlorn: sad, abandoned, lonely. Consider the denizens found here. The Misbegotten, like those found at the Haligtree, have sought sanctuary within this cave.

The Misbegotten's current place in Golden Order society is essentially encapsulated by the Crucible Scale and Crucible Feather Talismans:

"A vestige of the crucible of primordial life. Born partially of devolution, it was considered a signifier of the divine in ancient times, but is now increasingly disdained as an impurity as civilization has advanced."

- Crucible Feather Talisman



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The Misbegotten are relics of an age long past – life gone wild, illustrated by their various growths and vestigial tails and wings. This is a stark comparison to the ideals of regression and convergence espoused by the Golden Order, which venerates an idea of regression towards the mean. Hence the Misbegotten are enslaved, as we see at Castle Morne.

Thus it is no surprise that large quantities of Misbegotten have found themselves a home in the lands of Miquella, who is described by the Sacred Crown Helm as the protector of the meek. Indeed, in this cave there is a collection of Miquella's Lily which does seem to imply that the influence of Miquella is very much present.

This is all fairly self-explanatory, but something that is confusing is the leader of this particular group of Misbegotten: the Misbegotten Crusader who is wielding the legendary weapon, the Golden Order Greatsword. This is a very odd situation, and one that has been often discussed in the community. Just how did this Misbegotten get their hands on Radagon's legendary weapon?

Let's look at the possibilities, starting with the sword:

"Greatsword made of light, modeled after the Elden Ring itself. Forged by King Consort Radagon to proudly symbolize

The Misbegotten have a history of stealing legendary weapons. We see at the slaughter of Morne Castle the leader of the revolution claiming the Grafted Blade Greatsword.

the tenets of the Golden Order. One of the legendary armaments. Telltale signs betray that this was once the greatsword bequeathed to him by his first wife, Rennala." - Golden Order Greatsword

It is well agreed upon in the community that this sword was most likely originally the Full Moon Greatsword, and as we discussed in the section The Consort, we receive the Dark Moon Greatsword when we are engaged to Ranni as her consort. The description of that sword implies that the handing over of a sword is a tradition of the Carians, and thus we can assume that Radagon received a Full Moon version from Rennala. Yet, Radagon clearly modified this sword when he became Elden Lord in an attempt to symbolically represent his Golden Order and ideals. So this just



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underlines how unlikely it is for a lowly Misbegotten to get their hands on this prized weapon. What happened?

Firstly, the Misbegotten have a history of stealing legendary weapons. We see at the slaughter of Morne Castle the leader of this particular revolution claiming the storied sword of Castle Morne, the Grafted Blade Greatsword, as their prize, and it seems as though the Misbegotten Warrior of Redmane Castle is also in possession of the Ruins Greatsword. So we can imagine the Misbegotten have a more primitive culture where the biggest and strongest amongst them are granted the greatest prize.

In Leyndell we likewise witness Misbegotten killing on the outskirts of the city, and in general the city is in a pretty poor state. So perhaps after the fall of the Golden Order and the toll taken by the various sieges, the Misbegotten slaves of the capital looted the place and one of them escaped with the Golden Order Greatsword.

That is probably the easiest and most comfortable answer. But let's go a little deeper.

The Leonine Misbegotten are often referred to as "Misbegotten Warriors," such as in the fights with the Crucible Knight at Redmane Castle and with Perfumer Tricia, in which the boss bars

refers to each as a "Misbegotten Warrior." This has some interesting implications. Were they perhaps part of the Order in the days of the Crucible, and did they act as warriors like the Crucible Knights?

The Crucible Scale and Crucible Feather Talismans imply that these beings were once considered divine, and so it is very possible that these beasts were straight-up holy warriors who fought alongside the other forces of Order. Given the way they fight, we can see that they do seem to have some training. Yes, there are some bestial aspects to their combat, but they wield the sword with a certain warrior's finesse.

This brings us to the title of our particular Misbegotten in the Cave of the Forlorn: Misbegotten Crusader. A crusader is a person who campaigns for change, whether it's political, social or religious. Perhaps there is more to this story. This particular Misbegotten has led a group of Misbegotten to safety. Perhaps upon looting this sword, this Misbegotten found purpose and led a group of its people out of the mainland into the safety of the Consecrated Snowfield. That could be the crusade.

However, there is a slightly more unusual possibility. Was this Misbegotten a crusader of the Golden Order? I find it interesting that, unlike the other



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two instances of Misbegotten who drop legendary swords (the Misbegotten at Redmane Castle and Morne Castle), the Misbegotten Crusader is actually wielding the sword that it drops as loot.

The other Leonine Misbegotten have generic swords in their hands, but the Crusader is modeled with the Golden Order Greatsword and has unique animations where it activates the Establish Order skill – essentially a Golden Order incantation – by performing the signature gestures of the Golden Order.

Could it be that this Misbegotten Crusader was once used by Radagon, that they were essentially a slave knight that Radagon would sic on his enemies? And was it only upon the collapse of the Golden Order that this crusader abandoned Leyndell and led his people to a safer land?

Lokey translates the Misbegotten Crusader as something closer to a “Paladin or Holy Knight.” If it was once a paladin for the Golden Order, this would explain how the Misbegotten wields the sword so deftly, even down to using the correct Golden Order gestures.

I believe that Radagon is gone, forever, slain by us, and all that remains is the White Queen, the material, the vessel. And without her Red King she is reduced to mere material, a clay vessel

for our newly repaired Elden Ring. It is a really powerful story – a cosmic being created to be the perfect vessel of the great Elden Ring and to enact its will in a physical and philosophical way, while the other half was occupied with being the actual vessel, the god.

But two different characters and personalities sharing a single physical space is what led to the downfall of the Golden Order. The perfect god that was meant to oversee the Elden Ring enacted its sabotage. In this way we can now understand Goldmask’s conclusion on the Golden Order and its failings. The Mending Rune of Perfect Order description reads:

“A rune of transcendental ideology which will attempt to perfect the Golden Order. The current imperfection of the Golden Order, or instability of ideology, can be blamed upon the fickleness of the gods no better than men. That is the fly in the ointment.”

- Mending Rune of Perfect Order

The form of the rune itself is interesting in that it isn’t really a rune at all, rather a barrier protecting the Elden Ring from the influence of gods – perhaps Marika herself, given that the Elden Ring will still be housed within her.

Goldmask realized that the issue with the Golden Order was Radagon’s



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belief that faith could be bridged with knowledge – that while a fundamental and almost mathematically understanding of the form of the Elden Ring was required, so too was a god. Yet it was these gods, this singular Rebis who was meant to be the guardian of Order, that led to its corruption.

It was Marika’s grief that led to the Shattering of Order. It was Radagon’s pride that prevented a new Order from taking his place. It was the faith and fanaticism instilled by Radagon’s fundamentalists that led to the brutal butchery of innocent death-touched individuals. Had the Golden Order fundamentalists merely been scholars, they would have sought a solution within the Elden Ring itself. But with a blend of religiosity in the mix, the Golden Order’s fundamentals were wielded brutally in the name of a god.

This is the real truth of Radagon. I see people naming him as a great villain, and conversely they name Marika as a cold manipulator. But the reality of the issue is that they were both too human for their purpose.

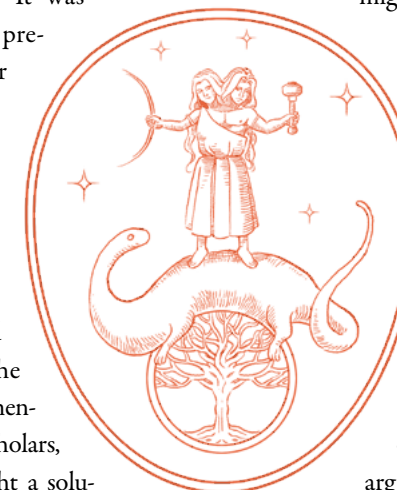
Radagon did what he felt was right. After years of studies he believed he could preserve a balance in a world that had long since lost its faith. Much of Radagon’s life is dedicated to unraveling the greater mysteries of the universe. Yet for all his godly power – and perhaps because of it – he suffered from the same self doubt

and crisis of identity that any human might. Goldmask was correct:

“[T]he instability of ideology... can be blamed upon the fickleness of the gods no better than men.” Indeed. Radagon was a champion, he was a leader and he was a philosopher, one who shaped the cultural and religious landscape of the Lands Between, arguably more than Marika.

He was her other half but in time he became her opposite. If perfection cannot be found in a Rebis, perhaps it cannot be found anywhere.

Or perhaps it does exist – in the balance of two twins, one of red and one of white, who instead of being forced to co-exist, choose to work together for the betterment of each other, and all other outcasts.





Chapter 13: Goldmask and the Golden Order

The Golden Order is the governing Order of the Erdtree, an ideology championed by the likes of Radagon, the second Elden Lord. The Golden Order enjoyed an unchallenged rule for years with its adherents being both scholarly and fanatical. Yet it still collapsed, the

Elden Ring was shattered and the Lands Between were plunged into a period of calamity and conflict. If this ideology was so perfect and immutable, then how did this even come to pass? This was a question pondered by a scholar of unmatched renown: Goldmask the Ever-Brilliant.



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Goldmask would pose a simple yet powerful question: why did the Golden Order fail? If the Golden Order was as holistic as its adherents claimed, how did it fail to prevent this great calamity? These questions get to the very core of what caused the Shattering and the matter of how the world reached this pressure point in the first place.

Through close attention to detail and a strong understanding of fundamentalism, we can learn how Goldmask identified glaring flaws within the Order. Viewing the Golden Order as a mathematical equation, Goldmask would seek to bring balance to this formula, much to the chagrin of Golden Order fanatics.

So first of all let us establish what we mean by the “Golden Order” and what the term “Order” means in this context. According to Oxford Languages, the definition of “order” is “the arrangement or disposition of people or things in relation to each other according to a particular sequence, pattern, or method.” It is critical to understand this right at the offset, because one of the main objectives Goldmask is trying to achieve is “perfect” Order.

The Golden Order is a term that can refer to a couple of concepts. The first and most important is the current “form” of the Elden Ring, and it is this version of

the Elden Ring that the ideology flows from. We hear this from the Greater Will itself, as the Fingers say the following:

“Great Elden Ring, root of the Golden Order. Anchor of all lands, giver of grace, wellspring of all joy. Until it was shattered. The tragic corruption of the Order has taken its toll. Across the realm, life lies in ruin. Fallen to pieces. Foul curses and misery spread, unabating. But the Greater Will has not abandoned the realm, nor the life that inhabits it. So it is that the Tarnished are guided by grace. Called to act. Brave Tarnished, your Great Rune is a handsome shard of the Elden Ring. Seek another of its kind. To become Elden Lord, and restore the Golden Order.”

- *The Two Fingers via Finger Reader Enia*

There are two interesting points in this dialogue. First, it points out that indeed the Elden Ring is the foundation of the Golden Order. Second, even the Greater Will is aware of a corruption of the Order that has led to the pitiable state of the lands. As we will see later, I believe that Goldmask wants to have the vassal gods, Marika and Radagon, removed from the Order, rather than the Greater Will itself. Even the Greater Will seems to be frustrated with the actions of its vassals.

(It’s at this point I would like to credit Last Protagonist and his excellent video “The Greentree, the Crucible,



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Destined Death, and the Golden Order,” for his eloquent thoughts. It has influenced my ideas on some of the foundational topics in this chapter, namely Death and the Law of Regression. So rather than referencing him at specific points, I just want to make it clear at the outset that they have had a great influence in fine-tuning my approach.)

The Elden Ring and the Golden Order were not always synonymous. The Crucible, as the primordial form of the Erdtree, represented an age of rampant and diverse life. In fact, we learn that any vestiges of the Crucible were once linked to the idea of what was divine, something we can learn from the Crucible Knot Talisman:

“A vestige of the crucible of primordial life. Born partially of devolution, it was considered a signifier of the divine in ancient times, but is now increasingly disdained as an impurity as civilization has advanced.” - Crucible Knot Talisman

In this time, when Godfrey was Elden Lord, those of the Crucible were welcomed within the established Order of the Erdtree. The Crucible Knights even became the champions of Lord Godfrey, as we learn from the Crucible Axe Helm:

“Helm of the Crucible Knights who served Godfrey, the first Elden Lord.” - Crucible Axe Helm

Yet the ideals of those who followed the Erdtree would change form alongside the Elden Ring itself. At some point, the Elden Ring had the Rune of Death removed from it, resulting in the new framework that we would come to know as the Golden Order. We learn of this event via Enia the Finger Reader, who says:

“The Rune of Death goes by two names; the other is Destined Death. The forbidden shadow, plucked from the Golden Order upon its creation... Unleashing the rune now would be unthinkable... The Fingers would never permit it. Nor would the Greater Will.” - Finger Reader Enia

The term “rune” tells us that this was once a part of the greater Elden Ring. During our quest to become Elden Lord, we learn that fragments of the Elden Ring have been claimed by the demigods. These fragments are Great Runes. And when we choose to repair the Elden Ring, we can use one of three Mending Runes – runes which in turn become part of the Elden Ring.

Returning to our definition of Order, we can determine that this Order is a grouping that now excludes Death. This is further clarified by the Mending Rune of the Death-Prince:

“The Golden Order was created by confining Destined Death. Thus, this new Order will be one of Death restored.” - Mending Rune of the Death-Prince



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Yet when exactly was Death removed from the Elden Ring? Well, it seems to track back to an event we have discussed in a lot of detail already: the Godskin Apostasy. Prior to this, Death Indiscriminate was still a power in the world. Destined Death was wielded, freely, by the Godskin Apostles – something we learn from Scouring Black Flame:

“The black flame could once slay gods. But when Maliketh sealed Destined Death, the true power of the black flame was lost.” - Scouring Black Flame

So at this stage the world was not as deathless as it is now, and the Godskins had the power to slay the gods, by channeling the Rune of Death through the Black Flame.

The Elden Ring and the Golden Order were not always synonymous. The Crucible, as the primordial form of the Erdtree, represented an age of rampant and diverse life.

Maliketh was the one who sealed the Rune of Death, separating it from the Elden Ring and thus sapping the power from the Godskins and taking it for himself, leading to the Godskins’ swift defeat at his hands. However, the power of Death was now absent in the Lands Between. Maliketh has specifically sealed it within his Black Blade. This would earn him a fearsome reputation, something we learn from the description of his armor:

“Maliketh, Queen Marika’s loyal half-brother, bore a blade imbued with Destined Death, and there was not one demigod who did not fear him.” - Maliketh’s Armor

Maliketh has kept Death out of the world at large since the Godskin event, and it is only reintroduced, or unbound, via the actions of the player. My interpretation is that this was the moment when the Golden Order was formed: when the Rune of Death was removed from the Elden Ring. Beyond this point, it was only Maliketh and his Black Blade who could now bring Death, and it was for this reason that he was so feared by the demigods.

I think this led Marika to define the Golden Order as a world not bound by Death, so that a threat such as theirs would never again surface. However, I believe it is Radagon, her second



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husband, who goes on to further codify this new age through fundamentalism.

So the world would enter a deathless state where life was bound and recycled through the Erdtree. This endless nature of life is best illustrated by the pathetic Wandering Nobles, who wear the Old Aristocrat Set:

“Abandoning their birthplace after the Shattering, these undead wanderers are the pitiful product of unending life.”

- Old Aristocrat Gown

This is why everyone is a desiccated, hollow shell. They have lived far too long without Death, forced to wander and never truly die.

I speculate this is why Death is tied to an Erdtree burial, where one doesn't die in the traditional sense but is instead absorbed by the Erdtree to rejoin the cycle of endless life. Consider Rennala's first dialogue with us regarding Spirit Ashes:

“Tis a bell for calling forth spirits. Summon them with it, from ash unreturned to the Erdtree. The spirits will obey thine command but briefly, as they recall battles past.” - Ranni (as Rennala)

So these are remains that have never been returned to the Erdtree, and live in a permanent state of undeath. This deathless version of the Elden Ring is the foundation of the Golden Order as we know it today, again with Maliketh's

sealing of the Rune of Death being the pivotal event that led to its creation.

I wanted to cover this in detail because I believe it is a foundational concept for one of the flaws identified by Goldmask as factors in the Order's collapse.

So with that established, let us review the belief system and behavior of those of the Golden Order, and how this contributed to the system's downfall.

GOLDEN ORDER FUNDAMENTALISM

We can get an inkling that the Golden Order was not always so intolerant of new ideas and opposing philosophies. Rogier says the following regarding the Golden Order's earlier days:

“The battle art you've learned is of the glintstone family. They were conceived at the great Academy of Raya Lucaria, to the north of this castle. In the past, they obeyed laws which contravened the Golden Order, or so I'm told. Fascinating, isn't it? That the Golden Order was pliable enough to absorb practices that contradicted itself in the past. With the Order broken, twisted, and in need of repair, such adaptability is more important now than ever.” - Sorcerer Rogier



Grace Given

We can see that there was an acknowledgement that the practices and laws of the Glintstone sorcerers once fell outside the Golden Order, but that they were brought into it and made part of it. Now these differences no doubt led to the two Liurnian Wars, a series of conflicts from which Radagon, that future leading member of the Golden Order, would rise as a champion. This is something we learn about from the Barrier of Gold incantation:

“This incantation was used by the champions of the Erdtree in the First and Second Liurnian Wars, during which the red-haired Radagon joined the heroes' ranks.” - Barrier of Gold

Despite the heroic feats of Radagon, the Carian Knights were more than a match for the forces of the Erdtree. Lord Radagon's forces were unable to break them, resulting in a stalemate, and instead the houses of the moon and the tree were joined in matrimony.

As Rogier says, despite the fundamentals of sorcery falling out of the bounds of the Golden Order, Radagon brought

them into the Order through marriage. I think this is an important moment to consider, because it is clear that Radagon is a central figure when it comes to codifying a set of tenets of the Golden Order.

The description of the Golden Order Greatsword describes these “tenets” that were laid down by Radagon in the time following his marriage to Rennala.

So Rogier speaks of the fluidity of the Golden Order in days passed, where it accepted new ideas and a new grouping of people into

its Order. But I believe this event led Radagon to lay down the foundations that would become the basis for the Golden

Order tenets, all based on the experiences he

had while still married to Rennala and before Godfrey was hounded from the Lands Between with the Tarnished.

As we will learn in a moment, a lot of golden fundamentalism scholarship is based around holism. This is a term coined by Brother Cohyn: an Order that confines, defines and explains the entirety of life within this one ideology. Such a deep and multilayered concept is why the Golden Order Seal refers to





fundamentalism as scholarship in all but name. This is where I think a lot of people get confused at what they perceive to be a contradiction between scholarship and fundamentalism, as many see the latter to be fanatical religious hardliners that are as far removed from intellectualism as possible. In fact, fundamentalists can be a group of scholars who analyze and scrutinize the very foundations of their religious tenets more than any other group, and thus they become even more inflexible and unwilling to bend on what they see as the strict outlines of their order.

Part of the development of this modern Order would be the acceptance and integration of intelligence-based practices, a movement spearheaded by Radagon himself. As Elden Lord he clearly had the time to ruminate on how the new Deathless Golden Order should be governed, and he blended his knowledge of the moon and the Erdtree to make a new whole.

This is the cornerstone of fundamentalism, as we learn from the Golden Order Seal that scales with both intelligence

and faith. It's a fact shared by the Golden Order incantations – all of which are incantations developed directly by Radagon and his son, Miquella, as we can learn from the descriptions of Radagon's Rings of Light and Discus of Light.

Yet what are the tenets of these fundamentalists? And what



explains their tendency to favor incantations that draw on both intelligence and faith? It has to do with the two laws that form the backbone of the fundamentalist ideologies: the Law of Regression and the Law of Causality.

Now, as a principle these are based on mathematical concepts, which I find interesting because math is referenced in-game in respect to the Golden Order. Specifically, I am referring to the Pulley Bow and the Pulley Crossbow. For example, the Pulley Bow description reads:

“Longbow which utilizes a series of pulleys and strings. The complex mechanism, which required advanced mathematical and mechanical understanding to craft, was likely made by a



Part of the development of this modern Order would be the acceptance and integration of intelligence-based practices, a movement spearheaded by Radagon himself.

certain genius who learned Golden Order Fundamentalism.” - Pulley Bow

I believe that the genius mentioned in their description who is said to have developed these was Goldmask. As we will see later, these oblique references to math are not insignificant, because while we may perceive the problems of the Golden Order as a philosophical problem, Goldmask views the Golden Order as an equation to be solved.

Let's look at how the in-game law refers to these by examining the two descriptions of the relevant incantations. First, the Law of Regression reads:

“The fundamentalists describe the Golden Order through the powers of regression and causality. Regression is the pull of meaning; that all things yearn eternally to converge.” - Law of Regression

And the Law of Causality reads:
“Causality is the pull between meanings; that which links all things in a chain of relation.” - Law of Causality

Both miracles make sense in the way that they operate – the Law of Regression regresses beings to their prior state, i.e. someone who has been poisoned is returned to a prior state where they are not poisoned. Causality is simply an illustration of cause and effect: The aggression of your enemy is the cause of the damage they receive.

In totality, both of these rules posit that all things are connected and affect one another, and that all things seek to regress and converge towards the mean. The Law of Regression in particular is important in understanding why fundamentalists are intolerant of diversity. Returning to our discussion on incantations, it explains why the fundamentalist incantations are balanced between faith and intelligence. After Radagon incorporated their beliefs and practices into the house of the Erdtree, he created a causal link between the two. This is a convergence of sorcery and incantations into one school rather than two.

Simply put, everything within the defined Golden Order must be interlinked and connected, and everything within this Order must converge to



Goldmask and the Golden Order

become a part of the greater whole of the Golden Order – just as incantations and sorcery pulled together to become the incantations of the fundamentalists. This makes the world more complete and less chaotic, and more ordered.

Just as the “dead” are buried at the roots of the Greattree to be returned to the Erdtree, returned to the One Great. And just as the twins known as D have converged to become two beings of one soul. And just as Radagon and Marika converged to become the god Rebis, the Golden Order totality.

But these laws only apply to those who fall within the boundaries of the Golden Order. Those who do not are labeled as imperfections that cannot be allowed to exist:

“I serve the Golden Order. That I might put this crooked land to rights. Following only the guidance of the great Elden Ring. Those Who Live in Death fall outside the principles of the Golden Order. Their mere existence sullies the guidance of gold. Tainting its truth. And so it is the vermin must be exterminated... Down to the very last.”
- D, Hunter of the Dead

As we hear quite plainly from D here, the entire reason that the hunters of the Golden Order abhor Those Who Live in Death is because they are a problematic inconsistency that starkly reflects the

flaws of the system. To the hunters it is a problem to be fixed; by collecting all Deathroot and returning it to Maliketh, the Golden Order can be repaired. In reality, however, the only role they play is one of distraction. By stoking hatred against Those Who Live in Death, the hunters manage to help deflect blame from the Order and its leaders.

When Ranni and her co-conspirators stole a fragment of the Rune of Death and murdered Godwyn, Deathroot spread throughout the world. This was not meant to happen, in the eyes of the Golden Order, which was defined specifically to contain Death.

We have learned that Golden Order fundamentalists see their world as something interconnected: even those who die are just recycled into the Erdtree. Yet Those Who Live in Death exist outside of such rules and just continue to exist, despite having died. The purity of the Golden Order’s claim to holism is therefore challenged, and this is where the fanatical hunters come in.

Indeed, we know that the hunters are tied directly to fundamentalism from the Order’s Blade item description:

“One of the incantations of the Golden Order fundamentalists. Used by hunters of Those Who Live in Death... Any felled by this incantation cannot be revived. The



Grace Given

role of the hunters is to stamp out defiled reason – all for the perfection of the Golden Order.” - Order’s Blade

“Defiled reason” – what an interesting term. And as we explore more, you will soon see the reason Those Who Live in Death are so hated by the likes of D. They are a tangible inconsistency with Golden Order tenets. They literally defile the reason that the Golden Order seeks to represent, thus calling into question the truth of Golden Order fundamentalism. This cannot stand.

The idea is well explained by the Holy Water Grease item description:

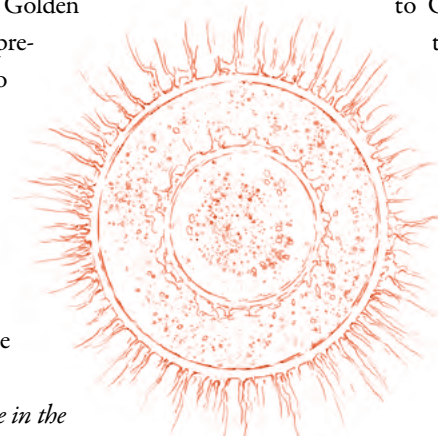
“There is no place in the Golden Order for those who have exceeded life’s bounds. These blemishes must be hunted down by the Virtuous.”
- Holy Water Grease

This gives us an insight into how these Hunters see Those Who Live in Death – as blemishes. They are a blemish on the truth of fundamentalism in that they prove it isn’t true at all, and so by eradicating these glitches one can make it true. And throughout your time talking to D, you will notice he mainly

talks about restoring the “purity” of the Golden Order.

The hunters, incorrectly, believe that the Golden Order can be restored by weeding out Deathroot. and thus collecting these fragments of the stolen part of the Rune of Death that has bled through the world since Godwyn’s death. In returning this Deathroot to Gurranq, i.e. Maliketh, the holder of the Rune of Death, they believe the Rune of Death will be made whole again, and thus the Golden Order will be restored.

However, this is a fallacy, as realized by Gurranq when he has collected all of the Deathroot, and yet the damage incurred by the rune’s theft remains. Indeed, on his death, Maliketh laments to Marika that the Golden Order cannot be restored. The Golden Order is fundamentally broken and this damage cannot be undone. No doubt this is a fundamental truth that is understood by the aloof Goldmask, but cannot be fathomed by spittle-flecked hunters of the Golden Order who see only the target in front of them.





Goldmask and the Golden Order

The Order Healing incantation details how Goldmask found the us-versus-them mentality of the hunters to be little more than a simplistic distillation of the foundations of the Golden Order. All the hunters serve to do is to keep the flawed Order in power by setting up a right-versus-wrong paradigm. This will not solve the problems faced by the Order, though I have no doubt the hunters believe otherwise.

The hunters highlight another issue with fundamentalism through their inability to recognize or even consider that any flaws existed in the first place. Marika, who clearly became a cynic, calls Radagon a “leal hound,” as if to mock his blind adherence to the tenets of a clearly broken system.

Corhyn, despite his deep respect for Goldmask as an intellectual, eventually goes insane rather than accepting his master’s truth. Surrounded by such blind sycophancy, is it any surprise that Marika felt trapped? Whatever her motivation, she shattered the Elden Ring following the chaos of the Night of the Black Knives, and brought an epoch to a close. The Golden Order had failed.

But how is that even possible? This is exactly the subject that would be examined by the learned Goldmask, a Tarnished who would come to the Lands Between not as a warrior but as a scholar.

COSMIC CONUNDRUM

We have already discussed the fact that those who ascribe to fundamentalism are in part scholars who have heavily philosophized about the nature of their Order in order to create strict outlines and boundaries. We know that Goldmask was one such scholar:

“I’m off in search of a noble scholar known as the Goldmask, to beg his instruction.” - Brother Corhyn

To augment this, we learn from his Goldmask that he is a staunch pursuer of fundamentalism. Unlike his fellow scholars, he was so loyal that he would seek to have things perfect rather than pretend they already were.

The way in which Goldmask is referred to in-game – the “Ever-Brilliant,” “Noble” and “Lord” Goldmask – shows that he was held in great esteem for his sharp mind and understanding of the inner workings of the Golden Order. I think it is clear that we aren’t meant to fully comprehend the intimate way in which Goldmask understands the Elden Ring. He perceives its formation in a mathematical way. Goldmask views the Golden Order through its shape and structure. Even in the introductory cinematic, Goldmask isn’t writing a philosophical



Grace Given

treatise; instead he is painting the form of the Elden Ring as it should be, in order to represent an equation of balance.

Indeed the very reason for Goldmask’s questioning of the Golden Order and for coming to the Lands Between is because he has foreseen the perfect form of the Elden Ring in a vision:

“A mask designed to resemble a blazing golden halo. Created and left behind by Lord Goldmask, a staunch pursuer of Golden Order fundamentalism... Its striking design represents both the brilliant inspiration that once shone upon him, and the vision of a ring that he will surely find at the end of his pursuit. ‘To you who seek to shine as I do, wear it well!’” - Radiant Gold Mask

Goldmask is a staunch pursuer of fundamentalism. Unlike his fellow scholars, he was so loyal that he would seek to have things perfect rather than pretend they already were.

This vision of perfect balance obviously has led him to ponder why the current form of the Elden Ring failed. When he figures out the problem he is able to produce this perfected equation.

There is some interesting cut dialogue that we can find in the text dump of the game, including some alternative dialogue from Corhyn. These bits of dialogue are variations on the dialogue we get from Corhyn regarding Goldmask’s reputation, when he tells us he is leaving for the Altus Plateau.

As I always say with cut content, this is not canon –this was cut for a reason. But my gut feeling is that they decided to go with a version that struck a balance between giving some information about Goldmask without resorting to the large exposition dump I am about to give you.

Corhyn could have said:

“There’s something I should mention to you, as well. I’m thinking of leaving the Roundtable Hold. Do you know of the noble Goldmask? Though he was but a Tarnished, living outside the Lands Between, he was a great scholar, who foresaw the coming guidance of grace. And now, I hear he has come to the Lands Between alone, to contemplate the Golden Order... I wish nothing more than to seek his instruction, and perhaps even help him in his research.” - Brother Corhyn, cut dialogue





Goldmask and the Golden Order

So while cut, I think this clearly reinforces the general vibe about the Ever-Brilliant's reputation. He is a scholar who has a deep understanding of the Golden Order, the Elden Ring and its form. His reputation and renown is reinforced by the fact that Goldmask was so revered that he at some point had disciples:

"Bracelets made in the image of Erdtree branches. Minimal adornments made by Lord Goldmask's disciples. Those disciples have long since left him." - Gold Bracelets

What should be clear to the player is that Goldmask obviously does not operate on the same plane of intelligence that we do. Goldmask does not speak; instead his mind is entirely focused on the unpacking of the Golden Order's formula. We can see this throughout Corhyn's questline, as he utters not a word and only gestures in reference to his calculations. It is no doubt this inhuman behavior that led to the abandonment by his aforementioned disciples.

Or it could be that, like Corhyn, these disciples realized that Goldmask did not agree with the perfection of the

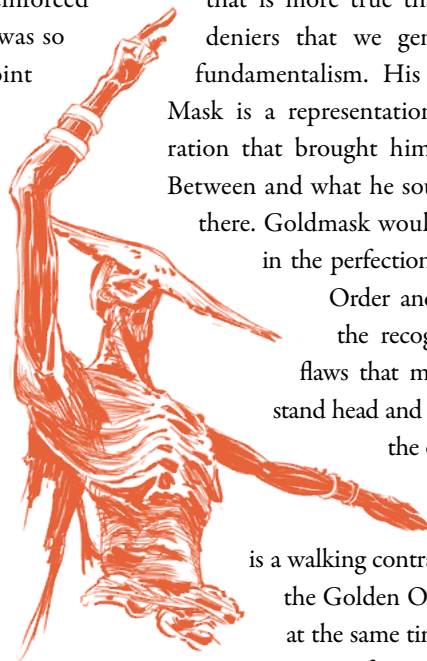
Golden Order, which must have felt like blasphemy to any hardliners.

We have already hinted at the fact that Goldmask was exceptionally loyal to the Golden Order, and in a way that is more true than the bigoted deniers that we generally find in fundamentalism. His Radiant Gold Mask is a representation of the inspiration that brought him to the Lands Between and what he sought to achieve there. Goldmask would identify flaws in the perfection of the Golden

Order and I believe it is the recognition of such flaws that makes Goldmask stand head and shoulders above the other delusional members of the Order. D

is a walking contradiction, calling the Golden Order perfect yet at the same time acknowledging imperfection. Corhyn loses his mind the moment he realizes that Goldmask would have the audacity to question the perfection of the Golden Order, despite having spent the entire quest calling Goldmask a genius.

Yet Goldmask is the most loyal to the Golden Order as a concept. He doesn't seek to bring light to these flaws to destroy the Golden Order.



Grace Given

In fact, Goldmask seeks to find the perfect Golden Order.

While Goldmask doesn't speak, mercifully there are a few item descriptions that can help us understand his feelings on the current state of the Golden Order. One such item description is the Order Healing, a fundamentalist hunter incantation:

"The noble Goldmask lamented what had become of the hunters. How easy it is for learning and learnedness to be reduced to the ravings of fanatics; all the good and the great wanted, in their foolishness, was an absolute evil to contend with. Does such a notion exist in the fundamentals of Order?"

- Order Healing

This is flaw number one, a flaw that goes back to one of the very first concepts we discussed: order itself. As we determined, order is the unity of people, ideas and variables. Yet by its very definition, an order defines itself by setting itself against "another," against a group that is not accepted, to illustrate what is accepted. Order must create a disorder to set itself against, and in this item description Goldmask laments this – that the sophisticated scholastic foundations of his order are being reduced to a primitive case of us-versus-them.

Using Goldmask's Mending Rune at the end of the game will result in the Age of Order, and I think it is clear that one of the aspects of the Golden Order that unsettles him is the fact that there actually is no Order in the first place. Yet this was merely a symptom observed by Goldmask. When he comes to the Lands Between, we see that he begins operating on a higher plane than most of us could understand, while he unwinds the mathematical core of the Golden Order, his thoughts and calculus expressed by his rhythms and gesturing.

While Goldmask is able to get to the heart of this equation, he is stopped when he is presented with a name he had not expected: Radagon.

"The master's reflections had heightened as we neared the Erdtree. While still a precise calculus, the rhythms grew increasingly wild. Until he simply ceased. Now the master is facing quite the puzzle. The Golden Order is founded on the principle that Marika is the one true god. However... The name of Marika's second husband, King Consort Radagon, also appeared... Who exactly was Radagon? The master is stumped. His finger has remained still, ever since Radagon's name was discovered." - Brother Corhyn

Goldmask is missing part of the formula, and this is why we see his



Goldmask and the Golden Order

right hand frozen while his left is outstretched. It isn't until he is presented with the missing variable that he understands the formula completely and adopts the pose of Golden Order Totality – with both arms in equal balance.

In my mind the Golden Order Totality motion is representative of the truth that we bear witness to by casting the Law of Regression on Radagon's statue – the truth being that Marika is Radagon. This is a revelation to Goldmask, as we hear him audibly gasp when we present him with this answer. As Corhyn has said, the Golden Order was founded on the principle that Marika is the one true god, and now Goldmask has just learned that this isn't entirely true. So in a way, this entire institution and therefore the violent actions of its adherents are based on a lie. This understanding of Golden Order Totality will govern the rest of Goldmask's journey. We see him in this pose in every subsequent meeting, even maintaining it upon his death.

PERFECT ORDER

So where does Goldmask go next? He goes to the Mountaintops of the Giants:

"I've been gripped by a terrifying thought. The rhythms and calculus of the master's finger... betray a suspicion of the holism of the Golden Order. A conceit, I am afraid, that cannot be overlooked. Oh, but how could this be? I dread to even entertain the possibility... but somehow, I cannot cast aside my doubts about the master. Tell me, have I simply lost my head?" - Brother Corhyn

If the master were true to the Golden Order, why would he think to breach this forbidden mount of fire? In short, Goldmask doubts the current structure of the ideology as a whole. We see from the Mending Rune of Perfect Order that he believes that the way to perfect Order is to excise certain elements from the current makeup of the Golden Order – a belief that is tantamount to blasphemy.

This concerning idea is further accentuated by Goldmask's journey to the mountaintops where the Flame of Ruin is confined, for why would the master come here? It is because he has come to the conclusion that the current gods must be destroyed for there to be a true Order. The Erdtree must be destroyed.

This is explained by the Mending Rune of Perfect Order:

"A rune of transcendental ideology which will attempt to perfect the Golden



Grace Given

If the master were true to the Golden Order, why would he think to breach this forbidden mount of fire? In short, Goldmask doubts the current structure of the ideology as a whole.

Order. The current imperfection of the Golden Order, or instability of ideology, can be blamed upon the fickleness of the gods no better than men. That is the fly in the ointment."

- Mending Rune of Perfect Order

So understanding what is actually said here is the critical moment in our assessment of Goldmask's actions and conclusion. The rune states that Goldmask's final conclusion is that it was the fickleness of gods that has led to the instability of this ideology. This implies that all the imperfections we have reviewed and the ones identified by Goldmask can be traced back to this fickleness.

It is hard to unpack, but I believe he is referring to the fickleness of the gods as a whole, both Marika and the Greater Will. Now, it tracks that

Goldmask believes that it is Marika and Radagon's fault that the world is the way that it is and that this instability would not have happened if not for their very human emotions and motivations. Goldmask seems to strike upon this truth when he realizes Marika is Radagon. As Corhyn says:

"The Golden Order is founded on the principle that Marika is the one true god. However... The name of Marika's second husband, King Consort Radagon, also appeared..." - Brother Corhyn

So the entire foundation of the Golden Order is built upon the "truth" they have always known: that Marika is the one god. Yet the fickleness of the gods led them to completely usurp this truth through the union of Marika and Radagon. This is why Goldmask gets stuck in his calculations, as he is basing his formula on what he knows to be the truth, only to later learn the gods have changed the rules.

This is a truth that has been kept from the faithful at large. Radagon himself is a leading member of the Golden Order who will have helped uphold this "truth," yet he will have been fully aware that it was a lie. With such foundational principles being so easily upended it is easy to see Marika, Radagon and their master as fickle, just as Goldmask does.



Goldmask and the Golden Order

And Goldmask is right: Marika, the one true god meant to uphold the will of the Elden Ring and the Erdtree, was the one who shattered it. Take her speech upon the Mountaintops of the Giants:

“In Marika’s own words. Hark, brave warriors. Hark, my lord Godfrey. We commend your deeds. Guidance has delivered ye through ordeal to the place ye stand. Put the giants to the sword and confine the flame atop the mount. Let a new epoch begin. An epoch glistening with life. Brandish the Elden Ring, for the Age of the Erdtree!”

- Queen Marika via Melina

And then her speech to Radagon:

“In Marika’s own words. O Radagon, leal hound of the Golden Order. Thou’rt yet to become me. Thou’rt yet to become a god. Let us be shattered, both. Mine other self.” - Queen Marika via Melina

We can see a real transformation of character here, from stalwart believer to jaded queen. From someone who waged war on behalf of the Erdtree to someone who struck at its very heart. For whatever reason, post-Night of the Black Knives, Marika decides to break the Elden Ring, because she chose to be driven by her own motivations.

Indeed the Rebus of Marika and Radagon is itself a walking paradox. On the one hand Marika drives the

faith towards total oblivion after seeing the flaws in the Order following the Night of the Black Knives. Meanwhile, Radagon’s fundamentalists are out hunting down Those Who Live in Death, trying to eradicate the flaw completely. This is not even to mention the fact that it was Marika who had the Rune of Death removed in the first place – a move that would eventually lead to the loophole that would spawn Those Who Live in Death.

Indeed their final actions are fickleness made manifest – Marika destroys the ring while Radagon tries to repair it.

The Golden Order in essence is ruled by Marika/Radagon and the Elden Beast, both of which are considered gods. I see the Greater Will as something far beyond even these incomprehensible beings. But it is their inconsistent actions that Goldmask sees as the cause for the imperfection within the Golden Order.

So with that said let us look at his Mending Rune, his solution to perfect Order.

When we use any of the other two Mending Runes, they are incorporated into the Elden Ring, meaning that the power of that rune becomes part of the new Order of the world; i.e. the Omen Curse or Those Who Live in Death.



Grace Given

However, Goldmask’s rune is slightly different, more like a halo that surrounds and encompasses the entirety of the Elden Ring. With the description of the Mending Rune in hand, the purpose of this should be abundantly clear: It is a protective ring shielding the Elden Ring from the influence of gods.

Beyond this, it is speculation. For me, I suspect that the Elden Ring must still draw its power from the Greater Will, but that it is now contained by Goldmask’s halo, so that it cannot be interfered with by any other vassal gods. This is why Goldmask comes to the Mountaintops of the Giants and the Flame of Ruin. He too seeks to see its power unleashed as the current vassal gods, Marika, Radagon and the Elden Beast, must be cleansed for his perfected Order to take effect. Indeed, the Greater Will shows frustration at Marika/Radagon going off-piste and not following the plan:

“Marika’s trespass demanded a heavy sentence. But even in shackles, she remains a god, and the vision’s vessel. Confer Great Runes to become Elden Lord, and join Queen Marika as her consort. The Fingers have willed it so.”

- The Two Fingers via Finger Reader Enia

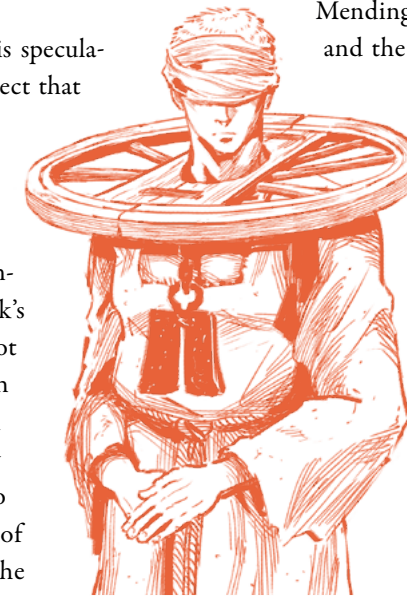
Goldmask’s rune is called the Mending Rune of Perfect Order, and the age we can bring about

is the Age of Order.

Goldmask’s motivations have been clearly laid out. He believes the Golden Order should mean order and stability. No creaking and shifting foundations, no personal motivations filtering through its ideology and no gods.

Humans are humans: There will always be war and conflict. But when

gods act the same way, there are cosmic consequences. When these gods harness the entire foundations of our existence to meet their own agendas, or if they destroy those foundations in a moment of despair, then their Order is simply a lie.





PART III:
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CONSPIRACY,
COLLAPSE
AND THE
SHATTERING



Chapter 14: Ranni the Witch

There are few in the Lands Between who have such august heritage as Lunar Princess Ranni. Ranni, Rykard and Radahn are born of Carian royalty, the powerful royal house of Liurnia that was able to stand toe-to-toe against the forces of Leyndell in two wars. They are the children of Rennala, the great lunar champion of Raya Lucaria, as well as the legendary champion of the Erdtree, Radagon.

In time these children would also become step-children of Marika through Radagon's second marriage, making them

both Carian royalty and Erdtree royalty. If you believe that Radagon and Marika have been sharing a body since Marika became a god, then in a way Marika is their parent as well.

If that weren't enough, Ranni was one of three of the demigods to be chosen as an Empyrean, alongside the twin prodigies. This is more impressive when you consider that Miquella and Malenia appear to have been chosen due to being born by the single-bodied Marika/Radagon. Ranni shares no such special birth, and thus her selection as Empyrean must be due to her potential.



Grace Given

I would like to address a theory that has been held by many, that Ranni can't be the biological child of Rennala, because Empyreans are only born from a single god. This theory cites Malenia's remembrance as a source. As a result, such theories believe Ranni was instead "born" from the rebirthing of the Amber Egg – in other words, born solely from Radagon's meddling. It could therefore be seen that the "sweetings" surrounding Rennala are failed short-lived versions of Ranni.

I don't necessarily think this theory is impossible. Rather I disagree with the idea it is predicated on: that Empyreans can only be born of a single god. In my mind, Empyreans are chosen, and it just so happens that Miquella and Malenia were chosen because of their birth.

I think the process of being chosen as Empyrean is better understood by Lokey's translation of Ranni's selection as an Empyrean:

"...I was once an Empyrean. For among the Demigods, only Malenia, Miquella, and I were discovered by our respective Two Fingers and became candidates for the next generation of god to succeed Queen Marika." - Ranni dialogue, via Lokey

It's up to you what to believe, but I will go with Occam's razor and argue that she is just another red-haired child of the Radagon/Rennala union. Decide your

truth. Ultimately the result is the same: she was raised as a Carian princess and was granted Empyrean status.

We get scant details about Ranni's early life, but we do get a few inklings, thanks to Iji and some other pieces of lore. Much like her sibling Radahn, it seems that in her original body, Ranni shared the iconic red hair of her father, Radagon; we see hints of red hair on her original petrified body.

One benefit to being an Empyrean in her youth was the relationship that Ranni developed with her Shadowbound, Blaidd. We know from Maliketh's remembrance and the Raging Wolf Set that Empyreans are granted a Shadowbound Beast – much as Maliketh was granted to Marika. Ranni confirms that she was provided with Blaidd, tailor-made as a result of her Empyrean status. But while Blaidd, in a way, is a reminder of what Ranni would come to hate, it is clear that the two developed a special bond that went beyond Shadow and Empyrean.

Iji gives us an insight into her childhood:

"Blaidd is Lady Ranni's stepbrother. Ranni's mother, Queen Rennala, approved of him, and they played like siblings from childhood. They were always happy to have me tag along, as well." - War Counselor Iji

So despite Rennala being associated with the moon and Blaidd being a product



Ranni the Witch

of the Two Fingers, she approved of him as a companion to Ranni. And it seemed Ranni played much like any other child with Blaidd and Iji. This explains why she holds the two so dear. It is nice to imagine Ranni having a normal and innocent childhood, as stories like this are scarce in the Lands Between.

Yet Ranni was also born to the Carian royal household, founded by Queen Rennala, whose power was centered around the moon. Being raised in that environment by as preeminent a sorcerer as Rennala, it is no surprise that Ranni herself would become a powerful being.

After all, Ranni is a powerful sorcerer – powerful enough to bend a dragon, Adula, to her will and conjure a full phantom of her mother at the height of her power. The moon is the defining partner to both Ranni and Rennala, and Ranni’s mother was keen to make the union with a moon a tradition of Caria’s heirs. We therefore learn of Ranni’s first meeting with the Dark Moon via Ranni’s Dark Moon:

“This moon was encountered by a young Ranni, led by the hand of her mother, Rennala. What she beheld was

cold, dark, and veiled in occult mystery.”
- *Ranni’s Dark Moon*

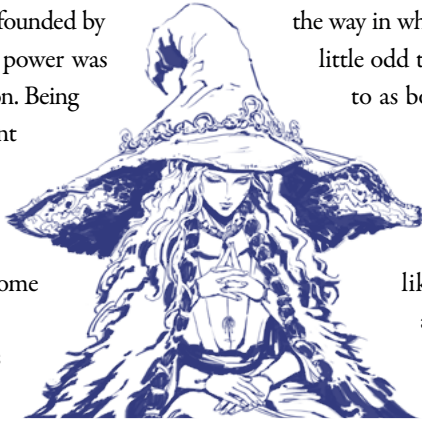
It’s almost as if Rennala takes Ranni on a journey so that she can encounter her own moon much as Rennala did in her youth – a recreation of that first fateful meeting.

I want to briefly comment on the Carian line and some strangeness in the way in which it is described. It’s a little odd that Rennala is referred to as both the founder of the Carian line and also as the last of the Carian queens. This makes it seem like a new royal family and an old one at the same time. And yet they have only had one queen.

The family also feels very small, consisting only of Rennala and her three children, and yet there are suggestions that Ranni is just the latest in a line of princesses. As the Carian Filigreed Crest states:

“An honor said to have once been awarded to Carian knights who served as direct retainers to the kingdom’s princesses. Now there is only one princess: Ranni, daughter of Rennala.” - *Carian Filigreed Crest*

This leads us to conclude that there were other princesses, and since Rennala



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is the one and only queen of the house of Caria, this would mean Rennala would have other daughters. In all honesty, I am unsure what to make of this, but there is a possibility that Rennala had been married prior to Radagon and had a number of children with another unnamed consort.

What interests me is how this lore interacts with the Three Sisters hill that exists behind Caria Manor. On this hill there are three towers: Ranni’s Rise, Seluvis’s Rise and Renna’s Rise. My presumption is that Seluvis’s Rise was renamed to reflect its new master and this was also once named after a sister. Could it be that Renna, Ranni and the unnamed sister were all the daughters of Caria? And therefore does the Carian Filigreed Crest refer to these sisters when it talks about princesses plural? Renna is a name that is essentially a derivation of Rennala, and given the way names work in *Elden Ring*, it would be logical to assume that Renna was a daughter of Rennala.

A wrench is thrown into the works here when Ranni first introduces herself as Renna – a false identity employed to hide the fact that she is one of the most influential players in the Lands Between. However, this doesn’t discount the idea that Renna was once a separate person, and Ranni has just taken on her name to hide her true identity. To me, the location of the Three Sisters heavily implies that

Ranni, Renna and the unnamed sister were jointly the princesses of Caria, but now it is only Ranni who remains.

There is the possibility that Renna is the name of the Snowy Crone, Ranni’s secret mentor – especially since one can find the Snow Witch Set in Renna’s Rise. My main issue with this is that, again, the name Renna is very much a derivation of Rennala. That said, I like the idea of Ranni, Seluvis and Renna operating out of the Three Sisters towers. It would also make sense of Ranni’s fake identity; she is literally pretending to be her mentor of old when she introduces herself as Renna the Witch.

There is of course the possibility that this item description for the Carian Filigreed Crest is just poorly worded. However, the impression that I feel we are meant to get is that the Carian royal house is an old one with many traditions, despite the fact that it has only had one queen. Rennala can simply have lived a long life and ruled for a very long time. And with regards to there being other princesses, my speculation would be that Rennala has had prior consorts and thus prior princesses.

Either way, by the time Ranni came around, the conventions and traditions of Carian royalty and princesses had been established. Yet Ranni will have stood head and shoulders above the rest due to her heritage, power and Empyrean status.



Ranni the Witch

What is most unfortunate about Ranni's story is that we are missing so much from her early days, including her relationship with her father and the Golden Order. The facts are this: Ranni was at one stage more humanoid and had red hair, and was granted Empyrean status early on in her life before being introduced to her Dark Moon by her mother. Obviously, this introduction is one of the three pivotal events that set Ranni on the course to becoming who she is now, a strong-willed character who wants to usurp the rule of the Elden Ring entirely. The other two were Radagon abandoning her mother and her mentorship under the Snowy Crone.

So with that said let us now discuss the nature of the Dark Moon, the occult, and that mysterious mentor of hers.

THE DARK MOON

I am sure most are aware that at this stage Ranni's moon and Rennala's moon are separate bodies. In fact you can see them both at the same time, at the top of Moonlight Altar. You can see the clear differences here in appearance – Ranni's moon is darker.

Rennala's moon is the Full Moon, as we know via her epithet and her signature spell. When you consider how impressive this magic is, and the fact it draws

its power from a completely different source from that of Glintstone sorcery, it is little wonder that Raya Lucaria would have fallen under the sway of Rennala. As a direct result of this prestige granted by her power, she founded her royal family.

Caria's power is directly a result of the power of the moon, and it makes sense that Rennala would lead Ranni to find her own moon. Should the royal family continue, we could imagine this would be a tradition that would last generations, with each subsequent princess being introduced to their own moon.

The other interesting thing we need to consider is the matriarchal nature of the Carian family and their relationship to the moon. We have already spoken of another matriarchal society, the Nox. The reason I see this society as matriarchal is due to the Night Maidens. This is a female-only class that appears to have been given particular prominence in Nox society, to the point where its members are appointed personal guards in the form of Swordstresses. There is also the prominence of Queen Marika, who is related to the Noxian people and may underline their matriarchal nature.

But why is this the case? There are many crossovers between Noxian society and Caria, including literal pieces of archaeological evidence that show Noxian statues within Carian structures, as in the



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I am sure most are aware that at this stage Ranni's moon and Rennala's moon are separate bodies. In fact you can see them both at the same time.

Church of Vows. However the main connection is their shared association with the celestial, and with the moon. Rennala and the Carians have the Full Moon, Ranni has the Dark Moon and the Nox once were in contact with the Black Moon. Again, a common interpretation is that the moon is associated with the feminine while the sun is masculine. The philosophical concept of Yin and Yang reflects this idea, Yin meaning moon or female and Yang meaning sun or male. There is also the fact that the menstrual cycle used to be associated with lunar cycles.

This association of the moon with the feminine isn't a new idea in FromSoftware games, either. We have Dark Sun Gwyndolin from the first *Dark Souls*. Gwyndolin is the child of Gwyn, Lord of Sunlight, and by the time of the first game, Gwyndolin is the last remaining deity in Anor Londo.

The description of his robes reads:
"The power of the moon was strong in Gwyndolin, and thus he was raised as a daughter." - *Moonlight Robe*

Then we have the School of Mensis in *Bloodborne*, utilizing a word associated with the menstrual cycle, which is especially relevant given the game's focus on childbirth and the moon. The point is that, especially when it comes to *Dark Souls*, we have a precedent set where the moon is connected to feminine energy and also magic.

This Yin of intelligence-based sorceries is balanced by the Yang of the sun and sunlight miracles and faith. Perhaps the reason that the Nox and the Carians are matriarchal is to do with the greater affinity that women have to the moon; they are more in tune with its power.

As such, Rennala led Ranni by the hand to meet a moon. Not Rykard, nor Radahn, because it was Ranni who was meant to carry on her mother's legacy and is evidently next in line for the Carian throne. This is why such a particular mention is made of Carian princesses, and not princes, in the Carian Filigreed Crest.

Yet there is something different about Ranni's moon that separates it from her mother's: It is the Dark Moon:

"What she beheld was cold, dark, and veiled in occult mystery."
- *Ranni's Dark Moon*



Ranni the Witch

Cold, dark and occult – all facets of its nature that appear to separate it from the Full Moon, and all three are aspects that Ranni in time appears to have embraced and which no doubt influenced the rather dark path that she took.

Of course, her mastery over the occult and cold would have not been possible if not for her mysterious mentor, who we only know as the Snowy Crone. But when would she have fallen under the influence of this figure? To me, it makes perfect sense that it would have happened at another pivotal moment in her life, when Radagon abandoned her mother Rennala.

Pastor Miriel speaks of this perplexing event and says:

“However, when Godfrey, first Elden Lord, was hounded from the Lands Between, Radagon left Rennala to return to the Erdtree Capital, becoming Queen Marika’s second husband and King Consort. Taking the title... of second Elden Lord. The mystery endures, to this day... As to why Lord Radagon would cast Lady Rennala aside... And moreover... why a mere champion would be chosen for the seat of Elden Lord.” - Miriel, Pastor of Vows

There came a moment when Godfrey and the Tarnished were driven from the Lands Between, and Radagon would abandon Rennala and marry his other half, Marika, to fill the vacant seat of Elden Lord. This would make Radagon,

Rykard and Ranni step-children of Marika, but it would also break Rennala. We learn of this via Rennala’s set:

“When Rennala, head of both the Academy of Raya Lucaria and the Carian royal family, lost her husband Radagon, her heart went along with him. And then, those at the academy realized. That Rennala was no champion, after all.” - Queen’s Robe

Radagon’s importance to Rennala can be seen by the fact that a statue of Radagon remains in the Grand Library of Raya Lucaria, close to where she herself stays. Rennala does appear completely broken, in a dream-like state obsessing over the Amber Egg and rebirths and her sweetings. This egg itself was given to her as a parting gift from Radagon – again explained to us by Miriel:

“In the end, Lady Rennala was left alone, cradling the amber egg Lord Radagon bequeathed her. Now she devotes herself to it through forbidden rite; the grim art of reincarnation. You would do well to remember... Severing a vow, strongest of bonds, has consequences ever more dire”.

- Miriel, Pastor of Vows

Radagon’s leaving has some wide-reaching consequences for the Carian royal family. As we see in Rennala’s set, her reaction to losing her husband is essentially seen as a sign of weakness by the Raya Lucarians. Miriel confirms outright that the academy’s



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revolt was triggered by Radagon’s abandoning Rennala when she says:

“You wish to know more of Lady Rennala? She is Queen, head of the Carian royal family, and governor of the Academy of Raya Lucaria. The great and beautiful Full Moon Witch. Sadly, her heart was broken when Lord Radagon left her. And then, when the academy rebelled against the royals, she was locked away in the grand library.” - Miriel, Pastor of Vows

So there it is, the trigger for the Raya Lucarian rebellion. They sensed weakness on the part of Rennala and locked her in the Grand Library, where she remains to this day.

Though no doubt the Raya Lucarians may have been planning this for a while, this was just the opportune moment. We learn of the Carians preparing for the academy’s revolt via the Carian Retaliation sorcery – who perhaps sensed that this would happen. We know then that the forces of Caria and Raya Lucaria did go to war with one another, a war that seemingly culminates in the siege of Caria Manor. This is an event we learn of from the Sword Monument outside of the manor itself, which reads:

“The resting place of the contemptible Cuckoos Lost in the siege of Caria Manor” - Sword Monument, Caria Manor, Liurnia of the Lakes

We also get more detail from Iji, a blacksmith to the Carians who may well have witnessed these events himself:

“When the Raya Lucaria Academy turned on the Carians, the Knights of the Cuckoo descended on this tract. After leveling it, they carried on to the manor. The

Carians were taken off guard, but their strength had not waned, and they repelled the knights’ onslaught... By conjuring an enchanted snare that remains potent to this day.” - War Counselor Iji

We can only imagine how Ranni, a princess of the Carians, would have viewed this chain of events. Not only did she effectively lose her mother to grief and later imprisonment, but she watched her family lose prestige and control of the academy, and ultimately come under attack from those once considered their vassals. I also have to remind you that the Cuckoo forces are renowned as ruthless and cruel adversaries, as we learn via the Raya Lucaria Soldier Ashes. No doubt they would have waged a brutal war against the Carians before being finally driven to a stalemate outside the gates of Caria Manor.





Ranni the Witch

So all this, all the tragedy Ranni's family suffers in the wake of Radagon's departure, is because he essentially chooses loyalty to the Erdtree over his own blood. We know the reason – Marika is Radagon – but to Ranni it could easily be seen that her choosing the Golden Order over her family brought despair to her mother and ruin to her house.

Could this have been the catalyst for Ranni's hatred for the Golden Order? There are certainly other factors, specifically Ranni's ideas on self-determination:

"But I would not acquiesce to the Two Fingers. I stole the Rune of Death, slew mine own Empyrean flesh, casting it away. I would not be controlled by that thing." - Ranni the Witch

However, it would be easy to see that, at this moment where her family had suffered great losses and she had lost her mother as a mentor, she would have required a new teacher. It is therefore my speculation that this would be the moment when Ranni met the Snowy Crone.

We learn of this character via the Snow Witch Set:

"Once worn by the snowy crone who the young Ranni encountered deep in the woods. She was a witch, and well versed in cold sorceries. It is said that the doll that houses Ranni's soul was modeled after her. That old witch was Ranni's secret mentor." - Snow Witch Hat

I have always found the description of this crone truly fascinating, especially

the term "crone" itself and her placement within the woods. Clearly the writers are playing up the classic witch of the woods archetype. These are the tropes when one writes about the sinister side of witchcraft and the occult. For me, this is where Ranni learned the darker aspects of magic that she would wield later to devastating effect.

Clearly this witch of the woods was an adherent of the Dark Moon, and thus teaching Ranni is a service to the Dark Moon. She helped form Ranni's worldview, and informed her of the path which she would need to take. The Snowy Crone embodied the cold aspects of the Dark Moon, not only because of her name, but because of the frost incantations that she taught Ranni.

It is clear that the cold is intrinsic to the form of the Dark Moon. It seems as if Ranni, clearly in tune with the Dark Moon, literally exudes some kind of cold. When she inhabits the miniature Ranni, the doll is described as "pleasantly cool," and after she departs this vessel the "chilliness is gone."

There is also the fact that Blaidd appears to be affected by Ranni's cold, as his armor set description states:

"The pelt serves as a cape, protecting from cold. Blaidd was the blade of Ranni, but the cold bothered him anyway." - Blaidd's Armor

Ranni also mentions the cold in the Age of Stars. She refers to the "chill



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night," and to me the cold and chill of her Dark Moon is meant to represent the cold of the cosmos, of the abyss.

However what interests me more is the occult nature of the Dark Moon and what this means for Ranni's story. There are a few other mentions of the occult in *Elden Ring*, and it is essentially a weapon affinity strongly associated with Death. For example, it is associated with the skill Lifesteal Fist, Spectral Lance, Assassin's Gambit and the Black Whetblade, which applies the occult affinity to weapons.

We can get an idea of what the occult is all about by reading the description of Lifesteal Fist:

"Skill that demonstrates mastery of the art of controlling vital energies." - Lifesteal Fist

So this is a life-manipulation focused practice, which I guess wouldn't be a surprise for those who are familiar with the term "cult" or "occult." The term "occult" often makes one think of witchcraft concerning life and Death, quite often the trope involving a blood sacrifice or actual death as a requirement for these powers.

We see this idea of a blood sacrifice in the skill Assassin's Gambit, where one is literally required to power the ability through a self-inflicted wound.

I believe Ranni employed a ritual in order to impart the blades with the power of Death, but also the very murder of Godwyn's

soul and her body, and that this is an occult rite learned via the Snowy Crone. After all, the murder of Godwyn's soul and ridding herself of her Empyrean flesh is very much a manipulation of life and Death, and to me firmly earns the occult title.

As to the dark aspect of the moon, as mentioned by Ranni and by Iji when they talk of the "dark path of the Empyrean," I think this is a general summation of what Ranni's moon symbolizes. It represents the abyss of space, and the Yin to the Erdtree's Yang. It's not necessarily that what she is doing is evil. While Rennala's full and bright moon may have existed in peace with the Golden Order, Ranni's dark path is fundamentally opposed to the path laid out by the Two Fingers. So while I think Ranni was first introduced to the moon by her mother, it was the Crone who taught her the deeper mysteries of the Dark Moon, of its cold and of its occult aspects.

The very fact that Ranni makes her new body in the image of the Snowy Crone shows how much of an impact this character had on her. I also speculate that it was the Snowy Crone who told Ranni what she needed to do in order to bring about the Age of Stars, and how to sever her connection to the Two Fingers.

So with that said, let us talk about Ranni's designs and the Night of the Black Knives itself.



Chapter 15: Night of the Black Knives



Where does the Night of the Black Knives sit in the *Elden Ring* timeline? It must have taken place after the Godskin Apostasy, because it is the Apostasy that led to Maliketh sealing Destined Death within his Black Blade – and it is from Maliketh that the conspirators would steal the Rune of Death. We also have the story trailer, in which Ranni narrates the events that led up to the Shattering war. I quote Ranni's narration from that trailer now:

"The rune of death was stolen and the demigods began to fall, starting with Godwyn the Golden. Queen Marika was driven to the brink. The Shattering ensued; a war that wrought only darkness."

- Ranni, *Elden Ring* story trailer

The way in which this is delivered seems to imply a direct chain of causality – the Night of the Black Knives happened, and as a result it pushed Queen Marika to the brink, leading her to shatter the Elden Ring. To me this suggests



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the event took place close to the end of Marika's reign, rather than closer to the earlier Crucible Era and Age of Plenty.

There is another similar retelling of the timeline by an in-game NPC that lines up pretty well with the story trailer. Sorcerer Rogier has dedicated himself to researching this event and its fallout. Describing the importance of the Night of the Black Knives and when it came to pass, he says:

"The misshapen corpse under Stormveil? That is a sacred relic. Of the black knives plot. As that famed night of assassination is known. It happened during the Golden Age of the Erdtree, long before the shattering of the Elden Ring. Someone stole a fragment of the Rune of Death from Maliketh, the Black Blade. And on a bitter night, murdered Godwyn the Golden. That was the first recorded Death of a demigod in all history. And it became the catalyst. Soon, the Elden Ring was smashed, and thus sprang forth the war known as the Shattering. I once wished to become a scholar, you see. I've spent many an hour scouring the archives for knowledge of that fateful plot."

- Sorcerer Rogier

Rogier reiterates that this event was the "catalyst" that would lead to the Shattering. This is an idea backed up by Lokey who believes that the kanji that was translated as "catalyst" could be more closely translated as "trigger":

"The term for 'trigger' (切欠, more literally like an opening/notch) likewise is the same one used for Dark Souls III's Eleonora... It is basically just saying that the death of Godwyn directly led to the events thereafter, namely Marika breaking the Elden Ring and the war which ensued."

- Lokey, author of *Abyssal Archive*

In terms of the Golden Age that Rogier mentions, again Lokey was kind enough to offer their perspective as it is written in the original Japanese:

"Prosperous period" (盛期) is its own term, and basically refers to what we would call a 'golden age.' Rogier is talking about the period before things fell apart, so of course that would be deemed a 'prosperous' era of peace."

- Lokey, author of *Abyssal Archive*

Lokey believes that Rogier is simply referring to a time when things were good and before the peace was broken. There are also some other tangential pieces of evidence that could be used to help support this theory. For example, there is the Golden Epitaph sword:

"A sword made to commemorate the death of Godwyn the Golden, first of the demigods to die. Infused with the humble prayer of a young boy; 'O brother, lord brother, please die a true death.'" - Golden Epitaph

The young boy is heavily suggested to be Miquella – not only because of their appearance, but also because of



Night of the Black Knives

Miquella's other associations with Godwyn and trying to grant him a true death. If you are unsure what I am referring to then I point you to Castle Sol, which appears to be a joint venture between the leader of the castle and Miquella in order to restore Godwyn's soul.

This is important because if Miquella cares so deeply about Godwyn's fate and even calls him dear brother, then they must have had a relationship. And if we assume that to be a given, then surely the Night of the Black Knives has to have happened after Miquella was born and thus later on in Marika's rule.

Regardless, all we can say definitively is that this attack must have occurred in the period of relative peace and growth, between the Godskin Apostle god hunt, but before the Shattering itself.

FOUL COVENANT

So now that we have a general idea of when the Night of the Black Knives happened, we need to talk about those who took part in it and how the conspiracy was formed. The heavy hand and muscle of this operation were of course the Black Knife Assassins themselves. These nimble and deadly warriors are described to be "scions of the Eternal City" by Rogier:

"You recall our conversation about the Night of the Black Knives, yes? They say the assassins who carried out the deed were scions of the Eternal City. A group entirely of women, arrayed in armor of silver under cloaks which fooled the eye. The knives they wielded though, were imparted with the power of the Rune of Death through sinister rite." - Sorcerer Rogier

But they are also characterized as Numen by their armor description:

"The assassins that carried out the deeds of the Night of the Black Knives were all women, and rumored to be Numen who had close ties with Marika herself." - Black Knife Armor

As we have already seen, the Nox are an offshoot of the Numen and I believe we can specifically track the development of these assassins and how they tie into the Eternal Cities.

The armor set describes the assassins as "all women." They are also extremely nimble warriors, and there is a warrior class found within the Eternal Cities who fit the bill: the Swordstresses. So while I do not necessarily suggest that the assassins themselves are Swordstresses per se, I think it is worth pointing out that the Nox have a precedent for nimble female warriors.

This is where I want to return to the term "scions of the Eternal City." Scion means a descendant, typically in reference



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to a specific family. Lokey was able to provide further insight into who these women may be, and he translated Rogier's dialogue in the following manner:

"I told you before, about the Night of the Black Knives Conspiracy... The perpetrators are said to be assassins who are descendants of the Eternal Capital." - Sorcerer Rogier dialogue, translation by Lokey

Then Lokey goes on to tie this to Gowry's dialogue regarding Sellia's ties to the Eternal Cities:

"Which ties into this: 'As promised, I shall teach you, sir. About the lost sorceries of Sallia, descendant of the Eternal.' (same term for descendant, 末裔)" - Lokey, author of Abyssal Archive

Yes – Sellians are indeed descendants of the Nox, and Lokey has linguistically tied the reference together. However, the potential link between Sellia and the assassins is also found in the lore.

One of the other defining features of the assassins themselves are their "cloaks which fooled the eye," a fact that is reflected in gameplay by the assassins, who are essentially invisible to us unless we are using the Sentry's Torch. Even then their cloaks seem to warp the light around them.

What is this technology and how were the Eternal Cities able to craft these

extraordinary pieces of armor? Again I think we can look to the history of the Eternal Cities for the answer, or more specifically Sellia, Town of Sorcery.

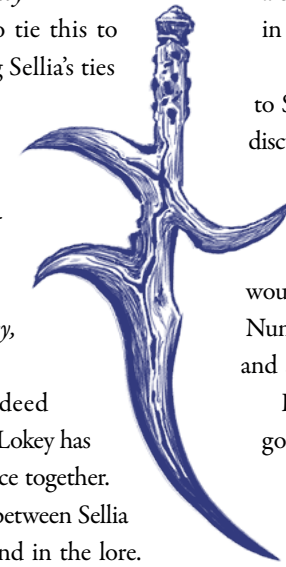
As we discussed in the section on Sellia, there are plenty of ties between Sellia and the Eternal Cities. Additionally, Sellia is now the center for Night Sorceries, a school of magic that specializes in obfuscation and assassination.

With those deep connections to Sellia in mind, let us once again discuss who specifically these women were. The most obvious answer to me is that these are assassins from Sellia, as it would quite easily tick all the boxes: Numen kin, Sellian assassin magic and scions of the Eternal Cities.

However, we could potentially go deeper if we examine the signature element of the assassins, the Black Knives. Ranni states that she forged the knives through a "fear-

some rite," and we will examine where Ranni may have gotten occult knowledge from momentarily. But despite Ranni using the term "forge," the actual description of the Black Knife reads as follows:

"A ritual performed on the oddly misshapen blade imbued it with the power of the stolen Rune of Death." - Black Knife





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So the ritual was performed on the blade, meaning that the blade already existed in some form. And of course the best bet for the original form of the blade is the Blade of Calling. For those who don't know, the Blade of Calling skill, Blade of Gold, is basically a golden version of Blade of Death.

This is also the blade wielded by Melina, who uses the same moveset as the Black Knife Assassins. So this begs the question: Who is Melina and what can that knowledge do to help inform us who these assassins may be?

Wild speculation incoming. It is heavily implied that Melina is a child of Marika, and yet she shares a combat style with these Numen kin, who have descended from the Noxian split of the Numen tribe.

As an example, Sellia's ties to the Nox are hidden, and in a way Sellia has reintegrated with surface society. Lusit is a great example of this: a Sellian native who became a Grand Master of Raya Lucaria and founded one of its conspectuses.

The armor of the Black Knife Assassin suggests that these are Numen close to Marika, but if they were distantly related through the Noxian line, this wouldn't explain that. So again I turned to Lokey for their help in translation. They translated the Black Knife Set and offered their appraisal of it:

"It is said that the assassins, who are the perpetrators of the night of the conspiracy, are all women, and according to one theory, were visitors close to Marika."

- Black Knife Armor, translation via Lokey

Lokey goes on to explain their translation:

"Close' in the psychological sense, not in terms of dealings."

- Lokey, author of Abyssal Archive

We will talk more regarding why I do not believe Marika is involved in the Night of the Black Knives later in this chapter. For now I want to focus on what Lokey is trying to say here. He is suggesting that the women involved were close friends or kin. So here is my speculation: these are women descended from the Nox, most likely via Sellia, but they "reintegrated" with Marika's tribe of Numen. I suggest that these women along with Melina were like ladies-in-waiting to Marika, part of her royal court.

This was a very common practice in royal courts throughout history: Queens would be attended by ladies-in-waiting who would also be members of the nobility and quite often related to the queen. They would act as confidants, advisors and spies. This would explain why Melina and these women are armed the same, have similar training, why they are "close" to Marika emotionally, and how they are Numen descended from the Nox.



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At this stage Ranni would have been a princess with some privilege, thus it's unsurprising she would have the resources and influence to organize such an operation.

It's interesting that the Bandai Namco site names the Black Knife Assassins as a "foul covenant." Given her connection to the occult and the Dark Moon, perhaps Ranni corrupted them with her beliefs. This is my speculation of course, but I do believe it ties everything together. At the very least I think the ties to Sellia are almost undeniable, even if you don't buy into the ladies-in-waiting theory.

When it comes to the assassins as characters, we do have two named members of the leadership, Tiche and Alecto. Both names have ancient Greek origins. Alecto, meaning "unceasing anger," was one of the Furies in Greek mythology. That seems fitting for an assassin who brought vengeance for her people against the gods. Tiche is a derivation of Tyche, who was the Greek deity of fortune, and I find this somewhat ironic given her ultimate fate. There is a little more here

if we mine it: fortune can sometimes be seen as a force of uncaring reversals of fate and arbitrary violence, which certainly is fitting.

This brings us to the main conspirator, Ranni herself. Whatever you think about the timeline that we just discussed, it is an immutable fact that Ranni was involved.

"Now, I have a fairly good idea who performed the rite upon the blade. The person who orchestrated the Night of the Black Knives. Lunar Princess Ranni. One of the children born to King Consort Radagon and his first wife, Rennala. Demigod and sister to General Radahn and Praetor Rykard. Hers was the name I discovered in the imprint."

- Sorcerer Rogier

Ranni also admits this:

"I see. Quite the sleuth, aren't we. Indeed, I am the witch Ranni. I stole a fragment of the Rune of Death, and used it to forge the godslaying black knives through fearsome rite. I did it all." - Ranni the Witch

These dialogues both suggest that Ranni was in fact the head of the conspiracy. This certainly makes sense, given that Ranni wanted something very specific out of it all, as we will see in the following pages. At this stage Ranni would still have had her original, Empyrean body with red hair. She would have been a princess with some privilege and thus it's unsurprising she would have had the resources and influence to organize such an operation.



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It also seems that Ranni's magic was necessary, as she claims that it was she who imparted the power of Death upon the knives, "through fearsome rite." This smacks of occultism, and it makes sense that Ranni would have knowledge of such things because of her association with the Dark Moon.

Ranni's Dark Moon spell reads:

"This moon was encountered by a young Ranni, led by the hand of her mother, Rennala. What she beheld was cold, dark, and veiled in occult mystery." - Ranni's Dark Moon

So Ranni's Dark Moon, specifically, is tied to "occult mystery," and it is no doubt via the Dark Moon that Ranni will have learned the skills necessary to imbue the Black Knives with Death. There is the possibility that, instead, Ranni learned these rites via her mentor, the Snowy Crone. It is clear that Ranni was taught a lot about the Dark Moon's nature from this witch, and so it is probable that, while a lot of Ranni's powers are tied to the Dark Moon, it was the Crone who told her how to wield them. As such, I think it is most likely that it was from the Crone that Ranni learned the "fearsome rite" that allowed her to forge the Black Knives.

Ranni's brother Rykard also seems to have been tangentially involved, as we learn via the Blasphemous Claw:

"On the night of the dire plot, Ranni rewarded Praetor Rykard with these traces.

Should the coming trespass one day transpire, they would serve as a last-resort foil, allowing Rykard to challenge Maliketh the Black Blade, the black beast of Destined Death."

- Blasphemous Claw

Given Rykard's later blasphemous philosophy and general disdain for the Erdtree, and his closeness to Ranni, it isn't surprising that she would trust her brother with this.

MARIKA IS INNOCENT

This brings us to the Marika question. Early on in the game's lifespan, many believed that Marika had a hand in the Night of the Black Knives. This has never felt right to me. However, let us examine why this is such a popular theory.

It is mainly anchored by the item descriptions of the Black Knife Set, which state that the assassins have "close ties with Marika herself." People have taken this to mean that Marika is tied to the conspiracy, and believe this is reinforced by her callousness towards her children:

"Hear me, Demigods. My children beloved. Make of thyselfes that which ye desire. Be it a Lord. Be it a God. But should ye fail to become aught at all, ye will be forsaken. Amounting only to sacrifices..."

- Queen Marika via Melina



Grace Given

According to the proponents of this theory, Marika's motivation is her way of rebelling against the Greater Will, by killing her son, Godwyn the Golden.

Yet the main person who benefits from this is Ranni, who had specifically planned the whole thing to take place in a certain manner so she could benefit. To jam Marika's ego and motives on top of that doesn't feel right. Emotionally, I also think that a lot of people view Marika as some Machiavellian schemer and readily accept this, despite the flaws of this theory.

To quote from the Bandai Namco article:

"One grim night in the depths of winter, a flock of unknown assassins stole across the Lands Between. In a coetaneous attack, this foul covenant snuffed out the lives of many of the God-Queen's kin throughout the empire, too numerous and too scattered for her godly protection to save. The assassins' targets were multifold, but none was as devastating a loss to the Eternal Queen as that of Godwyn the Golden. After his death, the Elden Ring was somehow shattered, and the order of the world broke with it." - A look into the history of ELDEN RING's lands between: the Age of Gods, Bandai Namco

Bandai painted a picture of a god who wanted to protect her children from this attack, and argued that Godwyn's death caused her a great deal of grief. I think

that those who believe Marika had a hand in the assassinations at the very least need to admit that this is a huge piece of evidence that challenges their narrative.

The reality of the Black Knife Assassin armor set may just be a case of slightly awkward English. While others read the description as proof of Marika's involvement, I have always read it very differently. For Marika herself is Numen, as we learn via the Numen's Rune. And the assassins are Noxian, from Numen stock. So for me, the armor set is implying that these assassins are kin to Marika, close kin, which would only heighten the tragedy. Marika's own brethren murdered her child.

Indeed this does seem to be the case when we assess the original Japanese used in the Black Knife Armor. Lokey said the following in an X discussion regarding this specific item:

"To clarify, Marika's 'close ties' with the assassins isn't in terms of dealings but familiarity/emotional affinity, (kinship, you could say) which makes sense given their blood ties. Whether that is alluding to more than just coming from the same tribe, no comment at this time." - Lokey, via X

What this highlights is that while some may see the English translation as irrefutable proof of Marika's guilt, all it really is saying objectively is that she "had close ties" to these women. And given the lore



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provided in the Numen's Rune, I think this is meant to reinforce the idea that Marika and the assassins are from the same tribe, and that the specific women in question had a close familiarity with Marika.

To me, Marika is in fact a secondary victim of the event, as someone who loses her son, rather than a Machiavellian mastermind who is playing 4D chess. The theory that she is involved posits that she kills her son in some bizarre convoluted plot to "hit back" at the Greater Will, and then shatters the Elden Ring, rendering this scheme moot anyway. Marika is all powerful and the god of this era. Why would she need to resort to such scheming when she has the power to kill Godwyn and shatter the Elden Ring whenever she pleases?

Again this is reinforced by the Bandai Namco article, which I quoted earlier, that seems to imply that the loss of Godwyn rocked her.

Not only does this make a causal connection between the Shattering and this particular night, but it again paints Marika as a victim, not a participant, and suggests that her shattering of the Elden Ring is due to the trauma of losing her son.

I have long believed this to be the case, especially ever since I heard Ranni in the story trailer say that, through the death of Godwyn, "Queen Marika was driven to the brink."

So, with the conspirators defined, it is time we discuss the motivations of those involved.

KILLING FATE

Let's first look at the Black Knife Assassins. Why were they part of this conspiracy and what did they expect to get out of it?

Being kin to the Nox, there is an underlying resentment of the Greater Will and its representatives. The Nox are where



Grace Given

they are because of past grudges against the Greater Will and its proponents, and we get evidence via the Fingerslayer Blade that they have acted against the Greater Will before. I think the motivation for this group is fairly straightforward: revenge. Revenge for their banishment, and a chance to overthrow the Gods – to put them to the sword and bring about their Age of Stars.

I also believe that Ranni betrayed the Black Knife Assassins following the Night of the Black Knives, and there are two possible reasons for this.

The first is that Ranni deceived them as to the true purpose of the attack, and used them to achieve her real goal. While the assassins believed this to be an operation to bring down the gods, Ranni used it to free herself from her body and kept the truth of this true purpose from the assassins.

The second is that the assassins were fully aware of the true purpose of the mission, but Ranni still turned on them following the attack and imprisoned their leader to cover up her involvement.

Ranni's true end goal is more than simple assassination. We hear it from her directly:

"I was once an Empyrean. Of the demi-gods, only I, Miquella, and Malenia could claim that title. Each of us was chosen by our own Two Fingers, as a candidate to

succeed Queen Marika, to become the new god of the coming age. Which is when I received Blaidd. In the form of a vassal tailored for an Empyrean. But I would not acquiesce to the Two Fingers. I stole the Rune of Death, slew mine own Empyrean flesh, casting it away. I would not be controlled by that thing." - Ranni the Witch

The death of Ranni's body was not an unwanted consequence of the attack or an accident. No, it was the actual purpose. Ranni wanted rid of her Empyrean flesh, the flesh that tied her to the Greater Will and the Two Fingers.

As to why Ranni feels this way, and feels resentment at being chosen as an Empyrean, we have some clues. Firstly, Ranni states "I would not be controlled by that thing," and one can certainly understand the resentment of having your fate chosen for you. Secondly, we have to remember that Ranni will, by this stage, have fallen under the influence of the Snowy Crone and the Dark Moon. No doubt they would have been encouraging her to take steps towards an Age of Stars.

But it would do her plan no good if she was destroyed completely, obliterated in both body and soul, and so she needed a totem to take half of the Rune of Death, while she took the other. Godwyn would take the consequence of soul death while she was freed from her flesh prison.



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The reason I believe that Ranni deceived the Black Knife Assassins as to the true purpose is because of the environmental and implicit storytelling we get in regards to the relationship between Ranni and the Nox.

For starters, near the conclusion of Ranni's quest, there appears to be a coordinated attack against her people. Iji is killed, and surrounding him are the bodies of Black Knife Assassins, and he is burning in the Black Flame of the Godskins. The connection between the Godskins and the assassins is something I have ruminated on before, but the main takeaway is that the Black Knives attacked Iji and it resulted in his death.

Next, when we free Blaidd from the Evergaol, he expresses fear for Ranni's safety and races to be by her side. When we next see him, he is in a bad way, maddened and surrounded by the corpses of Black Knife Assassins. To me it is implied that these assassins were here for Ranni. Unfortunately for them, Ranni had already passed through Renna's Rise and they ended up meeting Blaidd's blade instead.

There is also the fact that Ranni asks us to retrieve the Fingerslayer Blade from Nokron. Not only are Ranni's agents unaware of how to reach Nokron, but the Nox clearly aren't willing to give Ranni the knife, hence why we break into the city, slaughter the Nox and steal the treasure from them. If the two factions were still in

cahoots, with both ultimately wanting to bring about an Age of Stars, why wouldn't the Nox readily give Ranni the tool she needs? They wouldn't if she had previously betrayed them and there was an existing grudge between them, however.

Finally there is Aleecto, the leader of the Black Knife Assassins, who is imprisoned at Moonlight Altar, in Ranni's Evergaol. Again, why would Ranni imprison her ally? To me this is another sign of the double-crossing work of Ranni.

So with the stage set, the motives of both main parties are clear, let us talk about the specifics of the night itself.

NIGHT OF THE BLACK KNIVES

As the story trailer tells us, on a night of wintery fog, the Rune of Death was stolen, and this is the first part of the scheme. People may wonder how this is possible, but the truth is pretty simple: Maliketh was far more careless in the past than he is now.

When we meet Maliketh in our story, he is very reticent to even reveal his identity, and has the Black Blade, the sword imbued with Destined Death, hidden within his very flesh. However, the precaution comes too late, as we learn the following from the Black Blade item description:





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“After a fragment of Death was stolen on that fateful night, Maliketh bound the blade within his own flesh, such that none might ever rob Death again.”

- *Maliketh's Black Blade*

Prior to that fateful night, Maliketh did not hide his Black Blade, and there is evidence that he wielded it quite openly. For example, Maliketh's Armor:

“Maliketh, Queen Marika's loyal half-brother, bore a blade imbued with Destined Death, and there was not one demigod who did not fear him. Champions knew what was at stake. Indeed, that is what made them champions.” - *Maliketh's Armor*

If Maliketh was widely feared and everyone “knew what was at stake,” it stands to reason that Maliketh openly wielded the Black Blade. He was a symbol of Marika's power, and a subtle reminder that, in a world without Death, his Black Blade was the only thing capable of slaying a god.

Maliketh was a symbol of Marika's power, and a subtle reminder that, in a world without Death, his Black Blade was the only thing capable of slaying a god.

Yet it was this arrogance that evidently gave the conspirators their opportunity, and Ranni seems to claim that she personally stole the Rune of Death:

“I stole a fragment of the Rune of Death, and used it to forge the godslaying black knives through fearsome rite. I did it all.”

- *Ranni the Witch*

In fairness, this does also make quite a bit of sense when you think about it. Ranni was royalty and, given her involvement seems to be hidden for a long time, at this stage most people probably did not suspect her of any treasonous thoughts. It isn't hard to imagine that Ranni would be able to get close to Maliketh's blade and steal a fragment of the Rune of Death.

Then, using the knowledge learned from the Snowy Crone or the Dark Moon, Ranni imparted the power of Death through a fearsome rite. We spoke earlier on the knives themselves, and how Ranni no doubt used the Blade of Calling weapon and imbued these daggers with the power of Death. In essence this is why the Black Knife acts like a corrupted version of the Blade of Calling. And this brings us to an aspect of the blades we haven't yet mentioned: their unusual shape.

In the description of the blade it is described as “oddly misshapen,” and I believe it was the ritual itself that morphed the blade to take this form. The shape is not



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random. I believe it is either taking the form of the Rune of Death, or the half-wheel wound of the centipede. You see, the actual form of the Rune of Death appears to hold some power, as we will understand better when we discuss how Ranni and Godwyn had the runes literally carved into them.

Once the blades were forged, the assassins would head out to hit their targets and, thanks to their special garb, they would be able to reach their victims undetected. The Sentry's Torch may shine a light on how effective this was (pun intended), as it reads:

“Torch given to protectors of the Erdtree. Its flames are bestowed with a special incantation which allows the bearer to see assassins cloaked in veils. Furnished on behalf of the Erdtree and the Grace-Given Lord such that a Night of Black Knives will never come again.” - *Sentry's Torch*

This implies that on the Night of the Black Knives, the authorities and guards had no notion that numerous assassins were simply slipping past them.

Now at this juncture I want to again return to the Bandai Namco article that describes the event. In the game's canon, only one victim of this assault is confirmed – Godwyn. Yet this article suggests there was more than one, stating that the assassin's targets were “multifold” and “too numerous” for Marika to protect.

This of course ties in with the story trailer that accompanied this article, which says:

“And the demigods began to fall, starting with Godwyn the Golden.”

- *Elden Ring story trailer*

This suggests that Godwyn was only one of many demigods to die in this event, that this was a devastating attack against the gods. And this connects with some interesting references that could give such a claim some in-game credibility.

For one, the very intro to the game says something of a similar nature:

“In the Night of the Black Knives, Godwyn the Golden was the first to perish.”

- *Opening narration*

But only the first? So we can now imagine all the assassins spreading out throughout the Lands Between to strike at different targets simultaneously. This also supports the idea that the aim of the assassins was to generally strike against the gods, to cause as much damage to the regime as possible.

Now, does this help explain the other soulless demigods that we find in the Mausoleums throughout the Lands Between? I think it is meant to, but it presents some difficulties on the specifics of how the whole “soullessness” of Godwyn came about. Nonetheless, let's just accept that more than one demigod was slain during this attack, and that these may well be the demigods of the Mausoleums.



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Let's talk about the killing of Godwyn now, as it is the pivotal moment of the whole event. When it comes to the location, it almost certainly took place in Leyndell, given Black Knife Tiche's ashes describe a "flight from the royal capital" after she "slew Godwyn the Golden." (And so we also know that Alecto and Tiche were specifically part of the team that killed Godwyn.)

Considering how dramatic and tragic this event is, it would make sense thematically if this happened at the heart of the Erdtree empire – that the assassins slipped past the guards and right into Godwyn's personal chambers.

Given that we see Godwyn partially dressed in the intro slides and in the story trailer, I imagine that they caught him unawares and unprepared. Given that he is a mighty enough god to have defeated Fortissax, this would certainly be the prudent way to kill him. Yet the Assassins did not merely stab him. His death was far more ritualistic in nature. We can already get hints of this in the opening cinematic. He is being held in place by two assassins, while a third is carving a very specific shape into his back.

We can learn more about this carving via the Cursemark of Death, an item pulled from Ranni's original body:

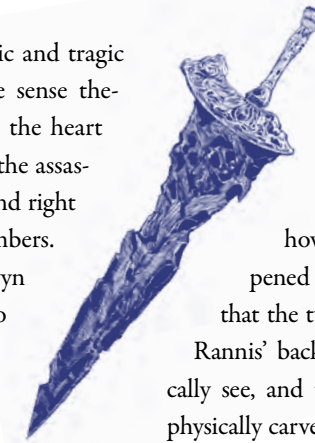
"Cursemark carved into the discarded flesh of Ranni the Witch. Also known as the half-wheel wound of the centipede. This cursemark was carved at the moment of Death of the first demigod, and should have taken the shape of a circle. However, two demigods perished at the same time, breaking the cursemark into two half-wheels. Ranni was the first of the demigods whose flesh perished, while the Prince of Death perished in soul alone."

- Cursemark of Death

So this gives us an insight into Ranni's plan, how it worked and what happened to Godwyn. It mentions that the two Cursemarks, the one on Ranni's back which we can still physically see, and the one on Godwyn, were physically carved. The carving of this mark upon flesh actually gives power to the rune, and brings Death to the bearer of the rune.

In this case, however, Ranni used this ritual for her own means, to split the effects of Death – using Godwyn as a totem to take the "death of the soul" part, while she merely took the "death of the body" part.

At the exact moment Godwyn was having the half-wheel wound carved into his back, Ranni was having the other half carved into her back. The effect of this is what split the wheel, and its effects, in





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two. This paints a pretty dramatic picture of Ranni atop the Liurnian tower that wintery night, having a half-wheel wound carved into her back, while Alecto and her cohorts did the same to Godwyn.

This was Ranni's plan. Yet the price was high, and even Ranni may not have foreseen the true consequences of her actions. Not only did it condemn a being to a soulless living-death, but it also resulted in the spread of Deathroot that started a brand new cycle of suffering. Again, these are points I would like to remind people of when they see Ranni as some kind of hero. She isn't a villain, but she ruthlessly condemns Godwyn to an eternity of suffering and her recklessness gives rise to the pitiful beings known as Those Who Live in Death.

This also brings us to the issue of the soulless demigods. Godwyn was the first to die, and he was killed in soul only to benefit Ranni's plan – so why are the other killed demigods described as soulless? Presumably the ritual was not repeated here, as it would be redundant for Ranni's designs.

There are a few ways to explain this. The first one is Occam's razor, the simplest explanation being that the other soulless demigods are dead both in body and soul. The assassins just repeated the ritual, but fully killed them. I think this makes sense. There is a distinction between being dead

and being soulless and dead, and the reason their fate is also mourned by the likes of those at Castle Sol is because they are without souls – it's not just that they are dead.

There is also the fact that they do not give off the Deathroot like Godwyn, which again suggests the body is also no longer living. For if they suffered the exact same fate, would they too not be giving off the Deathroot?

That being said, they could also still be living in body and be dead in soul like Godwyn, for the Eclipse Crest Heater Shield describes them as "slumbering," suggesting they are not fully dead. As I discussed in my lore video "The Deathbirds and Ghostflame," they may well be decapitated to prevent them from spreading Deathroot, as beheading is often seen as a method to put unquiet dead to rest.

This is a rabbit hole that will probably need to be explored another day. For now, let us just accept that the soulless demigods are probably the others that were killed that night, and the ultimate result was Ranni's death in flesh and Godwyn's death in soul.

AFTERMATH

In the immediate aftermath of the attack, we learn of the assassins fleeing the scene of the crime via Tiche's ashes:



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"Tiche was one of the assassins who, on the night of the plot, imbued her black knife with the Rune of Death and slew Godwyn the Golden. She was the daughter of the Black Knife Ringleader, Alecto, and was killed protecting her mother during their flight from the royal capital." - Black Knife Tiche

A flight from the capital suggests that, despite slipping into the capital undetected, their escape was far more eventful. Indeed, I get the general impression that Ranni basically hung the assassins out to dry after the attack. We find them scattered throughout the Lands Between, hiding in caves, dungeons and in the capital itself, giving the impression of a panicked flight from Leyndell.

If one looks carefully at the assassin found in the Deathtouched Catacombs, we can see that they are greatly wounded and their armor is bent and bloodied. Elsewhere, the assassins are hiding, and their resting demeanor gives off the impression of fugitives, exhausted and hounded. No doubt many were hunted and killed in the hours and days following the assassination.

And while I have no doubt that Leyndell authorities fell upon the assassins, I suspect that Ranni is responsible for Alecto's and Tiche's final fate. Whether Carian forces killed Tiche and arrested Alecto, or whether Alecto fled to Ranni with her daughter in her arms, it is clear

to me that Ranni imprisoned Alecto. Conveniently, her involvement in the conspiracy would be hidden for years, until Rogier uncovered the truth.

Ranni was probably content to let people believe she too was a victim of the slaughter, and I would guess she did not return in her new form until some time later – perhaps when she returned to claim a Great Rune after the Shattering.

Meanwhile, we learn that Godwyn was buried at the roots of the Greentree and from him would spread the Deathroot, bringing Those Who Live in Death. This event is something I look at in great detail elsewhere, but in short this is the biggest consequence of this fateful night. Why? It exposed the flaws in the deathless Golden Order, and began a cycle of persecution that would lead to Goldmask examining the very nature of the Order and what went wrong. The wrongness of the act, the slaughter of Ranni's own kin and the denying of a true death to Godwyn, is reflected in the corruption of the world. Godwyn's growths and tendrils reach even to Farum Azula. It is a rot born of a terrible crime and the breaking of fate.

Then came the shattering of the Elden Ring and the great suffering of the Shattering War that followed. I think we have shown fairly conclusive evidence that the trauma of the night and the loss is



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what drove Marika to shatter the Elden Ring. Bereft and disenchanted with the Golden Order she served, she brought her hammer down in a fateful blow.

As a sort of epilogue there is something else I want to touch upon: Ordina, Liturgical Town and the Black Knife Assassins found here. I feel it is no coincidence that Ordina has the exact same architecture as Sellia, and we have strong evidence that the assassins themselves are Sellian. To me it is very plausible that a group of assassins fled here and built a new township, perhaps under the aegis of a new, forgiving lord, one they still serve by controlling access to his lands.

RANNI'S FATE

We know that Ranni divulges her plans to Iji and Blaidd after disposing of her flesh, thanks to a dialogue from Iji:

"When Lady Ranni renounced her flesh, and chose the dark path of the Empyrean, Blaidd and I swore allegiance as vassals..." - War Counselor Iji

Yet Ranni and her vassals appear to have been in hiding for a long time, as we do get a rather interesting piece of dialogue regarding Ranni's whereabouts from Rogier:

"Ranni's whereabouts since the Shattering are a well-kept secret. She hasn't been seen even once. But I suspect she might have

returned to the manor in which she was born..." - Sorcerer Rogier

So Ranni was at least seen after the Night of the Black Knives, but has not been seen since the Shattering.

I have previously brought up the idea of the Sovereign Alliance, which is mentioned in the Sword Monument in Altus Plateau. This is a body which we will discuss in more detail later. In short, I believe this was a loose coalition of demigods whose membership is represented by the thrones that Morgott lists at the onset of his battle. There are some factors that could make Ranni's participation in such an alliance unlikely, mainly a lack of motivation for her to do so. There's also what Gideon says about Ranni setting aside her Great Rune:

"Ranni is said to have cast aside her Great Rune, so here at the Hold, we seek the whereabouts of the remaining three shard-bearers." - Sir Gideon Ofnir, the All-Knowing

However, Rogier's dialogue suggests that Ranni was seen at least prior to, and around the start of, the Shattering. If she was seen in the years following the Night of the Black Knives, then people would have glimpsed her new form. She did have a Great Rune, however, meaning she had to have claimed it at some stage following the shattering of the Elden Ring. So I don't necessarily agree that Ranni would not have been part of this alliance. Even if she were scheming to



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Even if Ranni was scheming to bring about the Age of Stars it would have behooved her to stay involved in the highest levels of politics, for information and power.

bring about the Age of Stars it would have behooved her to stay involved in the highest levels of politics, for information and power.

We learn via Gideon Ofnir that Ranni then set aside her Great Rune – again meaning she did claim one – as we know from the intro that the demigods actively claimed them:

"Soon, Marika's offspring, demigods all, claimed the shards of the Elden Ring." - Opening narration

My speculation is that she claimed a Great Rune for the same reason everyone else did: power. Then, upon the outbreak of war, she set hers aside and vanished, leaving her siblings to destroy one another while she waited patiently to enact her plans, following the cessation of the war and at a time when many of her potential rivals would have been eliminated.

The setting aside of her Great Rune is very symbolic. To me it really does reveal that Ranni sees her path as separate from that of the Elden Ring. While the others may be hoping to claim the Elden Ring for their own, and harness its power through their own Great Rune, Ranni is detached from such concerns. As such, her dark path of the Empyrean does not require a Great Rune, nor would it benefit from her taking part in the Shattering.

Rogier also talks about Ranni's vassals gathering at Caria Manor, the implication being that this is a recent activity, years after the manor's abandonment and Ranni's disappearance. This brings us to the here and now and Ranni's next step in her plans: severing the bonds between her and the Fingers for good. Then, upon the defeat of the Elden Beast, heralding the Age of Stars.

Despite Ranni's return and the fairly exhausted state of all other demigods, she is in essence blocked from achieving her goal by none other than her own brother, General Radahn.

At this stage in the lore, we all know the story of Radahn, a warrior who learned gravity magic so he could continue to ride his beleaguered horse. Yet he became so powerful in its usage that he would impose his will on the stars, during the Starscourge Conflict. According to a Sword Monument found in Caelid, this was to keep Sellia



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safe from something, either its fate or a direct threat from the stars.

However, with the movement of the stars arrested, fate is tethered along with it. And as we learn from Sellen and Iji, this means that Ranni's destiny is held in stasis alongside theirs. Indeed, whether Radahn intentionally wanted to prevent Ranni's plan or not, it is clear he is currently the greatest impediment to it, as the Dark Moon itself appears in the skies over Caelid upon Radahn's defeat.

This brings us back to a rather tricky subject – that of fate. Let us start at the beginning, and go over each piece of lore regarding fate before we try to understand what it means for Ranni specifically.

A good place to start is with the Celestial Dew:

“Once upon a time, the stars of the night sky guided fate, and this is a recollection of those times.” - Celestial Dew

Fate is the way a person's life unfolds; it suggests that part of a person's life is outside their control and is instead guided by an external force. In the case of *Elden Ring*, that outside force is the stars. This is put more simply by the Amber Starlight shard:

“If the stars command our fates, then amber-hued stars must command the fates of the gods. Such is the belief that inspired the use of these shards to prepare a most special draught.” - Amber Starlight

The stars command fates – they are in control of how people's lives play out, and the Carians seem to have had a special relationship with this fate. The Carians descend from astrologers, with Rennala herself being described as an astrologer in the Stargazer Heirloom. The Astrologer Set tells us astrologers are able to read fate in the stars. When Rennala established the Carian royal family, it looks as though she preserved such practices via the preceptors, for the Preceptor's Big Hat description reads:

“Large hat with the movements of the stars drawn on the inside of the brim. Worn by the magic preceptors who served the Carian royals... Glintstone sorcerers are the descendants of astrologers, a fact that the Carians remain aware of. Even if their fate has been long severed from the stars.” - Preceptor's Big Hat

This implies that some, especially the Carians, are well aware of their fates because they are able read them in the stars. This is fundamentally important to the Carians and especially Ranni. We learn of its importance to her plans via Sellen:

“The stars alter the fate of the Carian royal family. And the fate of your mistress, Ranni. But long ago, General Radahn challenged the swirling constellations, and in a crushing victory, arrested their cycles. Now, he is the force that repulses the stars. If General Radahn were to die, the stars



Grace Given

would resume their movement. And so, too, would Ranni's destiny.” - Sorceress Sellen

Sellen specifically states that Ranni's fate, her life, is unable to really move forward until the movement of the stars is resumed. It is hard for us to truly understand what is happening, but here are the main takeaways. First, the Carians are able to predict and read their fate in the stars. Second, fate is tied to the movement of the stars and if the stars do not move then there is no fate.

This seems to be some metaphysical power that we don't fully understand. When fate resumes we are physically able to enter Nokron, and we could say that “fate” really was just Radahn holding back an asteroid that was meant to strike that area. However, there is more to this power, since, if we try to open the chest containing the Fingerslayer Blade, but we are not serving Ranni, then we get a message saying that we “are not destined” to open it.

Furthermore, the Fingerslayer Blade itself states that it cannot be wielded by those without fate.

Fate and destiny appears to be a power exerted by stars onto the mortal

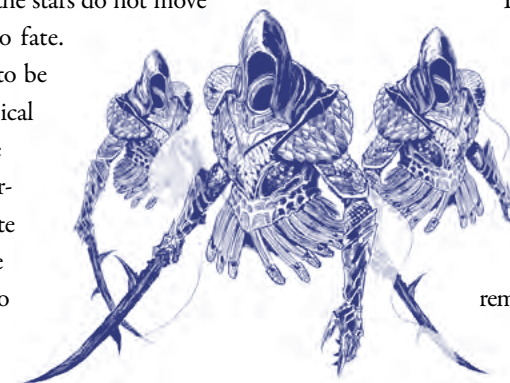
plane. To me it is a tool of the stars, which they utilize in order to guide their adherents along paths that they determine. They weave this power into being through their movements.

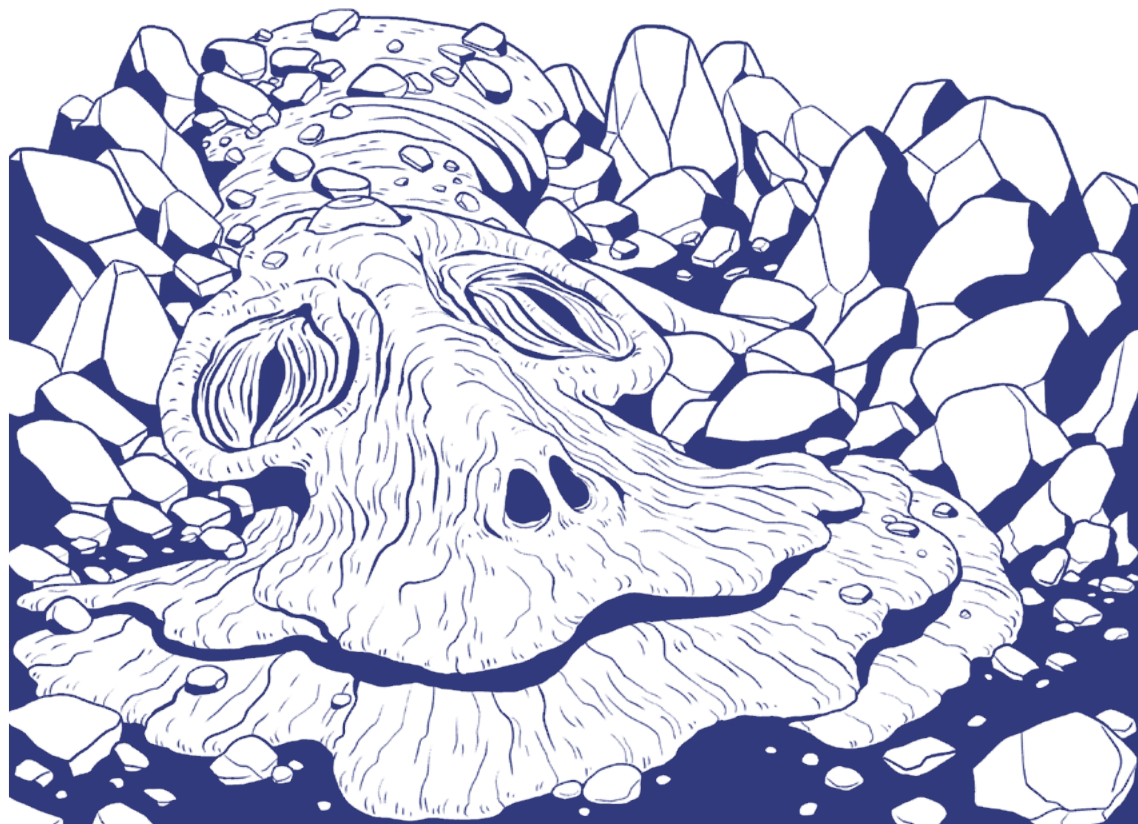
That is of course speculation. As we know the power of this fate can be used to control the actions of other people, as Seluvis uses the fate latent in the stars to create puppets.

Yet things still happen while Radahn has frozen the stars. For example, we are able to ascend the Elden Throne without killing Radahn, without the stars removing their movement.

This is why I believe fate is less of a wide-reaching concept that affects everyone. Rather it is a force of control or guidance.

Regardless, Ranni's plans are in essence frozen until we come along. Ranni is unable to wield the Fingerslayer Blade and finally sever her connection to her Two Fingers, by destroying the last of the Baleful Shadows and slaughtering her Two Fingers. At this stage when we become her consort, Ranni seems to be ready. All that remains for us to do is defeat Radagon and the Elden Beast.





Chapter 16: Godwyn, Prince of Death

What we know of Godwyn the Golden from before his murder is sparse, but we can build a semi-coherent impression of a gallant and heroic figure. He is clearly part of the Golden Lineage, and while it is readily accepted by the community at large that Godwyn is likely the child of Marika and Godfrey, it is worth remembering this isn't explicitly mentioned anywhere. So let us start there

and construct the arguments behind this commonly held belief.

First, there is his title and his name, belonging to the same naming practice as Godfrey, Godefroy and Godrick. And to help hammer home the idea that Godwyn is born of Marika and Godfrey there's this from a Finger Reader Crone, who we find in the Deeproot Depths:

"A scion of the golden bough, sentenced to live in Death... How could such



Grace Given

a thing come to be..." - Finger Reader Crone, Deeproot Depths

We know that Godwyn held an extremely prestigious position. Take this from Godrick's Great Rune:

"The first demigods were The Elden Lord Godfrey and his offspring, the golden lineage." - Godrick's Great Rune

This means that Godwyn was among one of the first of the demigods. Given his known exploits, he was surely one of the greats. And while Godrick idolizes Godfrey specifically, Godwyn is still everything that Godrick desires to be: a powerful and respected member of the Golden Lineage who wears the title "Golden."

We know that one of the greatest exploits attributed to Godwyn's life is his role in defeating the dragons who invaded Leyndell. We learn of this war via Bolt of Gransax:

"A great ancient dragon, Gransax once rained calamity upon the Royal Capital – the only time in historical record that Leyndell's walls have fallen. This marked the dawn of the war against the ancient dragons." - Bolt of Gransax

This mighty dragon, Gransax, is the gigantic corpse that we can still see in Leyndell today alongside his mighty bolt spear. This war appears to have been a massive challenge to the Erdtree forces.

The falling of the walls of Leyndell is significant: even the warring tribes of demigods could not pierce the mighty barriers during the Shattering, and we know of two instances specifically where the forces of Leyndell repelled all invaders – the first and second defenses of Leyndell.

This helps emphasize the power and brutality of this assault. Another dragon that took part in this assault would be Fortissax, one of the mightiest amongst his brethren. We learn of Fortissax's renown via Fortissax's Lightning Spear:

"During the War of the Ancient Dragons, these twin red lightning stakes were the hallmark of one ancient dragon who was called the mightiest boulderstone."

- Fortissax's Lightning Spear

All that, and yet Godwyn the Golden would step up in this war and earn the respect of this adversary:

"The Routing of the Ancient Dragons Godwyn the Golden fought to the last, Earning the friendship of dread Fortissax." - Sword Monument, Stormcaller Church, Altus Plateau

The Sword Monument tells us quite a lot about Godwyn as a person and a warrior. He clearly was a great fighter and a courageous one. The term "fought to the last" suggests a really brutal conflict. Godwyn must have been very



Godwyn, Prince of Death

mighty indeed, since we learn from Lightning Spear that Godwyn was able to comprehensively defeat the mighty Fortissax in this battle:

“Long ago, Godwyn the Golden defeated the ancient dragon Fortissax, and befriended his fallen foe – an event that gave rise to the ancient dragon cult in the capital.”

- *Lightning Spear*

Godwyn is also magnanimous in victory. Not only does he spare the mighty Fortissax but he befriends him, a loyalty that will be repaid tenfold later down the line, as we will see.

All of this is to say that while we don't get many pieces of information about Godwyn, what we do learn about him is compelling. He was a powerful warrior, powerful enough to contend with the dragons, but he also was a man of mercy and foresight. His friendship with Fortissax inspires both sides and turns a devastating conflict into an alliance between the capital and dragonkind. As the Lightning Spear states, this friendship would result in the rise of the Dragon Cult. Even Lannssex, Fortissax's sister, would become a priestess to this cult. We learn this via Lannssex's Glaive:

“Lansseax was the sister of Fortissax. It is said that she took the form of a human to commune with the knights

Godwyn is also magnanimous in victory, for not only does he spare the mighty Fortissax but he befriends him, a loyalty that will be repaid tenfold later.

as a priestess of the ancient dragon cult.”
- *Lannssex's Glaive*

This cult and the incorporation of dragon powers would become highly popular in Leyndell, as we can see from the good number of Leyndell Knights wielding lightning incantations. The most famous of these was Dragon Knight Kristoff, who was mighty enough to capture Godefroy. Yet another famous adherent of this cult would be none other than Vyke himself, who, we learn from Vyke's Dragonbolt, was Lansseax's favorite. It's clear that before pursuing the Frenzied Flame, he was a distinguished dragon knight.

All of this is a part of Godwyn's legacy, a tribute to his actions prior to his murder. And it paints a positive picture of the fallen lord.



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There is one more interaction of interest that we can attribute to Godwyn, tentatively, and this is some sort of relationship developed with his half-brother Miquella, later known as the Unalloyed. We have evidence that Miquella appears to have developed a fondness for his half-brother. From the Golden Epitaph sword:

“A sword made to commemorate the death of Godwyn the Golden, first of the demigods to die. Infused with the humble prayer of a young boy; ‘O brother, lord brother, please die a true death.’” - *Golden Epitaph*

This is a commemorative sword that is imbued with a young boy's prayer, and the reason Miquella is the most likely candidate is because we later find another connection in Castle Sol that implies Miquella's enduring empathy for Godwyn. We will return to this later.

The point of highlighting this relationship is to humanize Godwyn the Golden, who wasn't always the lifeless Prince of Death. Indeed, he was a figure of such stature that he even gained the love and respect of Miquella.

In totality this has always given me a very positive image and view of Godwyn, a truly colossal figure in the early years of Erdtree rule and a proud representative of the Golden Order.

THE PRINCE OF DEATH

After his murder, the corpse of the fallen demigod was buried in the Deeproot Depths, something we can pick up from the Prince of Death's Pustule. In your first playthrough, however, the first sight you get of Godwyn is the opening cinematic that shows him being murdered by the Black Knife Assassins. Despite the gruesome scene, we get the picture of a beautiful godlike figure, with a muscular physique and flowing golden hair.

So later it is very unsettling when players get their first look at what we later learn to be a visage of Godwyn hidden at the bottom of Stormveil.

I find the look of this face genuinely disturbing and repulsive. It reminds one of an oyster with its multiple folds of skin. Rogier later confirms that this haunting face is a relic of the Night of the Black Knives. Indeed, Rogier warns us away from the face because it possesses the Death Blight of Godwyn, which Rogier himself fell afoul of.

When we do finally find Godwyn in the depths of the Lands Between, we see that the visage under Stormveil is a spot-on replica of Godwyn's true face. This copy is still considered to be an actual “face” of Godwyn, as we can see from the Prince of Death's Pustule that we can pull from it:



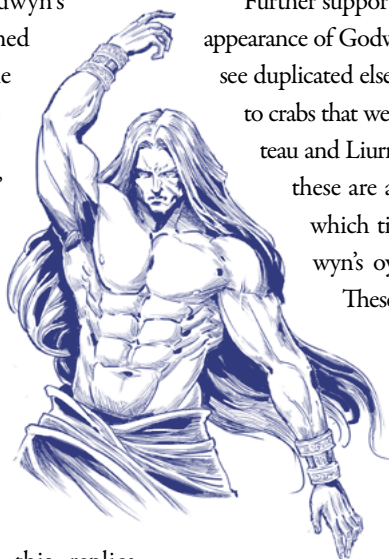
Godwyn, Prince of Death

“A fetid pustule taken from facial flesh. Raises vitality. (Vitality governs resistance to the effects of Death.) It is said that this pustule came from the visage of the Prince of Death, he who used to be called Godwyn.”

- Prince of Death's Pustule

This initially appears to be a confusing contradiction, but Godwyn's appearance is superbly explained by two videos from Zullie the Witch, in their “Godwyn, the Prince of Death” and “The terrible truth about Godwyn” videos. Zullie's work will be heavily referenced in this section, as many of the details we can learn of the Prince of Death's influence comes from environmental storytelling, and Zullie has by far been the most prolific creator on these subjects.

Let's firstly deal with this replica visage. In the video “The terrible truth about Godwyn,” Zullie says that Godwyn's image is spreading throughout the Lands Between. We can see his deathly pale eyes on growths in areas where the Deathroot has clearly spread, even reaching as far as Farum Azula. These eyes not only match Godwyn's true eyes, but also the eyes on the growths that we can see directly surrounding him in the Deeproot Depths.



Zullie therefore suggests that this Godwyn visage could very well be a more advanced type of this growth, one that has become an almost full replica of the Prince of Death. This is the most satisfying explanation to me, as I had long considered this to be a vestige of the true Godwyn.

Further supporting this theory is the appearance of Godwyn's visage, which we see duplicated elsewhere. I am referring to crabs that we can find in Altus Plateau and Liurnia. You will note that these are all waterlogged areas, which ties in well with Godwyn's oyster-like appearance.

These crabs have the visage of Godwyn upon their backs. Does he see through all of these eyes?

The implications are huge. Given enough time,

could Godwyn seep through the entire world? It's definitely suggested that this is the case. Godwyn's spread and the spread of the Deathroot have already transformed patches of the world around us.

Before we go further, we need to talk about Godwyn's appearance in general. We get the immediate allusions to the themes of stagnant water, in both the oysteresque face and in the fishlike tail that has replaced



Grace Given

his legs. His appearance is so abhorrent and so shocking compared to his original depiction in the introduction that it reminds me of the shock I felt when I first faced True King Allant at the end of *Demon's Souls*. The most disquieting feature is the blonde hair still present on this wretched form: a mockery of the demigod's original beauty.

Yet there are deeper connotations to Godwyn's appearance that we can make. It is possible Godwyn's appearance is a reference to the Japanese myth of the Ningyo¹.

Ningyo are essentially mermaids whose flesh, if consumed, confers immortality. That said, catching one is meant to bring calamity, and this fits with the cursed immortality of Those Who Live in Death.

In turn, stagnant water is often used to illustrate defilement and pollution, an idea in Japanese Shinto called *kegare*. *Kegare*, as described by Wikipedia, is “a state of defilement caused by varying events, including contact with any form of death.”

This is why Godwyn is so deeply corrupted. He is a living corpse. He has crossed the boundaries of natural life, and now he is a seedbed for the corruption that pollutes the Lands Between. Godwyn, through no fault of his own, is now the source of pollution existing outside the bounds of the existing Order, and he will continue to spread until he is either destroyed or is brought back in some form.

There appear to be new lifeforms that are created by contact with the Death Prince himself. There are the Basilisks, who have clearly had their eyes modified from prior Souls games to be more in line with Godwyn's². In addition, their connection to Godwyn is made all the clearer by their habitation in areas associated with Death, and by their amphibian features, which closely resemble the piscine features of Godwyn himself.

Yet they aren't the only lifeforms capable of inflicting Death Blight. There are also the mysterious and confusing Wormfaces. These are treelike humanoid, with worms burrowed into their faces. The connection to Godwyn is clear. As we discussed earlier, these mealworms, or maggots, are most likely allusions to the stagnant force of living within Death. They even spit these worms at us as they spread the Death Blight mist.

The file name for these enemies is “Deracine”, which is a French word referring to the uprooting of trees, an observation made by Zullie in their video “Elden Ring - The ‘Uprooted.’” This lines up nicely with the appearance of the Wormfaces: they look like upturned trees with their roots dangling, and I would suggest that their locations on the map are significant.

We mainly find them in two areas that are affected with Death Blight and

¹ “Elden Ring - Godwyn, the Prince of Death” - Zullie the Witch
² “Elden Ring - Godwyn, the Prince of Death” - Zullie the Witch



Godwyn, Prince of Death

have trees. My most likely explanation for their appearance is that they are somehow afflicted trees, or at least they have taken the form of trees due to where they have formed.

While I am sympathetic to Godwyn and his plight, this all paints a terrifying picture of his reach and the transformative nature of his power. So with that said, let us look at the spread of his corruption in more detail.

THE SPREAD OF DEATHROOT

Deathroot's spread was facilitated by the manner in which Godwyn's body was handled. We know from the Prince of Death's Pustule that he was buried at the roots of the Greattree:

"It is said that this pustule came from the visage of the Prince of Death, he who used to be called Godwyn. As First Dead of the demigods, it's said he's buried deep under the capital, at the Erdtree's roots."
- Prince of Death's Pustule

This matches up with what we see in the game – Godwyn's corpse slumped against the very roots of the tree in the Deeproot Depths. While this may seem pretty silly in retrospect, it does make sense, given we know from numerous sources that Erdtree burial was the idealized form of honoring

the dead, since the dead are returned to the roots of the Erdtree. Yet it was this connection that helped the Deathroot spread, something we have confirmed by the description of Deathroot itself:

"On the night of the dire plot the stolen Rune of Death enabled the first Death of a demigod. Later, the Rune of Death spread across the Lands Between through the underground roots of the Greattree, sprouting in the form of Deathroot."
- Deathroot

Not unusually for FromSoftware's elegant storytelling, this too is reflected by what we see in the game. At Godwyn's throne, we see the Death Blight spreading from his shattered form and infecting the roots of the Greattree to then spread throughout the world.

It is important to comprehend what this Deathroot actually is. The Deathroot is the Rune of Death that was stolen on that fateful night. These are the fragments of the Rune of Death that Maliketh failed to protect, and as such it explains his motivation in working with the hunters to retrieve it. He is trying to undo his mistake to restore the Rune of Death and thus the Golden Order.

Gurrang hungers for the Rune of Death, for the Deathroot, because he feels the Rune of Death since he bound it within his own flesh, as we learn from Maliketh's Black Blade:



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"Maliketh's black blade which once harbored the power of the Rune of Death. A sad shadow of its former glory. After a fragment of Death was stolen on that fateful night, Maliketh bound the blade within his own flesh, such that none might ever rob Death again." - Maliketh's Black Blade

He hungers for it to be complete and yet, tragically for Maliketh, some bells can't be unring. When we return all of the Deathroot, Maliketh realizes that the affliction of the half-wheel of the centipede has spread too far and too wide to be undone.

"It is... it is all... consumed. Still, I am not sated... Not nearly sated... Rrarrygh! Marika... Is this... what it is... to sin? Will things... never be the same... again?"
- Gurrang, Beast Clergyman

This is where we return to what happened to Godwyn on the Night of

the Black Knives. Godwyn only received the half-wound of the centipede, half of the Rune of Death. This half concerns the Death of the soul only, and said Deathroot contains the same "half" of the Rune of Death. This explains why those afflicted by Deathroot are dead only in soul but still exist corporeally. They literally live within Death.

The reference to this as the mark of the centipede is quite obviously fitting for a couple of reasons, not least because this half of the Rune of Death does indeed resemble a centipede.

However, the more relevant connotation is to do with the ideas of rot and stagnation from Shinto, where flowing water is seen as good, pure and representative of life, while stagnation is seen as corruption, death and decay.

Pests and insects thrive in stagnant water and thus they are also often used to represent corruption and rot. In Western culture, we are familiar with flies and insects being a pervasive symbol of death and rot; indeed, this is represented by the flies swarming around Godwyn's decaying corpse and buzzing in our ears as we try to talk to Fia, as well as by the fly wings that form the thorns of the Death Blight. However, it is helpful to understand the cultural context behind the rest of the designs so we can tie them in with the rich use of water-based themes.

**At Godwyn's throne,
we see the Death
Blight spreading from
his shattered form
and infecting the
roots of the Greattree
to then spread
throughout the world.**



Godwyn, Prince of Death

Centipedes fall within this category of a parasitic life that thrives in decay. They are often used in Japanese culture to represent stagnation. (The best representation of this in FromSoftware's work is in *Sekiro*, where the presence of centipede parasites are meant to denote the pollution of the divine waters.) This association is made even more interesting when we consider the Golden Centipede:

"The golden, desiccated remains of a centipede... Kept as a fetish by Golden Order fundamentalists, especially the hunters of Those Who Live in Death. As such, they're found near churches and similar."
- Golden Centipede

A fetish is usually a talisman or some other object used for spiritual protection. Given it is a *golden* centipede, it makes sense that Golden Order fundamentalists would use it as protection when hunting in areas marked by the half-wheel wound of the centipede.

This is why the half-wheel wound of the centipede is representative of Those Who Live in Death. They are stagnant forms of life. They are stuck at one part of the cycle. This is why Those Who Live in Death are often described as being outside of the Golden Order:

"Highly effective against Those Who Live in Death, even preventing them from rising again. The Golden Order has no mercy for

those who trespass beyond life's bounds."
- Holy Water Pot

It is again that idea of trespassing beyond the boundaries, leading to a pollution and stagnation that continues to spread the more it comes into contact with other forms. This is reflected in the language of the hunters such as D in a quote that I repeat here for the sake of clarity:

"Following only the guidance of the great Elden Ring. Those Who Live in Death fall outside the principles of the Golden Order. Their mere existence sullies the guidance of gold. Tainting its truth. And so it is the vermin must be exterminated... Down to the very last." - D, Hunter of the Dead

Thus the presence of stagnant water in many of the areas where we find Those Who Live in Death also makes sense thematically. Maybe it helps to explain the aquatic Tibia Mariners who seem to be an infection vector for the Deathroot. This is just another manifestation of the themes of stagnation and kegaré.

As we have just discussed, Those Who Live in Death are essentially a glitch in the system – and for this to occur there must be a fault in the Golden Order:

"Do you know of Those Who Live in Death? The very notion of life in death defies the Golden Order. By D's account, these defiled fiends must be expunged. But truth be told, I seek the cursemark to save



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them. You may find this peculiar, but I discovered something in my examination of the Night of the Black Knives. These souls have committed no offence. They have every right to life, only, they happened to touch upon a flaw in the Order." - Sorcerer Rogier

Like Rogier, I have a lot of sympathy for Those Who Live in Death. The fault in the system that they reveal is the removal and confinement of Death, which is fittingly described by the Mending Rune of the Death-Prince:

"Formed of the two hallowbrand half-wheels combined, it will embed the principle of life within Death into Order. The Golden Order was created by confining Destined Death. Thus, this new Order will be one of Death restored." - Mending Rune of the Death-Prince

So the very foundations of the Golden Order are built upon an Order absent Death. We see this effect on the denizens of the world, a world where nobody dies, but instead are doomed to life eternal, shriveling up. This is best explored by the Aristocrat Set worn by the Wandering Nobles, which describes their desiccated state as a result of unending life.

It really is a pitiful state of affairs. Unending life

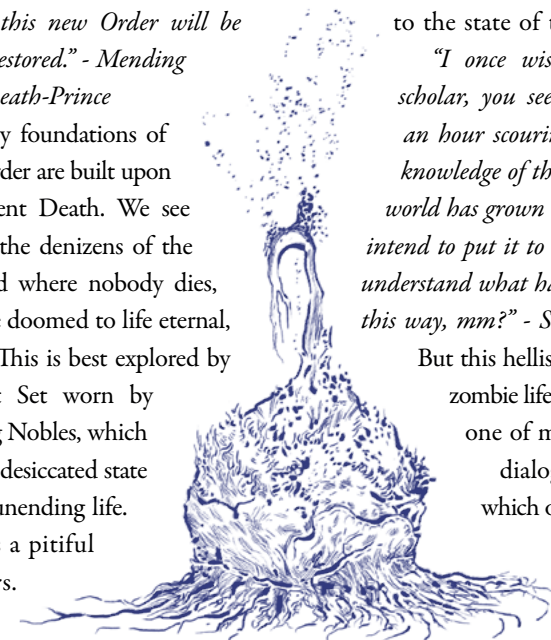
might sound great in theory but, in usual FromSoftware fashion, we are quickly disabused of that simple notion. And when you peel away the surface-level grandeur of the Golden Order, you can see it's fundamentally broken. There is no cycle on either side of the Order. Those who live within its bounds are as stagnant as those outside of it, something that probably wasn't apparent initially.

The removal of Death, and then the murder of Godwyn, are the two main events that broke the world as much as the shattering of the Elden Ring did.

Indeed, Rogier seems to agree that these are the pivotal events that lead to the state of the world as it is:

"I once wished to become a scholar, you see. I've spent many an hour scouring the archives for knowledge of that fateful plot. The world has grown crooked, and if you intend to put it to rights, you'd better understand what happened to make it this way, mm?" - Sorcerer Rogier

But this hellish state of ceaseless zombie life makes me think of one of my favorite Marika dialogues in the game, which occurs at the Minor Erdtree Church in the Altus Plateau:





Godwyn, Prince of Death

“I declare mine intent, to search the depths of the Golden Order. Through understanding of the proper way, our faith, our grace, is increased. Those blissful early days of blind belief are long past. My comrades; why must ye falter?”

- Queen Marika via Melina

I estimate that after the creation of the Golden Order, the flaws of immortality would become apparent, this would lead to declining faith. This shows the hypocrisy of the Golden Order hunters, or at least their ignorance, since the living and Those Who Live in Death are just two sides of the same broken coin.

The real result of the hatred directed towards Those Who Live in Death is best described by the Hunter Incantation, Order Healing, which we examined earlier.

As lamented by Goldmask, the hunters are merely preying on a scapegoat. And as I have said, the Golden Order, with its lack of Death, is itself flawed to the very core. It has caused the stagnation at the heart of the flow of life. Those Who Live in Death are the ones who acknowledge this obvious flaw. That is why they must be hunted, and that is why they are scapegoated.

When D says that “their mere existence taints the truth of the Golden Order,” it is inherently contradictory. If the Golden Order was true in its conception, it wouldn’t and couldn’t be contradicted.

Yet there are those who are looking for a workaround, a way to undo and reverse the corruption within the Prince of Death and ultimately save him. So it is time to look at those who would undo the curse afflicting the once golden Godwyn.

FORTISSAX & THE ECLIPSE

We’ve already seen that Fortissax and Godwyn developed a close bond due to their mutual respect and Godwyn’s sparing of the former’s life. But the depths of this bond don’t really become apparent until we get to the later stages of the game.

Fortissax’s remembrance reads:

“After Godwyn the Golden became the Prince of Death, the ancient dragon fought long and hard against the Death within its companion. Alas, victory was never achieved and its only reward was corruption.”

- Remembrance of the Lichdragon

This is indeed how we find Fortissax, renamed the Lichdragon due to the fact the ancient dragon himself has been suffused with Death. This is apparent from his appearance. All other ancient dragons have a distinct golden-beige hue to them, including his own sister. However, Fortissax is now stained with black, and you can see how brilliantly the design



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When we come to this Death realm within Godwyn, we literally see Death in the sky, symbolizing the saturation of Death within the Prince.

team have worked here. He isn’t just a black dragon: he still has his gold scales underneath everything, but he has been stained with the black mark of Death.

Much as when Rogier becomes suffused with Death, Fortissax also seems to be sprouting the blight. It has even burst from his eye sockets. This is the real corrupting power of Death; even the ancient dragons are not immune to it.

This point is explored in the Death Lightning incantation:

“Incantation that channels the power of the ancient dragon Fortissax, now corrupted by Death. Strikes surroundings with a storm of Death lightning. Inflicts Death blight upon foes... It said that this golden lightning was wielded by Godwyn, who befriended Fortissax.” - Death Lightning

Even Godwyn’s lightning, now wielded by Fortissax, has been suffused with Death.

Why is Fortissax so riddled with Death Blight? Fortissax’s remembrance implies that Fortissax is within Godwyn’s head, battling against Death within his old companion’s mind.

This a confusing concept, but it is clear that there does appear to be a realm contained within the mind of the Prince of Death. We can enter this realm ourselves at the end of Fia’s quest, when we are invited to enter the Deathbed Dream. Given that Fia is a deathbed companion, this must be Fia’s dream connecting her mind to Godwyn’s to birth the Mending Rune.

When we come to this Death realm within Godwyn, we literally see Death in the sky, symbolizing the saturation of Death within the Prince. Bear in mind we have joined Fortissax within Godwyn himself, and so what we see around us is representative of the corruption within Godwyn.

It is here that Fortissax has spent a long time fighting against this Death. Yet as should be obvious from the spread of Death in the world at large, the suffused nature of Godwyn’s mind and Fortissax’s own corruption, this fight was always doomed to fail.

Not only Fortissax felt great sorrow at Godwyn’s fate. There is evidence that Miquella was concerned with his half-brother’s suffering. Most specifically, we can make this connection via a spirit dialogue:

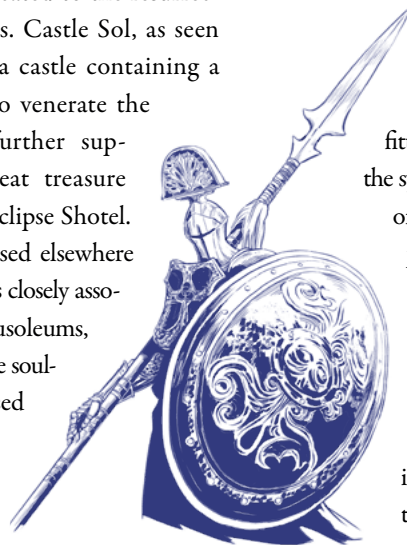


Godwyn, Prince of Death

“Lord Miquella, forgive me. The sun has not been swallowed. Our prayers were lacking. Your comrade remains soulless... I will never set my eyes upon it now... Your divine Haligtree...” - Castle Sol Spirit

This brings us to the location of this spirit, Castle Sol, a bastion that appears to hold a cult dedicated to the resurrection of the soulless. Castle Sol, as seen by its banners, is a castle containing a group that seem to venerate the eclipse. This is further supported by the great treasure of this castle, the Eclipse Shotel.

The eclipse is used elsewhere in *Elden Ring*, and is closely associated with the Mausoleums, their knights, and the soulless demigods housed within. The Eclipse Crest Greatshield wielded by the Mausoleum



Knights has a description that reads:

“The eclipsed sun, drained of color, is the protective star of soulless demigods. It aids the mausoleum knights by keeping Destined Death at bay.” - Eclipse Crest Greatshield

So the eclipse is a symbol of the soulless, and is seen as a ward that will keep Destined Death at bay. This is obviously something to avoid, so that the soulless demigods do not die permanently before they are restored.

The protective nature of the eclipse as a type of ward explains why it appears on the shields of the defenders of these soulless demigods. I feel the symbolism neatly overlaps with Those Who Live in Death, due to the similarity the eclipse symbol has to the two half-wheels of the centipede when they

are conjoined. Evidently this is not a coincidence. Given it is used to ward away Destined Death, it is fitting that the eclipse takes on the symbol of the Mending Rune of the Death-Prince to help protect his soulless brethren.

But what does it actually mean in the context of Castle Sol? What is the eclipse’s relevance? After all, as V-Limit points out in his video on this subject, the sun plays such an insignificant role in the Lands Between³. To unuddle this, let’s try and uncover the purpose behind the people who existed in Castle Sol, those who seem to venerate the eclipse.

One of the most interesting pieces of lore found at Castle Sol is the spirit who is praying to the eclipse in the main chapel:

“...Ohh great sun! Frigid sun of Sol! Surrender yourself to the eclipse! Grant life to the soulless bones!” - Eclipse Spirit



Grace Given

In other words, the common motivation appears to be the idea that the eclipse swallowing the sun would be able to restore the soulless to full life. Yet what is the basis for this theory?

Thankfully, Last Protagonist was able to provide the following insights regarding the eclipse:

“The term for eclipse comes from 蝕 shoku, which is the same kanji for 蝨 む *mushibamu, which means ‘worm-eaten; corroded; deteriorated; etc.’ This comes up a lot in Dark Souls to describe the way curses and the Dark eat away through things, like in ‘Gnaw,’ ‘Dark Fog,’ ‘Wolnir’s Holy Sword’ etc. In Elden Ring, the term also comes up with items attached to Godwyn (the ‘Weathered’ Dagger, the ‘corruption’ of Fortissax, etc). This all ties into the Eclipse Shotel which is described as being a sun ‘drained’ of color. It might imply that there is or was a connection between the sun and the grace of gold, and might coincide with the Sun Realm Shield or how Warming Stones say the Erdtree was ‘as warm and gentle as the sun.’” - Last Protagonist*

This immediately makes sense when we consider the term “worm-eaten,” especially the carrion and unliving forms of Godwyn and Those Who Live in Death, which could easily be described as “worm-eaten” too.

Additionally, it metaphorically introduces the idea of the sun being eaten, and again this lines up with a dialogue from a spirit at Castle Sol mentioning swallowing the sun:

“The sun has not been swallowed. Our prayers were lacking.” - Castle Sol Spirit

Given the Japanese connotations of worm-eating, the allusions are not only to the idea of corruption but to the vitality of the sun being consumed. This is analogous to Godwyn, a being devoid of soul and a sun drained of its color, which is how the Eclipse Shotel describes the phenomena.

Is it possible that when the cultists of Sol are beckoning for the eclipse to swallow the sun, they hope to steal its vitality to restore the soulless demigod? I suspect that is their belief. Specifically it appears that the Castle Sol is a joint venture between the group at Sol and Miquella. This is unsurprising, given Miquella’s great empathy for the outcast and forgotten, as well as his implied sympathy for his half-brother’s plight.

With that said, I now want to turn to an important figure who champions Godwyn’s cause, in an attempt to stand up for those without a voice. I am referring to Fia, and the conclusion of Godwyn’s story.

³ “The Eclipse | Elden Ring Lore” - V-Limit



Godwyn, Prince of Death

FIA AND THE MENDING RUNE

Fia is a fascinating character whose story is presented to us right at the beginning of the game during the introductory cinematic. We quickly learn that Fia is a Deathbed Companion and also a Tarnished.

When trying to understand what a Deathbed Companion is, a good place to start is probably with Fia herself:

"I was known as a Deathbed Companion, where I come from. After I received the warmth and lively vigour from a number of champions, I lay with the remains of an exalted noble, to grant him another chance at life. To do so is the purpose of my being. But before I could bear the noble into new life, I was awakened by the guidance of grace, and chased from my birthplace. Pray, be kind. Despite all that, I still wish to be a Deathbed Companion."
- Fia, the Deathbed Companion

Fia gives us the absolute bare bones of what this position entails: they absorb the vitality of champions that they embrace, and they then use that stored vigor to breathe new life into those who have already passed. In this dialogue Fia also seems to describe exactly what is depicted in her introductory slide. She was laying with a noble to "bear him" into new life.

There is a lot of lore that can help explain the Deathbed Companions.

For example, we can get an allegorical description of their origins via Perfumer Tricia's ashes:

"Tricia was once known as a healer who dedicated her efforts to treating Misbegotten, Omen, and all those seen as impure. When her efforts failed, she was their companion as they died, watching over them to ensure that they could pass peacefully, free of pain. A tale akin to the origins of the Deathbed Companions." - Perfumer Tricia

By using Tricia's story as a comparison, this description seems to suggest that the Deathbed Companions were once an order that watched over those who were dying to make sure their last moments were comfortable and not lonely. In time, however, this would have evolved to allow the restoration of important individuals who had passed, with the Deathbed Dress designed so that it is thin enough to share the companion's warmth and not damage the corpse.

I find it interesting to consider the origins of the Deathbed Companions, because the only one we meet is firmly removed from her métier. We can get a slightly better understanding of all this the more we search for it. First, let us look at Baldachin's Blessing. It seems to show a temple covered in curtains and clothes, and the item describes this temple as being in the guise of a bedchamber.



Grace Given

This matches up with the term "baldachin," for a baldachin is "a cloth canopy fixed or carried over an important person or a sacred object." This also matches with the very cloak that Fia wears over her Deathbed Dress for traveling. There are clearly temples surrounding these practices, suggesting a religious connection, and a baldachin could therefore be a god of healing through Death. That said, it's more than likely the word just refers to the heavy use of canopies and cloaks in the temples and clothing.

Either way I think we can glean some understanding of the beliefs and functions of the Deathbed Companions from Baldachin's Blessing which says:

"Favor bestowed by a deathbed companion. Protection of a hidden temple in the guise of a bedchamber... The favor allows one to forget any aches and pains. In Death, there is only peace, for in Death, there can be no sensation." - Baldachin's Blessing

The darkest aspect of this role is the fact that the Deathbed Companions never choose who they lie with. It seems that the society the Companions come from directs their use, while their personal feelings play no role in the matter. This is also backed up by Fia, who says this when she chooses to lie with Godwyn:

"This is goodbye, my dear. But I am satisfied. I choose to lie with Godwyn of my

own will. Not the remains of one chosen for me." - Fia, the Deathbed Companion

Given that Fia tells us that it was a noble she was last told to lie with, the implication is that it is the upper classes that benefit from this particular brand of resurrection. Yet the Radiant Baldachin's Blessing seems to suggest that when the companion chooses for themselves, the effect is even more potent:

"Uses FP to temporarily raise poise. The effect lasts longer than a mere favor. It's said a Deathbed Companion will only produce a blessing of this kind for a champion but once in her entire life. The sole blessing which she imbues of her own volition."
- Radiant Baldachin's Blessing

As Fia says, she has been told who to lie with her whole life and so when she becomes tarnished, she chooses a new path and chooses to use her skills for another purpose.

"For I am the companion of Godwyn, Prince of Death. I wished to be a mother to Those Who Live in Death. So it is, that any loathing, any hatred that overshadows them... I must bear, as a matter of duty, with my own flesh." - Fia, the Deathbed Companion

Fia chooses to defend those who, through no fault of their own, are hunted, persecuted and have no voice. Given Fia's life of being told what to do, before being chased from her homeland and now being



Godwyn, Prince of Death

bound by grace, we can easily see why she would have great sympathy for these people. Given her knowledge of Death and her association with recycling life into Death, she clearly would have an innate kinship with Those Who Live in Death, and is less likely to be repulsed by their deathly nature.

I feel her ideals must be similar to those of her ally, Rogier, who rightly states that their existence is no fault of their own. Fia takes it upon herself to try and right this wrong.

The first way she does this is by her embraces. Not only is she using this energy in the build-up for gestating her new “child,” but she also uses it in a more creative way. Fia appears to take a portion of the vitality of champions that she embraces, and can summon them as champions to defend the Prince of Death.

This is actually backed up by the mechanics of the game. Matt Gruen, in an X post⁴, details that the champions we fight are actually shadows of player builds who have been embraced by Fia. They share the blue colors of the puppets, so I see them as Fia’s puppets. This makes sense since we do see Rogier and Lionel, both Tarnished whom we know she has embraced.

To be clear, though, these are akin to puppets. These blue manifestations are not the actual champions, rather an imprint of them, especially since Rogier will be dead

by this stage in the quest. This is a rather impressive feat, and it really emphasizes how much power Fia gains from absorbing the power of champions. It will play a key role in her gestation of the Mending Rune.

Before Fia is able to do that, she has work to do. This is work that involves us. She needs to recover both of the halves of the hallowbrand so it may be repaired. The hallowbrand is what we have previously referred to as the two half-wheel wounds of the centipede, the Cursemark of Death that was split between Ranni and Godwyn during the Night of the Black Knives. Fia, being a follower of the Prince of Death, refers to it in more floral terms; the stolen hallowbrand of the exalted noble, aka Godwyn.

So she sets us and Rogier into motion to retrieve it. She makes great efforts to hide her true motivations, only portraying herself as someone interested in helping Rogier, while mysteriously handing us a pivotal map she got from the friend of a friend.

Fia has already mentioned how Rogier says things while in bed, and he appears to hold another secret that would be of much interest to Fia. It is the same secret he divulges to us in the form of a letter, written in a trembling hand:

“I forgot to tell you, but it seems D has a younger brother. I heard he lies in



⁴ X post by Matt Greun: bit.ly/3x0UuXx



Godwyn, Prince of Death

a deep sleep in the aqueduct beside The Eternal City of Nokron. And it's said he stood before the Prince of Death not far beyond that spot." - Rogier's Letter

With this letter, everything that transpires between Fia and D makes complete sense. Fia knew that D's brother had stood before the Prince of Death, and this no doubt explains why we find the twin huddled and broken not far from where Godwyn lies.

Now let us look at the Weathered Dagger that Fia asks us to return to D:

"Dagger received from Fia, the Deathbed Companion. She wishes for it to be returned to its rightful owner. It was once a special weapon of gold and silver intertwined, but is now worn down and marred by a black gash." - Weathered Dagger

A knife marred by black gash and worn down. Surely, given these two bits of lore, we can assume this blade was turned

Fia appears to take a portion of the vitality of champions that she embraces, and can summon them as champions to defend the Prince of Death.

against Godwyn, but to what end? The answer comes from Fia herself when we reach her in the Deeproot Depths:

"When the first of the demigods died, his flesh was marked with the half-wheel wound of the centipede. Godwyn's hallowbrand has since been recovered at the Roundtable Hold. But there is another hallowbrand out there somewhere. And I must find it." - Fia, the Deathbed Companion

Godwyn's hallowbrand has since been recovered at Roundtable Hold, taken from D's dead hands.

This is what I see as the chain of events: D's brother carves out the hallowbrand from Godwyn's very flesh, the act that mars his blade and drives him mad. Given his state, the brand will come to be possessed by D. Fia learns of this via Rogier, and knowing she will come into conflict with a Tarnished, she develops Fia's Mist, an incarnation only effective against undying Tarnished. For all his martial strength, D is no match for the Death Blight, and Fia lures him into a trap by passing the knife to D that all but says "I know," and by revealing her true loyalties.

Fia then kills D with Death Blight, reclaims the hallowbrand and disappears into the night to rest by Godwyn's side. It is a master plan that happens in front of our eyes, but is so subtle because neither Fia nor D shows their hand to us.



Grace Given

If we choose to return the other half of the hallowbrand to Fia, the endgame of her plan can come into effect:

"I will soon lay with Godwyn. And it will surely stir within me. The new life of the golden prince, and first Dead of the demigods, as the rune of Those Who Live in Death. Please, do one thing for me. Brandish this child, my rune, and take for yourself the throne. Stay the persecution of Those Who Live in Death." - Fia, the Deathbed Companion

So it seems as though Fia's position as a Deathbed Companion is key in the formation of this rune. Long has she channeled the power of champions' life to resurrect the dead, and so now she will do so to gestate a rune born of Godwyn. But this rune is also partially our child, for she is using the warmth of our vigor to breathe life into it.

Unfortunately, this is where we must face and kill one of the truest heroes of *Elden Ring*, Fortissax. Fortissax has spent unknowable years within Godwyn, fighting and resisting the Death within his friend, and yet that now means he is an obstacle to the birth of the Mending Rune. Fortissax's influence in pushing back Death no doubt means he is halting the birth of the Death Rune. And so it is with great sorrow that we must put the blighted beast down, so that Godwyn's and Fia's child may come forth.

MENDING RUNE OF THE DEATH-PRINCE

What does this Mending Rune represent for the future of Those Who Live in Death?

Let us first read the description of the rune itself to try and understand it:

"Formed of the two hallowbrand half-wheels combined, it will embed the principle of life within Death into Order. The Golden Order was created by confining Destined Death. Thus, this new Order will be one of Death restored."

- Mending Rune of the Death-Prince

This makes it clear that both halves of the hallowbrand, meaning both body death and soul death, will once again be restored into the ruling Order. You may assume that it essentially restores Destined Death and makes Death "normal" again. However, I do not think this is the case. It states that "it will embed the principle of life within Death into Order," very much suggesting that Those Who Live in Death will still exist. Now they will just be part of the Elden Ring's Order.

This is also backed up by Fia:

"With this, Godwyn can take his rightful place as First of the Dead. And claim a second, illustrious life."

- Fia, the Deathbed Companion

This implies that Godwyn will continue to be the source of Those Who Live in Death, but will take some kind of position of power



Grace Given

in the new Order, as First of the Dead – a rank analogous to Nito in *Dark Souls*.

This suggests that Death will return in a different fashion. The language used in the Mending Rune does seem to place importance on the fact that this isn't the original Rune of Death, but is formed of the two hallowbrands found on Ranni's and Godwyn's flesh. It is something new.

If it were merely restoring Death as it had been before, would the ending not have a different name? Maybe the Age Restored? When we repair the Elden Ring with this Mending Rune, the ending we get is called the Age of the Duskborn. Dusk is often associated with the end

of one's life. The Gloam-Eyed Queen was referred to as the Dusk-Eyed Queen in an earlier patch, and while this was obviously a mistake, it does belay dusk's inherent connection with Death.

To attempt to understand what this era really represents I asked Last Protagonist to translate the Mending Rune, and they provided the following:

“死王子の修復ルーン --- 死衾の乙女、フィアが宿したルーン エルデの王が、壊れかけの工

ルデンリングを掲げる時 その修復に使用できるそれは、2つの欠環が合わさった聖痕であり死に生きる理を、律の一部とするものである 黄金律は、運命の死を取り除くことで始まった ならば新しい律は、死の回帰となるであろう”

“Death Prince Mending Rune --- A rune that Fia, Deathbed Companion carried. When the Elden Lord brandishes the fractured Elden Ring, (this rune)

can be used to mend it. It is the

holy seal of two ring

fragments joined

together; It will

make the Way of

Living in Death

a part of Order.

The Golden Order

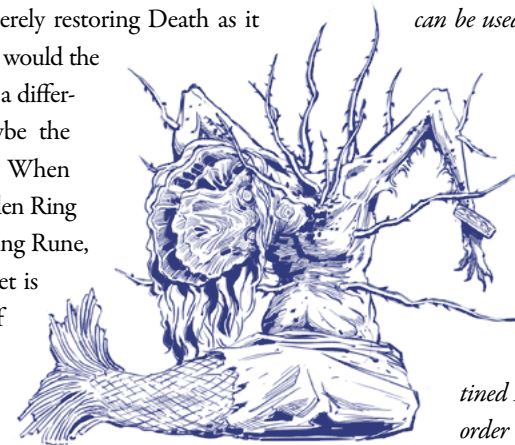
began with the

removal of Des-

tined Death. Thus, the new

order shall result in death's

return.” - Last Protagonist



This clarifies that “it will make the Way of Living in Death a part of Order,” i.e. confirming Those Who Live in Death will still exist as they are, but will be welcomed into the new Order of the world.

It also mentions that this new Order shall result in Death's return, and while that is true, the Death that will be restored will be a new type of Death. It will be life within Death: Death overseen by Godwyn, First of the Dead.



Chapter 17: The Shattering

With the destruction of the Elden Ring, both Marika and Radagon are gravely wounded. As seen from the story trailer and their body, which we glimpse in the final battle, they were shattered alongside the ring itself. Then, as we hear from the Two Fingers, Marika was imprisoned. Given that Radagon shares a body with Marika, he too would be left to languish within the Erdtree.

In a single stroke, the Elden Ring “root” of the Golden Order was shattered and both Elden Lord gods vanished. At

the beginning of the game it is specifically mentioned that Queen Marika has not been seen since this point. Nobody knows she has been imprisoned.

The Golden Order has been destroyed and the command structure has failed. So I think it is most likely that this is the moment that Mohg and Morgott would have escaped their captivity, taking advantage of the chaos.

The narrative I suggest is this: with the collapse of any sort of command, Morgott rose from the Shunning-Grounds and claimed kingship over Leyndell. He



Grace Given

does have a legitimate claim to the throne, as explained by his Great Rune:

“This Great Rune is the anchor ring that houses the base, and proves two things: That the Omen King was born of the golden lineage, and that he was indeed the Lord of Leyndell.” - Morgott’s Great Rune

On top of this, he refers to himself as the “last of all kings,” really emphasizing his claim to legitimacy.

“Have it writ upon thy meagre grave: Felled by King Morgott! Last of all kings.” - Morgott, the Omen King

Aside from physically governing and protecting the capital, Morgott clearly had a keen mind and sought to prevent any further calamities. He seems to be responsible for the Sentry’s Torches:

“Torch given to protectors of the Erdtree. Its flames are bestowed with a special incantation which allows the bearer to see assassins cloaked in veils. Furnished on behalf of the Erdtree and the Grace-Given Lord such that a Night of Black Knives will never come again.” - Sentry’s Torch

Clearly, Morgott has identified the massive role that the Night of the Black Knives played in the Golden Order’s eventual fall, as well as the damage it did to the Lands Between. Now that he is king, he would not want to fall victim to such an assassination.

The general narrative that we get from the intro cinematics, NPCs and the story trailer is that the Elden Ring was shattered, and then there was the Shattering War. However, I believe this glosses over the build-up to that war. We do get some minor evidence that a new Order briefly rose to maintain some kind of peace in the wake of the Golden Order’s collapse. This was the Sovereign Alliance.

We learn of this via Sword Monument found in Altus Plateau:

“The First Defense of Leyndell / A sovereign alliance rots from within / Traces yet remain of bloody conspiracy” - Sword Monument, Second Church of Marika, Altus Plateau

I take this statement to mean that there was an alliance before the First Defense of Leyndell, and that the crumbling of this alliance led to the outbreak of the Shattering.

Who could have the will to have brought together a tenuous alliance? Who would care enough to try for peace, and who do we know to be a sovereign? I believe the mastermind behind this alliance is Morgott, as Morgott’s actions throughout the game show us he is interested in one thing: the preservation of the Erdtree. Preserving peace between the demigods would certainly be in line with this aim.



The Shattering

Like the other demigods, Morgott had a claim to the throne and would claim a shard of the shattered Elden Ring. And, according to my own fevered speculation, they would form the Sovereign Alliance to oversee a period of shaky peace. While we don't learn anything else about this alliance, I feel it fits well with Morgott's opening dialogue, and the thrones we find before the Erdtree:

"What is thy business with these thrones? Ahh... Godrick the Golden. The twin prodigies, Miquella and Malenia. General Radahn. Praetor Rykard. Lunar Princess Ranni. Willful traitors, all."
- Morgott, the Omen King

What else could this arrangement of thrones be, other than a council that once stood between all of the demigods before the Shattering?

I believe the members named here to be those who once comprised the Sovereign Alliance alongside Morgott. To compound this idea, Morgott calls them traitors and pillagers, as if they betrayed some kind of oath or agreement in order to pursue their own quest for power.

The cut character Viscount Shainehaigh would have had a dialogue that would have reinforced this narrative:

"The Shattering caused a great many fools to overstep their bounds. Their impudence led to insurgency against Morgott,

Lord of Grace. They raised an army, and sought to lay siege to this sacred ground."
- Viscount Shainehaigh, cut NPC

The language used here is very similar to that which Morgott would use when discussing these "traitors": impudence and the overstepping of bounds. It also once again suggests that Morgott was the leader at this time.

There is further evidence that Morgott was at one point aligned to those like Godrick, as we learn that Godrick was once present in Leyndell. We learn of him being chased from the capital via the testimony of Kenneth Haight:

"Honestly, Godrick's no more than a jumped up country bumpkin. Lord? Don't make me laugh. First he hid himself amongst the womenfolk to flee the capital, then hid from Radahn in that castle..."
- Kenneth Haight

I have always assumed that it was Godrick and his relative Godefroy who laid siege to Leyndell. The coat of arms we see in the story trailer is Godrick's, and we learn that Godefroy was captured in the first siege. The Kristoff Ashes description reads:

"After the First Defense of Leyndell, Kristoff earned the hero's honor of Erdtree Burial for the feat of capturing Godefroy the Grafted." - Ancient Dragon Knight Kristoff Ashes



Grace Given

But why does Morgott take it upon himself to defend the Erdtree? Why doesn't he take the Elden Throne and repair the Elden Ring as the Greater Will clearly desires?

As such, I feel that Godrick was "driven" from the capital as a result of him and his relative taking advantage of his position within the Sovereign Alliance. They were trying to take the capital in one fell swoop. After all, Godrick's clear aim is to return to his Golden Lineage "birthright," i.e. the capital:

*"...I am Lord of all that is Golden....
...And one day, we'll return together...
...To our home, bathed in rays of gold..."*
- Godrick the Grafted

And the crumbling of the Sovereign Alliance is suggested in the very Sword Monument we have read. Its collapse would result in the first battle for Leyndell, and the Shattering would evidently follow.

But why does Morgott take it upon himself to defend the Erdtree? Why doesn't he take the Elden Throne and

repair the Elden Ring as the Greater Will clearly desires? I think the truth of this can be found in his final dialogue:

"Tarnished, thou'rt but a fool. The Erdtree wards off all who deign approach. We are... we are all forsaken. None may claim the title of Elden Lord."
- Morgott, the Omen King

Morgott reveals that no one will be given entrance to the Erdtree, and that he has failed. I believe this failure is his failure in defeating us, and not because he failed to stand before the Elden Ring. I would suggest that he has interpreted the sealing of the Erdtree as the will of the Greater Will.

This is why he sees those who are trying to claim the Elden Throne as nothing more than pillagers. Otherwise, given he is loyal to the Greater Will, surely he would have taken the throne himself or encouraged someone worthy to do so.

As the dialogue from Enia suggests, following our own failure to enter the Erdtree, we know that the sealing of the Erdtree is not, in fact, the will of the Greater Will. After all, the Two Fingers are confused as to what to do next.

We know that Radagon is responsible for the barrier of thorns, due to his own seal being present upon those thorns. This is not the plan of the Greater Will, as the Greater Will is clearly directing us to



The Shattering

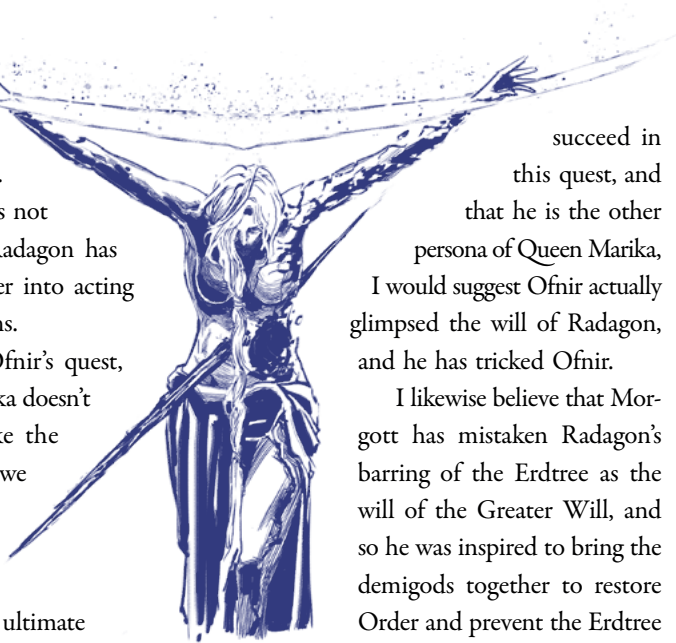
enter the Erdtree and ascend the throne. In my opinion, this is not the first time that Radagon has tricked a major player into acting in defense of his plans.

At the end of Ofnir's quest, he suggests that Marika doesn't want anyone to take the throne, arguing that we are to struggle for eternity. And, as a result, he stands between us and our ultimate aim. Ofnir appears to have had

some contact with what he believes to be Queen Marika, as his armor describes him connecting with her "will," which he has interpreted as stating that no one should ascend to Elden Lord. And so this age of struggle should continue with no conclusion.

Yet we get direct evidence that this is not what she wants. She wants all this to end, for someone to kill the Elden Beast and supplant the Golden Order.

The main evidence for this is Hewg. We know from Hewg's dialogue that Queen Marika placed him here, and she commanded him to forge a weapon capable of killing a god. Given that Radagon doesn't want anyone to



succeed in this quest, and that he is the other persona of Queen Marika, I would suggest Ofnir actually glimpsed the will of Radagon, and he has tricked Ofnir.

I likewise believe that Morgott has mistaken Radagon's barring of the Erdtree as the will of the Greater Will, and so he was inspired to bring the demigods together to restore Order and prevent the Erdtree from being pillaged.

The chain of events I am suggesting runs as follows. The Elden Ring is shattered, Morgott escapes from the Shunning-Grounds and claims a Great Rune before claiming the empty throne of Leyndell. Then, in an attempt to forge peace in this new shaky age, he binds the most powerful demigods together in the Sovereign Alliance, whose thrones we can still see in the capital.

However, in time the bonds that secured this alliance dissolve into warfare, with each of the demigods claiming the throne for themselves.

Infuriated by this betrayal, and by the selfish greed of these usurpers, Morgott would take on a new persona, becoming



Grace Given

Margit the Fell. This would result in the two personalities that we see today: the Fell Omen and the Veiled Monarch.

LANDS SHATTERED

The Shattering War is the event most central to *Elden Ring's* story. It's the inciting conflict that leads to the fall of the demigods and ultimately the return of the Tarnished. The name is relevant in two ways. It is a war that results from the shattering of the Elden Ring, and it ultimately shatters the Lands Between.

It is clear from interviews with both Miyazaki and George R. R. Martin that the writing Martin did for *Elden Ring*

was most likely focused on the demigods and the Shattering War. Miyazaki credits Martin with naming the Lands Between and creating the demigod characters. You can certainly feel Martin's influence on this aspect of the story: a dynastic struggle between powerful lords, each with their own army, strongholds and livery.

The story trailer gives us a glimpse of the scale of this war, as we witness the royal capital besieged by a huge army wearing the livery of Godrick or Godfrey. We also hear of many cataclysmic conflicts: the siege of Volcano Manor and Mt. Gelmir, the two defenses of Leyndell and of course the climactic Battle of Aeonia.

The result of this war is pretty clearly stated by the opening cinematic:

"A war from which no lord arose. A war leading to abandonment by the Greater Will." - Opening narration

This war was so devastating, fought between so many powerful factions, that no one truly came out on top. Most of the main players still exist, but it is clear that a sort of stalemate has settled over the Lands Between, with most lords retreating behind the walls of their strongholds.

This quote from the opening narration also mentions the Greater Will abandoning the demigods, a sentiment reinforced by a dialogue from the Two Fingers. They say the following of the demigods:

This war was so devastating that no one truly came out on top. Most of the main players still exist, but it is clear that a sort of stalemate has settled over the Lands Between.



The Shattering

“Tainted by the strength of their runes, her children warred, but none could become Elden Lord. And so grace was extended, to your kind, the Tarnished. Listen, the Fingers speak. ‘The Greater Will has long renounced the demigods. Tarnished, show no mercy. Have their heads. Take all they have left.’ The Fingers have willed it so.”

- Finger Reader Enia and the Two Fingers

So the Two Fingers once looked to the demigods for a potential successor, but the failure of one to emerge victorious has led to the Greater Will renouncing their claim. The Divine Towers are perhaps further illustrations of the prior relationship between the Two Fingers and the demigods. Atop each tower is a dead Two Finger, each associated with a demigod’s Great Rune.

Does this suggest that at one stage each demigod had a Two Finger watching over them? I certainly believe so, and I believe that at the conclusion of the war, upon the Greater Will abandoning the demigods, each of these Two Fingers died.

While the Shattering War is a result of a power vacuum and a royal family with too many heirs, there is a corrupting element that played an active role in pushing the demigods into conflict with one another: the Great Runes.

We know that the Great Runes are the largest fragments from the broken

Elden Ring, described as its “shards” by the opening cinematic. The motivation for seizing such a relic is quite clear: Not only are they powerful objects but they lend legitimacy to each would-be ruler.

The introductory narration also hints at something rather interesting, that the runes themselves had an effect on the demigods and contributed to the outbreak of war:

“The mad taint of their newfound strength triggered the Shattering. A war from which no lord arose.” - Opening narration

I take two possible meanings from this. Either their newfound strength emboldened them to the point that they each saw themselves as the rightful successors to the Elden Throne, or the possession of a Great Rune drove them nearly mad.

Does this suggest that at one stage each demigod had a Two Finger watching over them? I believe so, and I believe that at the conclusion of the war, each of these Two Fingers died.



Grace Given

The Great Runes are fascinating artifacts. It is clear that the Elden Ring itself is made out of several interlocking runes and that each rune contributes to the overall makeup of the current Order. Hence the removal of the Rune of Death effectively led to the current deathless state of the world, and by modifying the Elden Ring with a Mending Rune we can influence the form of the next Order.

What is interesting about the Great Runes is that they appear to be almost symbiotic with their hosts; each function is very much reflective of its owner. I think the clearest example of this phenomenon is Malenia’s Great Rune:

“The blessing of this half-rotted rune reduces the healing power of Flask of Crimson Tears. And yet, due to the infusion of Malenia’s spirit of resistance, attacks made immediately after receiving damage will partially recover HP. Malenia is daughter to Queen Marika and Radagon, and her Great Rune should have been the most sacred of all.” - Malenia’s Great Rune

So we have two clear pieces of evidence that Malenia has affected this fragment of the Elden Ring. First, it has become infected by Malenia’s Scarlet Rot. Second, it has been infused with an element of Malenia’s personality – her courage. Both of these things actually warp the rune’s function. We can use the rune ourselves

to benefit from Malenia’s health-regain abilities, at the cost of our healing items.

This is the same for each of the Great Runes possessed by a demigod: Rykard’s Great Rune devours enemy health, Radahn’s Great Rune burns like the Red Lion, and Godrick’s is the most pure gold, reflecting his obsession with his Golden Lineage.

Mohg’s and Morgott’s runes are some of the strongest evidence of demigods affecting the form, function and shape of a Great Rune. As with the others, both have affectations and effects that reflect their bearers. Mohg’s is soaked in his accursed blood and Morgott’s is the “anchor ring that houses the base,” reflecting his Golden Lineage and nature in holding everything together.

But even more interesting is the following line from Mohg’s Great Rune:

“Mohg and Morgott are twin brothers, and their Great Runes are naturally similar.” - Mohg’s Great Rune

So the literal shape of the rune has been affected by the bearer too.

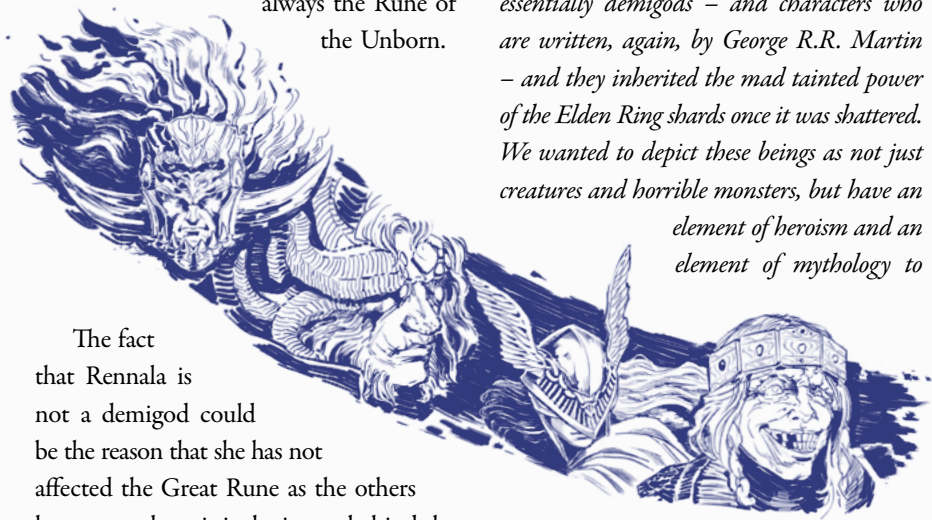
All of this leads me to conclude that the Great Runes as we find them have been massively altered from their original form, the form they had when they were part of the Elden Ring.

You’ll likely have noticed I haven’t mentioned one of the Great Runes, the Great Rune of the Unborn. And that is because



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it is a special case. First, the current purpose of the Great Rune, which is creating new life, seems to be its original purpose, given that Miriel's dialogue suggests Rennala has always used the rune for this. Indeed, the rune is a parting gift from Radagon to Rennala, something to give her comfort, and it is therefore likely that it was always the Rune of the Unborn.



The fact that Rennala is not a demigod could be the reason that she has not affected the Great Rune as the others have, or perhaps it is the intent behind the bearer that is significant. Rennala seems to be content with her rune's original function, whereas the demigods clearly wanted to use theirs as objects of power, and such intent has ultimately warped them.

Either way, the relationship between the Great Rune and its demigod goes both ways, as the power "taints" them. The introductory narration doesn't give too much detail as to the specifics of

this process, however Miyazaki himself thankfully offered some more information prior to the release of the game¹.

The following quote comes from an IGN interview in June 2021, in which Miyazaki said the following of the demigods:

"One main theme of the main bosses of the game, in particular, are that they are essentially demigods – and characters who are written, again, by George R.R. Martin – and they inherited the mad tainted power of the Elden Ring shards once it was shattered. We wanted to depict these beings as not just creatures and horrible monsters, but have an element of heroism and an element of mythology to

them. Essentially, they are the old gods of this world. And part of the design of these major characters is that in inheriting the shards of the Elden Ring, they each inherited a different power or element, so to speak, and each was twisted and warped in its own way, and it brought a tainted strength to each of them. They each fell to madness and fell to ruin in their own individual ways. So while there is heroic and mythological elements to them, they

¹ I credit Ratatoskr and his "Heroic Concept" video series for first bringing this to my attention.



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Radahn first learns gravity magic so he can keep his old horse, a horse that he has so grossly outgrown. He holds the stars in stasis and he venerates the heroes of the past.

are also going to have this very mad taint and this deep-seated ruin to them." - Elden Ring: The Big Hidetaka Miyazaki Interview, IGN

So we get some new information here about how the Great Runes affected each of the demigods. The runes brought them strength, yes, but they drove them to madness in their own way. In his "Heroic Concept" video series, Ratatoskr suggests that this means that each god has a "theme" that they embody, one that makes them heroic in a way, but that it is also the element that has been warped to the extreme and led to their ruin².

Let's look at Radahn, for example. He is a demigod who venerates the heroes of the past, as his helm item description reads:

"Helm of the golden lion, with flowing red hair. Worn by General Radahn. Radahn inherited the furious, flaming red hair of his

father Radagon, and is fond of its heroic implications. 'I was born a champion's cub. Now I am the Lord of the Battlefield's lion.'" - Radahn's Redmane Helm

We can clearly see here that Radahn's armor idolizes two heroes of the prior Order, his father and the First Elden Lord. Indeed, Radahn's livery wears the Golden Lion of Godfrey proudly on his chest, showing us that his ideals cleave closer to that of the Golden Order than that of his Carian family.

In a way Radahn is a lord of preservation, stasis or stagnation.

The reason Radahn learns gravity magic is so he can keep his old horse, a horse that he has so grossly outgrown. He holds the stars in stasis to preserve Sellia from destruction and he venerates the heroes of the past. He is completely unwilling to let go of the past, and while this is heroic in some respects – such as in his defense of Sellia and in his clear love for his horse – it is also a negative trait because it lines up with that classic FromSoftware theme of stagnation, of preserving things beyond their natural limits.

While Radahn's care for his horse is heartwarming, one only needs to look at the poor overborne horse to know that this is not right.

My conclusion is that the heroic element of each demigod is warped to the extreme, causing friction and, ultimately, war.

² "General Radahn's Heroic Concept" - Ratatoskr



PART IV:
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THE
DEMIGODS



Grace Given

Chapter 18: Morgott and Mohg

As we have already discussed, the Omen are not their own species. Rather, they are humans afflicted with the curse, and, royal-born or not, they are despised. Those of royal blood are spared the brutal horn surgery that common-born Omen face, but instead they are hidden away in the Shunning Grounds of the sewers, like some dirty secret.

The sewers would be the fate of the twin brothers Mohg and Morgott. While the other royal Omen may be connected to royalty as distant descendants or minor nobility, Mohg and Morgott are specifically of the Golden Order. Morgott's Great Rune reads:

"This Great Rune is the anchor ring that houses the base, and proves two things: That the Omen King was born of the golden lineage, and that he was indeed the Lord of Leyndell." - Morgott's Great Rune

It is heavily implied that these aren't just distant descendants, rather they are the direct offspring of Marika and Godfrey, given the recognition that Godfrey has for Morgott:

"It's been a long while, Morgott." - Godfrey

Perhaps it was their importance, the potential embarrassment that they could cause to the royal family, that led both Morgott and Mohg to be shackled by magical fetishes. As we learn from these

shackles, they are special precautions for Morgott and Mohg in particular.

Indeed, we know that Mohg and Morgott were placed here with the other royal Omen, because we can find Mohg's Shackle within the Shunning-Grounds, and because of the Bloodboon item description, which describes Mohg's meeting with the Formless Mother and says it took place "deep underground." However, I have always questioned one detail: were they immediately placed here the moment they were born, or did they once live among Godfrey and other royals?

The fact Morgott's remembrance can be used to create the Regal Omen Bairn suggests that this was a bairn carved for him in particular. It implies he was a child when he was placed below ground. Indeed the specific wording of Mohg's Great Rune outright says that he was "born into far below the earth," making it almost a certainty. However, let me offer an alternate, more nuanced theory. Maybe Morgott and Mohg's father Godfrey visited them underground.

Godfrey's reverential treatment of his son does suggest some kind of relationship, a bond that would have been difficult to build without Morgott having spent some time with his father. There is also the matter of the Godfrey phantom that we fight on our way to meet Morgott. This golden phantom shares the same magic symbol as the Margit projections when it

is summoned. This is also the same symbol used for Crucible miracles. Given Morgott's clear use of "golden" miracles, such as his weapons and the Margit manifestations, I think it is easy to conclude that Margit has summoned this Godfrey phantom as one final barrier, and that all of his golden miracles are Crucible Era incantations.

Yet how would he do so if he had no solid memories of his father? I reckon it would be hard for him to fully form a Godfrey that moves and fights like him, had he not spent some time with the real man.

Aside from this, Morgott and Mohg are extremely intelligent and well-spoken, something I imagine would have been unlikely had they lived their entire lives underground. Indeed, the other regal Omen we find in the Shunning-Grounds seem far more bestial than Mohg and Morgott.

Morgott is the "Veiled Monarch," however, and few know of his and Mohg's true Omen identities. So if this theory is correct then they could not have lived on the surface for very long or very publicly.

The Albinauric Bloodclot tells us that any life-form that is not touched by the Erdtree's grace is seen as impure, and the Omen would certainly fall under that category. The Remembrance of the Omen King reinforces the Omen's disconnection from the world of grace, by calling the Omen "graceless." One only needs to



Morgott and Mohg

see the treatment of the Albinaurics and Tarnished to see what being graceless will earn you in the modern Erdtree Era.

We have already spoken of the Dungeater, who spreads the curse that is connected to the Omen condition. The Seedbed Curse that is cultivated on those he defiles tells us that to be cursed is to be denied a return to the Erdtree upon Death, further reinforcing the Omen's graceless nature and underlining how they fall outside the current system. This of course gives greater significance to the title "Grace-Given" that Morgott would earn through his defense of the Erdtree and Leyndell, despite his graceless birthright.

With all that said, let us return to Morgott's life, such as it was, within the Shunning-Grounds, by examining the description of Margit's Shackle:

"A fetish bathed in golden magic. Shackles were used to bind the accursed people called the Omen, and these ones were made to keep a particular Omen under strictest confinement. Though faint, the shackles still retain vestiges of power – enough to trap the once-bound Margit on earth, if only for a short time." - Margit's Shackle

These shackles aren't made of metal or chains. Rather, they are a magical fetish, imbued with golden magic, which makes sense, given it is the Order of Grace which has imprisoned them. I'm also interested in the magical emblem that is manifested

when we activate the shackle ourselves. It takes the form of a tree symbol that seems to be something between the Crucible symbol and the Erdtree symbol.

I suspect it could mean one of two different things. It could point out the Omens' association with the Crucible. Or, it could mean they were imprisoned in the early Erdtree Era, not long after the Crucible.

I am inclined to believe that both of these meanings are true. The symbol used appears to be a variation of the Crucible incantation symbol, as if it is a Crucible mark denoting an Omen. However, the manner in which it works is the same as any other miracle. These emblems appear when we use a miracle, each denoting a different school or doctrine. In this case it is a similar phenomenon to the Crucible emblem that appears whenever Morgott projects himself.

A Crucible incantation emblem also appears at the feet of the Godfrey projection, which again must be the work of Morgott. This suggests that both Morgott's golden magic and the magic tied to these shackles are a sort of Erdtree magic or miracle.

Regardless, it is brutal to think of these two brothers scratching out a living here. The Shunning-Grounds themselves clearly aren't a purpose-made crèche for the Omen. Indeed, the cut NPC Viscount Shainehaigh would have given us insight into the hatred reserved for the Omen by grace nobility, which he



Grace Given

himself would have been a member of. He would have said the following on the regal Omen found in the Shunning-Grounds:

"The Undercapital is a repository of waste. For ages it's teemed with repulsive Omen. Fiendlings, even, who've never lost a horn. And what's worse, they've taken to bellowing in a most blood-curdling manner. You can hear it all the way up here. A vile, ceaseless affront to the Erdtree's sanctity." - Viscount Shainehaigh

We can get further insight into how Mohg and Morgott themselves would have been treated by Erdtree society via the Cursed-Blood Pot:

"Craftable item prepared using a ritual pot. Decorated with the crest of the Lord of Blood. Throw at enemies to douse them in accursed blood, causing summoned spirits to assail them with a rabid fervor. A childhood memory of the Lord of Blood." - Cursed-Blood Pot

To me this item description is partially an allegory for the way in which Omen are assailed by the general population, marginalized, abused and killed. Given that this is a "childhood memory" of Mohg's, we can safely assume that both Omen twins suffered similarly. It also becomes interesting when you consider how this item actually functions. Given the name of the pot and

its association with Mohg, it's not difficult to conclude that this is his Omen blood.

The result of splashing this blood onto an enemy is to have that enemy singled out and rabidly attacked by any spirit summons you may have. The blood of an Omen is so reviled, so tainted in its nature, that even spirits cannot help but be enraged by it.

Viscount Shainehaigh's dialogue tells us that one can hear the Omen bellowing from the depths of the Shunning-Grounds, and this is no doubt a result of the Omen suffering from the spirits that assail them.

I have already suggested that these spirits are those of people who have died after contact with the Omen curse. The main

reason for believing this is because of the black-brown magicks used by the horned Omen and unleashed by the Omen Bairn. These magicks are visually the same as the powers utilized by the Wraith Callers. The Wraith Calling Bell describes these brown projectiles as the wraiths of those who died cursed. Given that the Omen can also manipulate these powers, it is a fair conclusion that these wraiths are those who die from the Omen curse, the Fell Curse.





Morgott and Mohg

My conclusion then is that the Omen are able to manipulate these wraiths and redirect them in an offensive manner.

It also definitively ties together what I have suggested already, that the Omen are intrinsically connected to the spirits of the cursed, down to their very blood. And so these restless wraiths pursue the Omen, surround them and haunt them even in their dreams. It is clear that being haunted by these spirits adds to the torment of the Omen, and the regal Omen we find in the sewers are little more than rabid beasts as a result of their unfortunate situation.

This horrendous upbringing crystalized both Mohg and Morgott into polar opposites, as they both chose to deal with their tormented existence in different ways. We learn via the Bloodboon that Mohg would eventually accept his Omen condition and, in fact, revel in it, after a communion with the Formless Mother. He spited the Golden Order by learning to love his accursed blood and building a new dynasty upon it.

My reason for highlighting Mohg's ultimate revelation is to underline the dichotomy of the twins' characters. It is no surprise that both characters became extremists in their own ways. As I see it, there were three options for the twins in how to deal with their condition and treatment:

In the first, you would be completely broken, a gibbering beast no different

from the other regal Omen found in the Shunning-Grounds.

In the second, you would reject the condemnation of your jailers, accept what you are and make it your strength. This is the path that Mohg chose, admittedly while being helped along by a powerful outer god.

Then there is the third option, the option that Morgott chose. He embraced the ideals of his abusers and decided that he is indeed lesser than them. And instead of hating them for this, he would look up to the Erdtree and the world of grace with admiration and love. As such he would commit himself to doing everything in his power to defend the world of those who locked him away. Morgott's remembrance reads:

"Though born one of the graceless Omen, Morgott took it upon himself to become the

This horrendous upbringing crystalized both Mohg and Morgott into polar opposites, as they both chose to deal with their tormented existence in different ways.



Grace Given

Erdtree's protector. He loved not in return, for he was never loved, but nevertheless, love it he did." - Remembrance of the Omen King

This may seem to be a sort of Stockholm syndrome at first glance. Mohg would learn to love his accursed blood so much that he would build a new dynasty upon it. Contrast this veneration with Morgott's utter disgust at his own blood, a fact evidenced by his reaction during his fight with us when he accidentally releases his accursed blood:

"The thrones... stained by my curse... Such shame I cannot bear. Thy part in this shall not be forgiven." - Morgott, the Omen King

Morgott sees his blood as impure and sees himself as impure. He feels that his own blood has tainted the sanctity of the thrones and the Erdtree's purity. This explains his cursed sword:

"The accursed blood that Morgott recanted and sealed away reformed into this blade." - Morgott's Cursed Sword

Morgott despised his own blood so much that he siphoned it away, as if removing accursed blood from his body would lessen his curse.

And yet Morgott's actions as Margit and as the Veiled Monarch shows that while he accepts the teachings that he is tainted and cursed, he doesn't let his condition hold him back in the pursuit of doing what he believes in. If anything, it spurs him on to help defend the Order. With that said,

let us turn to Morgott's rise to power, and learn how he tried to keep Leyndell safe in the wake of the Shattering.

VEILED AND THE FELL

Some may question why Margit even needs to exist as a persona. I am sure a lot of players were initially confused as to whether or not Margit and Morgott were the same character. Any doubt is dispelled when you consider that Margit's Shackle works on Morgott, and Margit's fight at Stormveil disappears if you circumvent Stormveil entirely and defeat Morgott first.

To explain this we, return to the cut NPC, Viscount Shainehaight, who represents the very worst of the Order of Grace's prejudices. He sees himself as being above both the Tarnished and Omen. For example, one of his opening dialogues would have read:

"All things have their proper place. We, having been chosen by grace, were given this Golden Capital. You, on the other hand, have your own home, which is a far cry from here. So far, in fact, that it cannot be further marred by your touch." - Viscount Shainehaight, cut NPC

We see this disdain to a lesser extent with Kenneth Haight, but he at least is able to put his prejudices aside and work



Morgott and Mohg

with the Tarnished. In time he warms to them. Conversely, Viscount Shainehaight seems to be very sure of his superiority to you, a Tarnished.

However, as we have already seen, his greatest hatred is reserved for the Omen. He sees the Omen as vermin that offend the purity of the world of grace, and as a result he would have commissioned the Tarnished to clear them out. Once we had completed this mission for him he would have requested an audience with his beloved king of grace – Morgott, who to him, and no doubt the people of Leyndell, is the greatest living representative of the people of grace.

Of course the entire irony of this quest is that Shainehaight would not realize that his king, from whom he was seeking favor by slaughtering graceless Omen, is actually an Omen himself. And if a viscount, a member of nobility, was not aware of this then it is clear that this is also hidden from society at large by Morgott.

This gives new meaning to the title “Veiled Monarch” that Ofnir gives Morgott when listing all the demigods. Morgott rules from the shadows, knowing that he would

likely be rejected for his Omen form, as he is by Viscount Shainehaight. At the end of his quest, after his much-sought audience, Shainehaight’s world is turned upside down and he calls Morgott a fraud and asks you to kill him. He is still unable to see past his Omen form, despite all Morgott has done for Leyndell.



This is why Margit is necessary. When the Shattering broke out and Morgott’s vision of unity fell apart, he had only one goal in mind: protect the Elden Ring and Erdtree from these pillagers. Margit offered Morgott the ability to wield his considerable martial prowess and powers without revealing that Morgott was an “Omen” king. Margit takes the opportunity to channel his self-hate into this role and he embraces his Omen powers, taking the moniker “the Fell Omen.” He can revel in aspects of himself that he has had to keep restrained as a shadowy monarch.

It appears as though he first introduced his persona to the world during the Second Defense of Leyndell, which we learn about via a Sword Monument found in the outskirts of Leyndell:



Grace Given

“The Second Defense of Leyndell / The Fell Omen stacks high the corpses of heroes / Yet the Erdtree remains unshaken.” - Sword Monument, Capital Outskirts, Altus Plateau

The Second Defense of Leyndell was where the city was evidently successfully defended from one of the demigods, and Margit personally took to the field and reaped a bloody toll. Who Margit battled in this fight is up for debate, but I believe this is the battle shown in the opening cinematic. For clarity, I am referencing the slide in the opening cinematic where we see Margit tussling with a warrior who is wearing armor very similar to Radahn.

I personally believe Margit clashed with Radahn in this battle, not necessarily defeating him one-on-one. Rather, his forces defeated Radahn’s. I think this piece of art most likely shows Radahn, because the armor set matches almost exactly with Radahn’s in-game set. I think these slides are most likely to be concept art from an earlier stage in development, and so any discrepancies can be chalked up to the conversion from 2D art to 3D model. I also think there is a clear artistic intention to depict Margit and Radahn fighting, given the slide plays at the moment the narrator speaks of the demigods warring. I find it difficult to believe we are being shown a random warrior of Radahn here, who would absolutely not possess the strength to hold Margit’s staff at bay, as this warrior is doing.

The main argument against this being Radahn, incidentally, is the size, as Radahn is far larger than this warrior who is struggling with Margit.

In a later slide we do see an appropriately sized Radahn facing Malenia. We get other slides with size discrepancies as well, such as the image of Rykard being devoured by a very small serpent, when it is likely that the snake god was already much larger.

Regardless, whether one demigod or many invaded Leyndell, it’s clear Margit made a name for himself here, and personally slew a lot of enemy soldiers as his forces won the day.

The fear and horror that Margit inspired cannot be overstated, and is reinforced via the Fell Omen Cloak:

“Having slaughtered countless champions during the Shattering, the Fell Omen has become a horror to those who harbor ambitions for the Erdtree, or for Lordship.” - Fell Omen Cloak

The Fell Omen isn’t just a warrior. He has become a nightmare, a specter even. For those who harbor ambition, the Fell Omen will appear and mercilessly hunt them. The original Japanese reflects this almost mythological reputation. Lokey was kind enough to offer a translation, along with their perspective of how Margit is presented in the original Kanji, and I quote them now:



Morgott and Mohg

“Margit is referred instead as an omen oni (忌み鬼), a Japanese spirit often translated as ogre or demon.”

- Lokey, author of Abyssal Archive

So in the Japanese it is clearer that the Fell Omen is seen as something more than a regular Omen. His vengeful nature and power is almost demonic. Onis are evil demonic beings in Japanese folklore that, in appearance, are generally like the Omen: hulking ogres with horns.

Indeed, we see his ability to appear throughout the Lands Between at a moment's notice in his attempts to hunt us down. This makes it easy to see how he could appear to be a demon, especially since we kill him once, and yet he ambushes us yet again in the outskirts of Leyndell. I think what is clear here is that Morgott is able to manifest himself at will throughout the Lands Between – even possessing regular humans.

You will note that when we defeat him at Stormveil and in the battlefields of Altus Plateau, he breaks away into gold embers, as if this is a projection of Morgott's golden magic. Using his magic in this way, able to appear multiple times and reappear after Death, really would give the impression of Margit as a vengeful spirit rather than a corporeal being.

To help in his labor, and in a move that surely only increased Margit's myth, he would employ a unit of hunters: the hands

of the Fell, the Night's Cavalry. When we defeat Margit for the first time, he vaguely references his hands of the Fell:

“I shall remember thee, Tarnished. Smouldering with thy meagre flame. Cower in Fear. Of the Night. The hands of the Fell Omen shall brook thee no quarter.” - Margit, the Fell Omen

Then we get confirmation that Margit is indeed referring to the Night's Cavalry when we finally get their armor set:

“Pitch-black helm with flowing black hair. Worn by the Night's Cavalry who ride funeral steeds. The Night's Cavalry, who now wander the dim roads of night, were once led by the Fell Omen and were deliverers of death for great warriors, knights, and champions.”

- Night's Cavalry Helm

This paints a rather interesting picture: they were once led directly by the Fell Omen, clearly in order to kill those who would attempt to claim the crown. Perhaps they once rode beside him into the battles of the Shattering, and perhaps their blood-stained armor is a testament to how many lives they have claimed. Yet it is implied that despite the fact he no longer directly leads them, they still are a threat to champions – as is promised by Margit who tells us to “fear the night.”

There are ten members of the Night's Cavalry. Ten members for Ten Fingers – thus making up the “hands of the Fell Omen”¹. Again, this is another bit of beautiful



Grace Given

symbolism that really lends to the mythological legend and the superstitious fear they and Margit would inspire. Perhaps their very existence would dissuade champions from even trying to claim the Elden Throne.

These great knights will have only compounded Margit's terrifying legend, too. Their very appearance is designed to invoke an image of Death. Again, thanks to Lokey, we know this to be the intent of their design, due to the original Kanji. They translated the Night's Cavalry Armor in the following way:

“The cavalry wandering the highway at night, once, were led by the Omen Demon. They are reapers of every warrior, knight, and hero.” - Night's Cavalry Armor

This image of the Night's Cavalry is compounded by the steeds that they ride, and which are referred to as “funerary steeds.” In reality, it seems as though they are not called this because they are dressed for a funeral or are used in funerals – rather, they appear to be undead.

During our fights with them, the Night's Cavalry is able to resummon a slain horse from a purple portal. Perhaps this is why the Night's Cavalry only ride at night: Their funerary steeds have some relation to night. Or perhaps this is part of their psychological warfare: by coming out only at night they reinforce the image that they are unnatural reapers of Death.

Overall, then, Margit is more than a disguise – Morgott has carefully curated an image and a reputation that the Fell Omen is a force of vengeance, a karmic spirit that will hunt down those who burn with the flame of ambition. As a result, the Elden Throne remains accosted, whether through fear or through brawn, and Morgott's true identity remains veiled.

Yet when we do reach Morgott, the surprises don't end, with the reveal that he and Margit are one and the same. In his battle with us, he unleashes some unusual powers, and so I think it's time we discuss Morgott's powers and the relationship between the Formless Mother and the Omen.

ACCURSED BLOOD

Morgott is an exceptionally powerful being, no doubt one of the most powerful in the lore, probably ranked only behind Radahn and Malenia – and not by much.

As we touched on earlier, the Godfrey projection that we battle in the Erdtree Sanctuary also has the same golden emblem as the Margit projection. Given this phantom is gold in appearance, this again leads us to conclude that the summoning of this memory is the work of Morgott himself. I had once thought that the Mohg projection in the sewer was the work of Morgott, mainly

¹ “Like Father, Like Son (Godfrey & Morgott)” - AgtJake



Morgott and Mohg

because it fades away in sparkles of gold much like Margit projections. There is also the fact that this projection of Mohg appears before Morgott's golden seal, the seal that blocks the entrance to the Frenzied Flame Proscription, and thus I assumed it was another safeguard, perhaps taking the form of Mohg out of nostalgia for his brother.

However, I was quite wrong. I now think the evidence clearly suggests that this is a projection by Mohg himself. First, this phantom doesn't appear with the same Erdtree seal that we see with the Margit and Godfrey projections. Instead, it appears with a sinister red cloud, much more like the magicks of the Lord of Blood. Next we need to consider that this Mohg still appears when Morgott has been felled, while the golden seal and Margit in Stormveil will disappear, again suggesting this isn't connected to the Omen King.

Finally, in what I believe to be the most compelling evidence, Mohg's Shackle works on this projection. The magical shackle is tuned to Mohg specifically, so surely it would only work here if this is an aspect of the Lord of Blood himself.

This is an interesting revelation. It means that, in a way, Mohg is assisting his brother in sealing the Frenzied Flame. But this makes perfect sense, despite the twins' opposing views and aims, as the Frenzied Flame's ascension would just be as damaging to Mohg's

plans as it would for Morgott's. The fact that Mohg stands as guardian and Morgott has placed a golden barrier to bar the way is a nice poetic touch. It's one last time that the twin brothers have stood together in an unspoken pact against a common threat.

Aside from these impressive powers of projection, Morgott is able to conjure weapons at will, including swords, hammers and throwing daggers that he can use to devastating effect, catching his enemies off guard with their sudden manifestation. These weapons are all golden, and that would lead us to assume that these are some kind of miracle connected to Morgott's allegiance to the Erdtree.

However, when we push Morgott to extremes, something unusual happens, and he loses his control over the Omen blood that he has so desperately tried to

Morgott is able to manifest weapons, including swords, hammers and throwing daggers that he can use to devastating effect, catching his enemies off guard.



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contain. Suddenly, the arena is flooded with his tainted blood.

Morgott is utterly embarrassed by this turn of events, the full unleashing of his true Omen form that he himself has been conditioned to hate. Yet that doesn't stop him from using it to try and stop us. He has nothing to lose at this stage, and he hates us even more for our part in forcing his cursed blood out and staining the sanctity of the thrones.

We see similar powers to that of other Omen, such as the wreathing of his sword in the wraith flame. His Omen blood becomes volatile, and this can all simply be explained as his Omen powers.

However, most interesting are certain moves of his that are wreathed in a red flame identical to Mohg's Formless Mother-aligned powers. For example, Morgott's red flame slashes are of the same hue and leave the same lingering red lines as Mohg's Blood-flame Talons attacks. These incantations fall under the blood incantations category and, as we see from the descriptions of Blood-flame Talons, these are powers strongly associated with the Formless Mother and harnessed by her Lord of Blood. So how and why is Morgott using the power here?

To answer that we need to look at the Formless Mother itself, what it is and how it interacts with the world.

The Formless Mother is one of the beings known as outer gods:

"As well as serving as a weapon, it is an instrument of communion with an outer god who bestows power upon accursed blood. The mother of truth desires a wound."

- *Mohgwyn's Sacred Spear*

These cosmic beings are manifestations of certain elements or forces.

So the Formless Mother, on the surface, is a Kami of blood, viscera and wounding. We learn via the Bloodboon incantation and Mohgwyn's Sacred Spear that this being "craves wounds." This makes sense when we consider that the outer god interacts with this world through the medium of blood. More wounds, more blood, more influence. In turn, the areas where the Formless Mother's influence is greater are the areas that are flooded with blood – places like Rose Church and Mohgwyn Palace.

So it makes sense that when Mohg first interacted with the Formless Mother, she communicated with him through his own blood. The Bloodboon item description reads:

"The mother of truth craves wounds. When Mohg stood before her, deep underground, his accursed blood erupted with fire, and he was besotted with the defilement that he was born into." - *Bloodboon*

Again we see how the Mother of Truth can interact with blood, and specifically is able to "ignite" Mohg's blood. This notion of Mohg's blood literally being ignited, and



Morgott and Mohg

that it may be the source of his expanded powers, such as his wings, is a suggestion made by Crunchy in their video “The Crucible.” Mohg’s blood incantations that he wields with great ferocity are described as “bloodflame” in Bloodboon, Bloodflame Blade and Bloodflame Talons. They set the floor ablaze or cause explosions. In fact, we can even ignite our own blades with this “bloodflame” using the same incantation.

Unmistakably, Morgott utilizes this bloodflame in his second stage with us, occasionally lighting his blade with bloodflame and blade-like combos that behave the same as the Bloodflame Talon. So this brings us back to the original question: How and why is Morgott, a stalwart defender of grace and the mirror opposite to his brother, wielding the power of the Formless Mother?

I think thematically it fits in with another demigod who has tried to resist their nature but, in a moment of stress, no longer has the will to resist. I am referring to Malenia, the chosen vessel for the Scarlet Rot, chosen by the Outer God of Rot who has spent her life, alongside her brother, trying to control the rot within her. Yet when she faces the challenge of both Radahn and ourselves, the Scarlet Rot takes hold and an Aeonian Bloom occurs.

I think this is similar to what happens in our fight with Morgott. It is clear from the description of his sword that Morgott

has done everything to keep his blood in check, and of course it is readily apparent that he releases his blood due to the stress of our battle as he lays the blame squarely at our feet. Thus it follows that Morgott is connected to the Formless Mother in some way.

As we have discussed, the Formless Mother draws on blood for its power, and what blood is more powerful than Omen blood? I don’t believe Morgott chose to connect with the Formless Mother. We don’t see him making any sort of oath or covenant. Rather, the Formless Mother has an innate connection to his blood and, when he unleashed the full complement of his Omen blood, she ignited this cursed blood, much as she did for his brother.

Yet I think there is something more here. The Formless Mother is also referred to as the “Mother of Truth.” But what truth?

Upon the release of Morgott’s blood, the truth of his identity is revealed to him in a visceral manner. There is no truer material than blood, and it’s when the truth of Morgott’s Omen nature can be held back no longer that the Mother of Truth connects with him.

Likewise, when looking at the Bloodboon, we see that Mohg communed with the outer god when he accepted his blood and, indeed, embraced his condition. This is the truth: no one can hide from their blood. It is immutable and the core of what



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you are. In his rage and shame Morgott clearly utilizes this, just to defeat us in his desperation to uphold what he sees as his holy mission. In many ways, his defeat is one of the most brutal endings to any character’s arc in *Elden Ring*.

Morgott has been conditioned to protect those who would see him imprisoned or worse, forced to hide himself from the very society he rules over. Yet in the end, despite all his efforts to restrain his Omen blood, it is unleashed. He dies having spilled it all over that which he holds most dear, and ends up yoked to the same power as his twin brother.

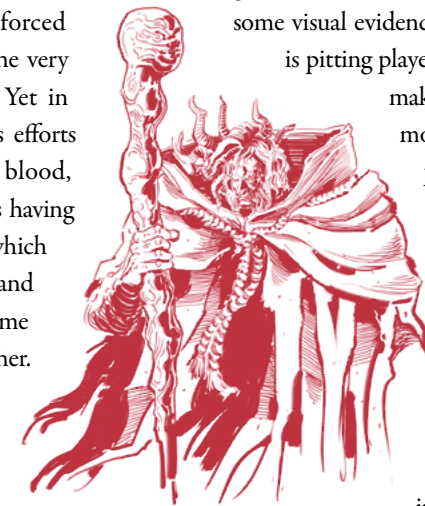
On top of this, if I am right, he did all this for a false purpose. He was just another pawn in Radagon’s game. This is Radagon demonstrating that he will do anything, even deny the Greater Will itself, just to hold on to the crumbling remnants of his power.

I don’t say any of this to disparage any of Morgott’s achievements. There is a lot to admire about him. He defended Leyndell and its mainly innocent citizens from years of war, and in a world gone mad Morgott is one of the only beings who seems to retain

stability. He is stalwart in his ideals and he stands in defense of them to the bitter end.

As such he gets a rare kind of respect from a FromSoftware game, as the mightiest man in the Lands Between gently cradles him and puts his son to a well-deserved rest.

And perhaps I am wrong about Morgott’s false mission. There does seem to be some visual evidence that the Greater Will is pitting players against each other, to make sure the strongest and most worthy succeeds. As pointed out by a commenter, when Godfrey puts Morgott to rest and he fades into gold, a Guidance of Grace appears in front of Godfrey – one that points toward us. Godfrey’s intent is clear: He wishes



to become Elden Lord again, and it seems as though the Greater Will is encouraging him to defeat us and do so. Yet it has also guided us to this point. It clearly wants us to battle to determine who is most fit.

Perhaps Morgott is grace-given because he is guided by grace. Perhaps his role is given by the Greater Will and he is to be a final test – to weed out the weak, so that only the strongest and most worthy might ascend the Elden Throne.



Morgott and Mohg

DYNASTY OF LOVE

The Lord of Blood's Mohgwyn dynasty foresees a world drenched in blood, and the adherents of this new movement come in many forms, ranging from merciless killers to displaced misfits. Mohg has laid the foundations of a heretical new Order in which love, acceptance and position are the rewards for loyalty. To the frustration of the Roundtable, more and more Tarnished are drawn away from the path of grace and instead dedicate their strength to the Lord of Blood, invading the worlds of their kin.

At the heart of this seemingly senseless cause is a darker truth, for the Lord of Blood's designs center around Miquella, the greatest of the Emphyreans. Mohg would use the ever-youthful as a corrupted totem for his new blood-drenched dominion.

Two very different men rose from the sewers of Leyndell. While Morgott left the sewers even more certain of the Erdtree's divine nature and the impurity of his own form, Mohg found a different sort of revelation, through his contact with the Formless Mother.

As we have already discussed, the Formless Mother operates on the mortal plane through blood, and the more potent the blood the better. To me there is no doubt that it was Mohg's Omen blood through which the Formless Mother made contact.

After years of being conditioned to hate oneself, it is easy to imagine how Mohg might see his own blood as a blessing. For it was this that allowed him to make contact with a higher being – a being which gave him a greater purpose. If Mohg saw the Formless Mother as divine and that his “accursed” blood was her preferred method of communion, then we can begin to understand why Mohg's blood became the holy medium of his new dynasty.

Thus the core premise of his dynasty is to spread his corrupted blood as far and wide as possible, so as to spread the influence of the Formless Mother. The corrupting power of this blood is clearly seen in areas where Mohg holds influence, especially in Rose Church, the first location associated with Mohg that players will likely come across.

The floor of the church is not only flooded with blood, but has giant bulbous cysts growing from the sodden earth. We know that this is indeed the corrupted blood of the dynasty thanks to the presence of the Bloodroses:

“Blood-slick roses that bloom in festering blood... Particularly beloved by those who serve the Lord of Blood. Glory to his inevitable reign.” - Bloodrose

The utility of such corruption becomes quite evident when we enter the church as a Sanguine Noble rises from the depths to



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face us. How is this possible? Well, when we later face Mohg himself, we see that he is able to transmute himself into the form of blood, as he leaves Miquella's cocoon in the shape of liquid blood before returning to his natural form. I would argue that this power is passed down to these nobles via the taking of Mohg's blood.

Mohg's whole dynasty seems to be structured through the dishing out of his noble blood. When we are inducted into the ranks of his knights by Varré, we undergo a procedure ourselves:

“Ah, my lambkin. You've completed your final trial. And with this, you are a formal inductee. A knight who will assist Luminary Mohg, the Lord of Blood, in the establishment of a new dynasty. Now, give me your finger. This noble blood will be an immutable badge of honor, once it settles. Inside of you. Oh, good heavens. Clench your teeth, or something. Never forget that feeling of agony. For it is what binds you to Luminary Mohg, to all of us. Ha ha ha... You have the sweetest scream. My lambkin.” - White Mask Varré

As Varré takes our finger and talks about giving us “noble blood,” if we follow his hand gesture it seems as though he injects something into our finger. We then receive the “Bloody Finger” item which outright confirms what has just happened:

“Glistening blood has been siphoned into the nail of this finger. Its sickly pale skin

feels nothing now, but the nail still aches with sweetest pain.” - Bloody Finger

Varré has inserted blood under our nail and into our system, and it is already having a physiological effect on us. Our finger is beginning to pale and our eyes are turning a cloudy red. This is because we have been corrupted by Mohg's Omen blood, as have the Sanguine Nobles.

If you look closely at the form of the Sanguine Noble, then you may notice an interesting detail: Omen horns. This leads us to conclude that these beings also have been blessed with Mohg's blood. Perhaps it's a boon for the higher classes of his coming empire, his lords and knights. It seems as though the noble is able to materialize from the blood itself, sharing the ability of their leader. I would suggest it is through the power of Mohg's blood that we are able to use our infected finger to invade other worlds as a red phantom. Again: there is a real power to the blood of the Omen – a power that Mohg and his followers have readily embraced.

Followers of Mohg view sharing in his blood as a great boon. As Varré says, it is a medium that binds them together. It is symbolically powerful, as each member has the same blood coursing through their veins. They are bound in a blood pact of the most literal kind. In turn, Mohg's supporters are some of the most zealous



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and loyal of any god, because of this philosophy his dynasty is built upon:

"I wish to anoint you a proper inductee. A knight to serve Luminary Mohg, the Lord of Blood, and establish a new dynasty. Luminary Mohg has strength, vision, and of course, love. So, what do you say, my lambkin?" - White Mask Varré

Love, a term you usually wouldn't associate with a being so clearly modeled after Satan himself, and yet this is the image Mohg wishes to present to his potential allies. He is modeled after Satan for a reason: because he represents a sort of counter-culture to that of the Erdtree Order, an Order upheld by his twin reflection, Morgott.

While Morgott resides in Heaven (Leyndell), Mohg wallows in the depths of Hell (Mohgwyn Palace). Mohg casts a fearsome figure, a challenge to the Erdtree's authority and the teachings of the Golden Order. With trident in hand and bound in almost religious garb, it is clear that Mohg sees himself as prophet, hence his title "Luminary Mohg."

"Abh, I can see it, clear as day! The coming of our dynasty! Mohgwyn!" - Mohg, Lord of Blood

I would argue that the Shunning-Grounds are therefore seen as holy to Mohg and his followers. It appears that he maintains a presence there. Connected to the Shunning-Grounds are the Leyndell

Mohg is modeled after Satan for a reason: he represents a sort of counter-culture to that of the Erdtree Order, an Order upheld by his twin reflection, Morgott.

Catacombs, and the boss of this area is called Esgar, Priest of Blood, who drops the talisman Lord of Blood's Exultation, which depicts Mohg himself. The existence of a priest within Mohg's faction further emphasizes the fact that there is a religious zeal to his movement. Mohg is part king, part prophet – one who has foreseen a new era in which the Erdtree dogma is cast down and a new god will rise.

Where the Erdtree Order is bound to a strict dogma, with a clear hereditary hierarchy, Mohg's dynasty will be built by exiles all bound by equal blood. As such, Mohg has built a new society that is a mockery of the conservative Erdtree royalty. He too has his nobles and knights. No birthright determines their rank, only loyalty to the Lord of Blood and the proving of oneself. Indeed, the nobles seem to emulate some



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noble qualities, such as wearing fine robes and wielding a rapier (the Bloody Helice), a weapon which was seen in the 16th and 17th century as the symbol of nobility.

Mohg embraced himself, a reviled outsider, and now he will accept other outcasts into his ranks: Albinaurics, Tarnished and others. Varré himself is himself a Tarnished, one who harbors no love for the Two Fingers or the powers that be:

"My doubts had been piling up, you see. ...The words of the Two Fingers cannot be trusted. Truly, naught but rambling, senile delusions. I believe, that when the Elden Ring was shattered, the Two Fingers were corrupted, their guidance; skewed. Even worse, the Fingers harbor no love for our kind. That's the part that irks the most." - White Mask Varré

Why serve someone who despises you, when you can serve someone who embraces you no matter your creed or heritage? This seems to be the message peddled by Varré and Mohg, and it appears as though many other Tarnished heeded the call. Given that the Tarnished are widely despised in the Lands Between, as are the Omen, it's easy to see why. Mohg is very well placed to empathize with the plight of other exiles.

This is the romanticized image of the Mohgwyn dynasty, one that has an almost chivalric code of honor. It's a twisted reflection of the Carian values, in a way. No wonder the Bloodrose is such a highly valued

symbol of the house of Mohg. A beautiful flower representative of their romanticized values, but one grown from the putrid, festering blood of Mohg and the Formless Mother.

We meet many of Mohg's knights (Bloody Fingers) throughout our journey: Okina and Eleonora, as well as one of his nobles who we know as Nerijus, so we know a good number have heeded his call. Indeed Gideon even expresses some frustration at Mohg's converting Tarnished to his cause:

"Oh, so that's where the so-called Lord of Blood was hiding himself eh. A fitting little squat for that deluded maniac to bleat about the revival of his precious dynasty, while he turns our fellow Tarnished into Bloody Fingers." - Sir Gideon Ofnir, the All-Knowing

I have painted a noble picture of Mohg's cause so far, and while there is certainly some nobility to the philosophy, the reality of his dynasty is far more grim. While Mohg calls his warriors knights, the truth is that most of them are blood-crazed fiends and it really is their ability to shed blood that makes them useful to him.

For example, we have Okina, quite likely the most psychotic killer in the Lands Between:

"When Mohg, the Lord of Blood, first felt Okina's sword, and madness, upon his flesh, he had a proposal, to offer Okina the life of a demon, whose thirst would never go unsated." - Rivers of Blood



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Mohg was actually attacked by Okina, and saw great utility in having a killer as proficient and unhinged as this. Thus he gave Okina the tool needed to sate his bloodlust: a Bloody Finger. And Okina clearly does not serve Mohg out of any sense of nobility or loyalty. Rather, he is given free rein to spill blood in a mutually beneficial arrangement.

There is also Eleonora, a person who Yura, hunter of the Bloody Fingers, has a personal history with. Yura is intimately familiar with the Bloody Fingers, and while it is clear this is partially to do with Eleonora, someone he knows, I do wonder if it is also to do with his homeland. The helm he wears, the Iron Kasa, directly states that this is crafted to mimic hats found in the Land of Reeds. His armor and katana are also clearly inspired by Samurai culture, a fact confirmed by the name of the armor set: Ronin's Set.

A ronin was a samurai who served no lord or master. They were quite often depicted in a negative light as wandering vagrants. So I think it is heavily implied that Yura is from the Japan-inspired Land of Reeds – a land overrun with bloodshed.

Again, I speculate that the Land of Reeds is locked in a sort of Sengoku-era conflict, but that it is being exacerbated by the Formless Mother's influence. This is why the Land of Reeds set describes the nation falling to "blood-soaked madness."

I think that Yura is a ronin because he no longer served any of the factions involved in his land's civil war. He abandoned such ties in order to pursue a higher goal.

Perhaps Yura grew sick of the bloodlust that engulfed his home, and has taken it upon himself to hunt those who live for such violence. Or perhaps he followed Okina, the demon swordsman, and upon arriving in the Lands Between he discovered the Bloody Fingers that Okina himself had joined. It is clear that Yura now has a personal investment in hunting the Bloody Fingers, as his Ronin armor description reads:

"The man, once known as Yura, kept a woman in the deepest reaches of his heart."
- Ronin's Armor

It becomes clear that the woman Yura loves is none other than Eleonora, one of the Bloody Fingers he is tracking:

"Yes, I've been tracking Eleonora for quite some time. She is the deadliest of all Bloody Fingers. She's felled many an old hand already. But in spite of her cessblood zealotry, Eleonora is a proud knight. If she comes for you, do not think twice. You must flee. There is no shame in self-preservation."
- Bloody Finger Hunter Yura

When we first meet Yura, he makes an ominous statement about those who partake in Dragon Communion:

"You must not forget though. Those who partake in Dragon Communion will one day



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shed their humanity. Their hunger for dragon, their yearning, only worsens. Until the floodgates burst, unleashing eternal torment. The strength of a mighty dragon. Magnificent, but deadly. It's no surprise that Dragon Communion is ruinous." - Bloody Finger Hunter Yura

When we face Elenora, she is wearing the Drake Knight Set, a set worn by those who partake in Dragon Communion, and she wields Dragon Communion incantations. Our conclusion? Yura's warning to us about Dragon Communion is based on first-hand experience of watching the woman he loved devolve from a noble knight into a person consumed by her hunger for Dragon Hearts. It seems as though Eleonora sought to muffle this yearning by joining the Bloody Fingers and satiating herself in the blood of others.

So, yes, not quite the noble dynasty Varré and Mohg would have you believe. We only need to look at the putrid, blood-soaked lands of Mohgwyn Palace to see the ghastly future that awaits the world should Mohg be victorious.

Indeed, Varré himself, despite his softly spoken words, is also someone with a taste for blood. He wears the War Surgeon Set. We learn about these field doctors from the Dagger Talisman:

"The white-garbed field surgeons come to the aid of friend and foe alike by dealing a final deadly thrust to spare them from the prolonged agony of a mortal wound. A

sense of mercy is a catalyst for bloodlust."
- Dagger Talisman

There's lots of interesting information here. On the surface it does seem as though they deliver merciful deaths to those who are beyond saving, a brutal reality of battlefield medicine in medieval times. However, we end with a more sinister note, implying that such mercy will inevitably develop a bloodlust within one. This is further emphasized by the description of the Miséricorde dagger:

"Dagger favored by military physicians in white. The pointed blade is hard and sharp, making critical hits especially potent. Medicine is mercy, and mercy upon the battlefield is ruthless. Beware the killers clothed as men of compassion." - Miséricorde

This suggests that the war surgeons got a taste for blood and were likely killing people who didn't even need their "mercy," perfect recruits for Mohg's blood-crazed dynasty. The War Surgeon Set directly tells us that Mohg sought these people out:

"Bloodstained white gown of the war surgeons who were effectively mercy killers. Of the surgeons that were abducted by the Lord of Blood none were able to tame the accursed blood. None but Varré, that is; though he was an exception." - War Surgeon Gown

It seems as though the war surgeons were initially taken in by Mohg in order to figure out a way to control his accursed blood. Most of them failed, hence they are relegated



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to being Bloody Fingers, three of whom we fight in the lower levels of Mohgwyn Palace.

However, Varré was successful, and therefore it makes sense that he is the one who administers the bloody injection ceremony on us. I would argue that “tame the accursed blood” refers to Varré’s ability to handle Mohg’s blood and administer it to inductees. This is a crucial role, and it certainly makes sense as to why Varré is the face, or recruiter, of this operation. Not only is he himself a Tarnished who is able to emphasize and manipulate his fellows, but he is the one who developed the induction procedure.

THE LORD OF BLOOD

While a lot of Mohg’s power comes from his demigod nature, Omen blood and Great Rune, it is clear that he only became a man of purpose after his communion with the Formless Mother. Mohg is ultimately the first disciple in the Formless Mother’s cult. Indeed, Mohg’s relationship with the Mother of Truth is one of the most intimate that we have seen between an outer god and a mortal. Take Mohgwyn’s Sacred Spear:

“Trident of Mohg, Lord of Blood. A sacred spear that will come to symbolize his dynasty. As well as serving as a weapon, it is an instrument of communion with an outer god who bestows power upon

accursed blood. The mother of truth desires a wound.” - Mohgwyn’s Sacred Spear

This method of communion becomes clear when we witness Mohg stab his spear into something invisible whilst chanting, before dousing the arena in flaming blood and unfurling two black wings. What is he stabbing and where is the blood coming from? The weapon skill description provides the answer:

“Raise the sacred spear and pierce the body of the Formless Mother. Stab up to three times, creating explosions of blood with each thrust. This skill will coat the armament with bloodflame for a while.” - Bloodboon Ritual

When the spear says “the mother of truth desires a wound,” it is clear that she desires a wound upon her own flesh so that her blood may enter the world. This brings a new horrifying truth to our battle with Mohg: he is literally flinging a cosmic substance at us.

The Mother of Truth communes through blood, and so it is not a big surprise that stabbing her with this spear and spreading her blood is seen as an act of communion. Given that he so directly interacts with an outer god, it is little wonder that Mohg sees himself as a “luminary.” Mohg has also been granted some significant powers through his association with the Mother of Truth. Not only can he summon her burning blood at will, but he can also lacerate her, which causes



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a dangerous explosion (Bloodflame Talons).

Mohg’s transformation in his second stage is unique among the Omen, and it clearly must be an enhancement granted upon him by the Mother of Truth. The Bloodboon item description explains how Mohg’s blood “erupted with fire” when he first communed with her, and so I believe she is able to touch the blood within him and enhance his Omen elements.

Like the Misbegotten, the Omen are chaotic creatures with plenty of vestigial growths across their bodies. If you look at Mohg’s back before his stage two transformation, you can see very stubby vestigial wings growing from his back too. I believe that in stage two, when Mohg drains the player’s blood while communing with the Formless Mother, (“Nihil! Nihil! Nihil!”) she sets his blood on fire once more and grows these stubby wings into the vast feathery ones. This is all just further proof that the Mother

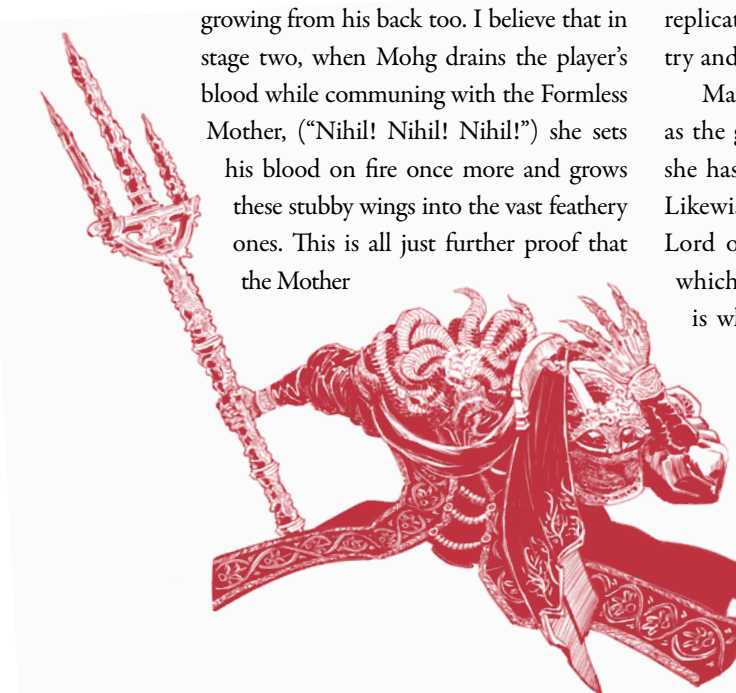
of Truth has a deep connection to blood, and the more potent (or corrupted) it is, the easier she can manipulate it.

There is a common trend in *Elden Ring* that the outer gods seem to choose a champion for their element. We know that the Order of the world consists of two main representatives, a god and a lord. Placidusax was lord in the age before the Erdtree, and his remembrance mentions *his* god who has fled. We also have also witnessed two ruling pairs under the Erdtree: Marika as the god, with both Godfrey and Radagon as her lord. So it isn’t a surprise that we see new Orders replicating this formula in an attempt to try and replace that of the Golden Order.

Malenia has evidently been chosen as the god for the Order of Rot, though she has spent her life denying this truth. Likewise Mohg has been chosen as the Lord of Blood for the Order of Blood, which meant he just needed a god. This is where Miquella comes in, and it was no doubt his Empyrean status that made him a target of Mohg, as Empyreans have the potential to ascend to godhood.

This is made all the clearer by Mohg’s remembrance:

“Wishing to raise Miquella to full godhood, Mohg wished to become his consort, taking





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the role of monarch. But no matter how much of his bloody bedchamber he tried to share, he received no response from the young Empyrean.”
- Remembrance of the Blood Lord

Prior to the DLC there was an oft-repeated theory that Mohg was the reason for Malenia’s march on Caelid, given that Mohgwyn Palace is directly below the spot where Malenia and Radahn clashed. However, we now know that Malenia likely marched on Radahn in order to fulfil their vow.

I believe that Mohg took Miquella while Malenia was absent, most likely during the period in which she was recovering after the war of Aeonian. How else are we to believe that Malenia let Mohg take Miquella? Had Malenia still been present at the Haligtree, Mohg would not have dared to try and take him.

No, instead this is how I envisage the series of events: Miquella vows to find a way to save his sister and so he embeds himself in the Haligtree, cocooning himself. Meanwhile, Malenia enters the Shattering; should she emerge victorious, she and Miquella will have free rein to pursue their own goals, and Miquella would be able to resurrect Radahn as his new consort.

However, Miquella is left defenseless because he is cocooning and is essentially comatose. (I believe the cocoon is of Miquella’s design and not a part of Mohg’s interference, mainly because of the introductory

slide where Mohg is shown kidnapping Miquella. If you look at Miquella closely here then you can see some strands of goo clinging to him, as if he has been ripped from an insectoid pupa, a reading enhanced by the insect wings that appear to be protruding from Miquella’s back.)

And thus Mohg brought the incapacitated Miquella, alongside his cocoon, back to Mohgwyn Palace where he became the centerpiece to his plans. Of these plans, Varré says the following:

“The meeting must wait until the Mohgwyn dynasty commences. Luminary Mohg yet slumbers beside the Divinity. We must endure a little longer.” - White Mask Varré

So it seems as though Mohg’s Dynasty is on hold until their blood god rises. And when that day comes, the Mohgwyn dynasty shall establish itself as the new Order of the world. Or at least that is what these people believe.

It’s clear that Miquella has been grossly corrupted by Mohg. Varré mentions that Mohg “yet slumbers beside the Divinity.” He is doing so in blood form, as that is how Mohg emerges when we disturb his slumber. I think that Mohg has essentially used his blood form to corrupt Miquella’s form. Miquella was cocooned because he was likely trying to ascend as a god, and thus Mohg clearly believes that, if Miquella is corrupted by accursed blood during this transformative process, then he will emerge



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as the god of blood, heralding the start of the Mohgwyn dynasty’s dominion.

“Welcome, honoured guest. To the birthplace of our dynasty!” - Mohg, Lord of Blood

Gideon Ofnir scoffs at Mohg’s plan, writing him off as a deluded nuisance. But what Mohg has done to Miquella is a tragedy. Miquella’s current form is a far cry from the fair, youthful appearance presented in the opening cinematic. Mohg’s blood has twisted him, and the fact he actually uses the same model as Morgott (in his shrunken, dying form) shows that he has been corrupted beyond recognition.

Mohg clearly envisaged Miquella arising as a tortured blood god who leaves the Lands Between awash in rivers of blood. However, as we now know thanks to the DLC, Miquella actually charmed Mohg after he was kidnapped and he has since escaped to the Lands of Shadow. Mohg has been misled and the God of Blood will never arise.

Indeed many may not realize this, but when we choose the Elden Lord endings and repair the Elden Ring, we actually become Marika’s consort.

Regardless, he is a useful symbol to Mohg, and I think Mohg still took Miquella to be his betrothed of his own volition and was only later charmed. Betrothal seems to be a constituent part of Elden Ring’s power structure. When we help Ranni become the new god of the Age of Stars, we stand next to her as her betrothed – after slipping a ring on her finger. It is hard not to notice the ring upon Miquella’s finger, no doubt placed there by Mohg. However, these marriages are largely symbolic, and any love Mohg has for the slumbering Empyrean is clearly based on what Miquella gives Mohg: power and legitimacy.

Indeed, many may not realize this, but when we choose the Elden Lord endings and repair the Elden Ring, we actually become Marika’s consort. The Two Fingers say the following via Enia:

“Marika’s trespass demanded a heavy sentence. But even in shackles, she remains a god, and the vision’s vessel. Confer Great Runes to become Elden Lord, and join Queen Marika as her consort. he Fingers have willed it so.”

- Two Fingers via Finger Reader Enia

Symbolic or not, Mohg has rested the entirety of his dynasty upon Miquella’s shoulders, which is why he will literally fight to the death to defend his claim: *“Miquella is mine and mine alone.”*
- Mohg, Lord of Blood



Chapter 19: Miquella, the Chosen One

Miquella is one of the few characters in *Elden Ring* who is consistently presented to us in a positive light, and in terms of his intelligence and kindness, no less. In many ways, Miquella feels like the destined member of the current pantheon, the figure most suited for godhood after the imprisonment of Queen Marika.

Miquella's remarkable nature can be traced to his auspicious birth. This event is described in Malenia's remembrance, which states that Miquella was born of "a single god," and, as a result of this unique parentage, is Empyrean.

The birth was not without its issues, as both parties emerged afflicted, Malenia with the Scarlet Rot and Miquella with eternal youth. Yet the twins' unparalleled bond made up for this. Miquella would use his great intellect to try to cure his sister, while his sister would use her might to compensate for her brother's frailty.

This bond is best expressed by the statues found throughout the Haligtree, where the two are shown in a tight embrace – two halves making a whole. This is why the story of Miquella's fall is so tragic. There is so much hope at the



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core of Miquella's movement, and now Malenia is left bereft and alone.

The first significant event in Miquella's life seems to be the work he undertakes with his father. We learn of this via Discus of Light and Triple Rings of Light, the former of which has a description that reads:

"One of the incantations of the Golden Order fundamentalists... A gift from the young Miquella to his father, Radagon."
- Discus of Light

So here we get direct evidence that Miquella assisted his father in developing Golden Order fundamentalist incantations. The fact that these miracles are something Miquella taught to his father, who himself is a scholar, really highlights Miquella's genius.

It becomes clear that Miquella was looking for something within the Golden Order and he was left disappointed. From Radagon's Rings of Light:

"One of the incantations of the Golden Order fundamentalists. A gift of gratitude to the young Miquella from his father, Radagon... And yet, the young Miquella abandoned fundamentalism, for it could do nothing to treat Malenia's accursed rot. This was the beginning of unalloyed gold."
- Radagon's Rings of Light

Miquella was looking for a cure for his beloved sister, and after all his research into the Golden Order, he realized that the answer could not be found there. Therefore, he abandoned the Order in favor of Unalloyed Gold, perhaps remembering its properties

from the lilies he so loved in his youth.

The reason why Miquella sought a cure for his sister in Unalloyed Gold becomes clear when we find one of his relics, the golden needle:

"One of the unalloyed gold needles that Miquella crafted to ward away the meddling of outer gods."
- Miquella's Needle

Miquella forged this needle to ward away the influence of the outer gods – clearly another attempt to cure his sister from the Scarlet Rot. Miquella would go on to develop Malenia's armor and prosthetics from Unalloyed Gold, as we learn from the armor description:

"Armor made of unalloyed gold. Worn by Malenia, Blade of Miquella. Malenia awaited Miquella at the foot of the husk. 'My brother will keep his promise. He possesses the wisdom, the allure, of a god – he is the most fearsome Empyrean of all.'"
- Malenia's Armor

This was not only to replace her limbs that had rotted away, but to place the gold against her skin and forestall the rot.

Miquella's love for his sister was clearly reciprocated, as she would relegate herself to his "blade," a subservient protector. Malenia truly believed in her brother. She believed that he had the right temperament and the required wisdom to become a god. And Miquella's frustration with the failure of the Golden Order to help his sister evidently ran deep, for he went as far to establish his own Order to rival the Erdtree: the Haligtree.



Miquella, the Chosen One

THE HALIGTREE

The word “halig” means “holy”, and like many things connected to Miquella, the tree is revered in a religious sense.

To his followers he is divine. There is plenty of evidence for this; many items and locations associated with Miquella are referred to in religious tones, such as the Sacred Crown Helm, the Consecrated Snowfield and Ordina, Liturgical Town.

The Haligtree itself is a symbol of his divinity: a tree to rival the Erdtree, blazoned proudly on the livery of his men, much as the Erdtree decorates the armor of the capital knights of Leyndell. That acknowledgement alone makes Miquella's intent clear. He is going to build an Order that rivals the Golden Order, tree and all.

The significance of this is underlined once one realizes that the Haligtree is itself the offspring of the Erdtree. Why do we know this? First, we know that Miquella was trying to grow his own Erdtree, which we learn of via the Haligtree Crest Surcoat:

“The surcoat bears the crest of the Haligtree. Though watered with Miquella's own blood since it was a sapling, the Haligtree ultimately failed to grow into an Erdtree.” - Haligtree Crest Surcoat

To confirm that Miquella took a Minor Erdtree sapling, we fight an Erdtree Avatar in the lower rungs of Elphael. Erdtree Avatars are beings that

exist solely to defend Minor Erdtrees, as is described by the Staff of the Avatar.

It makes sense that Miquella would take a sapling of the Erdtree in order to grow his own rival tree. We can imagine how impressive the tree would have looked in its heyday when we look at its symbol on the shields and livery of Haligtree Soldiers.

However, as the surcoat states, the Haligtree “failed to grow into an Erdtree,” and this likely wasn't helped by the rot that afflicted it following Malenia's bloom. This is important. It is hinted to us that the life of the tree is linked to Miquella somehow. Gideon Ofnir says:

*“But... with the Haligtree as it is... I suppose Miquella must already be...”
- Sir Gideon Ofnir, the All-Knowing*

The implication is that Gideon assumes Miquella must already be dead, given the state of the fading Haligtree.

Even so, it wasn't just Miquella's ability to grow a Greattree that earned him the loyalty of his troops. It was also his kind and empathetic nature. Just look at the Sacred Crown Helm, the helm of his men:

“Flanged iron cap adorned with a crown of unalloyed gold... Worn by foot soldiers sworn to the Haligtree. Who is it that Miquella shall bless, if not the low and the meek?” - Sacred Crown Helm

Miquella is seen as the only God to show empathy to the outcasts of society – aside from the sinister Mohg. Misbegotten



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have found their way to his land, sheltering in Haligtree Town, and while we previously presented the argument that these Misbegotten may be here in a crusade *against* Miquella, I think that it fits with Miquella's lore that they have been granted asylum.

This is seemingly confirmed by *Shadow of the Erdtree*, as we face a Golden Phantom Misbegotten Crusader who is guarding Saint Trina's domain. This Misbegotten drops the incantation ‘Multi-Layered Rings of Light,’ the description of which explains that this is an incantation of those who served Miquella, and for me it confirms that the Misbegotten are servants of Miquella.

He has also granted asylum to another fringe faction, the Albinaurics. To the Albinaurics in the Lands Between, the lands of Miquella are viewed as the promised land.

Here we not only find Phillia the Towering Sister of the Albinaurics, but second-generation Albinaurics who seem to be blessed by Miquella's Unalloyed Gold. Their eyes radiate a gold tint and they are able to cast spells associated with Miquella, such as his Rings of Light. The female Albinaurics are guarding Ordina, Liturgical Town, the entrance to the Haligtree, again suggesting they repay Miquella's sanctuary by serving as guardians to his realm.

Miquella's empathy clearly extends to Those Who Live in Death as well, as we have previously seen at Castle Sol, where Miquella seems to have aligned with an eclipse cult

that seeks to restore Godwyn's soul. Even so, there is a sinister aspect to Miquella's love that borders on brainwashing. This is hinted at by the Bewitching Branch:

“Tree branch blessed with an incantation of unalloyed gold... Pierce a foe, using FP to turn them into a temporary ally. The Emphyrean Miquella is loved by many people. Indeed, he has learned very well how to compel such affection.” - Bewitching Branch

The Bewitching Branch is an item that turns a foe to an ally against their will, and the description implies that Miquella's Unalloyed Gold magic can be used to compel people to love him. This calls into question all of Miquella's allies, and whether or not they are legitimately loyal to him.

I'd argue that the answer lies somewhere in between the extremes here. Clearly Miquella is a lord of more empathy than most, but his bewitching nature makes his allies more loyal than is natural. This is reflected in the zealous nature of some of his warriors, the foot soldiers who they run at us and explode in a golden light – suicide bombers, for all intents and purposes, operating with a zeal unmatched by any other demigod's forces.

It is clear that Miquella's combination of bewitching magic and genuine empathy has led to his army becoming almost crusader-like, utterly emboldened by a holy purpose. The knights and soldiers of Miquella's army bear Unalloyed Gold in bands around their helms, almost reminiscent of a crown of



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thorns, whilst bearing white livery with golden crosses. It is hard to ignore the similarities to the Knight Templars, heavily armed warriors also emboldened by a holy purpose.

It wasn't until *Shadow of the Erdtree* that we learned the true extent of Miquella's bewitching powers, however. Characters like Ansbach, Thiollier, Moore and even Mohg were influenced by Miquella. This power is extremely potent and yet seemingly subtle.

That Miquella was able to influence a being as powerful as Mohg, himself a demigod in possession of a great rune and the backing of an outer god, is a real testament to the Unalloyed's power.

There are two divisions of warriors that inhabit the Haligtree, the aforementioned Haligtree Soldiers and the Cleanrot Knights. It is clear even from their name that this order of knights is loyal to Malenia. As the "Blade of Miquella," it makes sense that she would have her own elite order of warriors to help defend her brother's lands. However, it seems her brother still blesses these warriors, as the Halo Scythe used by cleanrot commanders is able to unleash Miquella's Ring of Light.

I mentioned earlier that Miquella clearly built up this faction to oppose the Erdtree and Leyndell; it is hard not to see the similarities between the two groups. Each has a tree with a city built around it, each has a livery of gold, and the soldiers of each bear the sigil of a tree.

Let's once again consider the term "Unalloyed Gold," the foundation of Miquella's

power and his moniker. "Unalloyed" means that something is pure, and this makes sense when Miquella is concerned with purifying the world of the taint of the outer gods. But to me, the fact that his Order is one of Unalloyed Gold and stands in opposition to an Order of gold suggests that he believes the Erdtree Order is corrupted and that his new Order is what *should be*.

GOD OF COMPASSION

In the base game Miquella's story ended rather abruptly. With the outbreak of the Shattering, Miquella embedded himself in the Haligtree and Malenia marched on Radahn. The result was Miquella captured, Malenia incapacitated, Radahn condemned to a slow death and Mohg's corruption of Miquella's form via his accursed blood.

Now we know that it was all part of the plan.

After coming to the Lands of Shadow, Miquella implements his plan to become a new God, one that is separated from the sins of the past and his mother. His Great Rune reads:

"Miquella set off for the tower enshrouded by shadow, abandoning everything - his golden flesh, his blinding strength, even his fate. All in an effort to bury the original sin. To embrace the whole of it, and be reborn as a new god." - Miquella's Great Rune



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We have already seen how Miquella views the Golden Order, an imperfect order that he doesn't want to be associated with. To break the cycle of violence and power, Miquella believes he has to shed everything that connects him to his mother, his flesh and rune included:

"Miquella has said as much himself - he wishes now to throw it all away. He says the act - though undoubtedly painful - will sear clean the Erdtree's wanton sin." - Hornsent

Having learned about his mother's origins and her methods of ascension, Miquella is heading to the Gate of Divinity, but he wants to be a god on his own terms. He thus discards anything that connects him to his Mother and the Erdtree, and we find pieces of his body at the Miquellan crosses that mark his passage through these lands.

We have discussed numerous times how every Order needs a God

and Lord. Miquella is evidently aware of these requirements and has made preparations for this before stepping into the Gate of Divinity. But there may be an additional benefit to Miquella shedding his flesh: he could be shedding his ever-youthful curse, as suggested by Zullie the Witch in their *Elden Ring - Miquella's greatest mistake* video.

This makes sense to me because the Miquella we see at the end of *Shadow*

of the Erdtree appears to be more of an adult, unlike the childlike depictions of him we have seen earlier.

When Miquella emerges from the Gate of Divinity at the top of Enir-Ilim he is an immensely powerful being, wielding his golden light to eviscerate and purify his enemies. He is also not alone. He is accompanied by his new consort, the reborn and reformed Radahn.

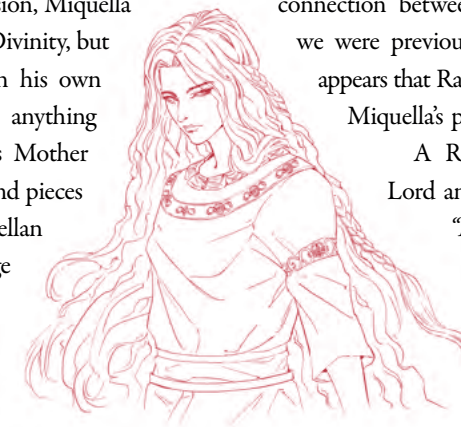
A vow was made between Miquella and Radahn during their childhood, creating a connection between these two that we were previously unaware of. It appears that Radahn was critical to Miquella's plans for ascension.

A Remembrance of a Lord and a God reads:

"In their childhood, Miquella saw in Radahn a lord. His strength, and his kindness, that stood

in stark contrast with their afflicted selves. And so Miquella made his heartfelt wish. That Radahn would one day be his king consort." - Remembrance of a Lord and a God

So Miquella saw Radahn's qualities early on and believed he was the best choice for consort, should he become a god in the future. I believe that Radahn also willingly entered into this deal, and would get something from Miquella in return for becoming his consort.





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I think the proof that Radahn entered this vow willingly (rather than being bewitched by Miquella) is found in the wording of Miquella's speeches. After defeating Radahn, we are able to access a memory of Miquella's in which he seems to be addressing Radahn:

"Lord brother. I'm going to be a god. If we honour our part of the vow, promise me you'll be my consort. I'll make the world a gentler place." - Miquella

'Our part' to me suggests Miquella had to do something for Radahn in return for his allegiance. But what? I believe we can find the answer in the opening speech for the Radahn boss fight in *Shadow of the Erdtree*, where Miquella says:

"Now, the vow will be honored, and my Lord brother's soul will return. So that he may be my consort." - Miquella

Miquella is quite clearly saying that he is honoring his part of the vow by bringing Radahn back to life. That is what Radahn gets out of the deal: a second chance at life. In return, Radahn willingly becomes Miquella's King Consort.

This promise from Miquella appears to be indirectly confirmed by Freyja when we meet her in the Specimen Hall. Ansbach, having discovered the purpose of Mohg's corpse, passes on a note explaining Miquella's intentions for Mohg's body and how it relates to Radahn. In response, Freyja confirms that this is the answer to her investigation into the vow:

"Yes, of course, I see. As the festival of war concluded, General Radahn's soul met an honorable end. But Kindly Miquella wishes to revive it... Which is fine by me. I know it would pain old Jerren, but war has always suited General Radahn best. And certainly far more than any honorable death. Endless war to invigorate the soul. As befits General Radahn, the great lion." - Freyja

Freyja, a personal guard to Radahn who would likely know him well, implies that Radahn would indeed agree to a vow that would give him a second chance in the event of his death.

As a man who lives by the sword, he may well die by it. In the event of his death, his brother would bring him back, and Radahn would repay him by becoming his consort.

However, with this in mind, how do we make sense of Malenia's conflict with Radahn? Why would she fight Radahn if Miquella had a preexisting relationship with him?

The Young Lion set reads:

"When Malenia, Blade of Miquella, let the rotflower blossom in Aeonian, Radahn heard a murmur in his ear - Miquella awaits thee, O promised consort." - Young Lion set

We are told that this is what Malenia whispered into Radahn's ear during their iconic duel in Aeonian, completely recontextualizing the fight. And as to why Malenia was sent here to fight Radahn by Miquella?

I have two main theories. The first is that Radahn agreed to the vow as an insurance



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policy only, but fully intended to try and achieve lordship by himself on his own terms. Radahn agreed to become Miquella's consort only if he died, so Miquella sent Malenia to defeat and kill Radahn. My second theory is an expansion of the first, that Radahn agreed to be resurrected if Malenia, his only worthy rival, could defeat him in battle - he is, after all, a warrior who relishes a challenge.

If Radahn doesn't die, he is free to gain lordship on his own terms. If he dies, he gets a second chance at life and becomes lord regardless. Framed this way, it's win-win for Radahn.

We helped Miquella by killing Mohg and Radahn, freeing Radahn's soul and providing a new vessel for him in the form of Mohg's cadaver. We learn from Freyja that Miquella wandered the battlefields of Aeonian after the conclusion of the battle:

"Long ago, I was stricken by scarlet rot in the Swamp of Aeonian. Immobile, feverish, and in great pain, I was entirely resigned to death. I was left behind, and only Kindly Miquella was good enough to seek me out. My wound was swollen and festering - exuding a most pungent odour - and yet he drained the poison from it." - Freyja

This really makes me re-evaluate the timeline of events. For the longest time, I assumed that Mohg kidnapped Miquella while Malenia was fighting Radahn. However, it seems Miquella was still active after the war, even coming to Caelid himself to witness the devastation.

One of the challenges I've had with the new lore is reconciling how Miquella was seemingly fine with the number of soldiers who died in Aeonian. If Malenia came here at Miquella's behest, then their blood is essentially on his hands. However, perhaps he wasn't okay with it, and Freyja's story could illustrate Miquella's remorse, healing one of Radahn's soldiers as an act of atonement.

In the end, Miquella's lord clashes with the Lord of the Erdtree: us. No matter what role we play in aiding Miquella's rise to power, we are set against him. While in the Lands of Shadow, grace guides us to this final confrontation. We have been led by the Erdtree to kill this interloper.

Leda reflects on whether both Miquella and the Erdtree want this fight to happen: a showdown of lords to determine who has the right to rule. I think this is something that *Elden Ring* does extremely well - examining conflicting ideologies. This is at the core of the various endings we can achieve, and once again here we have the ideals of a new god being challenged by those who disagree with his methods.

SAINT TRINA

Before we leave the story of the remarkable Miquella behind, we have to talk about a figure whose true nature is hidden



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in shadow but appears to be linked to the Unalloyed: Saint Trina.

From the information we find in the game, we learn that Saint Trina is a being associated with sleep and dreams, as most items associated with Saint Trina inflict the sleep status on enemies.

We know that Saint Trina seems to have worshippers, because the Sword of Saint Trina mentions that this is a weapon held by *clerics* of the saint. Furthermore, Trina's Lily describes how it is a symbol of *faith* in Saint Trina.

We actually get a depiction of Saint Trina on the side of Saint Trina's Torch, which shows a fair figure with long flowing hair. We can learn a little more of their appearance via the Sword of Saint Trina:

"Saint Trina is an enigmatic figure. Some say she is a comely young girl, others are sure he is a boy. The only certainty is that their appearance was as sudden as their disappearance." - *Sword of Saint Trina*

Saint Trina's appearance aligns with what we have seen of Miquella. He, too, is a fair, young and somewhat feminine child, and if you were to look at the countenance of Saint Trina on the torch of their name, it truly looks like Miquella.

Miquella having two aspects, potentially one male and one female, would be in keeping with the world of *Elden Ring*, given Marika and Radagon's situation. If anything, this would reinforce the idea that Miquella

was the ideal candidate to replace Marika's Order, as he matches her dual nature.

Shadow of the Erdtree confirms this. Saint Trina is indeed an alternate persona of Miquella.

Thiollier, a devotee of Saint Trina, directly states that the saint is the "discarded half" of Miquella, in fact. Additionally, Ansbach says the following when we inform him of the Saint Trina-relevant Miquella crosses:

"To think there was a cross left in such a faraway place... And that deep-purple water lilies would be blooming there. This can only mean Kindly Miquella has divested himself even of that... His adoring other self, his blossom of slumber." - *Ansbach*

In the Cerulean Coast, signs of Saint Trina's influence are apparent, evidenced by the deep-purple lilies found there. Further confirmation of Saint Trina's presence comes from the Nectar Blood Surgeon found at the base of crosses near the fissure along the coast. The item description reads:

"A young shoot, heavy with velvety purple nectar. Material used for crafting items. Exceedingly rare to find. Said to burgeon forth where the nectar-like blood of abandoned Trina pooled." - *Nectar Blood Surgeon*

What I find fascinating here is the suggested physicality of the separation. Despite Miquella and Saint Trina sharing a body in ways we don't fully understand, Miquella literally ripped Saint Trina from himself, causing blood to be shed. Indeed, we see a



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physical body being thrown into the abyss in the *Shadow of the Erdtree* gameplay trailer.

This act of separation also answers a long-standing question: can conjoined beings like Marika and Radagon be separated? I have long wondered if part of Marika's aim was for the Tarnished to destroy Radagon. After all, it is Marika who directs Hewg to forge us a weapon capable of slaying a god, and grace guides us toward the ultimate confrontation with Radagon and the Elden Beast.

Regardless, we must now consider *why* Miquella needed to discard Saint Trina. The answer seems to be provided quite clearly. The crosses leading to Saint Trina's sanctum offer insight into Miquella's reasoning in his own words. One cross reads:

"I abandon here my doubt and vacillation."

The other reads:

"I abandon here my love."

Miquella seemingly had a close relationship with Saint Trina, reinforced by the soft manner in which Saint Trina refers to Miquella in her dialogue. Whether this love is romantic or platonic is largely irrelevant. Miquella feels Saint Trina will distract him from his goals, filling his mind with doubt at a time when he must be decisive.

He is right to think so, because Saint Trina clearly does not agree with the path Miquella has chosen. As she says:

"Godhood would be Miquella's prison... You must kill Miquella..." - *Saint Trina*

Miquella has already taken measures to ensure that no one can reach his better half. If you come to the fissure before Miquella discards his Great Rune, you will find a golden seal barring entry.

This seal bears Miquella's mark, and if you interact with it, it is confirmed that Miquella is the one blocking access to the fissure. I believe the

Misbegotten Crusader is another barrier to Saint Trina, perhaps summoned by Miquella, which would explain why it appears as a golden phantom.

Miquella discarding his rune is clearly a vulnerable moment for him. Between this

act and his eventual ascension to godhood, he must be at his weakest, as much of his power is initially connected to his Great Rune.

Without his rune, Miquella is unable to maintain his powers of enchantment or the golden barriers that seal away Saint Trina. Of course, when he ascends, he regains these powers tenfold, but it's an interesting idea to consider.





Chapter 20: Radahn, the Starscourge

Radahn is one of three children that we know about who were born to Rennala of Caria and Radagon, Champion of the Golden Order. As with most of the demigods, it is important to understand Radahn's origins so that we can better comprehend the hero he would become.

Radagon's union with Rennala was a massive political moment in the Lands Between and the culminating event of the two Liurnian Wars. By this stage, Radagon had led the forces of the Erdtree against the stalwart Caria Knights. He would gain significant renown during this conflict, as we can learn from the relevant Sword Monument:

"The First Liurnian War / Radagon's glory burns red as his hair" - Sword Monument, Bellum Church, Liurnia of the Lakes

Radahn no doubt grew up learning about his father's renown and reputation as the "champion," a warrior who earned the respect of Liurnia and Rennala. Hence we get the iconic quote that we can attribute to Radahn himself. It comes via Radahn's Redmane Helm:

"I was born a champion's cub. Now I am the Lord of the Battlefield's lion."

- Radahn's Redmane Helm

This is an important aspect of Radahn's personality to bear in mind as we move forward. He venerated these old heroes, his own father included.

In our discussions on this subject, Lokey suggested that Radahn may have witnessed Godfrey's glory in his youth and grown to respect him as well. As evidence, Lokey identifies that the Kanji used in Radahn's armor refers not



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vaguely to his younger years, but is specifically a reference to his childhood:

"Very younger days (幼き日) more emphasis on childhood, different from Remembrance of the Starscourge or his 'young' self in Starscourge Greatsword or Rock Sling sorcery."
- Lokey, author of Abyssal Archive

While Radahn's father was important for his emerging identity, his mother's heritage was a crucial factor in his abilities. All three of Rennala's children with Radagon inherited her ability as a talented sorcerer.

It is therefore no surprise that Radahn would arise as one of the most powerful sorcerers of a generation. While you could argue that Ranni is more in tune with magic and maybe more knowledgeable, Radahn is simply unmatched in terms of raw power.

Sadly, we know little of Radahn's earlier years, and little of his relationship with his siblings. However, given he is part of a prestigious royal family, we can assume that he had an excellent education, including sorcery basics and military and combat training.

The first event we hear of from Radahn's youth is his journey to Sellia for tutelage under an Alabaster Lord. His remembrance reads:

"The Red Lion General wielded gravitational powers which he learned in Sellia during his younger days. All so he would never have to abandon his beloved but scrawny steed." - *Remembrance of the Starscourge*

This description gives us the basic facts. Radahn went to Sellia in his youth so that he would never have to abandon his beloved - but very small - horse. Thanks to Zullie the Witch, we know that this steed is called Leonard¹, and from this small detail we already learn quite a bit about Radahn. We learn that Radahn grew over time, as we can assume that in his younger years he was more proportional to his horse.

(I want to briefly address his size here. While I usually think bosses are made large for visual and gameplay purposes, it is part of Radahn's lore too. This has led many to question whether Radahn has giant's blood. This would have come from his father Radagon, who some also suggest has the blood of giants because of the Giant's Red Braid item description. I believe this is not the case, because I think Radagon was always part of Marika, and thus could not be related to the Fire Giants. His hatred of his hair is just a transmitted feeling of hatred for their kind, inherited from Marika. Thus I would simply chalk up Radahn's size as a side effect of his growing power. Perhaps he even grew in size after he claimed a Great Rune. However, I acknowledge this is an area of the lore we cannot be certain of.)

Aside from his physicality, this remembrance tells us something else about Radahn. He is a man unwilling to move on. He is of a royal family and would have no issue in procuring a new steed more suited to his

¹"Elden Ring - The Tragedy of Leonard" - Zullie the Witch



Radahn, the Starscourge

size. But because of who Radahn is, he is absolutely unwilling to let go of the past. And if you bear in mind that unwillingness, all of his actions can be explained.

So with that said, let us talk about Sellia, gravity magic and the Alabaster Master.

THE STARSCOURGE

Radahn is an heir of the Carians – the most powerful bloodline when it comes to magic. This means he had easy access to tutors and books, never mind the fact his mother was ruling Raya Lucaria at this stage as well.

Yet despite this, Radahn specifically seeks out Sellia, a remote town in Caelid – again reinforcing that Sellia, specifically, was once renowned for this gravity magic.

The Onyx Lord that you can face in the Carian Evergaol used to be referred to as an Alabaster Lord. As a result, on my first playthrough I had assumed that this was the same Alabaster Lord that had once taught Radahn and perhaps Ranni. However, this seems to have been a mistake, as this lord always held the curved sword of an Onyx Lord.

I posit that Sellia was unmatched in knowledge of gravity magic even when compared to Raya Lucaria or Caria. It was overseen by an Alabaster Lord, and these two facts together are why Radahn sought it out.

We have discussed Sellia before and thus I would refer you back to that chapter for a full analysis on its ties to the Eternal Cities. However, the relevant details to Radahn are his Alabaster Lord tutor and the gravity magic he learned there.

The Alabaster and Onyx Lords are deeply mysterious. However, we do know that they were capable of interacting with humanity and holding positions of prestige, as the Meteorite description reads:

“The sorcery originates from the Onyx Lords, who had skin of stone, and were called lords in reverential fear of their destructive power.” - Meteorite

Thus we can assume this Alabaster Lord held a position in Sellia for similar reasons, and when Radahn came to town, it took him under its arm.

We get three examples of the gravity magic that Radahn mastered under the tutelage of this lord: Collapsing Stars, Gravity Well and Rock Sling. We can see Radahn using these powers to great effect in our battle with him, and, of course, in his victory over the stars.

Radahn’s remembrance implies that his reasons for coming here was to continue using his horse. Yet during his time here, his motivation seems to change, as Collapsing Stars states:

“A gravitational technique mastered by the young Radahn. I thank you for your tutelage, for now I can challenge the stars.” - Collapsing Stars



Grace Given

This quote seems to be from after Radahn had completed his studies. It’s implied that in some period between his arrival in Sellia and completing his studies, his objectives evolved, and he became aware of a threat towards Sellia.

What would follow is the defining moment of Radahn’s early years and his legacy: the Starscourge Conflict. We hear of this conflict via the relevant Sword Monument:

“The Starscourge Conflict / Radahn alone holds Sellia secure / And stands tall, to shatter the stars” - Sword Monument, Impassable Greatbridge, Caelid

The purpose of Radahn challenging the stars is evident. He is seeking to protect Sellia from some kind of star-bound threat. The extent of his power cannot be overstated, and we get a flavor of how overwhelming his eventual victory is from the Starscourge Heirloom:

“The mightiest hero of the demigods confronted the falling stars alone – and thus did he crush them, his conquest sealing the very fate of the stars.” - Starscourge Heirloom

As we heard from Sellen, Radahn is using the power of gravity to hold the stars in stasis. Can you consider the power a being must have to arrest the movement of celestial bodies? Not only this, but Radahn continues to hold the stars in place up until the current era. This means he kept the stars in place during the Shattering,

while fighting Malenia and even while he was wasted away by the Scarlet Rot. Even with the rot having eaten his mind, he still has the inner will to maintain this stasis.

Now, I am always Team Malenia. She is my favorite demigod. But I would be delusional to ignore the implications of this. Had Radahn not been using a portion of his presence to literally hold back the stars, a significant feat, would Malenia have even stood a chance against him? Would he have pinned her to the earth with gravity? Or torn her apart?

It’s clear that while he needed to be taught by an Alabaster Lord, Radahn would eventually outstrip his master. Inevitably, he becomes the most proficient gravity sorcerer of all time. Radahn obviously chooses to protect Sellia because of his personal attachment here. Having studied here for a long period of time, he no doubt has a fondness for the town. This makes sense given what we have already discussed. Here is a man who refuses to let go of the past. Despite the fact that it may well have been Sellia’s fate to be destroyed, Radahn goes to great lengths to defy fate and he crushes the stars themselves.

This comes to what I believe Radahn stands for: stagnation.

All this can be seen in the imagery he chooses and in the actions he takes, as he combines the symbolism of Radagon and Godfrey. We have already looked



Radahn, the Starscourge

at the helm of Radahn, which venerates his father's hair. His chest piece description reads:

"The golden lion is said to symbolize Godfrey, the first Elden Lord, and his beast regent, Serosh. From his youngest years, Radahn was naturally captivated by the Lord of the Battlefield." - Radahn's Lion Armor

He becomes the "Red Lion." The red for the red hair of Radagon and the lion for the lion of Godfrey. As Ratatoskr highlights, this is a great insight into the mind of Radahn, as Radahn venerates his childhood heroes – both heroes of the past and, more importantly, heroes of the current Order².

Likewise, he is reluctant to let go of his childhood horse, despite it being grossly undersized for his weight. He is unwilling to let Sellia be destroyed, unwilling to let it meet its natural fate.

Radahn is a lord of preservation, or thematically he is a force of stagnation, literally using gravity magic to halt the flow of fate. As we have discussed many times in this book, stagnation and flow are a recurring theme in Souls games, and *Elden Ring* is no different. The world we enter is stagnant. With the Elden Ring shattered there is no progression; the Lands Between are stuck.

Had fate been flowing, had the stars not been halted and stagnant, then Ranni could have completed the Age of Stars

already and moved everyone into a new era. She only needs our help in the current era because fate has been arrested:

"The stars alter the fate of the Carian royal family. And the fate of your mistress, Ranni. But long ago, General Radahn challenged the swirling constellations, and in a crushing victory, arrested their cycles. Now, he is the force that repulses the stars. If General Radahn were to die, the stars would resume their movement. And so, too, would Ranni's destiny." - Sorceress Sellen

Not only is Radahn a man who holds on to the past, but he is also a man who actively prevents the future. And there are consequences.

Perhaps it is almost karmic that he is overthrown by another force of stagnation, the Scarlet Rot. Indeed, Sellia, the town he sacrificed so much to save, is overwhelmed by the Scarlet Rot – arguably a worse fate than that which he tried to prevent.

Radahn is a lord of preservation, or thematically he is a force of stagnation, literally using gravity magic to halt the flow of fate.



Grace Given

Of course this is a thematic observation. In terms of the story significance of his choices, Ratatoskr's video is closer to the truth. Radahn is a man who venerates the current Order and, should he have won the Shattering, he would have reinstated the Golden Order and modeled himself after the first and second Elden Lords.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves, and we should return to the Starscourge Conflict itself and ask the obvious question: why was Sellia in danger? And how did Radahn know?

As to the first question, the two main chains of thought are that something physically threatened Sellia, like a falling star or a cosmic life form, or that fate itself was conspiring against Sellia.

I am more of a believer in the first theory: Sellia was physically under threat. My main reason for believing this is that, when Radahn is defeated and the stars resume their movement, a falling star does hit fairly close by. Is it possible that Sellia was meant to be caught up in a similar event?

Thanks to data miners we know that Astel has an unused animation³ that was very similar to Radahn's. In this animation Astel would have crashed into the ground like a meteor in a way that would have required a huge arena. The most likely arena for this original fight is the Wailing Dunes, due to the crossover in VFX and the sheer size needed for this animation.

So I do agree with the assessment that Sellia was likely under a physical threat from a cosmic attack, perhaps an Astel or Fallingstar Beast. In this reading of events, the arresting of fate, the obstacle that he provides to Ranni and her plans, are just incidental in my eyes – at least, initially they are.

We do have to consider the possibility that Radahn continued to fetter fate in order to stymie Ranni's plans and preserve the Golden Order. We have already discussed the fact that Radahn idolizes the past Elden Lords, and should he wish to emulate the Golden Order then would it not behoove him to keep the stars held? While he learned gravity magic to protect his horse, and then arrested the movement of the stars to save Sellia, did he keep the stars frozen because of his beliefs?

I think so, and we have the Telescope item description to back that up:

"During the age of the Erdtree, Carian astrology withered on the vine. The fate once writ in the night skies had been fettered by the Golden Order." - Telescope

This description states that the Golden Order fettered the stars. We know Radahn was the one who did this, so is this item outright telling us Radahn is aligned with the Golden Order and that he is acting in concert with them?

Perhaps. But I think it's interesting that Ranni and her counselors don't seem

² "General Radahn's Heroic Concept" - Ratatoskr

³ "Elden Ring - Where were they going to use this?" - Zullie the Witch



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to realize that Radahn's actions are the cause of her plans being halted. Iji treats this as a revelation after you speak to him of Jerren and the Radahn Festival:

"Oh, no, wait... How did I not see it before? I ought to retire as war counsellor for such a gross oversight! Let me explain. The fate of the Carian royal family is guided by the stars. As is the fate of Lady Ranni, first heir in the Carian royal line. But General Radahn is the conqueror of the stars. Who stood up to the swirling constellations, halting their movement in a smashing victory. And so, if General Radahn were defeated, the stars would once again resume their movement. As would Lady Ranni's destiny. Perhaps, even, revealing the elusive path." - War Counselor Iji

I believe that Radahn's intention was to stop the stars from destroying the town of sorcery first and foremost, given all we have discussed. The relevant Sword Monument suggests this was his aim and, as with his horse, we have precedent of a man who will do anything to preserve that which he loves.

As a result, I think it's likely that arresting Ranni's fate was not a factor anyone considered until much later when Ranni found her plans stymied. If Radahn had any intention to prevent fate from advancing to protect the Golden Order, then this was a motive he developed some time later.

With the scene set and Radahn's background examined, we are ready to move to the next chapter in Radahn's tale: the Shattering.

THE RED LION

Although the Starscourge Conflict is where Radahn claimed his title, it was the Shattering that would make him a legend. He would forever be known as the mightiest of the demigods.

With the stars crushed and Sellia secure, I would speculate that it was around the time of the Starscourge Conflict that Radahn established Redmane Castle and made Caelid his main base of operations. When I say establish, I mean this is when he would occupy the castle, as architecturally this building seems to share features with Stormveil and Morne Castle. This, to me, suggests these castles date back to the Hoarah Loux-era conflicts. This is fitting, given how much Radahn idolizes Godfrey.

Radahn would establish his own livery, and because it bears the Red Lion we can surmise that his house must have been created after he developed his own ideals. We have already seen from his armor set that he became the Red Lion because of his combined appreciation for his red-haired father and Godfrey's lion. The Redmane Greatshield description reads:

"Greatshield shaped like a fang, featuring the crest of red-maned lion." - Redmane Greatshield

Even the name "redmane," a name given to him and his forces, alludes to the symbolic importance of these two



Grace Given

figures. Every aspect of his livery speaks to his ideology of venerating these past heroes and what they stand for. If you had any doubt that Radahn seeks to emulate them in both martial deeds and in preserving their Order, then I would ask you to consider how deeply baked into Radahn's identity Radagon and Godfrey are.

Furthermore, I would argue that all the aspects of his identity were forged after his defeat of the stars. Consider the Starscourge Greatswords. Their description reads:

"Curved greatswords of black steel wielded by General Radahn. A pair of weapons decorated with a lion mane motif. Radahn earned considerable renown as the Starscourge in his youth, and it is said that it was during this time he engraved the gravity crest upon these blades." - Starscourge Greatsword

Not only are they named after his victory over the stars and engraved with the symbol of gravity magic, but they are also decorated with the lion mane motif. This suggests that all the facets of Radahn's identity coalesced around this time.

Again, the swords still indicate that this all took place in his youth, emphasizing that plenty of time would pass after the Starscourge Conflict and the Shattering for Radahn to build his reputation, strength and power base.

Radahn was seemingly accompanied by one of his men to study in Sellia. This is Ogha, whose ashes read:

"The longest-serving member of the Redmane Knights, Ogha studied techniques to manipulate gravity alongside Radahn. May use a rain of gravitational arrows in response to a war cry, but only once."

- Redmane Knight Ogha

This is an interesting piece of lore for a couple of reasons. The first is that it tells us that Ogha is the first of the Redmane Knights, which again implies to me that Radahn would not have established his own forces and base until after his learning in Sellia. I suggested that Radahn would have established his power base around the Starscourge Conflict, but before the Shattering, mainly because it is in Caelid. I feel Radahn would have chosen to settle here because of his association with Sellia, and so that he could effectively maintain his victory and vigil over the stars.

His relationship with Ogha is close, and if he is the first-ever Redmane Knight, I would suggest he was a Carian Knight, a retainer who accompanied the young Carian heir to Sellia before declaring for Radahn's cause. This relationship is a good thematic indicator that General Radahn has a close warrior's bond with his soldiers. This would contrast with the type of haughty disregard someone like Godrick might have for his troops.

The loyalty that Radahn inspires can also be seen in his relationship with Castellan Jerren, the eccentric fellow who now



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hosts the Radahn Festival. We learn from his armor set that he was once a nomadic character, but that Radahn inspired him to put down some roots. I believe that his hunting of Sellen is also based on his loyalty to the Carians in general, as Sellen is a well-known enemy of the Carians.

She despises the Carians for their ousting of Primeval Current sorcery:

“The toothless pedantry peddled by the Carian royal family can rot for all I care. I want glintstone sorceries that open our minds, unbound by terrestrial taboos.” - Sorceress Sellen

And at the end of her quest she takes control of Raya Lucaria, and briefly deposes Rennala, so she is correctly identified as an enemy to their rule. It is stated that Sellen’s death is something Jerren is doing for the family. Iji says:

“Now the time has come to remind him of an old promise made. With the stars of fate set into motion, a certain sorceress is dispossessed of her immortality... Finally, we can be rid of a longstanding Carian weed...” - War Counselor Iji

Yet while he is loyal to the Carians in general, it is specifically to Radahn that he is bound, giving up all of his other duties to fulfill his oath to the general. We learn via his hood:

“Jerren served General Radahn as a guest commander, and they are said to have sworn an oath of honorable death to one another.” - Eccentric’s Hood

So not only did Jerren serve Radahn as one of his commanders, but he also swore a death oath with him.

As Ratatoskr points out, even during the Radahn Festival we enter the castle and hear a mournful warriors’ chant, and we are to assume that these are Radahn’s men, honoring and mourning the man they follow and love. Their loyalty to their lord is emphasized by their continued presence in Caelid, fighting a battle against the Scarlet Rot themselves. This is despite the fact that their general is no longer himself, and no longer giving orders.

The Redmane Knight Set reads:

“Armor worn by knights who fought by General Radahn’s side. When they were driven to defeat by Malenia’s scarlet rot, the Redmane Knights burned the crest on the left breast of their armor to indicate their resolve. Alas, dear home, I shan’t see you again! For our duty is to remain here, a bulwark against the blight.” - Redmane Knight Armor

Even after their defeat and the destruction of Caelid, these warriors continued in their duty. We see them fighting an impossible battle against the elements itself, hunting the mutated dogs and attempting to burn the rot away. The Redmane Fire Pot reads:

“Even today, the survivors of Radahn’s battalion employ fire to stave off the scarlet rot.” - Redmane Fire Pot

Another warrior that shows exceptional loyalty to Radahn appears to be Commander



Grace Given

O’Neil, whose standard makes it clear that he was a veteran of this battle. His battle standard still bears the red banner of Radahn and he has refused to abandon the field.

It may appear that Radahn is welcoming to any warrior, despite their creed and background – as long as they are a worthy warrior. In the interior courtyard of Redmane Castle we can face off against a Crucible Knight and Misbegotten. Given this is at a time when the castle is occupied by Redmane forces, we have to assume these two are part of Radahn’s army. Despite being outsiders, they are considered worthy by Radahn, as they were by Godfrey. Perhaps it is their tie to Godfrey’s Crucible Era that led Radahn to seek them out.

We just discussed Commander O’Neil, whom you may normally associate with Banished Knights. This is if you consider his potential relationship with Commander Niall of Castle Sol, who runs with a crew of spirit Banished Knights. We also find Banished Knight armaments and shields hung around castle Redmane. Does this suggest that O’Neill and other Banished Knights were also welcomed into Radahn’s forces?

The hung armaments are more likely the arms of those who have fallen in the festival, but this doesn’t preclude them from first being part of Radahn’s army.

Radahn’s men are loyal, but they are hardy too – they have refused to retreat from an unwinnable battle against the rot itself. Thus they have a fearsome reputation in the Lands

Between. The Radahn Soldier Ashes reads:

“General Radahn’s soldiers were all reputed to be masterful warriors, and it was popularly said that the Redmanes knew no weakness.” - Radahn Soldier Ashes

Compare these people to the forces of, say, Leyndell. Leyndell’s troops seem to be closer to professional soldiers, defensive masters with good discipline. The impression I get from the Redmanes, on the other

hand, is that they are warriors, not soldiers: maybe not the most technical or organized of forces, but the most steadfast, the most like the Roundtable culture of old.

Radahn also has the specific title of “general.” I have long believed that this was a position he was granted prior to the Shattering. Rykard is also referred to as “praetor,” praetor being a Roman magistrate – so basically a keeper of law and order. I see this as





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Marika, and/or the Golden Order, giving her step-children the roles best suited to their skills. Praetor Rykard and his inquisitors keep law and order, although in a brutal fashion, and Radahn was given the position of general due to his martial prowess and esteem after his victory over the stars.

THE FALL OF RADAHN

Eventually the Shattering would occur and, as per the opening slides, the demigods would claim shards of the Elden Ring. Radahn was no different. As I have posited before, I believe that Radahn was part of what was called the Sovereign Alliance. The question needs to be asked, however: Why did Radahn take part in this conflict? If everything I've argued so far is true, and Radahn was someone who wanted to preserve the Golden Order, why would he partake in this war? Why would he not stand beside Morgott instead of fighting him, as the opening slides would suggest?

We have already discussed the warping power of the Great Runes. These artifacts essentially acted as an accelerant to war, pushing the most extreme values of each possessor to the fore and thus into conflict with one another.

Maybe Radahn is no different. In possession of a Great Rune, he too likely saw

himself as the rightful successor. So while on the surface it may seem like he shares a perspective with Morgott, in reality Morgott is still an obstacle to him.

Morgott's loyalty is to preserving the Erdtree and Leyndell, and preventing any of the demigods from claiming the throne. Should Radahn want to implement an Order that emulates that of Godfrey and Radagon, then he has to destroy all opponents and claim the throne for himself.

We know of a couple of conflicts that Radahn would take part in, no doubt as part of his quest to become the successor. We know that he laid siege to Godrick's castle, thanks to dialogues from Kenneth Haight:

"Lord? Don't make me laugh. First he hid himself amongst the womenfolk to flee the capital, then hid from Radahn in that castle..." - Kenneth Haight

It is probable that the wounds in the side of the castle, due to the precise form they take, are most likely to be from gravity attacks by Radahn rather than trebuchets or catapults. We know he then clashed with Margit aka Morgott, as we can see in the opening slides of the game.

I have always believed this battle between Radahn and Margit to be the Second Defense of Leyndell, mainly because this image specifically shows the Margit persona, and we know the Second Defense of Leyndell is where Margit made a new name for himself. As the related Sword Monument reads:



Grace Given

"The Second Defense of Leyndell / The Fell Omen stacks high the corpses of heroes / Yet the Erdtree remains unshaken." - Sword Monument, Capital Outskirts, Altus Plateau

I believe the image shown in the opening slide depicts this same battle, the Second Defense of Leyndell. Here Margit and Radahn clashed, resulting in Margit slaughtering Radahn's men and the Starscourge having to end his attempt in taking the capital.

We can only imagine what other incredible feats and victories Radahn achieved during this war, as he is regarded as the "mightiest hero of the demigods" far and wide. Yet there may well be one feat that truly earned him this title:

"General Radahn, the famed Red Lion and scourge of the stars, is a ferocious warrior. He fought Malenia and her rot to a standstill in the Caelid Wilds to Limgrave's east. And now Caelid has been engulfed by the scarlet rot, even approaching the region is no mean feat." - Sir Gideon Ofnir, the All-Knowing

Malenia, the undefeated, was also regarded as one of the most powerful of the demigods, nigh unbeatable and an Empyrean. And yet Radahn, who is not an Empyrean, managed to fight her to a standstill. This of course all happened in the most well-known clash of the Shattering War, the Battle of Aeonian.

This battle and its fallout is so well known that Caelid is now remembered

for very little else. We don't know what it looked like before, or what its culture was like before it was consumed by the Aeonian Bloom. Even the Caelid map states that this land is known for this battle:

"Caelid, known as the locale of the last battle between General Radahn and Malenia, Blade of Miquella, is a vast land consumed by scarlet rot." - Map: Caelid

In the story trailer, Ranni gives us the reason why this clash took place, and it's very straightforward: These were the two most powerful gods who remained.

We know that Malenia eventually marched directly on Caelid to confront Radahn, thanks to a Sword Monument found in Liurnia:

"This marks Malenia's southward march / The Blade of Miquella and her Cleanrot Knights / Grant her wings never to be clipped" - Sword Monument, Liurnia Highway, Liurnia of the Lakes

I know there is a theory that Malenia marched on Caelid because of Miquella, because Mohgwyn Palace existed below Caelid and she could sense him, and she only ended up fighting Radahn by accident. I don't accept this for a couple of reasons.

First, I think it makes more sense that Mohg would be capable of stealing Miquella when he was undefended by Malenia. I actually think he would have stood no chance of taking him while Malenia was still at the Haligtree. However, when she marched on



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Caelid, she and the majority of her warriors would have left the Haligtree undefended – a perfect opportunity for Mohg.

Second, I think it is heavily implied that Malenia and Radahn fought because they were the two strongest demigods left. This was the battle for the throne. Despite each demigod's motivations and different plans, they all took the Shattering as an opportunity to establish their primacy. With the Elden Throne claimed, no one could stop their vision of Order.

This could have been the end of the stasis, and either of them could have gone on to claim victory. Yet neither walked away unscathed. Radahn was wasted away by the Scarlet Rot, and Malenia lost part of herself:

"There is something I must return to Malenia. The will that was once her own. The dignity, the sense of self, that allowed her to resist the call of the scarlet rot. The pride she abandoned, to meet Radahn's measure." - Millicent

Malenia, pushed to the limit by the sheer power of Radahn, is too stressed to hold back the Scarlet Rot and it is unleashed. Radahn, as mighty as he is, is blasted by its power and the Scarlet Rot eats him away.

And we know from Cleanrot Knight Finlay that Malenia is rendered unconscious and is carried back to the Haligtree. Both are defeated and the Greater Will abandons all hope in regards to the demigods.

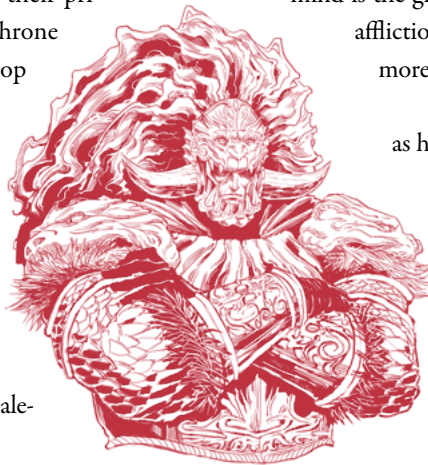
Meanwhile, Radahn meets an ignoble end. We can see his feet are literally eaten away, and his bond with Leonard becomes even more important. Yet the loss of his mind is the greatest tragedy of his affliction. He becomes little more than a beast.

Radahn, as powerful as he is, stood no chance against the Scarlet Rot. The Scarlet Rot is no mere disease; it is an expression of the Outer God of Rot itself:

"The rotting sickness that afflicts Millicent has no cure. When the Erdtree flourished, even the demigods could not stave off its effects, despite their nigh godhood." - Sage Gowry

We know that his mind must not have rotted immediately, as he at least retained his sanity long enough to express his desires to Jerren:

"At last, the war festival has ended. Brave champion, you have our gratitude. The celebration was spectacular. General Radahn is surely pleased. Festering with



Grace Given

rot, and crippled by madness, all he wanted was an honorable death."

- Castellan Jerren

Hence the festival of Radahn was born – a fitting celebration of this incredible champion, a warrior who always idolized martial strength and combat. The word is put out, and champions come from far and wide to compete:

"In truth I quiver at the thought, such is his frightful repute. But! The fear simply assures me the ordeal is worth undertaking!" - Alexander, Warrior Jar

No doubt this is why many Tarnished, aspiring Elden Lords, come to this festival: to claim this mighty artifact. Yet if we came to this battle expecting a battered and broken beast we are delusional. Despite losing his mind, Radahn is still as competent a warrior as ever, bringing his gravity magic to the fore in an incredible display of power that resonates even harder when you consider he is greatly wounded but also he is still holding back the stars:

"Did you see that, afterwards? A falling star, right before our eyes! I can't fathom how Radahn was holding back something of that scale. He was a living legend, if ever I saw one." - Blaidd the Half-Wolf

This is a fitting ending to this incredible warrior.

Yet one question still lingers and I am sure you've noticed it too:

"Champions, welcome! The stars have aligned! The festival is nigh! General Radahn, mightiest demigod of the Shattering, awaits you! ...A celebration of war! The Radahn Festival!" - Castellan Jerren

How have the stars aligned if Radahn has them in stasis? And why do we need to wait for it?

There are explanations. Perhaps Radahn hasn't frozen all stars, or perhaps even under Radahn's influence they still move. My best guess is that Radahn's power is holding back falling stars that are close to the earth, but that stars that are thousands and thousands of light years away are still moving.

And why do the stars need to be aligned? Perhaps it is something to do with fate. Perhaps Radahn told Jerren that he could only be killed when the stars aligned. There is the more pragmatic interpretation: Jerren may just be using this as a turn of phrase to indicate that all preparations are complete.

Ultimately Radahn's legacy is similar to Godfrey's. It is a legacy of unyielding strength – such strength that even Rykard, on his blasphemous path, clearly respects his brother's might, as we find a Radahn painting in Volcano Manor.

He truly is a titan, a general, a hero. And as we put him to rest, I think I speak for us all when I say that this is one of the better actions we take in this game.



Grace Given

Chapter 21: Rykard, Lord of Blasphemy

Rykard is a sibling to Radahn and Ranni, and a child of Rennala and Radagon. Much like his siblings he is talented with magic. On my first playthrough, he was the character who captivated me the most.

Rykard develops his own form of sorcery, the Mt. Gelmir Magma Sorceries, by building upon ancient hexes. As an example, take the Magma Shot spell:

“After discovering the ancient hexes of Gelmir, Rykard, son of Queen Rennala, brought them back into practical use as new forms of sorcery.” - Magma Shot

That he is able to convert “hexes” into a sorcery underlines that he is a being of great magical prowess. Rykard’s Rancor, the blasphemous spell he uses in our showdown with him is itself an incantation:

“The terrible power of Rykard, Lord of Blasphemy... These spirits manifest from the rancor of heroes who met a violent end. The lord granted them an audience, whereupon they were welcomed by the maw of the great serpent – and within the serpent’s bowels, they became the lord’s kin.” - Rykard’s Rancor

Rykard is quite often referred to as a “praetor.” This was a position held in ancient Rome that covered many responsibilities, including keeping law and order. Rykard employs “inquisitors” and thus I imagine him as a Draconian law enforcer within the Golden Order’s command structure.

My speculation has always been that he was awarded this position by Queen Marika, much as his brother was awarded with the position of general. The idea that Rykard was an authority who enforced the law is supported by the fact that Rykard appears to have run an inquisition. As Gideon Ofnir says:

“Praetor Rykard is the Lord of the Volcano Manor on Mt. Gelmir. He is a ruthless justicar who commands a company of inquisitors, reviled for his serpentine demeanor.” - Sir Gideon Ofnir, the All-Knowing

Gideon refers to him as a justicar, suggesting that Rykard was an official whose job was to maintain law and order within the realm. On top of this, the Taker’s Cameo describes Rykard as “stern.” However, it would appear as though Rykard’s

zeal for his work was a little extreme. The term “inquisitor” has obvious negative connotations. Likewise, Rykard’s inquisitors appear to be of a similarly brutal kind to those of the Spanish inquisition. The one inquisitor we meet, Ghiza, is wielding a particularly cruel-looking instrument. Ghiza’s Wheel’s description reads:

“Great iron wheel lined with flesh-flaying blades. Device of torture used by Inquisitor Ghiza. As the wheel spins it causes severe pain and blood loss. The design was adopted for use as the iconic weapon wielded by Iron Virgins.” - Ghiza’s Wheel

This is an instrument of torture, and if you go to the depths of Volcano Manor, you can find a Site of Grace called Subterranean Inquisition Chamber, a deep dungeon surrounded by similar tools. It is clear that this cruelty was something Rykard maintained when he became the Lord of Blasphemy, incorporating the torture wheels into his Abductor Virgin contraptions.

He must have met his consort, Lady Tanith, when he was a human, because the Consort’s Mask description reads:

“Mask worn by Tanith, Lady of the Volcano Manor, in the image of a foreign queen... Long ago, when Rykard first set eyes on Tanith, she was working as a dancer in a foreign land. Soon, he made her his consort. She was the only human to remain by his side when he became the serpent of



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blasphemy. In that moment, Tanith was truly charmed by him.” - Consort’s Mask

There is a lot of interesting information here. First, it confirms that Tanith has been with Rykard before and after he became a serpent. Second, it tells us that Rykard visited nations outside of the Lands Between. This suggests that it was during peacetime, as it is unlikely he would have had the luxury to do so during the Shattering War.

Perhaps he was serving as a diplomat for the Erdtree monarchy. Either way we get no clue as to where he went, though the Dancer’s Castanets¹ (an item that belongs to Tanith) suggests it could be a Spanish- or Moorish-inspired culture. Regardless, it is a nice illustration of life outside the Lands Between and how the Lands Between has interacted with other nations.

Rykard clearly had eyes for the beautiful dancer. He brought her back as his consort and masked her as an eastern queen, perhaps an early indication of his intentions to become king.

Aside from this we don’t know much about Praetor Rykard’s earlier years, beyond the fact he was clearly drawn to Mt. Gelmir. Ghiza’s torture instrument is decorated with serpents along the handle, suggesting he has long had a fascination with the serpent cult found on Gelmir. We find evidence of this old cult via the Serpent-God’s Curved Sword:

“Curved sword fashioned in the image of an ancient serpent deity and tool of a forgotten religion practiced on Mt. Gelmir. Formerly used to offer up sacrifices, this sword restores HP upon slaying an enemy.”

- Serpent-God’s Curved Sword

This tells us that the serpent god of Mt. Gelmir is an ancient one and that he was worshipped long before Rykard arrived. This religion would certainly see a revival under Rykard. However, Rykard did not become one with the serpent until further into the Shattering. When the Shattering War commenced and Rykard let his intentions be known, his blasphemous ideals had nothing to do with the serpent. Rather he is the Lord of *Blasphemy* because of his blasphemous intention to overthrow the Erdtree, something we learn of via the ghost of one of his knights:

“Praetor Rykard’s ambitions, though blasphemous, marked him a worthy sovereign.”

When the Shattering War commenced and Rykard let his intentions be known, his blasphemous ideals had nothing to do with the serpent.

¹ “Castanets used by dancers from foreign lands. Received from Patches. The passionate dance comprises no seductiveness, but merely a dignified beauty.” - Dancer’s Castanets





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But they were reduced to gluttonous depravity, once he gave himself to the serpent. Whatever that thing is, it is no longer Praetor Rykard.” - Volcano Manor Spirit

Indeed, it seems as though the Gelmir Knights do not wear the sigil of the blasphemous snake. Instead, it appears to be a raven or some other bird, and its description reads:

“It bears an emblem that none wear any longer, standing as it does for a lord that fell from loft ambition into gluttonous depravity. As the lord lost his dignity, so too did these knights lose their master.”

- Gelmir Knight Armor

This reinforces the idea that there was a period where Rykard pursued his blasphemous aims in a more humanoid form. It would make sense that his old sigil was that of a bird, because the statues at the Temple of Eiglay are a cross between a bird and a snake. Perhaps they are representative of Rykard and the serpent combined.

Many found his aims admirable. Perhaps there was an appetite for a world without the Erdtree. He must have developed these feelings before the Shattering and confided in his sister Ranni, because it seems as though Rykard had some role within the Night of the Black Knives conspiracy. We learn this via the Blasphemous Claw:

“A slab of rock engraved with traces of the Rune of Death. Can deflect the power

of the Black Blade. On the night of the dire plot, Ranni rewarded Praetor Rykard with these traces. Should the coming trespass one day transpire, they would serve as a last-resort foil, allowing Rykard to challenge Maliketh the Black Blade, the black beast of Destined Death.” - Blasphemous Claw

While we don't learn anything further about his involvement, it speaks to Rykard's strength, if Ranni believed that Rykard could potentially defeat Maliketh, assisted with the Blasphemous Claw.

Rykard's resentment for the Erdtree is well explained by his closest confidant Lady Tanith:

“Now, perhaps the time has come to tell you. Of the true ruler of this manor, Lord Rykard. The Erdtree blessed the Tarnished with grace. But it was all too meagre, in the face of the enormity of their task. The Tarnished were forced to scavenge, squabbling for crumbs. Like the shardbearers, vying for power in the wake of the Shattering. Our Lord, indignant, has refused. To scurry about, fighting over what miserly scraps they allow us. If the Erdtree, and indeed the very gods, would debase us so, then we are willing to raise the banner of resistance, even if it means heresy. We at the Volcano Manor, under Lord Rykard, have sworn no rest until it is done. If you follow this heroic path, one day the Lord will see you.”

- Tanith, Volcano Manor Proprietress



Grace Given

On the surface of it, this seems like a righteous cause of rebellion, and hearing these words it would be easy to understand why Rykard's knights gladly followed him into battle. However, while this initially would have been Rykard's goal in the war, once he became one with the snake, this eventually just became a cover for his true, more base desire: to devour the world.

THE LORD OF BLASPHEMY

In order to compensate for the meager offerings given to Rykard and the Tarnished, the philosophy he developed was one of “taking.” We learn of this via the Taker's Cameo:

“A talisman engraved with a stern likeness of Praetor Rykard, master of Volcano Manor... When Rykard turned to heresy, taking by force became the rule. The gods themselves were no different, after all.” - Taker's Cameo

Everything Rykard does is an attempt to accumulate power, from allying with the Godskins and Omenkillers to eventually being devoured by the elder serpent. Indeed, one notes that Rykard has innumerable rings on his hand, and I can't help but think this is a further attempt to gain power, as rings provide the wearer with unique bonuses.

This cameo shows Rykard as a man, confirming that this was the mantra he developed while still humanoid and on his blasphemous path. One can see how a man obsessed with taking power by force would see great value in a serpent that claimed the power of those it devours. Indeed there is some truth to this, as while Rykard's final form is utterly grotesque, he is extremely powerful, unleashing waves of rancor in a truly bombastic showdown. It fits. The serpent is often a symbol of greed, a being that devours others. Even in *Dark Souls*, the Covetous Serpent Rings tell us the serpent is a symbol of gluttony.

Even the Serpent-God's Curved Sword, an instrument used in ancient rituals dedicated to the serpent, restores health upon claiming a life. Gameplay-wise, the function of the sword is to absorb the HP of the slain, so lore-wise we can assume that the sacrifices offered up to the elder serpent with this sword would have granted the strength of the sacrifices to the serpent. This is a mechanism that would be of interest to a lord who is seeking further strength.

Rykard's reasons for taking his serpent form is clearly spelled out by his remembrance:

“Rykard took the form of a giant serpent that he might devour, grow, and live eternally. I understand. The road of blasphemy is long and perilous.



Grace Given

One cannot walk it unprepared to sin.”

- Remembrance of the Blasphemous

Rykard has always been a man who craves strength, and the description of Gelmir's Fury even intimates that Rykard's arrogance in trying to harness magma hexes makes him akin to a snake:

“This sorcery is held to represent the fury of the volcano, but the arrogance of attempting to harness it is solely that of men and serpents.”

- Gelmir's Fury

It is not surprising, then, that Rykard eventually resurrected the serpent cult by building the Temple of Eiglay as an extension to his Volcano Manor. This is a temple dedicated to the serpent. Not only is it decorated with serpent statues, but the central altar has a giant snake skin draped

over the top. Snakes routinely shed their skin as they are growing, which explains why the skin is smaller than the serpent we eventually face. No doubt Rykard found this “relic” and had it returned to Volcano Manor as an object of worship.

Given the temple is called the Temple of Eiglay and is dedicated to the Serpent-God we can assume that is the god's name: Eiglay.

Interestingly there is a similar real-world myth that may well confirm that Eiglay is indeed the name of the great serpent. Eglė the Queen of Serpents², is a Lithuanian fairytale in which the main character marries the grass snake prince. In some representations she is depicted as a human-serpent hybrid, which is very similar in appearance to Rykard, Lord of Blasphemy.



We have already discussed the potential history of this serpent in Chapter 6: The Gloam-Eyed Queen, where I raised the possibility that it was involved in the Godskin Apostasy and argued that its involvement is why it is reviled in the Erdtree capital, even prior to Rykard's actions. Whatever you believe to be the reason, the serpent

and the Erdtree are ancient enemies and thus Rykard wants to harness its power and common ground for his own ends.

The ghost of one of his knights tells us that Rykard willingly fed himself to the serpent. In the introductory cinematic we see Rykard seemingly just sitting there as the serpent devours him. One interesting thing to note here is the relatively small

² Credit to Niels “Copper Coin” Kleinheinz for this observation. In the process of editing the book, Niels suggested there may be a connection between Eiglay and Eglė. I would also highly recommend you search for the Eglė statue in Glebe Park, so you can see how similar Rykard is to this depiction.



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size of the serpent, compared to Rykard. As I have already discussed, I do not think we should take the size of objects in any of these paintings too literally. These images are illustrative and evocative. I also think it is likely that the snake was already quite large at this stage, as it was already worshipped as a serpent *god* by ancient cults. It's possible, though, that it gained most of its size from ingesting Rykard.

"Join the Serpent King, as family... Together, we will devour the very gods!"
- Rykard, Lord of Blasphemy

This is why Rykard's sigil changed from a raven to the devouring serpent; it is clear that the serpent's own desires have polluted Rykard's mind as soon as he became one with it. So while Rykard once wanted to overthrow the gods, the Serpent King now wants to devour the gods, a warped philosophy born of Rykard's taker's mantra combined with the serpent's instinct. Indeed, we get a hint of Eiglay's desires via the Devourer's Scepter:

"Scepter in the shape of a serpent devouring the world. This weapon will one day become the very symbol of the Lord of Blasphemy... A vision of the future briefly seen by Rykard in his final moments before being devoured by the great serpent." - Devourer's Scepter

No doubt Rykard had this scepter commissioned after merging with the serpent, when Eiglay's desires became his

own. Who is really in control here? The spirit of the Gelmir Knight, someone who clearly knew Rykard, believes that nothing of Rykard remains:

"Whatever that thing is, it is no longer Praetor Rykard. Someone must kill him. To spare him, and his ambitions, from further dishonour." - Volcano Manor Spirit

I would say the truth lies in between. This being is neither Eiglay or Rykard; rather it is a confused creature that has Rykard's consciousness and will, and yet these things have been polluted by the instincts of a world-devouring serpent.

At this stage, many of Rykard's inner circle have abandoned him. Tanith's mask tells us that she was the only human to remain by his side after he became one with the snake. Indeed, the dialogue of the aforementioned Gelmir Knight spirit suggests that Rykard's knights found what he became repulsive. Given that they never donned armor that bore his new serpent insignia, which can be found on banners up and down Mt. Gelmir, this abandonment must have happened quickly. It could even be that the knights tried to put him down. The same spirit says:

"Worthy Tarnished. I left the serpent-slaying spear in the Lord's Chamber. It is the only thing that can kill that horror. Run it through. The great serpent... that unspeakable monstrosity..." - Volcano Manor Spirit



Grace Given

We find a corpse in the serpent's chamber still clutching the spear. Is this the cadaver of the spirit we are now speaking to? The description of the Serpent-Hunter suggests knights certainly conspired to do kill what Rykard had become:

"When their master's heroic aspirations degenerated into mere greed, his men searched for a weapon with which they might halt their lord." - Serpent-Hunter

Yet the question must be asked: if all of Rykard's soldiers fled, who fought for him during the siege of Volcano Manor? We learn of this brutal conflict via the relevant Sword Monument:

"The Assault on Volcano Manor / The squalid, the sick, the blasphemous; / a wretched, unending war with no glory"
- Sword Monument, Ninth Gelmir Campsite, Mt. Gelmir

The way this war is described reminds me of the First World War, a war in which every inch of ground is paid for in mountains of blood, a war fought in the mud where sickness is as deadly as an enemy blade. This is unsurprising when you consider how much of a defensive advantage Rykard's forces would have had, especially if they were the ones to sabotage the bridge that connects the lower slopes of the mountain to the manor.

The banners on the slopes tell us this battle was between Leyndell and Rykard's

men. The slopes tell a story of a most bloody conflict. Corpses are piled higher here than anywhere else, with siege towers abandoned and broken camps located midway up the mountain. The battle was clearly so brutal that the Leyndell soldiers who remained are completely broken: on the lower slopes we see Leyndell soldiers engaging in cannibalism.

Indeed, the battle drove some to frenzy as, at a camp part-way up the slope, the Leyndell soldiers were completely overwhelmed by the Frenzied Flame. As we have discussed before, the Frenzied Flame can manifest in the eye of those who experience despair. The fact it manifests here is just a further testament to the brutality of this conflict.

But despite Rykard's banners being found throughout the mountain, we see no evidence of his troops. There are no "Rykard soldiers" in this game, and aside from the knights we get no evidence of a traditional army. There is the possibility that Rykard did have an army and we just don't get their armor set or see any evidence of them, but I keep going back to Tanith's mask which describes her as the only *human* that stayed by his side.

At this stage Rykard clearly would have had his Abductor Virgins up and running, and while their primary function is to kidnap people, it is clear that they



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are extremely effective in battle. We can see them decimating Leyndell soldiers on the lower slopes, and they are very much the tanks in our First World War metaphor. However, when we enter Volcano Manor we meet a certain type of life-form which likely played the role of Rykard's foot soldiers in lieu of human warriors: the Gelmir Man-Serpents.

Given Rykard's affinity with the serpent, it is unsurprising that he would want to extend that power to his army. The Man-Serpent Ashes confirm that their creation came after Rykard was devoured:

"Spirit of a deformed man-serpent that wields a whip of magma. It is said that long ago, the elder serpent that dwelled on Mt. Gelmir devoured a demigod, and the birth of the man-serpents followed."

- Man-Serpent Ashes

One can only be a Serpent King if there are serpent subjects, but how did these beings come to pass? We can learn more from one of the manor's inhabitants, Rya. Rya initially seems to be a young girl who serves Lady Tanith. However at one stage we walk into her room and she doesn't realize that she isn't hiding her true form, that of a serpent. She then confides in us:

"Lady Tanith is my mother. I am told I was born by the grace of a glorious king. That my mother cherishes this form I inhabit. I am proud of what I am. But people are

cruel. If they saw my true form, they wouldn't speak to me. And so I assume a guise when seeking new recruits. But you are not like the rest. My serpentine form, and the name Zorayas, were secrets known only to Lady Tanith and I. Now I share the secrets with you, as well." - Rya the Scout

This is a half-truth told to Rya by her "mother," and Rya has suspicions herself after she realizes there are other Man-Serpents in the hidden part of Volcano Manor. At her insistence, we explore Volcano Manor and find the ghoulish Prison Town. This is the place where victims are dumped after being abducted. Once a home to Rykard's inquisition, it is clear this area is now being used as a black site for horrific experimentation. Eventually, when we find our way to the Temple of Eiglay, we find a disturbing relic named the Serpent's Amnion:

"Amnion from the mother's womb which cradled the poor unwanted offspring of a repellent birthing ritual. It will never dry out, remaining damp indefinitely."

- Serpent's Amnion

We pass this item to Rya and she recognizes that she was born from this, meaning that she was born of a "repellent birthing ritual." Given the item was displayed on the altar of the Temple of Eiglay as an object of import, the implication is that Rya was the first of the Man-Serpents, and perhaps this is why she is closer to human than the



Grace Given

The corpses found throughout Prison Town tell us that not everyone was devoured. Perhaps these victims met their end via experimentation?

others. Later she confirms that she was born of some human-and-serpent hybridisation:

"Oh, it's you... I'm afraid... there is something I must tell you. I was an unwanted child. Born not of grace, but of a hideous ritual. Something that can never be accepted, not by men, nor serpents." - Rya the Scout

Finally, at the conclusion of her quest, Rya leaves behind a talisman called Daedric's Woe:

"Disturbing likeness of a woman whose skin was flayed. She smiles with a serene tenderness... It is said that this woman, named Daedric, indulged in every form of adultery and wicked pleasure imaginable, giving birth to a myriad of grotesque children." - Daedric's Woe

This is clearly Rya's true mother, the mother of the Man-Serpent race who took part in an unholy ritual that allowed her to give birth to the new hybrid race and Rykard's new army. This is part of the

reason Rykard will have commissioned the Abductor Virgins. Yes, he will have needed victims to devour, but he will also have needed subjects for conversion. I think their design reflects this aim, as it takes the form of a woman wrapped in snakes and holding a child. Perhaps this is representative of his new serpentine children.

The corpses found throughout Prison Town tell us that not everyone was devoured. Could these victims have met their end via experimentation? Indeed, throughout Volcano Manor we find human NPCs whose heads explode with poison when we strike them. Are these failed attempts at Man-Serpents? Or their immature form?

A lot of the Man-Serpents are armed with magma weapons – clearly an extension of Rykard's study of Gelmir hexes. These are the perfect soldiers for Rykard, then, a reflection of his depraved form and the culmination of all of his research. Unlike his knights, they would have no problem in serving a serpent lord.

The other denizens of Volcano Manor also speak to Rykard's depravity and his willingness to make allies in unusual places. There are two Omenkillers present in Prison Town, one by a pile of corpses in the center of town and one in the guest hall. It is clear that these beings are some useful extra muscle that Rykard has decided to put to work, overseeing the burning of



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spent corpses and guarding the “guests”. But why would Omenkillers align with Rykard? Rykard aims to overthrow the Erdtree Order and its current king, who happens to be an Omen, Morgott the Grace-Given. Surely Morgott would be target number one for those who hunt the Omen, and thus it is little surprise they have aligned with one as blasphemous as Rykard.

This Guest Hall appears to be little more than a dungeon that houses Albinaurics. All of these Albinaurics are seen in various stages of torture: some are chained, some are in racks and others are forced to wear the Black Dumpling.

“Mask forced on a victim’s head to lend torture an extra degree of cruelty. It magnifies one’s fears and makes them acutely aware of all forms of pain... When the Black Dumpling goes on, the torturer no longer seeks answers; only to inflict suffering without hope of relief.” - Black Dumpling

This is why these Albinaurics act in a crazed, violent fashion. They have been driven into utter madness. Yet we do need to ask what Rykard’s interest in Albinaurics is. This could just be an act of wanton cruelty. We have already discussed the prejudice and harsh treatment these beings face throughout the Lands Between, after all. However, I believe Rykard is likely more interested in their artificial nature. Their presence makes sense in the context of Rykard’s interest in

creating a new race. Could it not be the case that in the early stages of his Man-Serpent program, he would have examined and experimented on a race that was also created by human hands? Perhaps he wanted to uncover the secret of creating life, by pushing them to their mental and physical limits, peeling them apart and dissecting them.

In one of the rooms of the Guest Hall we find the Albinauric Mask:

“Made from the largely unaltered hide of a young Albinauric... A far cry from godskin, this Albinauric hide mask is the product of malicious mockery.”

- Albinauric Mask

The direct reference to “godskin” implies that it is the resident Godskin Noble who is responsible for the skinning of this poor Albinauric, though the quality of material is no doubt considered poorer than legitimate godskin. This is clearly just an act of sadism by the noble, creating a parody of “fine” apparel. I suggested earlier that the Godskin presence here can be explained by potentially linking the serpent to the Godskin Apostasy. Therefore this is just the renewal of an ancient alliance. A more simple interpretation is that it just makes sense for the Godskin and the nearby Blackflame Monk to align with Rykard, as they are both after the same thing: the destruction of the gods.

However, if the Godskins are the product of artificial life as I suggest, are



Grace Given

they also here as an expert assistant for Rykard’s human-serpent experimentation? After all, the Godskin Noble himself is an example of serpent-human hybridisation performed successfully.

I also believe that Rykard was responsible for the creation of the Fingercreepers, the crawling hand-like enemies who wear rings. I have a few reasons for believing so. Firstly, we know Rykard has an interest in creating life-forms to replace his army, and secondly, we find these hands *mainly* in areas associated with him: Mt. Gelmir and Caria Manor. The latter of these could be explained by Rykard still caring for his sister Ranni, with whom he had once allied during the Night of the Black Knives.

More importantly, these things have an unnatural amount of fingers, much like Rykard’s serpentine hands, and they wear rings similar to him. Even more conclusive is the Ringed Finger, a grotesque finger that clearly comes from a Fingercreeper:

“Bludgeon made of an enormous finger sheathed in several heavy rings. Thought to have been cut from an ancestor of the Fingercreeper. Some life yet remains in this legacy of an ancient act of blasphemy, as evidenced by the barely perceptible warmth it still exudes.” - Ringed Finger

The fact the word “blasphemy” is used here is proof enough for me. But how did he make them? Perhaps they are literally

cut from his hand and they then regrew like a lizard’s tail. It is clear that Rykard has an unnatural number of fingers now. Who knows what his bizarre physiology is capable of. Nonetheless, they are powerful golems, and they certainly round out Rykard’s unconventional forces.

Yet for all these efforts, it seems that after the massive assault on Mt. Gelmir by Leyndell forces, Rykard was effectively boxed in. Yes, his enemies had taken massive casualties, but he simply wasn’t strong enough to defeat the other players on the board. So his plan moved into a new stage, when the Tarnished returned to the Lands Between.

THE RECUSANTS

When we finally meet Rykard, we can see bloody corpses emanating from his body and sword. The sword’s description reads:

“Sacred sword of Rykard, Lord of Blasphemy. Remains of the countless heroes he has devoured writhe upon the surface of this blade. Now they share the same blood, bound together as family. Some HP is restored upon defeating an enemy.” - Blasphemous Blade

These people have been devoured. They still live and they lend their strength to the collective body of the serpent who is being piloted by the will of Rykard – the dominant soul who exists within



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this twisted family. This horrific melding process is described by Rykard's Rancor:

"The terrible power of Rykard, Lord of Blasphemy... These spirits manifest from the rancor of heroes who met a violent end. The lord granted them an audience, whereupon they were welcomed by the maw of the great serpent – and within the serpent's bowels, they became the lord's kin." - Rykard's Rancor

This process is so horrific that the "rancor" of the victims can be manifested as spirits by Rykard and directed as offensive missiles. The suffering of these absorbed champions just cannot be overstated. It's a living hell from which there is no release.

Yet it is clear from the description of the Blasphemous Blade that Rykard desires "heroes". The stronger the victim, the stronger the boon. Thus, in the age following the Shattering, when the Tarnished began to return to the Lands Between, Rykard set up a new system to gather the strongest to his side. It would be an elite brotherhood gathered under the pretense of rebellion: the Recusants.

We receive a letter from the Recusants via Rya. As a promising Tarnished, we might join the "family of champions." Bernahl's final speech is a good insight into the motivations for joining up:

"O Greater Will, hear my voice. I am the recusant Bernahl, inheritor of my brother's will, and you will fall to my blade.

We refuse to become your pawns. Consider this fair warning." - Knight Bernahl

This is a faction of Tarnished who refuse to be used by the Roundtable Hold and the Two Fingers. Bernahl's hatred for the Greater Will seems to come from his own attempt to become Elden Lord. His armor description reads:

"Beasts are drawn to champions, and to lords. And this armor befits a champion worthy of becoming a lord. And that is what Bernahl was. Until his maiden threw herself into the fire." - Beast Champion Armor

Is this perhaps referring to the part of the Elden Lord's path where your maiden must burn as kindling for the Fell Flame, much as Melina does for us? Did Bernahl resent this sacrifice so much that he refused to continue down the path of a lord anymore? It would certainly explain why he is so resentful of the Greater Will making "pawns" out of mortals.

There is also the misfit Patches. This is a man with a strong sense of individuality, and thus it is no surprise he resents having his choices made for him:

"Are you surprised? That I belong to the Volcano Manor. I always hated the gibberish about lost grace and the laughable Two Fingers. I thought I could lend a hand in unmasking the charade." - Patches

It becomes clear quite early on that the Recusants adopt Rykard's classic philosophy



Grace Given

of "taking" in order to achieve the Erdtree's destruction. Bernahl, one of the most decorated Recusants, can describe the organization's beliefs better than I:

"You... What in heaven's name are you doing here? The Volcano Manor is a pit of recusants who spit at grace and hunt our own kind." - Knight Bernahl

They are a group of rebels who have rejected the Erdtree and grace, and thus will hunt fellow Tarnished who are largely aligned with the Two Fingers in order to claim their power. The code is so literal in the application of "taking" that Bernahl understands that the player killing Rykard is all part of the cycle:

"So. You killed Rykard? I harbour you no ill will. The strong take. Such is our code." - Knight Bernahl

This explains why, despite being comrades, Knight Bernahl will invade you at Farum Azula. He is just taking your

strength as per the code. This is described by Lady Tanith as the "path of the champion," the necessary road one must walk to attain true strength:

"Never forget. That the recusant fights to tread the path of the champion. The way is tainted, but for this very reason, it is the true path to valour." - Tanith, Volcano Manor Proprietress

The Recusant philosophy is also very self-aware. They know they walk a bloody, heretical and unpleasant path and they know that it is necessary in order to overthrow the current Order:

"To take power and make it his own, the recusant must hunt his own kind. To raise the flag of revolt against this sanctified pillaging. We recusants must become the most wretched of predators. All you can do is laugh." - Knight Bernahl

Bernahl uses some interesting language here that reflects what is said in the Taker's Cameo. This is sanctified pillaging. The gods take what they want, and so to rebel against it, the Recusants must also take part in the system they wish to overthrow by doing the distasteful act of hunting their kin. The strong take from the weak and ultimately the Recusants believe that after they have walked the bloody road of the champion they will rise in rebellion:

"Though we may yet fulfil an old promise. We hunted our own kind, and took

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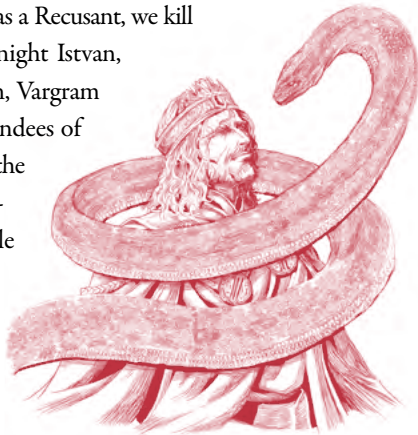
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what was theirs. And with everything in hand, the time has come to rise, against the Erdtree.” - Knight Bernahl

There is another goal that is achieved through their actions. They are disposing of Tarnished who are aligned with the Roundtable, or at least those who have rejected their invitations. Through the course of our missions as a Recusant, we kill Tarnished like Old Knight Istvan, Great Horned Tragoth, Vargram and Wilhelm – all grandees of the Roundtable. Thus the Recusants are weakening their enemies while strengthening themselves. It’s a very powerful message: become a champion and deny the Greater Will another pawn in its game. And yet, by buying into this, the Recusant may become a pawn of Tanith and Rykard.

As we become stronger and we complete our missions, Tanith encourages us to continue to grow to the point where we may earn an audience with the Lord Rykard:

“If you follow this heroic path, one day the Lord will see you. The Lord’s visits with our champions are always a spectacle. I cannot come a day too soon!”
- Tanith, Volcano Manor Proprietress



This sounds like an honor, a meeting of two kindred spirits and a chance to meet a legendary demigod in person. However, upon being delivered to Rykard we quickly learn the truth: the road of champions is there just to prepare a worthy meal for Rykard. Rykard wants more strength, and the more powerful the champion, the more strength he devours. In other words, the Recusants are an efficient way for Rykard to coalesce power into a few individuals whilst also weakening his enemies. This is the true “family of champions” that was mentioned in our initial invitation: a seething mass of flesh and fang.

Of course, we refuse to be devoured and become just another appendage in this abomination, and so with Serpent-Hunter in hand, we finally put this disturbed being to rest. The Volcano Manor collapses soon after and, despite Rykard’s depravity, I am always sad at the conclusion of this quest. After all, it is one place you can feel some sort of camaraderie (as well as a couple of cozy fires) in the Lands Between. Patches leaves, Bernahl declares his intent to rise up only to later die at



Grace Given

our blade, and Lady Tanith is left bereft. Despite her duplicity, it is hard not to feel something during her final speech:

“You... It’s true then. You’ve defeated our Lord. No, I must thank you. Our Lord was yet weak. You have taught us that. Defeat is not the end. Our Lord is immortal, and will one day rise again, stronger. Until then, I must stay the path, and do my part. I will leave the Volcano Manor before long. I suggest you do the same. I will miss these encounters. The champion who walks the tainted path shines all the more. I always was an admirer. This is farewell. Perhaps we will meet again, along the path.”
- Tanith, Volcano Manor Proprietress

Even after the slaying of her lord, her love, she respects the code. Rykard tried to take our power and instead we took his, as per his own philosophy. Yet, sadly, Tanith does not leave the Manor and tries to pursue a new path. We find her in Rykard’s chamber, eating what remains of his writhing corpse:

“Oh, you... Allow me some time. Our lord’s carcass is vast and not easily consumed. Dear Rykard, please find purchase within me, I wish to be your serpent; your family. One day, let us devour the gods together.”
- Tanith, Volcano Manor Proprietress

Tanith is clearly utterly broken by Rykard’s death, and wrongly assumes that by eating him, his visage and consciousness will once again manifest in her body as

it did in the snake’s. In reality it was the nature of the snake that allowed this union to take place, not Rykard’s powers.

Tanith is a fascinating character all told, and one can’t help but admire her loyalty to Rykard even when he defiled his flesh and took on a new form. Even Patches, an irreverent character in every single game he appears in, seems to respect Tanith. After risking his life to retrieve the Dancer’s Castanets from the Shaded Castle, he urges you to return to Tanith and help restore her sanity:

“I should have stuck to what I know best... No matter. I know I-I can trust you. Gullible, yes, but a good soul. Make certain that Tanith gets this. Oh, it’s nothing, it’s just... Makes me sick to see her all bent out of shape. C’m on, Tanith, back on your high horse, where you belong.” - Patches

Sadly, not even this act of kindness can bring her back from the brink. Even so, it is a very moving moment from a character who usually doesn’t show decency.

Rykard starts off as a man with lofty ambitions, who needs great power to achieve them. Yet because he gets addicted to the process of accumulating power, he doesn’t actually achieve anything in the end, nor does he leverage any of the power he gains. He is just a symbol of gluttony, a deadly sin made manifest. Nonetheless he remains one of the most compelling characters in all of *Elden Ring*.



Chapter 22: Malenia and the Scarlet Rot

Before discussing Malenia herself, I believe it is critical to understand what the adherents of the Scarlet Rot expect to achieve. From Gowry:

“Since Malenia fought Radahn, and the great scarlet flower blossomed in Aeonis, I have dedicated myself to her. And to the resplendence of the Order of Rot. The cycle of decay and rebirth.” - Sage Gowry

So the Scarlet Rot, to those who venerate it, is a vehicle for a cycle of decay and rebirth. Disease brings death, but the carcass

of the dead teems with new life and so the cycle continues. As we will see, a lot of the things associated with the Scarlet Rot, such as butterflies and blooming flowers, are symbolic of these themes of rebirth.

The death-bringing aspect of the Scarlet Rot is especially clear when we see the wasting properties of the rot in game. The Rot Pot item description aptly describes these effects:

“The rot bubbles up from the Swamp of Aeonis, and eats away at life like a vicious plague.” - Rot Pot



Grace Given

It is a plague that eats away at flesh, as we see in Malenia and Millicent, who have essentially become infection vectors. They have had their limbs consumed by the Scarlet Rot. We can also see how the infection can devour someone’s brain, corroding them from the inside out, until they are little more than a rabid beast. Such is the fate of both Radahn and Ekzykes.

This is not a natural disease. It is an aspect of the cosmic being known as the Outer God of Rot, and as such it cannot be as easily cured. Gowry comments on the fact that even the gods could not stop it:

“The rotting sickness that afflicts Millicent has no cure. When the Erdtree flourished, even the demigods could not stave off its effects, despite their nigh godhood.” - Sage Gowry

The only things that appear to have any effect on forestalling the rot are fire and Miquella’s Unalloyed Gold. Even then, fire only seems to have a limited utility. Unless the infected are completely burned away, they can still be animated by living plague, as seen by the plague zombies.

I think we can see how unnatural this infection is by looking at the effect it has on the beings known as the Crystalians. These are inhuman life-forms that do not have fleshy bodies, and yet they can still become riddled with the Scarlet Rot. I wonder if this explains the presence of Putrid Crystalians at the Haligtree; it’s

as if the Scarlet Rot now controls these very unusual life-forms.

What of the rebirth that follows? This aspect is represented by the various fungi we see in areas afflicted by the Scarlet Rot. We see truth in what Gowry says: new life is springing from that which is broken down by the Scarlet Rot.

The prevalence of mushrooms in rot-afflicted areas implies the rot itself is some kind of cosmic fungal infection. Wherever you find rot, you find mushrooms. Living beings that have been saturated with the rot sprout mushrooms from their festering flesh. Even Miquella’s revered Haligtree was no match for the overwhelming influence of the rot. With Malenia returned from her conflicts, she has brought the wasting sickness to the tree itself.

I believe that the presence of an Erdtree Avatar at Ephael implies that the Haligtree is itself a sapling of the Erdtree, as the description of the Staff of the Avatar reads:

“The avatars, emerging in the wake of the Elden Ring’s shattering, were determined to protect the withering Erdtree’s offspring.” - Staff of the Avatar

The very fact the Scarlet Rot has infested not only the avatar but this tree is a testament to its potent and devastating nature. The rot has hollowed out the Haligtree and completely taken over its carcass – a far cry from the idealized tree



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we see represented in the symbolism of Miquella's people.

Aside from the fungi, other examples of life appear to form in the Scarlet Rot, such as the Pests and the Giant Ants. The latter of these is implied to be connected to the rot through the Antspur Rapier. This would explain why they infest the underground areas and the Haligtree. The Pests themselves are the most closely connected to the rot, especially since they are also referred to as the Kindred of Rot.

Interestingly, however, these Pests were not born of the Lake of Rot nor from the Outer God of Rot, but from Malenia directly. As such, they are often referred to as the children of the goddess. These pests seem evocative of a type of carrion life, an insectoid lifeform that flourishes in the decaying remains of other life.

Yet these creatures are not completely mindless beasts, as we learn from the item description of the Pest's Glaive:

"Though men might recognize the keen intellect of the pests evidenced by this spear's uncanny design, it will never be understood by them." - Pest's Glaive

Indeed, we see them participating in behavior only exhibited by sentient life, such as guarding Millicent, whom they see as a holy vessel for the Scarlet Rot. They wield weapons they have constructed and they worship objects and locations, such

as the holy relic of the Scorpion's Stinger in the Grand Cloister and at the cult site within Sellia Crystal Tunnel. Additionally, we see them serving peacefully beside other servants of the Haligtree.

One of the constant indicators of the rot's presence that we see in-game are butterflies. In the depths of the rotten Haligtree and the Swamp of Aeonia there are butterflies aplenty. The imagery here is once again pretty clear, as butterflies are symbolic of rebirth. This is hammered home with Malenia's transformation into the Goddess of Rot, when she emerges from a cocoon as a winged being. Interestingly, all these Aeonian Butterflies seem to be part of Malenia:

"According to myth, these butterflies were once the wings of the Goddess of Rot herself." - Aeonian Butterfly

When Malenia transforms into the Goddess of Rot, her wings appear to be made from these butterflies. This poses a difficult lore quandary and one I will seek to explain as we move onward.

Given these butterflies already exist before we force Malenia to transform during our fight, it means that she must have already transformed at least once, so that these butterflies could break off from her wings and infest the Lands Between. I suggest that each time she blooms, a facet of her god form comes into being, much as it does in her fight with us. Ultimately,



Grace Given

I believe that her transformation during our battle with us is actually only the second bloom, rather than the final third bloom that most people seem to assume. More on this later.

So the Aeonian Bloom has literally wrapped its tendrils through all of Caelid, spreading death and disease but also new forms of life. This is the vision of the world that the Servants of Rot would have brought about: a world of constant death and rebirth. It is an ideal encapsulated in the description of Poison Armament:

"Those who dwell within poison know rot all too well. The death that begets life, that comes to all equally. That is to say: it is the cycle of rebirth put into practice." - Poison Armament

Who is really behind all of this? Let's turn to the history of the Scarlet Rot that predates even Malenia's birth.

THE OLD LORDS OF ROT

The Outer God of Rot is mentioned as such in the Blue Dancer Charm, which tells us that the legendary Blind Swordsman sealed the God of Rot away in an age past.

We will return to the Blind Swordsman later, but the important aspect to remember for now is that this outer god is explicitly described as a real being. It is later referred to in the Scorpion's Stinger item description, which itself is said to be a physical remnant of the Outer God of Rot.

The physical presence of the Scorpion's Stinger seems to go against the normal state of these outer gods: it is an implied physical form. This relic is now the holy medium for the Pests who worship this aspect of their ultimate creator deep within the Grand Cloister, an ancient ruin engulfed by the Lake of Rot that exists beneath the surface.

Malenia is responsible for the Scarlet Aeonia in Caelid, but the Lake of Rot has no ties with her. It is nowhere near any of the sites where she has bloomed or visited. I would suggest that the Lake of Rot is an earlier manifestation of the Scarlet Rot that predates the Swamp of Aeonia, and it was no doubt gestated by the outer god itself, given we find its relic in this area. I also get the impression that the Lake of Rot is a more mature version of the Scarlet Rot. It is Scarlet Rot in pure, perfect, liquid form.





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I believe that this first instance of the Scarlet Rot gave rise to a movement that long ago championed its cause. Just look at the description for the Mushroom Crown item, also found in the Lake of Rot:

“Mushrooms found growing all over the body. These overgrown mushrooms form a towering headpiece... Long ago, great lords served the scarlet rot. Perhaps such fungal bodies served as their crowns.”
- Mushroom Crown

This is one of those item descriptions that just has massive implications for the game’s lore as a whole. It suggests that there was once a civilization of people who worshiped the rot, having hierarchy and numbers enough to give rise to these lords who wore these mushroom crowns as a symbol of their allegiance. One can’t help but imagine what this community would have once been like: people infected by mushrooms much like the Servants of Rot we see today, a people led by Lords of Rot, all in the presence of this scorpion god.

Of course, this rot empire would not have contained the Kindred of Rot, as they would be born later in the Caelid swamp. Their presence here now can be easily explained by their intimate connection to the rot, and so some would be drawn here by the presence of the lake and the relic beyond.

To me, the location of the Mushroom Crown, the Scorpion’s Stinger and this

massive body of rot suggests that this was the center of this old rot kingdom. The description of the crown says that this was “long ago,” which fits in nicely for an event that takes place prior to Malenia’s birth. Indeed, reinforcing the Scarlet Rot’s pre-dating Malenia’s involvement is the item description of the Antspur Rapier:

“Scarlet rot is an old legend, of which Maleigh Marais of the Shaded Castle was a private believer. And indeed, he eventually found his own personal goddess.”
- Antspur Rapier

It is an “old legend,” and the events in Aeonina are more recent. This implies that the Scarlet Rot has long predated Malenia.

Let’s bring this all together. Deep underground we see that the presence of this Outer God of Rot manifested, and the first instance of the Scarlet Rot would one day grow into the Lake of Rot. Some, seeing the promise of Scarlet Rot, would become Servants of Rot, led by lords among them. For these people it must have seemed as though the ascension of their Order was inevitable, given the actual physical presence of their god.

Alas, this hope was something that would soon be snatched away from them. Unfortunately for those of the rot, agents of the flowing waters were moving against them. From the Scorpion’s Stinger item description we learn that the outer god would become “sealed”, and we can learn



Grace Given

more of this event from the Blue Dancer Charm:

“The dancer in blue represents a fairy, who in legend bestowed a flowing sword upon a blind swordsman. Blade in hand, the swordsman sealed away an ancient god - a god that was Rot itself.” - Blue Dancer Charm

This is another bombshell piece of lore, so let us unpack it one piece at a time. We see that it was the Swordsman of the Flowing Blade who would defeat the outer god, sealing them away. I take this to mean that he removed the outer god’s physical form from the mortal plane. Significantly, this swordsman seems to be the same warrior who would go on to be Malenia’s mentor, as we learn from the Prosthesis-Wearer Heirloom, which we will return to later.

We can see this warrior’s techniques in Malenia’s own style, most clearly her Waterfowl Dance. Again, the dancer’s technique, a flowing move, seems to have some sort of power over the rot, as well as a connection to the flowing waters.

We learn this from the Blue Cloth Set, the set for the warrior starting class that also seems to refer to the Warrior of the Flowing Blade, due to the language used and the use of the color blue:

“The blue color of its fabric symbolizes brisk waters, as fluid and flowing as the sword in the hand of its wearer. Just as still waters turn foul, stagnation leads to

decay. Warriors must remain ever drifting.” - Blue Cloth Vest

So the blue is again representative of flowing waters, a color used in reference to the fairy and the Warrior of the Flowing Blade. Flowing sword movements are therefore evocative of fresh, moving waters in opposition to stagnant and still water. A favorite theme returns.

It now makes sense that this warrior was able to ward away the Outer God of Rot using the purifying techniques of his flowing blade. This clearly means that the fairy is a force connected to flowing water and exists in opposition to the power of decay found in the Scarlet Rot.

But who is this fairy, who is never mentioned again in any other in-game lore? Thanks to Reddit user NamelessSinger, we may well have an answer¹.

In a Reddit post on this subject, NamelessSinger suggests that the fairy is none other than an embodiment of the Siofra River itself. This already fits in with the flowing water themes we have picked up on. But more importantly, NamelessSinger points out that Siofra is Gaelic for fairy, tying up nicely with the Blue Dancer Charm, which credits a fairy as the origin of the Blind Swordsman’s flowing sword.

This works neatly, because in various European folklore, especially in Celtic mythology, fairies are often seen as

¹ Reddit post “The Blue Dancer Fairy is the Siofra River“ by u/NamelessSinger: bit.ly/4c0KJY5



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metaphysically tied to water. So I do believe it was the Siofra River that gave the dancer his flowing techniques that drove away the Outer God of Rot: the flowing natural water versus the stagnant rot.

Now that is one hell of a legacy to be burdened with as you choose the warrior class! And it returns me to the armor description that describes the warrior as nomadic. Looking at the Curved Sword Talisman, there is a figure depicted who we can assume to be the Blind Swordsman, given the talisman's description reads:

"It is said that a blind swordsman was the originator of this technique – the art of allowing one's opponent to strike so as to leave them vulnerable to a well-timed reply." - Curved Sword Talisman

This depiction of the swordsman is wearing the same garb as the warrior starting class, leading me to speculate that they are of the same tradition or tribe as the Blind Swordsman.

One final observation is the unusual white hair wig that appears to make up part of the cowl. While it could just be part of padding or insulation, one can't help but see it reflects the hair displayed in the Curved Sword Talisman. Perhaps this is one further homage to the Blind Swordsman and the tradition of those who follow in his footsteps.

With the outer god sealed and the rot forestalled for now, the dancer would keep his vigilance until the rot would surface again. This time it would take the form of Malenia.

AFFLICTED FROM BIRTH

Malenia's birth should have been an auspicious moment for the Erdtree royal dynasty and her Great Rune *should* have been the most sacred of all because of her parentage. The Remembrance of the Rot Goddess reads:

"Miquella and Malenia are both the children of a single god. As such they are both Empyreans, but suffered afflictions from birth. One was cursed with eternal childhood, and the other harbored rot within." - Remembrance of the Rot Goddess

So these children were born of a single god – a single being, the Marika and Radagon Rebis. This birth is so special that the Two Fingers would subsequently select Miquella and Malenia to be Empyreans as a result. They would become potential replacement gods.

The importance of Malenia's birth and its relation to her connection with the Scarlet Rot is elaborated on by Gowry:

"Queen Marika and her King Consort Radagon were blessed with twin demigods,



Grace Given

With the outer god sealed and the rot forestalled for now, the dancer would keep his vigilance until the rot would surface again. This time it would take the form of Malenia.

and Malenia was one of them. She was born an Empyrean, carrying the scarlet rot. An Empyrean...is no mere demigod. In the age of the Elden Ring, and Queen Marika, the precious Empyrean was born. A new god to forge a new Order. Since Malenia fought Radahn, and the great scarlet flower blossomed in Aeonian, I have dedicated myself to her. And to the resplendence of the Order of Rot. The cycle of decay and rebirth." - Sage Gowry

Gowry confirms that at the moment she was born, Malenia already carried the Scarlet Rot within her. This means that at some point between conception and her birth, the Outer God of Rot chose her to be its vessel. This makes sense. Given its defeat at the hands of the Swordsman of the Flowing Blade, the outer god would need a god to rule on their behalf, much like Marika does

for the Greater Will. The Outer God of Rot no doubt saw the potential in these twins.

Being a vessel for such a potent substance was clearly a massive burden. We can see the effect of the rot upon Malenia's body: she is covered in scars and scaly skin, and has even lost limbs to the advancing rot. This is why I find Malenia to be one of the most extraordinary, heroic and tragic figures in all of *Elden Ring*. She suffers so much right from birth, and yet still manages to rise up as one of the most powerful beings in an age, all while bravely containing the rot within herself.

The one joy she would find in her life was the pride she felt in her skill with a blade. Tragically, it is this pride that would undo all of her efforts to resist the rot and remain herself. Meanwhile, it would become a fixation for most of Miquella's life to find a cure to his sister's plight. Miquella first looked for answers within the tenets of the Golden Order, but in time he determined that the answer lay not with his father's Order nor with the Greater Will.

In the course of his work Miquella would develop his Unalloyed Gold, a purifying material that has the power to repel outer gods.

Sage Gowry has designs for Miquella's Unalloyed Gold. It isn't capable of curing the Scarlet Rot – especially for those who act as its vessel, such as Malenia and her Valkyries – but



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it is effective in holding back its advances. We see the effect of the Unalloyed Gold on Millicent firsthand. When we first meet her, she is basically unable to function at all as the rot eats away at her insides. However once she inserts the Unalloyed Gold into her flesh, she is given relief from its advances.

How Miquella is able to develop this cure is partly explained by Gowry himself:

“Well, well, this is a marvel indeed. The work of a true artisan... a meticulous, bold craftsman who grasps the essence of life.”
- Sage Gowry

Miquella understands the essence of life and how it can be affected by the powers of the outer gods. As discussed, the Scarlet Rot is no ordinary disease and cannot be treated in a medicinal way. It is the essence of an outer god, and so by using the Unalloyed Gold as a foil that blocks the outer god’s influence, one is able to forestall its corroding effects. At least, that is my interpretation.

Like Millicent, Malenia was clearly treated with the Unalloyed Gold to allow her to live a more normal life. We see proof of this in her prosthesis and armor, the item descriptions for each informing us that these too are made from the Unalloyed Gold. I also believe that the Unalloyed Gold Needle that we present to Millicent was once Malenia’s, and was the main tool that held back the power of her Scarlet Bloom.

This is all to buy Malenia more time while Miquella searches for a more permanent solution to her illness – something I believe is alluded to in the item description found within Malenia’s helmet:

“Malenia awaited Miquella at the foot of the husk. My brother will keep his promise. He possesses the wisdom, the allure, of a god - he is the most fearsome Empyrean of all.”
- Malenia’s Winged Helm

Here we see mention of a “promise.” To me it is quite clearly implied that Miquella’s promise is to search for a true and complete cure for her sickness – alas, a promise he would be unable to keep, due to the interference of Mohg. However, it may be that the Outer God of Rot *needed* Miquella’s interference in order to cultivate Malenia’s transformation into the goddess, rather than rotting away completely. More on this later.

This all highlights the incredible bond shared by these two twins. In *Elden Ring*, twins are often used as a sort of yin and yang, two opposites in balance, such as Mohg and Morgott. Miquella is purity and Malenia is decay, and even in cut content Miquella was once meant to represent abundance in opposition to Malenia’s rot. (I would refer you to Garden of Eyes’ excellent video on this subject².) Yet the opposing nature of these two siblings just seems to bring them together.

They were both born with afflictions, and they came together to lift each other up:



Grace Given

Miquella would use his fearsome intellect to help Malenia’s sickness, and Malenia would repay his devotion by compensating for his physical frailty by becoming his blade. Yet it would not only be Miquella who would watch out for Malenia. There was clearly another important influence on her in her early life: the Swordsman of the Flowing Blade. The Prosthesis-Wearer Heirloom talisman tells us about this relationship:

“Though born into the accursed rot, when the young girl encountered her mentor and his flowing blade, she gained wings of unparalleled strength.” - Prosthesis-Wearer Heirloom

This meeting was not a coincidence. Rather, the Swordsman of the Flowing Blade once again finds himself hunting down the source of the Scarlet Rot. In this case it happened to be a young girl, Malenia, and so he became her mentor, teaching her his combat techniques. The image of the talisman seems to show them both in sparring gear. We know already that the Blind Swordsman is a warrior of exceptional skill, and this is reinforced by the description of the Curved Sword Talisman which was quoted earlier.

This explains why Malenia would go on to be the greatest swordswoman of all the demigods. The wings mentioned in the Prosthesis-Wearer Heirloom are meant to symbolize her combat skill, as described by the Winged Sword Insignia:

“The wings symbolize Malenia and her undefeated prowess. Though she never knew relief from the accursed rot she was born into, her blade was forever beautiful – and relentless.” - Winged Sword Insignia

Yet while clearly symbolic of her power, I also believe that in the heat of combat people may have caught glimpses of her true winged form. This is especially clear if we look at the description of the Hand of Malenia:

“Malenia’s war prosthesis symbolized her victories. Some claim to have seen wings when the weapon was raised aloft; wings of fierce determination that have never known defeat.” - Hand of Malenia

Malenia’s winged goddess form is always close to the surface. These wings also explain the winged symbolism associated with Malenia, such as the wings on her helmet and those on the helmets of her Cleanrot Knights.

The unmatched swordsmanship of Malenia would lead to her becoming a renowned and feared hero. Exploits like making Godrick the Golden beg for his life would only increase her fame. This would give her a measure of pride and self worth, something to focus on rather than the rot eating away at her.

The Blind Swordsman’s tutelage to my mind is about far more than just making Malenia a skilled warrior, though. It was also about teaching her the rot warding

² “Elden Ring: Miquella DLC & Secret Boss Dialogue Revealed! (Datamining Cut/Unused Content)”
- Garden of Eyes



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techniques of the flowing blade. It is almost as if by using these techniques herself, the rot within her would be contained.

Regardless, with both Miquella's gold and the Swordsman's techniques, Malenia was able to develop into the mighty warrior that we see today. Alongside Radahn, she ranks among the most powerful of all. Despite being an Emphyrean herself, she seems to have put aside any ambitions for godhood, no doubt due to her affliction, and instead decided to acquiesce to her brother's authority. Yet the Scarlet Rot would have its due, and it would find new opportunity as conflict and chaos broke out in the Shattering.

A FLOWER BLOOMS

During the Shattering, despite Malenia's loyalty to her brother, she too appears to have thrown her hat into the ring. According to the story trailer for *Elden Ring*, it was she and Radahn who were the two last contenders standing. We know from a Sword Monument that she would also clash, albeit briefly, with Godrick the Golden, whom she would humble.

She would lead her personal warriors, the Cleanrot Knights, to invade Caelid. These knights were remarkably courageous:

"Winged helm of the Cleanrot Knights, celebrated for their undefeated campaign in

the Shattering. The Cleanrot Knights vowed to fight alongside Malenia, despite the inevitable, if gradual, putrefaction of their flesh.

Their acceptance of their fate made these battles the fiercest of all." - *Cleanrot Helm*

These warriors are truly remarkable. They choose to fight by Malenia's side, even though it will mean their slow, agonizing death. This description seems to imply that the inevitability of their death actually made them even more fierce in battle. It also makes it clear that these knights were known for being undefeated. We know that Malenia's warriors really pushed the Redmane forces to the brink, given that the Cleanrot Knights were able to wound Radahn himself, as we learn from the arrows he uses, called Radahn's Spears:

"Greatarrows used by General Radahn during the festival of combat. These are in fact the many spears with which he was stabbed by the Cleanrot Knights."

- *Radahn's Spear*

We can see these spears in Radahn's hide in the story trailer, so we know these wounds were inflicted by the Cleanrot Knights even before he was afflicted with the Scarlet Rot. The Cleanrot Knights were winning this battle. We can also get an idea of how vicious the fighting was during this conflict if we go to the War-Dead Catacombs, where the ghosts of each side seem to be stuck in an echo of that war.



Grace Given

Yet Malenia still had Radahn to contend with at this point, and he was clearly at the height of his strength. Despite using a portion of his power to hold back the stars, and a further portion to prevent his dear Leonard being crushed, Radahn still measures up to Malenia and fights her to a standstill.

It is by coming up against this mighty champion that Malenia becomes so desperate that she lets go of her pride to unleash the Scarlet Rot. Millicent states that, unable to defeat Radahn conventionally, Malenia abandons all that she is just to gain victory over him. Millicent is actually hoping to return to Malenia the Unalloyed Gold Needle that she currently harbors within herself. She

equates this needle with a sense of self, as if it holds back the rot enough for one to think clearly and rationally. Indeed, prior to having the needle, Millicent would invade and attack us in the Swamp of Aeonias, something that is not usually within her nature.

If we then apply this to Malenia, we can determine that she removed the Unalloyed Gold Needle from her flesh at this moment, so that she could unleash its power against this mighty opponent. This is why we find the needle right in the center of the swamp, broken. But in

doing this, she lost her sense of self, and is now very much at the mercy of the encroaching rot. Perhaps it explains why she attacks us when we meet, essentially without motive.

Indeed, the story trailer shows us this pivotal moment in real time. Malenia leaps on Radahn, seemingly piercing him with her sword before wounding herself and allowing her own, afflicted blood to run down the blade into his wound.



It is at this moment that Malenia's flower bloomed, a sort of nuclear reaction that unleashes the Scarlet Rot across Caelid and births the flower that would in time devour this region. This power is described

by the Scarlet Aeonias incantation:

"Creates a gigantic flower that blooms into an explosion of scarlet rot. Each time the scarlet flower blooms, Malenia's rot advances. It has bloomed twice already. With the third bloom, she will become a true goddess." - *Scarlet Aeonias*

This flower is a manifestation of the Scarlet Rot gestating within Malenia. Its blooming marks the transformation of Malenia from a bud of potential to the Goddess of Rot – something she and her brother have tried to resist.



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Having bloomed, Malenia would fall unconscious and would need to be carried back by one of her Cleanrot Knights:

“Finlay was one of the few survivors of the Battle of Aeonian, who in an unimaginable act of heroism carried the slumbering demigod Malenia all the way back to the Haligtree. She managed the feat alone, fending off all manner of foes along the way.”

- Cleanrot Knight Finlay Ashes

This effectively ends the battle. Malenia is put to sleep and Radahn begins to suffer from the Scarlet Rot. And this event is what makes Caelid what it is today: the taint of the rot has corrupted the land beyond repair. It's a preview of what the world would be like under the Order of Rot.

The Swamp of Aeonian was the site of the bloom that we see in the trailer. This is another example of superb visual storytelling: you can see exactly where this flower bloomed at Commander O'Neil's arena. Even from far away, you can see the great boughs of the plant twisting into the sky in the center of the swamp – ground zero.

From this site, the rot evidently spread throughout the land. We see the branches of the flower have spread throughout the swamp and all across Caelid, all originating from this plant in the swamp, and each branch itself holds Aeonian buds ready to bloom. Given the far reach of its branches, it should become clear that Caelid is doomed.

This is a powerful indicator of how dangerous Malenia is. Just one bloom was enough to unleash this flower that would grow and spread to effectively consume an entire region.

As we learn from Finlay's ashes, with their general incapacitated, not many Cleanrot Knights survived this conflict. Yet for the Redmane warriors, a new battle was about to begin: one against the land itself. The general himself has been lost to the Scarlet Rot, his mind destroyed. His warriors must continue his fight against the rot on his behalf:

“When they were driven to defeat by Malenia's scarlet rot, the Redmane Knights burned the crest on the left breast of their armor to indicate their resolve. ‘Alas, dear home, I shan't see you again! For our duty is to remain here, a bulwark against the blight.’” - Redmane Knight Armor

So we can see here that the Redmane warriors, dutiful to the last, saw that the battle had not ended and they took up fire to contain the spread. Again, fire does appear to halt the advance of rot:

“Even today, the survivors of Radahn's battalion employ fire to stave off the scarlet rot.” - Redmane Fire Pot

But these forces must also do battle against the resilient and dangerous beasts of Caelid. Right near the entrance, we see that a camp and caravan has been completely overrun by these monsters, the flesh



Grace Given

of the warriors being devoured by the time we arrive. This is a brutal war against an entire ecosystem, one built to erode human life. And from the ruined remains, new dangerous life will be sustained.

In retaliation, warriors hunt, kill and burn the mutated beasts of the Caelid wilds. These animals, able to survive and eat in a land polluted by Scarlet Rot, must be part of its ecosystem somehow. And as suggested by Zullie the Witch on X³, gigantism could be a symptom of the Scarlet Rot, explaining the unusual proportions of the crows and dogs in Caelid.

Regardless, it seems as though the warriors have been successful in their efforts to a degree, and have isolated the spread of the Scarlet Rot to Caelid. As we can see it effectively ends at the border between Caelid and Limgrave.

How have they achieved this? We know fire seems to at least hold back the infection, and between Caelid and Limgrave there is a smoldering wall. It seems that walls like this are how the Redmane soldiers have been able to slow the rot's advance.

Yet remember, the bloom had more consequences than the immediate devastation of Caelid. It was an act that brought new life in its wake. Malenia's Aeonian Swamp would raise her children, the Pests, but it would also birth a more intriguing and complex lifeform in the shape of her Valkyries. In

so many ways these daughters are closer to Malenia than anyone else, and so it is to Millicent and her sisters that we turn next.

THE VALKYRIES

Understanding Malenia's development can be difficult at times. Fortunately, we have close contact with one of her blood, Millicent. Having been born from the Goddess of Rot she, too, suffers in a similar fashion.

The cultivation and the journey of Millicent is perfectly in balance with what we expect from the Order of Rot: hers is the story of death and rebirth, her final Valkyrie form born from the death of Millicent. At the beginning of her journey we find that Millicent is wracked with constant pain and can barely function. It's even implied that in her pain she is consumed by anger; in her pre-healed state, Millicent will invade us in the Swamp of Aeonian.

For those who have done this quest and know Millicent, you'll realize this is not in keeping with her usual calm and reasonable behavior. If you inspect her invasion character model, you can see that this is pre-healed Millicent: her hair is unkempt and covers her face.

What do we really know of Millicent and her sisters? A good point to start is the Rotten Winged Sword Insignia:

3 X post by Zullie on the effects of Scarlet Rot: bit.ly/4e2azg6



Malenia and the Scarlet Rot

“A talisman depicting a raised prosthetic blade. An honor bestowed upon the Valkyries who serve the Goddess of Rot... The four sisters were born in the Swamp of Aeonian, and came to the Haligtree under the aegis of Gowry. And yet, those buds were doomed to never blossom.” - Rotten Winged Sword Insignia

These four sisters, the four that attack Millicent later in her quest, were born of the swamp – they are born of Malenia’s Aeonian rot. Later on in her quest, Millicent confirms that she is related to Malenia, yet does not know exactly how. The answer to this conundrum seems to be given by this Rotten Winged Sword Insignia. In a way the sisters are Malenia’s daughters, as they are born of the rot that she discharged in Caelid.

Gowry describes both Malenia and her connected daughters as buds getting ready to bloom, for after you provide Millicent with a prosthetic arm he says:

“This is a wonderful development. Thank you for your kindness. Now Millicent may fully realise her true warrior’s potential. Like her beautiful mother. Green and undeveloped, waiting to flower into magnificence. What a wondrous day that will be. In truth, before her, I’d never seen a bud of such superior quality. She might very well outshine her sisters.” - Sage Gowry

Describing the sisters as buds implies that, like Malenia, Millicent and the sisters have not reached their final form. Millicent herself seems to have more potential than her sisters, as mentioned by Gowry and by the Rotten Winged Sword Insignia talisman.

The term “Valkyrie” can give us a hint as to what we could expect from this sort of transformation. In Norse mythology Valkyries were not gods but rather beings who served the god Odin as winged maidens. These maidens would choose who would die in battle.

So Malenia would rise as a winged Goddess of Rot, and these daughters would transform into her Valkyries, her maidens of rot:

“She is to meet them very soon. Her sisters. And when she does, she’ll be defeated, surely, and begin to flower. Which is why... If you happen to be present for the girl’s fight with her sisters, I ask that you side with the sisters and kill Millicent. It must be done by your hand; no other. Millicent trusts you, rather deeply in fact. Sever that trust. Nurtured by betrayal, her bud will flower most vividly. When Malenia ascends to godhood, Millicent too shall be reborn. As a scarlet valkyrie.” - Sage Gowry



Grace Given

Like all flowers, they require cultivation – and in this case this is implied to be stress or emotional damage. Gowry suggests that Millicent’s heartbreak over your betrayal of her will turn her into a bud that will sprout an Aeonian Bloom, from which a new being will arise. Millicent seems aware that she is being prepared for a transformation. If you choose to side with her at the end of the quest, she says:

“Tell whoever put you up to this. That if I am to flower into something other than myself, I would rather rot into nothingness, as I am.” - Millicent

In the end, Millicent sees this transformation as the loss of herself. This is true, for if we do betray her, she will bloom, becoming just another part of the greater Scarlet Rot ecosystem, and that innocent girl will be lost forever. By letting her die on her own terms, she just rots away as herself – as Millicent – and breaks the cycle of rebirth.

For an Aeonian Valkyrie to bloom, they must die and be reborn as a Valkyrie from their death bloom, at the moment of Malenia’s ascension to godhood.

This has pretty huge implications for Malenia as well. If Malenia is reborn into the Goddess of Rot, does her own self die? This would certainly explain her desperation – and that of Miquella – to prevent this from happening.

Millicent’s Prosthesis makes it clear that her original form does die, but from this a new being will be reborn:

“The despair of sweet betrayal transformed Millicent from a mere bud into a magnificent flower. And one day, she will be reborn – as a beautiful scarlet valkyrie.” - Millicent’s Prosthesis

And if you do betray her and choose to kill her, as Gowry suggests, then her body will bloom into an Aeonian flower. The assumption is that from these remains of her old body, one day she will be reborn as a Scarlet Valkyrie. This is the path you should choose if you are a supporter of the Order of Rot. I would argue that another Valkyrie has already achieved this state. You can find a bloom outside of Malenia’s boss room with the Valkyrie’s Traveler’s Set right next to it.

To summarize: for an Aeonian Valkyrie to bloom, they must die in the right conditions and be reborn as a Valkyrie from their death bloom, at the moment of Malenia’s ascension to godhood.

In an ironic twist, the Order of Rot needs the Unalloyed Gold, something developed precisely to help defeat it. It’s an interesting, if confusing, idea to wrap



Malenia and the Scarlet Rot

our heads around, so let me explain by walking you through Millicent's quest.

As mentioned already, both Millicent and Malenia seem to suffer a great deal from the Scarlet Rot when untreated by Unalloyed Gold. By the end of the quest it is clear that without our intervention Millicent would rot away to nothing but a pile of flesh, as she does if you choose to help her and she subsequently removes the Unalloyed Gold Needle.

So if the rot was allowed to run its natural course then the host would eventually be disintegrated by it. And given these Valkyries are not the Goddess of Rot like their mother, I imagine they have far less tolerance for surviving its effects. Hence Millicent does indeed die from her affliction not long after removing the needle.

Clearly this is something that those who wish for an Order of Rot would not want, especially Gowry, who goes out of his way to make sure we intervene. There are two endings to Millicent's quest. There's one in which you let her die on her own terms by taking out the Unalloyed Gold Needle. Then there's the second ending, the one desired by Gowry, where she keeps the needle in, allowing her to bloom when she is killed by your hand.

If you choose the latter then both Malenia and Millicent have bloomed, reaching their potential as scions of rot. But both were only able to achieve this victory for rot with the help of Unalloyed Gold, using

a tool which once held back Malenia's potential. If you allow Millicent to take out the needle and rot to death on her own terms, then Gowry laments her decision to abandon the cycle of death and rebirth:

"Millicent, my daughter. Why would you take out the needle? You were so close. So very close. To becoming the fairest of all flowers. Would you disown us too? As your Mother did? We children of the scarlet rot?" - Sage Gowry

I feel that Malenia's evolution is slightly different, given that she is the vessel and Goddess of Rot herself, and removing the needle from Malenia is what allowed her to begin blooming. But for Millicent the rot is too overwhelming and this decision will lead to her death.

Yet who is the man who made this happen? The mysterious figure Sage Gowry seems central to the followers of rot, so let's examine him now, along with the modern rot faith.

GOWRY AND THE FAITHFUL

Sage Gowry is fast becoming one of my favorite characters in the game, as well as one of the most incomprehensible. However, he does give us a few different facts about himself.

First of all, he states that he was once a great sage in his day. This is backed up by the Sage Set:



Grace Given

"Thick burgundy robe. Attire of the wise sages who were deemed heretical. Evidence that the wearer was driven from town." - Sage Robe

In fantasy, sages are sometimes conflated with mages, and the item description here states Gowry was driven off. Given he is located right next to Sellia, I would speculate that he was a mage that once lived in Sellia. Indeed we do get evidence that Gowry is familiar with the town and its intimate details:

"I'd hoped to ask a favour, when one of your ilk came along. A strapping young Tarnished, able to cross the scarlet swamp of Aeonia. Don't fret, I'll provide fine recompense. Should you accept... I will teach you the secret of Sellia, the town you see there." - Sage Gowry

He is extremely well versed in Sellian magics, as one of the main rewards he provides after we help him is the ability to learn Sellian sorcery. He is also familiar with secrets of the town that only a member of that society would be aware of. Namely, he knows that Sellians are descended from the Eternals, and he knows how one is able to break the seals of Sellia. I think this is enough to quite heavily imply that Gowry was once a Sellian sorcerer, before he was driven from town for his heretical interest in the rot and rot incantations.

But there is far more to Gowry than meets the eye. I would speculate that he is now a rather important figure in the modern

cult of rot, collectively known as the Servants of Rot, as per the Rot Incantations. We know such a following exists due to the item known as the Faithful's Canvas Talisman, and the upgraded version, Flock's Canvas Talisman. Both have descriptions that read:

"A talisman bearing an icon that depicts a group of masked figures... The figures represent the flock at prayer, their firm belief in the intangible inspiring even the solitary founder of their religion. What is faith if not an affirmation?" - Faithful's Canvas Talisman

While this seems like a fairly generic description of any religion, both versions of this are found in locations tied to the Order of Rot. The first can be found in Sellia Crystal Tunnel, a cavern controlled by the Kindred of Rot. The talisman is found deep inside this tunnel network in what appears to be a cult room, as it is found at the foot of a stone altar that is a site of worship for the Pests.

The upgraded version, the Flock's Canvas Talisman, can be found on Gowry himself, firmly linking this talisman to the Cult of Rot. I think that this description is meant to indicate the existence of a faith related to the Scarlet Rot – something you probably won't even pick up on in your first playthrough, given we don't see much tangible evidence of such a thing.

However, belief in the rot is here. We see it in the form of a couple of ghosts which surround the Aeonian Swamp. One is the



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ghost venerating the swamp at the site of the first bloom, and praising Malenia in her journey to godhood. To those who believe in the rot, this would no doubt be holy ground, and it makes sense to find cult activity here. The second ghost is praising Malenia's sword-craft and the beauty of rot itself.

We also find a group of the Servants of Rot near the swamp, kneeling as if in holy communion with it. These servants are among the most devoted to the Order of Rot, for if we read the item description of the Mushroom Set we learn:

"Mushrooms found growing all over the body. These overgrown mushrooms have colonized the torso. To those enraptured by the scarlet rot, they are holy vestments that root one to the earth." - Mushroom Body

Another indicator of a rot faith is the Shaded Castle and House Marais. We learn from the Marais Mask and Marais Executioner's Sword that this line of nobles were castellans of the Shaded Castle, meaning they ruled the castle on behalf of the powers that be, presumably the royal family of the Erdtree. These items also tell us that they served as executioners, Elemer of the Briar being one such person who was sent here to be executed by the Marais.

The latest in this line of executioners is Maleigh Marais, who we can actually fight at a site outside of the castle itself. Maleigh is the castellan who would reduce

the castle to what it is now: a stronghold of the rot and a temple to its goddess, Malenia. We learn from his robes why he gravitated towards such worship:

"The sons of House Marais are all sickly born. Little wonder that Maleigh Marais would be so beguiled by the beautiful and fierce goddess who was born into rot." - Marais Robe

Being a sickly man himself, he is clearly enraptured by Malenia who, while also sickly, manages to be one of the most powerful beings in the world. Indeed, his cult ideas are certainly more focused around Malenia personally than on the grand plan of the Order of Rot. This is backed up by the description of the Valkyrie's Prosthesis:

"Golden prosthesis once used by the one-armed valkyrie. A masterwork of craftsmanship, with practice and skill it can be used as proficiently as a real arm. When Maleigh Marais, Lord of the Shaded Castle, embraced this prosthesis, he claimed to feel the presence of his personal goddess." - Valkyrie's Prosthesis

His worship of Malenia is clearly very personal to him, and this is why he has collected this relic of hers, as well as why he has a painting of her in the audience chamber of the castle.

This also explains why the castle is overrun with rot, Cleanrot Knights and Servants of Rot. Maleigh has given it over to Malenia's followers, and this has led to the castle collapsing under the weight of decay.



Grace Given

It should be clear by now that there are faithful who believe and serve the power of rot. Now let us return to Gowry himself.

Gowry has been dedicated to this cause since the battle of Caelid, when the Aeonian Flower bloomed. I would speculate that he was so overwhelmed by the event and the spread of the rot thereafter that he dedicated himself to the rot's cause immediately. Given he was a resident of Sellia, he would have had a first-hand view of the bloom and Malenia's battle; Sellia sits right on the edge of the Aeonian Swamp itself.

I would argue that this in turn is when he would be chased from Sellia, for harboring these heretical beliefs. And when the Valkyries would be born of the swamp, he would be there to act as a father figure before guiding them to their mother at the Haligtree, as described by the Rotten Winged Sword Insignia.

I believe that Gowry is the founding figure of this modern rot faith, as described by the Flock's and Faithful's Canvas Talisman. First, he is in possession of the more powerful version of the talisman. Second, he is the only person in the game who really fits the bill. He is wise, powerful, has an understanding of Rot Incantations and is intimately well-versed in the history of Scarlet Rot and also in what it stands for.

Additionally, there is a fact about Gowry that many may not have noticed. We don't

actually meet Gowry in person. If you strike him down before the conclusion of Millicent's quest, his body will die but transform into a Pest, and this process can be repeated more than once. This shows that he is not actually here. He is so powerfully connected to the rot that he is able to pilot the Pests from afar.

I know that there are people who believe that Gowry is the Outer God of Rot possessing the Pests in order to guide Millicent. And while I agree that this is an exciting proposition, I do not actually agree with it.

First, as I have shown, there is a fair bit of lore that suggests that Gowry is in fact a Sellian sorcerer. Second, I believe there is a line later in his quest that shows his subservience to Malenia, a subservience the Outer God of Rot would not show. Gowry refers to himself as one of the "children of the scarlet rot" if you choose to help Millicent die her own way. By referring to himself like this, he places himself alongside the rest of the faithful.

With this out of the way, it's time to examine Malenia's attitude to her own godhood, and her eventual fate.

THE GODDESS OF ROT

Malenia is an unwilling god. She has not embraced her near-divinity and has worked with her brother to rid herself of this burden. This is why Gowry and the



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other faithful, while loyal to her, lament her rejection of the rot:

“Millicent... Malenia... Do you detest us, so utterly?” - Sage Gowry

Her own children, the Kindred of Rot, are repeatedly described as abandoned, due to the fact their own mother has spurned their kind and the rot itself. Not for nothing the description of the incantation Pest Threads reads:

“A technique of the pale pests who crawl through the lands afflicted by scarlet rot; the abandoned children of the goddess.”

- Pest Threads

And yet, whether Malenia chooses it or not, the rot will have its due. As with Millicent, Malenia’s transformation is linked to the birthing of Aeonian scarlet flowers; she is a bud coming to blossom alongside her Valkyries. Specifically, her transformation appears to be linked to her flower blooming three times, as described by the Scarlet Aeonian incantation:

“Each time the scarlet flower blooms, Malenia’s rot advances. It has bloomed twice already. With the third bloom, she will become a true goddess.” - Scarlet Aeonian

The power of the rot within Malenia advances every time she unleashes its power in the form of an Aeonian Bloom, when her goddess form rises like a butterfly from its cocoon. Much like Millicent, as we have seen, Malenia’s final form would come at the cost of her original form dying. This is obviously something Malenia wants to avoid, as Millicent

does. Again, it is implied that the needle that is embedded in Millicent’s flesh was once embedded in Malenia’s, for Millicent says:

“There is something I must return to Malenia. The will that was once her own. The dignity, the sense of self, that allowed her to resist the call of the scarlet rot. The pride she abandoned, to meet Radahn’s measure.” - Millicent

Millicent implies that Malenia has essentially had her judgment clouded and lost her own will to the Scarlet Rot, and Millicent wishes to return this to Malenia. Specifically Millicent wants to return the needle that once provided this clarity, that allowed Malenia to be herself and to be free of the rot’s influence on her mind.

But she abandoned this pride to meet Radahn’s resolve, and indeed what do we find, crushed at the foot of the Aeonian flower itself? The broken needle – the needle or “the sense of self” that Millicent wishes to return to her mother figure. If you assist Malenia you can complete this quest for her: Millicent dies as herself and you can return this needle to what remains of Malenia.

Yet by the time we face Malenia, it is too late for any curative measures. We are forced into a confrontation that forces her to bloom another time.

I believe we get too carried away with the fact Malenia is referred to as the Goddess of Rot in her second phase. I believe this is only the second time she has bloomed and that



Grace Given



each time she blooms, her goddess aspect emerges.

The first bloom and appearance of her goddess form was in the Swamp of Aeonian, and we know that this is true as it was confirmed by the ghost NPC. It seems as though this is when Malenia first removed the needle, thus allowing her to unleash this form for the first time.

People often cite the bloom outside her boss room to be her second blooming, something which I now see differently. It’s clear this is another Valkyrie that has fallen and bloomed as an Aeonian flower. We can find the Traveler’s Set within its center, the same set worn by Millicent and her sisters.

If her fight with us was the third bloom and the only time that she has taken her full goddess form, then a lot of things in the world would not make sense. The first thing would be something I have already touched on: the Aeonian Butterflies.

We are directly told she has only bloomed twice – this is from the Scarlet Aeonian incantation, an item we get after defeating Malenia. There is also the fact that Malenia is already referred to as the “goddess” in multiple different sources, such as the lore pertaining to House Marais, and in most items regarding the Pests who are known as “the abandoned children of the goddess.”

Finally there is the fact that rot is all about the cycle of death and rebirth.

Does Gowry not

claim that Millicent will rise as a Valkyrie from her Aeonian Bloom that blossomed upon her death?

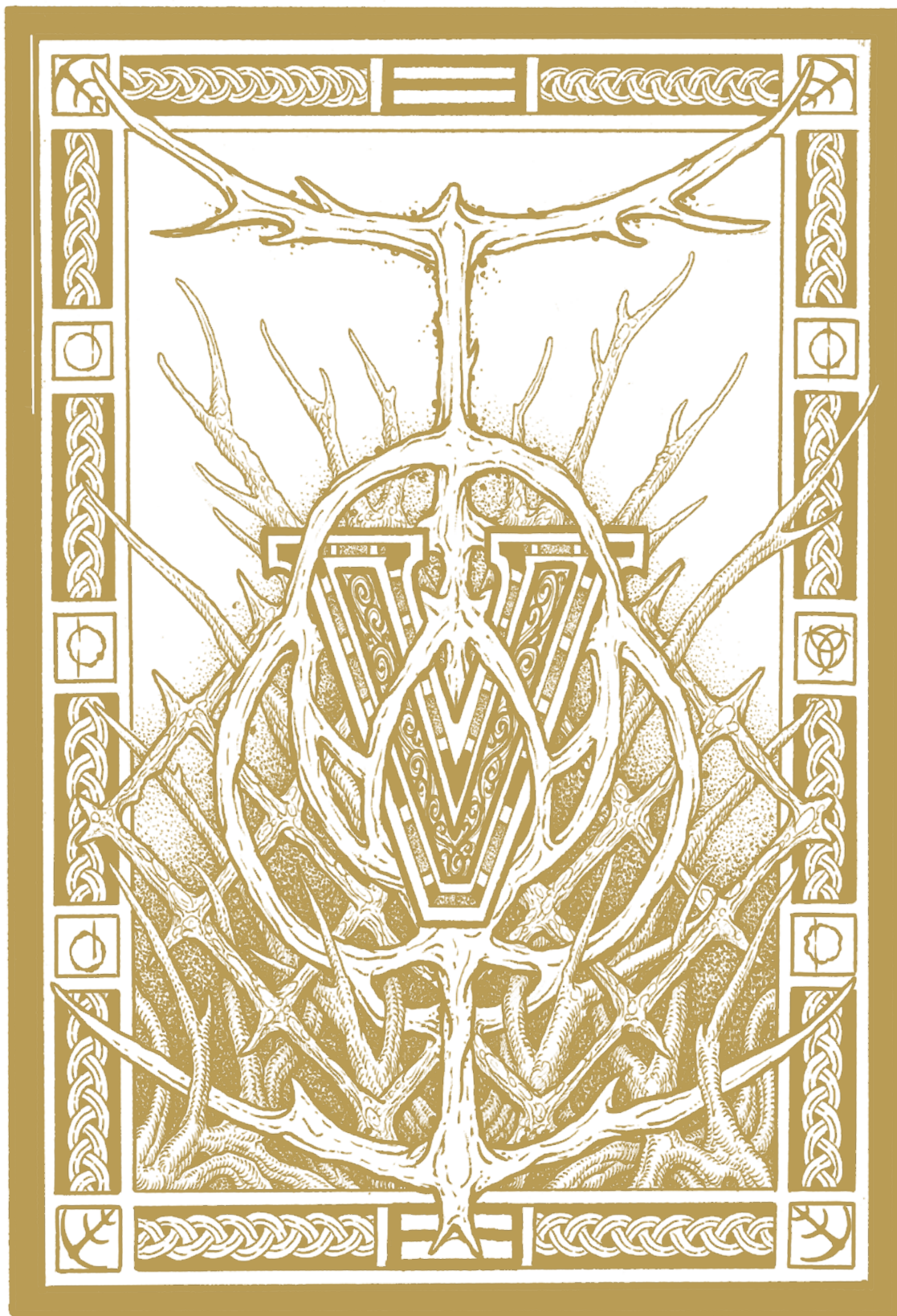
Well, upon Malenia’s death a similar flower blooms from her corpse. I believe that one day she will rise again from this bloom as a true Goddess of Rot.


On the rotten boughs of the Haligtree we find the Oracle Envoys, who we learn about from the Oracle Envoy Ashes:

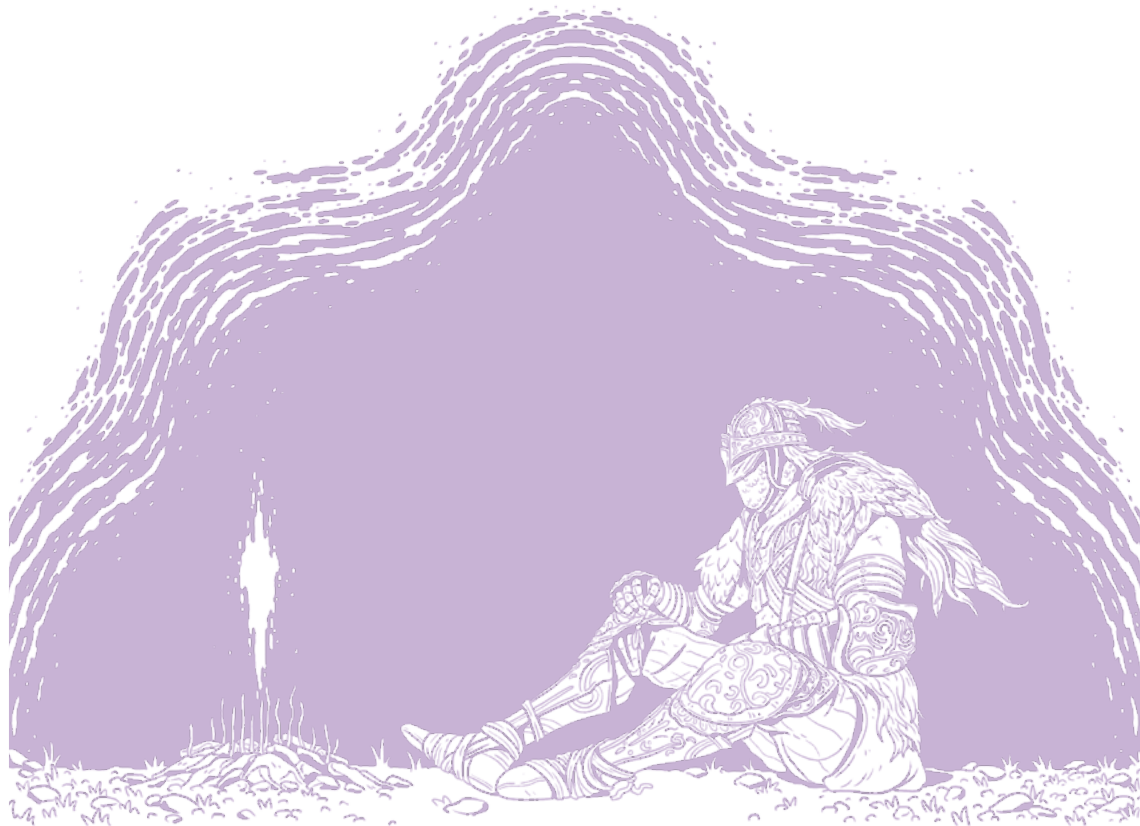
“Spirits of a monstrous band of musicians who employ sacred arts. It is said that when Oracle Envoys appear, playing their pipes, they do so to herald the arrival of a new god, or age.” - Oracle Envoy Ashes

I believe it is patently clear they are here for Malenia as, despite her efforts, despite her denial of what she is, her godhood is no longer a choice. It is nigh, and the Scarlet Rot will have its due.

Even as she falls to us, I believe that this is not the end. In fact it is just part of the cycle of death and rebirth. And one day the world will need to fear the true god of the Scarlet Rot.



PART V:
——
RETURN OF
THE
TARNISHED



Chapter 23: The Tarnished and Grace

Arise now, ye Tarnished. Ye dead, who yet live. The call of long-lost grace speaks to us all.” - Opening narration

Death is one of the first aspects of the lore that the player will stumble across in *Elden Ring*, even if they don't think about it too deeply. In an interview with Weekly Famitsu in March 2022, Miyazaki describes the Tarnished as descendants of those originally exiled.

“Miyazaki: The people who live in the Lands Between have a golden glow in their

eyes from the grace of the Erdtree. Some people, however, lost that glow, and they were called the Tarnished and exiled from the Lands Between. The player character and the other Tarnished who appear in the game are the descendants of such people. After the Elden Ring was shattered, the guidance of grace appeared to the Tarnished and others who could not die, telling them to return to the Lands Between, gain audience with the Elden Lord, and become the Elden Lord, and that is how the game begins.” - Weekly Famitsu, via Frontline Gaming Japan



Grace Given

So we are descended from those who were originally exiled by Marika and the Greater Will, alongside Godfrey, after grace left their eyes:

“Very well. In Marika's own words. My Lord, and thy warriors. I divest each of thee of thy grace. With thine eyes dimmed, ye will be driven from the Lands Between. Ye will wage war in a land afar, where ye will live, and die.” - Melina

Even at this stage it is clear that Marika expects the Tarnished to go outside the Lands Between and die, before being brought back by grace, in due course. And from what we see of Godfrey, we know this to be true.

In the opening cinematic, we see Hoarah Loux slaughtered, pinned to a tree with varying weapons. This vision of death is an ongoing theme as we are introduced to the Tarnished. Dung Eater, Gideon Ofnir and Goldmask are, like Hoarah Loux, all introduced to us while dead in the opening slides.

Death is one of the first aspects of the lore that the player will stumble across in *Elden Ring*, even if they don't think about it too deeply.

Yet in each of these same pictures there is a light of grace beside each of the dead, suggesting that Tarnished are resurrected through the power of grace. Indeed, the Erdtree and the Two Fingers need us, and will not let us die. This is a plot point confirmed by Miyazaki in an interview from the Overture of Elden Ring book.

“The immortality of the Tarnished stems from the power of the Guidance of Grace. Tarnished that die outside the Lands Between are given new life through the Guidance of Grace and are beckoned to the Lands Between. This is basically the start of the game. I guess the Guidance doesn't want the player character to be freed.” - Miyazaki, Overture of Elden Ring

Mechanically this makes sense, as when we die we resurrect at the last Site of Grace. But what is grace? How does it have this power to keep us from permanently dying?

Grace seems to be an extension of the Elden Ring, of its power and influence. The Golden Rune item descriptions suggest that having grace is the same as holding runes:

“Grace that dwells within the inhabitants of the Lands Between; the lingering trace of gold... Runes are nourishment for the development of any Tarnished. Provided a Finger Maiden can be found...” - Golden Rune

This explains why those without it, those known as Tarnished, are seen as



The Tarnished and Grace

tainted or lesser beings. The tutorial notes reinforce that grace is essentially a tool to transmit the Erdtree’s “directions” for the Tarnished:

“Grace exists to guide the Tarnished and lead them along the proper path.” - About Guidance of Grace

In short, grace is just another extension of the Erdtree and the Elden Ring, and through it the Tarnished are bound to its power, shackled beyond even death until their task is completed or their usefulness outlived. We ourselves seem to be dead as well, as in the opening of the game our Tarnished lies immobile, before grace touches us and we rise.

At this point, we experience a purgatory space that is not unlike the interior of the Erdtree, before we are brought back to life and to the Lands Between – as if grace is also responsible for transporting the player here.

Enia tells us the reason why the Two Fingers now turn to us at this moment:

“Queen Marika. She who is vessel of the Elden Ring. Tainted by the strength of their runes, her children warred, but none could become Elden Lord. And so grace

was extended, to your kind, the Tarnished.”

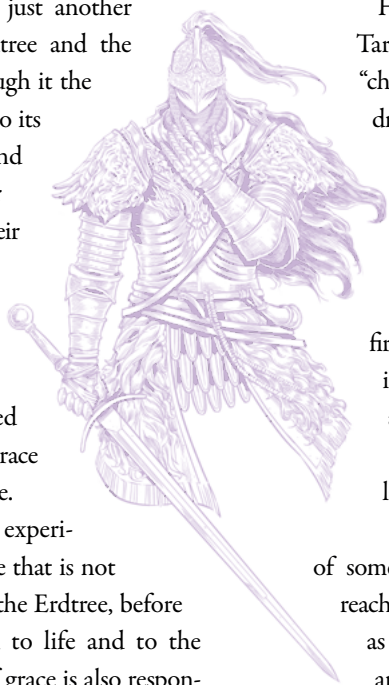
- Finger Reader Enia

This, then, is why the Tarnished are given back their grace and summoned again to the Lands Between. They are the last chance for the Greater Will to restore Order and create the next Elden Lord.

However, it does seem that Tarnished are resurrected and “chosen” by grace in dribs and drabs rather than all at once, because the Tarnished seem to have a long history in the Lands Between and in Roundtable Hold. We know we are far from the first to arrive, as Gideon makes it clear that we are not only a newcomer, but that it has been a long time since they last saw a newcomer.

We also learn the history of some of the first members to reach the Roundtable Hold, such as Vargram and Wilhelm, who are described by their armor sets as being some of its first visitors. There is also the Tarnished known as Istvan, whose armor set, the Scaled Set, has a description that reads:

“Armor worn by Old Knight Istvan... Istvan is one of a few wizened Tarnished who survived to this day.” - Scaled Armor



Grace Given

Grace is just another extension of the Erdtree and the Elden Ring, and through it the Tarnished are bound to its power, shackled beyond even death until their task is completed.

The language used here really does hammer home the passage of time. Istvan is an “old, wizened” Tarnished who has survived after all this time.

There are also hints that the Two Fingers have been here for some time, as the Coded Sword description reads:

“Hidden sword once granted to the Tarnished of the Roundtable by the Two Fingers. A formless cipher comprises its blade, which deals holy damage no shield can repel. Champions would gather at the Roundtable Hold in days long past, when the Two Fingers were masters of oration, their flesh yet full of vigor.” - Coded Sword

We find this weapon in the Fortified Manor, but it is clear that the ethereal Roundtable Hold is the gathering place of champions being referred to. That’s not only because this is clearly the Two

Fingers’ base of operation, but also because it is referred to as something separate from the original manor as it is here: “Roundtable Hold.”

The Coded Sword tells us that the Two Fingers were once “full of vigor” and delivered rousing oration to the Tarnished. I would hazard a guess that this is the scene shown on the Two Fingers Heirloom talisman. This is a very different picture to the rather faded glory we see in Roundtable Hold now, an observation made by Varré:

“But, how did you find the Roundtable? Oh, you don’t have to say it. Before, the Roundtable was chock full of venerated warriors, but now, it’s home to puff-chests and has-beens.” - White Mask Varré

Indeed, not only is Roundtable far from an inspiring collection of mighty champions, but the Two Fingers seem diminished from their glory days. No rousing speeches are given, and they are actually in seclusion for all but the mightiest Tarnished. Lords’ Divine Fortification seems to tell us that the Two Fingers are ancient and long past their best:

“Gideon gained true knowledge after his long exchange with the Two Fingers – discovering all had been broken long ago; that the trembling fingers, bent with age, and the Erdtree itself, were no exception.” - Lord’s Divine Fortification



The Tarnished and Grace

Despite this, there seems to be an exceptionally strong bond between the Fingers and the Tarnished in general. For example, when we arrive in the Lands Between and we first speak to Bernahl, he expects us to act like a good “loyal” Tarnished and serve grace. We already know that there are Tarnished beyond the Lands Between who act as confessors – enforcers of the Two Fingers. These confessors also operate on behalf of the status quo of the Roundtable, who seem to be also serving as the “assassins of the Two Fingers.” We learn of this conflation from Crepus’s Black-Key Crossbow:

“Black crossbow featuring a long stock. Used for sniping, it has a very long range. Weapon of Crepus, who served the Two Fingers from the shadows of the Roundtable as the head confessor.” - Crepus’s Black-Key Crossbow

Combined with Crepus’s Vial, we know the confessors and the roundtable assassins were one and the same. Crepus’s Vial is named after the aforementioned head confessor, and describes these roundtable assassins. They were essentially Tarnished enforcers meant to stop any Tarnished from straying from the Two Fingers’ direction, something we learn from Assassin’s Approach and Darkness incantations, the former of which reads:

“Incantation of the Two Fingers’ servants, who once served as the assassins of the Roundtable Hold... The assassins were charged with eliminating Tarnished who had strayed from guidance.” - Assassin’s Approach

These assassins would eliminate rogue Tarnished on behalf of the Two Fingers to ensure that the Roundtable Hold was kept “grace aligned.” It seems that Rileigh the Idle, dressed in confessor garb and wielding Crepus’s Black-Key Crossbow, is potentially one of the last of these figures. Many Tarnished have strayed from grace and the will of the Two Fingers by the time we come to Roundtable Hold. Again this speaks to a long, rich Tarnished history of the time when the Fingers were able to more rigorously control the summoned champions.

Both Godfrey and the Tarnished return to the Lands Between in its time of need, and no matter what we choose, we will end the stagnation.



Grace Given

Yet ultimately the Fingers are now weak, and the strong Tarnished can choose to do what they want. We can choose to uphold the Fingers’ mission or we can stray from it, forging our own path of destruction and treachery. Whatever we choose, we will face the leader of our people once more at the foot of the Erdtree.

This is the King Arthur analogy coming full circle¹, a point made by Tarnished Archaeologist in their excellent video on Godfrey.

Arthur was described as “the once and future king,” a term reputedly carved in Latin on his grave: “Rex quondam, rexque futurus.”

The promise is that one day Arthur may return, even from death, in the United Kingdom’s most dire hour, in order to defeat evil and deliver justice. In this way Godfrey does fit the mold – except it is he and his Tarnished who have returned from the grave to rebalance things.

Godfrey, First Elden Lord, is returned, resurrected by grace and given

guidance once again. We can see that in Godfrey’s cinematic. After he places Morgott to rest, a line of grace is placed before Godfrey and directed at us.

This makes sense in any ending. If we are a vessel for the flame of chaos, then grace is directing Godfrey to stop us.

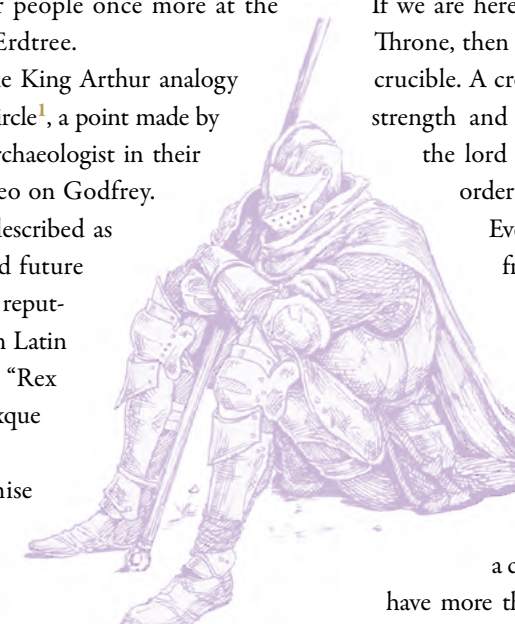
If we are here to claim the Elden Throne, then Godfrey is one final crucible. A crown is warranted by strength and we must overcome the lord of the battlefield in order to prove our worth.

Even in his death Godfrey remains a man of honor, a man who adheres to a certain code. Should we defeat him, Godfrey acknowledges that our strength befits a crown. To Godfrey we

have more than proven ourselves as the rightful successor.

Both Godfrey and the Tarnished return to the Lands Between in its time of need, and no matter what we choose, we will end the stagnation.

I don’t know about you, but I would have loved to have stood around that Roundtable with Godfrey and his warriors.



¹ “The secret story behind the Crucible” - The Tarnished Archaeologist



Chapter 24: Age of Stars

There has been a lot of debate regarding the ending of Ranni's quest: what it really means, and what happens when we choose the Age of Stars. I think a lot of the confusion is very quickly cleared up when you speak to Ranni at Ranni's Rise, at the point in which you have become her consort.

Here she clarifies the form her new Order shall take:

"Mine will be an order not of gold, but the stars and moon of the chill night. I would keep them far from the earth beneath our feet. As it is now, life, and souls, and order are bound tightly together, but I would have them at great remove. And have the certainties of sight, emotion, faith, and touch... All become impossibilities. Which is why I would abandon this soil, with mine order. Wouldst thou come to me, even now, my one and only lord?" - Ranni the Witch



Grace Given

Ranni's new Order will be one that is not situated on Earth. What she means by this is not that everyone in the world will be forced into the cosmos. Rather it's that she, as a god of the Age of Stars, will be far removed from Earth. She compares this concept with the current Order: "Life, souls and order are bound tightly together," as Marika and her Order literally lived among her people.

There is a great article from Frontline JP¹ where the author not only retranslates the ending but also some of Ranni's other dialogues. While I don't think this dialogue is nearly as cryptic as the ending, I do think the author's translations provide clarity.

For the line we have just spoken of, the line that talks of life, souls and order being tightly bound, they would translate it in the following way:

Ranni would have Order physically separated from the world that it governs, and have the "certainties" of sight, faith and touch all become impossibilities.

“生命と魂が、律と共にあるとしても、それは遥かに遠くにあればよい”

"...Even if life and souls are one with the order, it (the order) could be kept far away."

Ranni would have Order physically separated from the world that it governs, and have the "certainties" of sight, faith and touch all become impossibilities. If she is far removed from Earth as a god of the new Order, then people would not worship her, and would be unable to interact with her or even see her. Nor would she be swayed by her emotions. She would be far removed from society.

To quote Frontline JP:

"Ranni believes that while the order may have to exist, as it is entwined with life and souls, it causes problems for the people. Her solution is thus to take it and leave, keeping it far away, where people cannot see, feel, touch, and believe in it, embarking on a journey into fear, doubt, solitude and darkness to do so." - Frontline JP

In a way, this also lines up with the problems that Goldmask himself identifies with the Golden Order. The fickleness of the gods caused the issue in the first place, and Ranni would essentially eliminate that problem by removing herself far from the Earth.

This implies an Order of logic instead of emotion, a nuance that is easier to see with Lokey's translation of Ranni's final dialogue:

¹ "Ranni's Age of Stars ending mistranslations explained" - Frontline: bit.ly/4e0h3fz



Age of Stars

“To all life and all souls. From here on is the Era of the Stars. The logic of the moon, a thousand-year journey.”

The logical “Order,” or the moon, achieving an Order that is not steeped in religion or faith but is governed by an emotionally detached and distanced ruling force. This is the nuance that I think has confused people early on in *Elden Ring’s* history. People believed that Ranni’s final dialogue for the Age of Stars ending was implying that the whole world would be brought on this journey into the stars. In reality, she is talking about her own journey.

With this new understanding in place, we know what is really being said here. Ranni is ushering in the Age of Stars, an age that will be governed by her and her Dark Moon. Yet she will depart into the cosmos, no doubt to join her Dark Moon, beginning her journey into the chill night. It’s a path of fear, doubt and loneliness for Ranni herself. She will rule from afar, out of sight and thus the problems of the prior Order will fade.

Again I will quote the translation from the Frontline JP article which makes this all abundantly clear:

“私は誓おう すべての生命と、すべての魂に”
“I shall swear to all lives and souls,”
“これよりは星の世紀”
“From hereon is the Age of Stars,”
“月の理、千年の旅”

“The laws of the moon, a thousand year journey,”

“すべてよ、冷たい夜、はるか遠くに思うがよい”
“To all, you may think of the chill night as infinitely far away,”

“恐れを、迷いを、孤独を そして暗きに行く路を さあ、行こうか”

“And now, let us go on our path of fear, doubt, and loneliness, into darkness.”

Let us now talk about the big picture. What does this mean for the Greater Will and the Elden Ring?

First, I think it is clear that the Elden Ring is no more. In the various Elden Ring-governed endings, we defeat the Elden Beast but we take the time to repair the Elden Ring afterwards and implement a new Order. This Order is then imposed through the power of the new Elden Ring. However, in

Ranni is ushering in the Age of Stars, an age that will be governed by her and her Dark Moon. Yet she will depart into the cosmos to join her Dark Moon.



Grace Given

Is it possible that the Elden Ring has been such a power that it has bent even the stars to its will? Has it always been the preeminent force in the universe?

Ranni’s ending, Marika fades away and presumably the Elden Ring fades with her. I think that the erasure of the Elden Ring is necessary. After all, Ranni doesn’t implement her plan until after we have defeated Radagon and the Elden Beast.

This implies that Ranni’s Order could not take hold until the power of the Elden Ring was neutralized, until the Elden Beast, a powerful vessel of the current Order, had been removed. Clearly the beast’s presence and the power of the Elden Ring kept the power of the Dark Moon at bay. But with the

Elden Ring and Beast no more, the Dark Moon lays claim to the mortal plane.

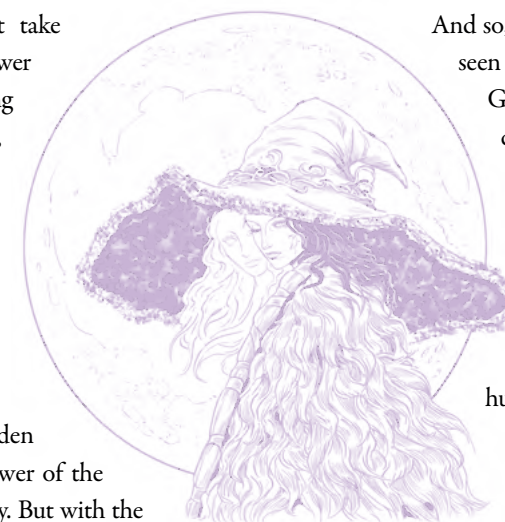
In the announcement trailer for *Elden Ring*, the narrator refers to the Elden Ring as “that which commanded the stars.” Is it possible that the Elden Ring has been such a power that it has bent even the stars to its will? Has it always been the preeminent force in the universe?

I believe so, but I also believe that the moon and the stars have their own agenda. As we spoke of earlier, they are in a way the yin to the Elden Ring’s yang. They are its opposite, and yet while the Elden Ring was present, the ring was ultimately in control.

Through agents like Rennala, the Nox and now Ranni, celestial bodies have tried to free themselves from such Order.

And so, while I have always seen Ranni’s act against Godwyn as a terrible crime, is this a case of the ends justifying the means? Do we now finally have a god that will act like a god rather than a human warlord?

I leave such judgments to you, my fellow Tarnished.





Chapter 25: Let Chaos Take the World

By the time we reach the Elden Ring, we may well have encountered Shabriri, sleeved within Yura's flesh, and heard his compelling yet deceptive appeal to "save" Melina's life:

"You are about to sacrifice something precious. The life of a fair maiden, that you would toss into the fiery forge. Only so that you may be Lord. What a horrible thing to ponder. Your ascendancy requires her sacrifice, whether she wishes it or not. But how would the Lord, crowned so, be looked upon?" - Shabriri

Hyetta is the second figure within the chaos pantheon who appears to take the form of someone deceased. Hyetta is not available at all until Irina is dead. She is played by the same voice actor, uses the same character model and even wears the same bloody dress. Both describe themselves as being born blind.

Given what happens with Yura and Shabriri, it isn't hard to imagine that Hyetta is an instrument of the Three Fingers, with Irina's body being repurposed as Hyetta much as Yura's is.

I see Irina as a purpose-made instrument of the Three Fingers, as she appears to know that she is meant to be a maiden to the Three Fingers. It is almost as if, because the Three Fingers don't recognize individuality and they see all as one, they are able to shuffle souls into different bodies as if they are one already.

Hyetta illustrates some of the core beliefs of those who serve the Frenzied Flame. Those afflicted by the Frenzied Flame know that they need to provide her with eyes in order to advance their objectives.



Grace Given

"...Maiden, dear maiden, where are you? Please, take my grapes." - Grape Spirit, Stormveil Castle

And indeed these adherents also know about their promised Lord of Frenzied Flame, as we see it, also referenced by frenzied ghosts.

"Abh, Lord Vyke, it seems that you were no lord, after all. Then where is he? Our true Lord, our Lord of Frenzied Flame. We beg of you, incinerate all that divides and distinguishes. Abh, may chaos take the world!" - Frenzied Spirit near Church of Inhibition

For a philosophy set against Order, this mirrors the structure of the Two Fingers candidacy surprisingly closely.

A lord and a maiden. One lord almost rose in times past to claim the mantle of the Lord of Chaos: Vyke, once one of the greatest champions of the Roundtable, and the closest to Elden Lord. We learn

Given what happens with Yura and Shabriri, it isn't hard to imagine that Hyetta is an instrument of the Three Fingers, with Irina's body being repurposed much as Yura's is.

of Vyke's sudden change of heart via the Fingerprint Set:

"No other Tarnished was closer to the throne of the Elden Lord than Vyke. But without announcement, Vyke traveled far below the capital, and was scorched by the flame of frenzy. Did he make his choice for his maiden, or did some other force lure him with suggestion?" - Fingerprint Armor

Vyke made a decision and chose the Frenzied Flame, and his armor suggests he did this for his maiden, or he was convinced by some other force. Given the speech that Shabriri offers us, leaning heavily on our relationship with Melina, it seems likely that Vyke received a similar speech, but then buckled. Indeed, his ties to his maiden are hinted at more strongly by his invasion location in Liurnia, above the Frenzied Village and outside of the Church of Inhibition. In this church is the corpse of a Finger Maiden, and it is almost as if Vyke's phantom is protecting his maiden still. This could very well be his motivation for choosing the path of frenzy.

This seems counterintuitive given what will actually happen to all life, including Finger Maidens, should the Frenzied Flame be unleashed. Yet it seems as though Vyke failed to become the Lord of Chaos, as lamented by a frenzied ghost in the Frenzied Flame Village. Most likely, Vyke failed because he was imprisoned. We can find him in an Evergaol in the mountaintops,



Let Chaos Take the World

as if he was on the way to the forge to unleash its power, as we ourselves do later in the game on our own path.

Yet we can take up the mantle, inherit the Frenzied Flame and take Shabriri's advice in using our own body as kindling to the Flame of Ruin. This moment shows the power of the Flame of Frenzy within us. Melina seems to be burned away in the process when she does this, and yet we survive, as if the power within us is enough to sustain us through this process.

While those on the path to Elden Lord will merely burn the Erdtree superficially, and essentially restore it with the repairing of the Elden Ring, the Lord of Chaos will unleash the Frenzied Flame within himself to burn the Erdtree to the ground, with the world soon to follow.

With the defeat of the Elden Beast and the Elden Ring unrepaired, there is no longer any Order to hold back the chaos, and it is why at this moment that the chaos flame erupts from the player and burns the world.

Hyetta is the best source for what happens here:

"And so, what was borrowed must be returned. Melt it all away, with the yellow chaos flame. Until all is One again."

- Lightseeker Hyetta

We can learn of the Frenzied Flame's power not only through her words but also by witnessing her ultimate fate. For by

With the defeat of the Elden Beast and the Elden Ring unrepaired, there is no longer any Order to hold back the chaos, and it is why at this moment that the chaos flame erupts.

touching her with the flame, she too becomes a vessel for the flame's power, albeit briefly, before succumbing. When we return to her location, she is gone. She has melted away, and only a trace of flame remains.

The Three Fingers and the power of the Frenzied Flame is the manifestation of chaos and disorder in this universe. Its aim is to melt the ordered separation of individual life, so that life is more chaotic and unformed. It is this nihilistic end game that appeals to those who despair, to those who have suffered, to those who think that life itself is a mistake. For, without it, they would not have experienced the pain they have and the things they have seen.

Starting with their eyes, the yellow flame will melt away the very notion of pain. For without life there is no pain. There is nothing, in fact.



Grace Given

The fact there is pain and hardship is something even the flame's opponents do not deny. But perhaps those on the side of life see it differently. For without order there is no disorder, and without pain there is no beauty, love or life.

This decision to embrace or refuse the Frenzied Flame is emblematic of the player's journey through the Lands Between and the ultimate choice they need to make.

We enter the Lands Between at its lowest point, its crumbling remains in the trembling grasp of ruined and delusional demigods.

The Greater Will has placed a huge burden upon the Tarnished – we must succeed where the demigods failed, and become the Elden Lord of the next age, while realizing that one day we too will be replaced.

This is why many players choose the Age of Stars ending: it feels more complex and suggests there is more agency involved. Yet is it? Instead of serving the Greater Will, you will be serving the Dark Moon and Ranni.

By the time you reach the Mountaintops of the Giants, you may find yourself genuinely persuaded by Shabriri's arguments; perhaps this world does not

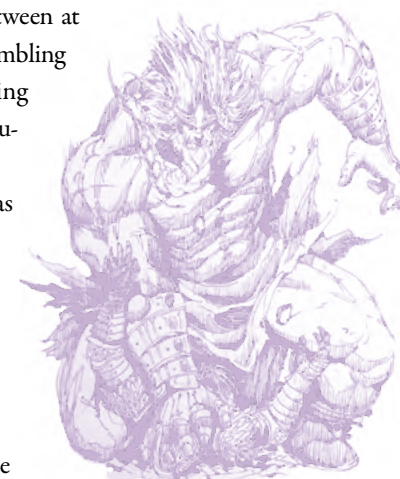
deserve to be saved. Aside from anything else, you would be sparing Melina from a fiery death – one of the only companions you have had on this lonely journey.

Yet it is Melina herself who argues against such nihilistic thoughts, poignantly defending the truth of all life. While living is hard, brutal even, there is still value to be found in life itself.

Hyetta and those afflicted by the Frenzied Flame would have you believe that life itself is a mistake and that suffering is an inevitable consequence of it. However, the more nuanced take is the one hinted at by Melina; life itself is beautiful but it is the corrupt institutions of men and gods that causes suffering.

Thus with Melina's words ringing in your ears, you need to consider the biggest choice of all: is the world worth saving, even if you change very little? Or should it all be burned in the yellow flame?

"However ruined this world has become, however mired in torment and despair... Life endures. Births continue. There is beauty in that, is there not?" - Melina





ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Geoff “SmoughTown” Truscott has been making videos exploring the lore of beloved videogame series for over a decade. While he has turned his attention to games like *Blasphemous* and *Destiny*, his truest love is the work of FromSoftware. When he’s not resting at a Site of Grace, he lives in Edinburgh. *Grace Given* is his first book.



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