This post is less complete than I had hoped, but I wanted to get the new thread underway – perhaps with the intention of spurring me to write an update quickly. This may be difficult – my work schedule is insane at present, and I’ve had little time to game – much less write – for the past month or so. Nonetheless, the backlog is very large.

Do not expect anything too soon! I will do my best.

Many thanks for kind words. The story continues, albeit at a slower pace...

---------------------------------------

You See

Eadric sat cross-legged in his tent and looked at his God. Tramst – who, of course, was Oronthon – looked remarkably unchanging and unprepossessing. There was no celestial choir, no radiant light, and no feeling of awe. There was, in fact, no indication that this was anything other than a normal human being.

The Devas who had escorted him had vanished – Eadric had not dared to use Palamabron’s Eye to see if they still remained in some insubstantial form nearby, any more than he had dared to look at Tramst himself through the stone. It would have somehow been blasphemous. He wondered if even thinking about using it was a sign of his unworthiness and lack of faith.

Tramst raised his eyebrows and smiled sympathetically.

*Lord, I fear. I doubt.*

Well, yes, I know that. So what’s your point? And don’t call me ‘Lord.’ A simple ‘Holiness’ will suffice (irony).

*I do not know how to proceed.*

Ahh. And how, exactly, is that different from how things were say, yesterday, or a year ago? Or five years ago?

*In order to come to understand you more, the fiend Titivilus informs me that I must deal with him on an ongoing basis. That he will act as a foil to my...*

Virtue? Piety?
(Profound discomfort.) Holiness, I feel unworthy...

(Raised eyebrows.)

(Shame at false modesty...)

(SLAP.) (Smile.)

(Humility)

Your brother, Orm, frequently struck me when he taught me. (Laughter). He looked terribly offended on the morning that I slapped him back.

Where is Orm now, Holiness? Will he be coming?

No. Why should he, when he can meditate in solitude?

But I may visit him, when things are quieter?

Well, of course. Why could you not? When could you not?

(SILENCE.)

What do you wish of me, Holiness?

To be active in the world. To be the Ahma. To lead. To act as a guardian and protector. To be my strong right arm.


I appreciate your honesty and directness.

I don’t know what to do. Part of me desires to be selfish. I fear that I will resent you if I abandon her. I fear that I will fall if I pursue her, and you will withdraw your grace from me.

It is a difficult conundrum (humour). You have the right to choose. That can never be denied.

She suffers.

As do countless others.

I fear Titivilus.

That is wise. He is subtle and cunning. But he is not beyond your ability to deal with.

I feel confounded by him – why is he tied to my own salvation? His temptation is to be free of his presence. If I accept it, I fail. If I reject it, am I burdened with his whisperings for eternity?

There are always Devils. To deny it would be fruitless.

Part of me wishes to ask you to release me – if only for a short while.

Are you asking me?
(Shakes head). No.

Then what will you do, Eadric-Ahma?

Put my trust in you. Command me, and I will obey. I will abandon Nehael to whatever fate awaits her. But I ask that you grant me the strength to endure my guilt and shame.

And you still hope that, in so making that offer, I will take mercy upon you and release you from my service?

Yes – or part of me does, at least. But the offer is made in spite of that hope, not because of it.

(Leans forward and touches Eadric lightly on the forehead).

SEEING FOR THE FIRST TIME I-THOU BEING-NONBEING-BECOMING KNOWING-UNKNOWING SEEKING-FINDING-LOSING-FINDING TIME-BEING ETERNITY-NONBEING NOW-BECOMING EVERYTHING-NOTHING IDENTITY-DIFFERENCE RELATIVE-ABSOLUTE. NOTHING IS. NOTHING IS NOT. NOTHING BECOMES.

“Saizha*,” Oronthon said.

Eadric wasn’t sure if it was a question, or not, and knew that it didn’t matter. Duality had evaporated in a soaring ecstasy.

**

I will enter Morne, now, and take up my seat in the Fane.

I will follow.

That is not necessary. I will go alone. Instruct the army to wait, although not to stand down – they will not be needed quite yet. And not in the capacity that many anticipated.

Then command me.

(Smiles). You are free. Do as you must do. I will recall you to my side when I need you.

(Disbelief). But that is not what you require of me.

No. But I grant it nonetheless.

But why?

(Laughter). Because you didn't ask. Consider Grace to have descended upon you for the third time. Remember, you are empowered to decide right from wrong.

Titivilus insisted that you will demand much of me. That you will not compromise. That you will push me to my limit. He did not lie.
And so I will. But not yet. Eadric, it is not always this or that. There is room for flexibility.

_But Morne. And Graz’zt?_

Will do what it is in his nature to do. What is Necessity, if Oronthon is not unlimited?

_What will happen?_

Rivers of blood will flow. You will know what to do.

_Holiness, forgive me – but what will you do?_

I will weep.

And he vanished.

*

“Well?” Nwm asked.

The Paladin tried to speak, but merely looked frustrated, unable to convey the full magnitude of the experience.

“Is he a man, or a god?” Ortwin asked.

“Yes,” Eadric replied.

But his face shone with a light that never after left him.

**

“So, what is he going to do, exactly?” Ortwin asked. “Will there be a big showdown with Graz’zt, with lots of fireworks?”

Eadric sighed. “That is not his function. He will provide succour to those who need it, and guidance, and instruction. He is a teacher, not a soldier.”

“You’d think he’d be a bit more pro-active.”

“Hah!” Mostin said snidely. “Fat chance. He’s probably just your typical aloof deity-type, following his own, mysterious plans. Don’t expect him to put himself on the line.”

The Paladin moaned. “Let’s just leave out the motivational analysis. The fact is, I will have a temporary grace period in which I can act. I don’t know how long it will last, but we should seize the opportunity.”

“Er, how long are we talking, Ed?” Ortwin asked. “Hours? Days? Months?”

“I don’t know.”
“Hmm. That’s not much help.” Ortwin said sarcastically. “And what’s going to happen with Prince You-Know-Who? Is he still coming here?”

“Yes.”

“In an hour or so?”

“Yes.”

“Is there anything else you should tell us?”

Eadric briefly related the news about Jovol. And Kothchori. And Rimilin. And the exchange with Titivilus.

Mostin groaned. “It might have been useful if you’d told us this earlier.”

“There wasn’t time.”

“I don’t understand,” Ortwin said. “You said that this is an either/or situation. Titivilus’ temptation was based on that premise.”

Mostin merely laughed. “I think you’ll find that if you were to analyze exactly what the Devil said, you’d find plenty of loopholes and incomplete accounts. Without him actually lying, of course. I don’t blame you, Eadric. Even my colossal intellect was hard-pressed to contend with his nuances and intimations.”

“That’s reassuring,” Nwm said drily. “So is this Devil going to harass you from now on?”

“He will jibe me, and attempt to lead me astray, and at the same time I will use him to purify myself.”

“You definitely need to speak to Shomei,” Mostin grinned. “I didn’t know that Oronthon endorsed such radical methods.”

“Generally, he doesn’t. I am the Ahma, however.”

“I thought Devils were only allowed one shot at the temptation thing,” Ortwin said. “Isn’t that some kind of violation of the rules?”

“The rules are changing,” Eadric replied.

“Perhaps,” Mostin said. “I think that the usual rules simply don’t apply to you any more. I see it in you Eadric. We are brethren now.”

Eadric looked confused, and more than a little worried.

“You are like me. You are no longer a man. You have transcended.” Mostin bowed in recognition.

“Being a quasi-semi-hemi-demigod is all very well,” Nwm said impatiently, “but the basic problem of what the hell should we do? remains. Currently I can sense no extraplanars or arcane casters of Rimilin’s power within Morne, so where exactly are they all?”

“Elsewhere, or Mind Blanked,” Mostin replied. “Tramst will not even show as a ripple in your continuum, Nwm. Any more than Graz’zt, or Rimilin, or Kothchori,
I’d guess.”

“Jovol can sense them indirectly,” Eadric said.

“Can he indeed?” Mostin seemed half-dubious and half excited at the prospect.

“Titivilus informed me that Jovol is more powerful than the rest of the Wyrish wizards appreciate.”

“Go on…”

“He says that Hlioth knew him from before. That he is capable of...self incarnation? It may have been a metaphor. I don’t know. He was vague about the details.”

Nwm clicked his fingers. “Hello? Can we please deal with the matter in hand? We can discuss arcane mysteries at a later time. As I see it, we have two options: one, we hit Graz’zt when he arrives, and all die; or, two, we translate to the Abyss while he’s here, try to bust out Nehael...and all die. Other suggestions which do not include the ‘death’ component would be appreciated.”

“The first option is not an option in any case,” Mostin replied. “We will not find him unless he wishes to be found. In which case, he would kill us all in short order.”

“You’re going about this the wrong way,” Ortwin said casually. “We call his bluff. We can’t attack him directly, no matter what the circumstances are. We’ve already broken Ainhorr’s sword, imprisoned Rurunoth and snuffed out another one - which Balor did you disintegrate, Mostin?”

“I’ve no idea,” the Alienist replied.

“I can answer that,” Eadric said. “His name was Uruum – at least, according to Titivilus.”

“Aside from Ainhorr, that leaves Choeth, Irzho and Djorm,” Mostin said. “One of whom is already on the Prime.”

“Then let’s call in another one,” Ortwin said. “And kill him. And then another one. And when we’ve killed them all, we can start on the Mariliths, and the Nalfeshnees. We can break this bastard without going toe-to-toe with him, Ed.”

“I think Eadric has issues about conjuring demons,” Mostin said drily, “no matter what the motives.”

“Maybe he did once,” the Paladin replied, “but he’s damn well earned the right to decide whether the ends justify the means or not. And I have no reservations on this count.”

“Are you above the Law now, Ed?” Ortwin asked slyly.

“When I’ve decided exactly what the Law is, I’ll let you know,” Eadric answered. “In any case, we should probably wait until after Graz’zt has made his translation, and done whatever it is that he plans to do.”

“I’m not sure of the merit of that idea...” Mostin began.
“Titivilus expressly warned me against irritating Graz’zt too much before he acts. He seems to think that it might precipitate an overreaction. Jovol has been reluctant to interfere for the same reason.”

“And you trust him?” Ortwin asked.

“No,” Eadric replied.

“All the same, he might be right,” Mostin conceded. “That is entirely plausible. Demon Princes are not renowned for their tolerant natures.”

“Plausibility is what worries me,” Ortwin countered.

“I hear you,” Eadric agreed.

“In any case,” Mostin continued, “I need to prepare – and that will take some while. But I don’t have adequate free valences to do it all in one evening.”

“Do what?”

“To bind and destroy two Balors,” Mostin grinned. “It will have to wait until tomorrow. And I’ll need to find out which one is already present on the Prime.”

“I seem to recall your needing expensive gems,” Eadric said.

“To trap them, yes,” the Alienist said. “To kill them, no. We just kill them.”

“Are you sure it’s that easy?” Nwm asked.

“Piece of cake,” Mostin smiled.

“Why do I get the feeling that we’ve had this conversation before?” Eadric groaned.

“Perhaps we should ransom one,” the Bard suggested. “Propose an exchange. Can you bring a succubus in as well?”

“I suppose so,” Mostin said.

“Then let’s kill a Balor, stick another one in a pentacle, bind a succubus and instruct her that we’ll kill the second one unless Graz’zt releases Nehael, and then dismiss her to relay the news to her master,” Ortwin seemed delighted with his plan.

“I’m not convinced that Graz’zt will go for a ransom deal,” Mostin said dubiously. “It’s difficult to know exactly what passes in the mind of any Demon, much less one of his stature. Who can tell how he thinks, or what his counsels are, or what things motivate him? Moreover, what of Kothchori? If he is capable of opening a Gate once, he can do it again. If we rouse Graz’zt’s ire to that degree, then it is likely he will deal with us swiftly and decisively. I say we hit Kothchori first. And after the Prince has made his return to the Abyss. We must break the link.”

“He is undetectable,” Eadric groaned.

“Not entirely,” Mostin replied. “If Titivilus was accurate in his appraisal of Jovol’s abilities.”
“Can you contact the Ogre?” Nwm asked. “He would be a useful ally.”

“Jovol follows his own rules,” Mostin answered. “When I have tried in the past, he has been unforthcoming. But it is possible.”

“Hlioth knows more about him than anyone else,” Eadric said. “It may be worth approaching her.” He looked at the Bard.

Ortwin sighed.

“There is another possibility,” Mostin said tentatively. “It is very dangerous.”

Eadric raised an eyebrow. “If it involves more Devils, then the answer is ‘no.’ I’ve got enough to deal with on that score already.”

“Pseudonaturals,” Mostin said. “Big ones.”

“I think I like that even less,” Eadric said. He sighed. “By rights, we should deal with our dead, before we do anything else. They should be taken in state into Morne – all deserve a place in the Temple crypts. But it will have to wait. And I suppose that, as we do not know exactly how or where Graz’zt will strike, we must simply wait until he does and then react accordingly in the aftermath. But it is frustrating. I feel impotent. Now would be a time to possess some insight into his nature, to be able to predict what he might do.”

“Presumably, Tramst could have told you, if he is privy to that information,” Ortwin sighed. “Why didn’t he?”

“I don’t claim to fully understand his methods,” the Paladin answered. “But I have no doubt as to his motives. And I am not above being addressed expediently.”

“Has it occurred to you that that is one of the functions of Titivilus,” Ortwin pointed out. “From Oronthon’s perspective, at least. By entering into a dialogue with Evil, you come to understand it. To anticipate its movements and action. There may come a point when you can pre-empt it.”

“Maybe,” Eadric replied. “There might be a thousand other reasons, each equally plausible. I also think that thinking about it too hard is likely to lead to irreducible paradox, so I’m not going to get started on it.”


**

Uedii, the Goddess, the Green Reality, groaned as yet another extraplanar entity desecrated her realm by manifesting within its confines. She was still far from her limit – as far as tolerating the interlopers was concerned. Her near-infinite capacity for absorption had, in the past, accommodated entire pantheons of warring gods, before she squashed them like flies.

Nonetheless, Nature was irritated. Clouds began to gather over Morne. Feys became short-tempered and vicious. Far to the south, in the archipelago of Pandicule, a volcano – long dormant – rumbled threateningly.

Prince Graz’zt appeared before the mage Kothchori in the sanctum of his island
retreat, and the wizard quailed. Nearby, bound within a thaumaturgic diagram, the Archon Zhuel stood in silent meditation.

Graz’zt smiled. To be able to use this Archon had been an unexpected pleasure. His face screwed up as he considered Uzmi and Uruum and Rurunoth, and contorted wildly as he thought of Eadric.

“You are fuel, Archon,” the Prince said snidely. “Consider this: when your sublime form expires after aeons of servitude to your effulgent master, your spirit will be consumed and transformed into something filthy and loathesome.”

Zhuel said nothing. His face remained serene and impassive. As the Demon absorbed his essence, and swelled with the potency so imbibed, Zhuel gave no indication of pain or discomfort, and shot no look of hatred or contempt towards the Fiend. His annihilation was accompanied by an expression of profound pity for Graz’zt, which threw the Prince into a brief but prodigious rage. After a minute of paroxysm, he abruptly mastered himself.

The Demon appeared in Morne for a few seconds, spoke a phrase so terrible that space itself buckled under the strain, and promptly vanished exhausted back to his Abyssal realm.

A surge of elemental hatred broke outwards from the place where he had stood: the same spot in the Orangery of the Temple where Feezuu had slain the Archbishop Cynric. The Aether reverberated sympathetically. Fruit rapidly ripened, spoiled and fell to the ground in festering heaps. The grass wilted, and the orchard blackened and died.

Madness seized the already distressed inhabitants of Morne.

*Lit., “You See.”

**Ascended Masters and Saints within Oronthonianism frequently give cryptic or incomplete accounts to lesser beings, in the knowledge that often such creatures are incapable of understanding the full ramifications of information that would otherwise be imparted.

Dark Subsumption is a method used to fuel Epic Spells cast by certain fiends, which involves the annihilation of powerful outsiders. The mechanics were only worked out after I had access to the BoVD.

Wave of Hate was the spell that Graz’zt invoked. It will be detailed in the next post.

The Characters

Although I’d normally post them in the Rogues’ Gallery, here are the characters as of this post. My rewards aren’t always conventional, so it’s probably worth explaining a few things:
Eadric

Levelling was rapid for Eadric from 18-20: the final level was, in fact “free” to all intents and purposes – the transcendence granted by Tramst in this post (i.e. a 5th level Divine Disciple). Marc is targeting the Divine Emissary PrC from the Epic Level Handbook, although he has yet to decide the intervening levels. Maybe Divine Agent from MotP.

I am using the idea of ‘levelled weapons’ for Lukarn – i.e., as Eadric grows in stature, so does the sword. This had been the plan since around level 13-14, although I had neglected to implement it (oops). Eadric’s transcendence seemed like a good point for a large growth in the sword’s abilities, perhaps reflecting an ‘awakening’ similar to that of its master.

Rewards for Eadric were big, but Marc deserved them. He’d been a truly awesome player.

Ortwin

Rob had already foregone advancing one level of experience, and did so again in order to fully rationalize his character (in his mind). I allowed him to apply the remaining benefits of the Satyr race, which the reincarnation spell had denied him – these included the Fey hit dice and skill points (minus those extra x4 which he would have gained at 1st level), and three feats (two of which he already possessed). As Ortwin originally had an extra feat on conversion to 3e, Rob and I came to an arrangement which suited both of us: Ortwin’s Satyr-ness was fully integrated both mechanically and in the role-playing sense, and the inconsistencies of the reincarnation spell were resolved. Ortwin is no longer a reincarnated half-elf. He really is a Satyr, in every sense. Rob is happy with Satyrdom, although he feels he will be shafted by the ELH multiclassing rules.

It also meant that the ‘is he ECL +5 or not?’ question was resolved. He now is. Of course, when he levels to 18, he will receive another feat. Epic Skill Focus (Bluff) looks likely. One has to work hard to remain the best liar in the world.

Nwm

Nwm levelled, and I allowed Dave to trade out TWF and Improved TWF for some feats from MotW – reflecting a gradual ‘forgetting’ of abilities, to be replaced by new ones. I’m pretty flexible in that regard, and Nwm is less optimized than the other characters anyhow. Nwm will stick with Druid all the way.

Mostin

Dan decided to pump all of his XP into a +5 inherent bonus to Mostin’s intelligence instead of levelling to 19. Mostin now has a ‘brain the size of a planet,’ as Marvin, the Paranoid Android, once said.

More generally, I allowed a retrospective realloction of skill points in the case of previous cross-class skills for Eadric: Knowledge (Religion) and Knowledge (Nobility) shouldn’t be quite such a sink for a Paladin. I also did the same based on Mostin’s Intelligence increases over several levels – note, however that I do not allow the Headband of Intellect to increase skill points gained per level. That’s just silly.

Mostin, having maxed out the skills that were any use to him, opted to throw
them into Craft skills. Apparently, Illumination and Engraving have been a secret passion of his for some while...

**Eadric, Earl of Deorham**
Male human Paladin 15 / Divine Disciple 5; CR 20; Medium size outsider (human); HD 15d10+60 plus 5d8 + 20; hp 201; Init +1; Speed 20 ft; AC 28 (touch 11, flatfooted 27); Attack: +30/+25/+20/+15 melee (Lukarn) or +27/+22/+17/+12 (Kirm); Dmg: 1d10+11 (15-20/x2)(Luakrn) or 1d8+9 (x3) (Kirm). SV Fort +23, Ref +13, Will +18; AL LG; Str 18, Dex 13, Con 18, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 23.

Languages: Common, Celestial

Skills: Ride +16, Knowledge (Religion) +18, Knowledge (Nobility) +9, Diplomacy +29, Handle Animal +11, Perform +10 (Ballad, Ode, Lute, Dance), Knowledge (History) +6, Sense Motive +18.

Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Bastard Sword), Power Attack, Mounted Combat, Ride-by-Attack, Spirited Charge, Weapon Focus (Bastard Sword), Improved Critical (Bastard Sword), Divine Might.

Special Abilities: Detect Evil at will, Divine Grace, Lay on Hands (75hp/day), Divine Health, Aura of Courage, Smite Evil (1/day, +15 dmg), Remove Disease (5/week), Turn Undead (as CLE 13, 8/day). Strength Domain Power (1/day: +20 to Str for 1 round). Divine Emissary (Telepathy w/ LG celestials in 60 ft.), Sacred Defense +2, Imbue with Spell Ability, Transcendence.


Magic Items:
"The Skin of Sarth." +4 Full Plate Armour of Invulnerability.
"Melimpor's Shield." A Large +3 Shield of Blinding.
"Kirm." Heavy +2 Dragonbane Lance.
3 Javelins of Lightning
4 Potions of Cure Serious Wounds; 2 Potions of Haste.
The Left Eye of Palamabron: A Gem of Seeing with the “Discern Lies,” “Zone of Revelation,” and “Zone of Truth” abilities as cast by a 20th level Cleric usable at will.

34 Years. 190 lbs. 6’1”

**Ortwin the Satyr**
Male Satyr Fighter5/Rogue5/Bard7; Medium-size fey; HD 5d6+20 plus 5d10+20 plus 5d6+20 plus 7d6+28; hp 175; Init +10; Speed 40 ft; AC 28 (touch 16, flatfooted 22 ++ Displacement Effects); Attack: +27/+22/+17/+12 (Githla) or +26/+21/+16/+11 (Anguish and +3 arrow); Dmg: 1d6+7 (12-20/x2) (Githla) or 1d8 +5 + enervation (Anguish and +3 arrow); SV Fort +12, Ref +20, Will +12; AL CG(N Tendencies); Str 13, Dex 22, Con 18, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 20 (24).
Languages: Common, Draconic, Old Borchion, Elf, Sylvan


Feats: Weapon Focus (Scimitar), Weapon Finesse (Scimitar - Yes, I allow this), Dodge, Expertise, Mobility, Weapon Specialization (Scimitar), Skill Focus (Bluff), Spring Attack, Whirlwind Attack, Improved Critical (Scimitar), Brew Potion, Improved Initiative.

Special Abilities: Sneak Attack +3d6, Evasion, Uncanny Dodge (Flatfooted Dex Bonus), Bardic Music, Bardic Knowledge. +4 Racial Bonus to Hide, Listen, Perform, Spot and Move Silently checks.


Magic Items:
"Dread Githla." +4 Keen, Throwing and Returning Scimitar
Cloak of Displacement (Major)
+5 Studded Leather Armour
The Blue Garnet Collar (Grants wearer +4 to Charisma).
Winged Boots
Potion of Fiery Breath.
Potion of Invisibility.
"Anguish." A +1 Magical (+3 Mighty) Composite Longbow of Enervation. Those struck by missiles from this weapon are affected as though by the spell of the same name (Save DC17).
20 x +3 Arrows
Masterwork Pan Pipes
Masterwork Lute
Hat of Disguise

**Nwm the Preceptor**
Male human Druid 18; medium sized humanoid (human); HD 18d8+36; hp 121; Init +1; Speed 30 ft; AC 19 (Touch 11, flat-footed 18); Attack: +18/+13/+8 (Magical Quarterstaff) or +15 (Magical Javelin) Dmg: 1d6+4 (x2) (Magical Quarterstaff) or 1d6+3 (x2) (Magical Javelin), SV Fort +13, Ref +7, Will +16; AL NG; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 15, Wis 20, Cha 17.

Languages: Common, Elven, Sylvan, Druidic

Skills: Animal Empathy +19, Handle Animal +9, Swim +10, Intuit Direction +10, Concentration +18, Wilderness Lore +26, Knowledge (Nature) + 22, Knowledge (Arcana) +6, Scry +18, Spellcraft +11, Diplomacy +8, Heal +7, Profession (Herbalist) +11, Craft (Leatherworker) +6

Feats: Weapon Focus (Quarterstaff), Ambidexterity, Extra Wild Shape, Create
Infusion, Brew Potion, Craft Wondrous Item, Natural Spell, Snatch

Special Abilities: Woodland Stride, Trackless Step, +4 on Saves vs. Fey Enchantments, Wild Shape (6/day; Huge; Elemental 3/day), Venom Immunity, A Thousand Faces, Timeless Body.

Spells Per Day: 6/7/6/6/5/4/3/3/2

Nwm's Staff (+2 Staff of the Woodlands topped with an Orb of Storms)
"Leofric's Token," a +3 Amulet of Natural Armour
+3 Leather Armour
"The Bleeding Spears of Huttur," 2x +1 Javelins of Wounding
Bag of Tricks (Rust Colour)
Nwm's Torc: Command activated device which allows the wearer to ‘Commune with Nature’ as cast by a 9th level Druid.

46 Years; 178lbs; 5’11”

Mostin the Metagnostic
Human Diviner 8 / Alienist 10; medium-size outsider (human); HD 8d4+8 plus 10d4+10 +6 (Insane Certainty); hp 74; Init +3; Speed 30 ft; AC 22 (touch 17, flat-footed 19); Attack: +10/+5 MW Rapier melee; Dmg: 1d6+1 MW Rapier melee (18-20/x2), SV Fort +7, Ref +9, Will +18; AL N(G Tendencies); Str 11, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 27 (33), Wis 16 (18), Cha 12.

Intelligence includes a +5 Inherent bonus.
Languages: Common, Draconic, Celestial, Abyssal, Infernal, Auran, Ignan, Terran, Aquan, Elven
Skills: Knowledge (Arcana) +32, Knowledge (The Planes) +32, Knowledge (History) +32, Knowledge (Geography) +32, Knowledge (Nobility) +20, Knowledge (Engineering) +20, Spellcraft +32, Alchemy +32, Scry +32, Concentration +32, Craft (Illumination) +21, Craft (Engraving) +21, Ride +5.
Feats: Martial Weapon Proficiency (Rapier), Scribe Scroll, Brew Potion, Alertness, Craft Wondrous Item, Quicken Spell, Still Spell, Maximize Spell, Chain Spell, Energy Substitution (sonic), Empower Spell, Spell Focus (Conjuration).

Special Abilities: Alien Blessing (+1 Insight Bonus on Saving Throws), Extra Summoning, Summon Alien, Insane Certainty, Timeless Body, Pseudonatural Familiar, Transcendence

Phobia: birds.

Spells: 4/7/7/7/6/6/5/4/3 per day. Specialty: Divination (+1 spell/level/day). Extra Summoning = 1 x Summon Monster IX. Prohibited: Necromancy. Save DC 21 + spell level (or 23 + spell level for Conjurations).

Known:

0lvI: All PHB Cantrips.

1st lvI: Sleep, Charm Person, Alarm, Ventriloquism, Know Protections, Lesser Acid
Orb, Enlarge, Chromatic Orb, Expeditious Retreat, Mount, Message, Summon Monster, Comprehend Languages, Detect Undead, Identify, True Strike, Jump, Spider Climb, Magic Missile.

2nd lvl. Detect Thoughts, Summon Swarm, Tasha’s Hideous Laughter, Summon Monster II, Web, Locate Object, Detect Invisibility, Darkness, Alter Self, Knock, Cat’s Grace, Bull’s Strength, Eagle’s Splendour, Fox’s Cunning, Arcane Lock, Continual Flame, Obscure Object, Whispering Wind, Dimensional Pocket, Mostin's Aura of Inscrutability, Mostin's Arhythmic Apoplexy, Mostin's Myopic Emanation


4th lvl: Dimensional Anchor, Evard's Black Tentacles, Minor Creation, Summon Monster IV, Arcane Eye, Detect Scrying, Locate Creature, Leomund's Secure Shelter, Scrying, Charm Monster, Stoneskin, Phantasmal Killer, Shadow Conjuration, Zone of Respite, Ethereal Mount, Vitriolic Sphere, Improved Bull’s Strength, Improved Cat’s Grace, Improved Fox’s Cunning, Attune Form, Polymorph Self, Mostin's Interminable Sermon, Mostin's Torque Tendril, Zone of Revelation.

5th lvl: Dismissal, Lesser Planar Binding, Cloudkill, Major Creation, Summon Monster V, Contact Other Plane, Fabricate, Prying Eyes, Rary’s Telepathic Bond, Dream, Nightmare, Mestil’s Acid Sheath, Wall of Force, Sending, Teleport, Mostin's Metempsychotic Reversal, Mostin's Paroxysm of Fire, Permanency, Tenser's Destructive Resonance.

6th lvl: Repulsion, Gate Seal, Eyebite, Make Manifest, Hardening, Contingency, Acid Storm, Antimagic Field, Fiendform, Disintegrate, Planar Binding, Summon Monster VI, Analyze Dweomer, Legend Lore, True Seeing, Chain Lightning, Guards and Wards, Tenser’s Transformation, Mass Haste, Mostin’s Id Eruption


8th lvl: Mind Blank, Greater Planar Binding, Great Shout, Summon Monster VIII, Sympathy, Trap the Soul, Discern Location, Binding, Etherealness, Mostin's Metagnostic Inquiry, Polymorph any Object, Mass Manifest, Symbol, Maze.

9th lvl: Summon Monster IX, Wish, Gate, Time Stop, Prismatic Sphere, Imprisonment.

Magic Items:

Looking Glass of Urm Nahat (Mirror of Mental Prowess)
Portable Hole
Bracers of Armour +4
Ring of Protection +4
Incandescent Blue Sphere Ioun Stone (+2 Wis)
Pale Green Prism Ioun Stone (Sustains without Air)
Iridescent Spindle Ioun Stone (Sustains without Food or Water)
Amulet of Absorption (21 Spell Levels Remain): 3 currently stored
Headband of Intellect +6
Regarding Eadric's experience:

**SEEING FOR THE FIRST TIME**

There is a compounded meaning within this phrase. Not only *saizhan* – i.e. "Insight," but also insight into the nature of insight, and insight into that etc. The rational mind rapidly loses the ability to grasp the spiralling nature of the Real.

**I-THOU**

This calls into question the conventional apprehension that the object (in this case, Oronthon/Tramst) and the subject (Eadric) are, in fact, separate entities. By extension, all other dualities between the perceiver and the perceived are shown to be merely conventional, and not ultimately Real.

**BEING-NONBEING-BECOMING**

The three possible ontological states as understood by Urgic Mysticism: either something *is*, or *is not* or is in the process of *becoming something else*. No phenomenon, when viewed from the standpoint of conventional philosophy, can exist outside of this triad. Again, this is called into question by *saizhan* when describing the Real.

**KNOWING-UNKNOWING**

The nature of *saizhan* itself cannot be framed in conventional epistemological language, and transcends the usual categories of gnostic understanding. The duality between whether the Real is known, or whether it is not, is also shown to be false.

**SEEKING-FINDING-LOSING-FINDING**

The rational mind attempts unsuccessfully to reassert itself and grasp the nature of the Real. During the experience of *saizhan*, when the subject attempts to articulate the nature of the Real using conventional thought, the experience eludes him. Only when it is lost to the rational mind, can its nature be apprehended. The Real is slippery.

**TIME-BEING ETERNITY-NONBEING NOW-BECOMING**
The ontological triad (being, nonbeing, becoming) is linked with the three temporal states (conventional linear time, timelessness/eternity and the moment Now), but *saizhan* reveals these correspondances to be nothing more than convenient labels. The true nature of the Real is beyond these categories, and cannot be described by normal temporal language.

**EVERYTHING-NOTHING**

The extremes of monism (i.e., the philosophical idea that ‘all is one’), and nihilism (‘nothing is Real’) are shown to be false conceptions – *saizhan* reveals that the duality between them is constructed, not Real.

**IDENTITY-DIFFERENCE**

An important point, in which *saizhan* diverges from other mystical systems. Even the duality between regarding whether something is identical to something else, or different from it is shown to be vacuous.

**RELATIVE-ABSOLUTE**

The philosophical coup, which marks *saizhan* as unique (and is a demonstration of Tramst’s genius). Here, the distinction between the Real (the absolute) and the merely conventional (the relative) is shown to be false. Even this duality is addressed. Now there is nothing left for the rational mind to grasp onto.

**NOTHING IS. NOTHING IS NOT. NOTHING BECOMES**

The final, bold assertion framed as a threefold dialectic of negation, and reiterating the ontological questions raised before. The Real cannot be described as either *existing* or *not existing*, or as being in the process of *becoming*. This is the central mystical assertion of *saizhan*.

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**POST 3: THE RAPE**

*Posted by: Sepulchrase II at ENWorld on 10th February 2003, 06:10 PM*

Sorry for the slight delay (ahem). As I’ve said, updates are likely to be less frequent from now on (although, hopefully, not quite *this* infrequent.)

I’ll try and stop in again later today to answer any questions that I haven’t yet addressed.

If any kind moderators are around, some radical pruning of this thread *would* be enormously appreciated...

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The Rape

Wyrt, a cloth-merchant of considerable financial means, lived in a large, comfortable manse in the Temple district of Morne. His home – constructed on a single level in the antique style – was maintained to immaculate standards. Pristine whitewashed walls, a red clay pan-tiled roof, and a neat, formal garden were looked after by Wyrt’s small but diligent retinue of indentured servants.

Wyrt – a member of Morne’s influential middle class – enjoyed his life, although of late the war had taken a toll on his income. His wife, Qéma, was a younger daughter of the Silubrein household – relatives of the incumbent Earl of Scir Cello in the south of Wyre. The marriage had been a favorable one, elevating Wyrt to quasi-noble status, and benefiting the Silubreins with a much-needed boost to their near-empty coffers. Wyrt was a Gilded Thane, in the popular parlance – regarded with disdain by those of established pedigree, but nonetheless one who wielded as much power as many of those who could trace their lineage back twenty generations.

An hour before sunset, as clouds were gathering again in the sky above Morne, and many wondered what new sorcery was at work, Wyrt suddenly paused above his ledgers and accounts, his quill pen twitching nervously in his hand. He swallowed, and his hackles rose. Blood thundered in his temples as he thought of Qéma, and he wondered what folly had led him to marry her in the first place. He glanced around his study, selected a sturdy marble book-end, and went in search of his wife.

Wyrt never had a chance to smash her skull, however, because as he exited a small drawing-room, Qéma stood in wait for him. She pushed a long larding needle into his throat, and Wyrt fell over, gurgled briefly, and died.

In a red haze, Qéma walked outside and went to look for the gardener, who had annoyed her earlier that day by what she perceived as his mismanagement of the shrubbery.

Across Morne, with minor variations, the pattern was repeated a thousand times.

**

"The Goddess is angry," Nwm said with startling certainty, as his torc relayed a variety of natural grumblings to his mind.

"Graz’zt has come?" Eadric asked anxiously. "Can you determine his whereabouts?"

"I cannot," Nwm answered. "And Graz’zt is merely the latest in a succession of aliens who should not be here." The Druid’s disdain towards demons, devils, celestials and incarnate deities alike was barely concealed. His perceptions shifted repeatedly as he tried to focus on something tangible in his consciousness. Half a minute passed.

Across his field of inner vision, tiny points of light – sentient beings – appeared. All of those within nine miles, in fact. There were eighty-four thousand three hundred and nineteen of them. In the Temple district of Morne, many flared rapidly – enjoying a brief moment of intensity – before they disappeared.
permanently. He watched in morbid fascination as lives were snuffed out.

Death – unnatural - violence – the desire to do great violence – fear – hatred.

Nwm vomited, as his groping mind resonated with the emotional reality of what was transpiring within the city.

"Hatred," he gasped.

"Enchantment?" Mostin asked cannily.

"Yes. YES."

"Intriguing," the Alienist observed.

"Is it permanent?" the Paladin asked. "Are those who enter likely to feel its effects?"

"No, and no," Mostin answered. "Unless Graz'zt's stature has somehow grown tenfold."

"Do we really know how powerful he is?" Ortwin asked nervously.

"Not that powerful," Mostin assured him.

"Er, so remind me why exactly Oronthon’s avatar isn’t doing anything about this," Ortwin said sarcastically.

"I am in no mood for a Theological debate," Eadric snapped.

"Nwm would say Theological," Mostin quipped.

The Druid groaned, and abruptly turned into an eagle. He exited the tent, screeched, and was quickly joined by two more – Sem and Gheim. The three flew towards Morne. Eadric, Ortwin and Mostin followed him out, to be greeted by a riot of colour – Templars, aristocrats, soldiers and mercenaries – all of whom had expectant looks upon their faces.

Ahma, they cried with one voice.

Oh, Sh*t, thought the Paladin. The damn army wanted someone to tell them what to do. He motioned to Brey and Sercion, who approached expectantly.

"Assemble every anointed Templar*," Eadric instructed his captains. "We are going into Morne."

A wide grin appeared on Brey’s face. "That is a wise choice, Ahma. Our holiness alone will prevail. We have no need of foreign mercenaries."

The Paladin smiled grimly. "You misunderstand, Brey. We are not going in to fight. I require swords to remain in their scabbards."

Tramst had told him that he would know what to do. He hoped he was doing the right thing.

**
Inside the audience chamber of the Royal Palace – the ceiling of which still dripped slowly from the torrential rains of the previous night – Prince Tagur was finally received by King Tiuhan and the remainder of the Small Council. He limped, his arms were burned and painful from the exchange with Rimilin and the Demons outside of the gates, and he was still bloody and bruised from his escape from Hullu’s encampment.

Foide, who had privately hoped for Tagur’s demise, feigned relief at his appearance. The Prince of Einir, who seldom misread others’ motives, scowled briefly.

"So who had the bright idea of employing the Demonist as an ambassador?" He spat sarcastically.

"His Majesty," the Chamberlain replied loftily. "And you should speak with more respect, although we are glad to find you alive and well."

Tagur gave an icy stare. "Foide, shut up." He bowed to the Boy-King. "I fear that you may have made an error of judgement, your Highness. It is a hard lesson – but you should learn from it. Where is Rimilin now?"

"No longer here," Sihu answered. "The Bishop of Gibilrazen says that he and the Heretic are most likely engaged in some diabolic feud, where they are arguing about who claims the spoils after the world ends."

"Where is that fat oaf, anyway?" Tagur asked irreverently, causing Tiuhan to snicker.

"He has returned to the Temple," Sihu replied with earnest piety. "He left abruptly, and did not explain why."

The Prince grunted. From Eadric’s words, he had an inkling of the reasons for the Bishop’s sudden departure, but felt no urge to share them with the others present. Damned religious nonsense. Why couldn’t people just get by without it?

After an hour of wrangling about how best to deal with the ongoing crisis in Wyre – half a dozen armies in the area, all but their own respective troops of dubious loyalty to each of the magnates present – Attar, the Warden of the North returned to the chamber. His normally taciturn manner had been replaced by something which Tagur perceived to be close to panic.

"Riots have broken out in the Temple Quarter," he panted.

"What now," Foide sighed drily, "another doctrinal dispute?"

"If it is, I’ve never seen anything like it before," Attar replied. "It’s some kind of hysteria. They’re killing each other in the streets. Templars, soldiers who were stationed on the West Wall, old women, toddlers, everyone."

Tagur groaned. The Demonist probably had a hand in this new mischief. And with the Heretic outside of the city, they could hardly draw soldiers away from the walls to contain it. He motioned to Attar, winced in pain as he hurried out of the audience room, and made his way to the tall West Tower of the palace.

Sh*t, he thought as he looked out at the scene. They were butchering each other
by the hundred out there, and new fires were starting – their smoke rising to join
the smoldering remnants of those which had burned the night before. A lot had
happened in a day. And now the Fane itself was burning.

In disbelief, Prince Tagur watched as the Temple’s south transept, wracked by
earthquake, wind, torrential rain, and now, fire, teetered and cracked. Immense
butresses and pilons snapped like straws, and the edifice collapsed in a ruin,
briefly exposing a light in the nave beyond, before it was obscured by smoke and
dust.

From inside the Temple, something reached out and gently touched his mind.
Tagur suddenly saw. The cosmos melted, and was made whole again in an
instant. Moments later, Eadric’s trumpets sounded beyond the city walls.

Tagur turned to Attar. "Let him in," he said. "Before its too late."

The Warden’s jaw dropped. "Your Highness..." he began.

"Do it. Open the South Gate."

**

"It is only a technical violation," Mulissu complained. "I don’t see what all the fuss
is about." She lounged in one of the huge leather chairs in Shomei’s study.

Jovol sighed. "If you don’t have the stomach for this, Mulissu..."

"Don’t be so damned condescending. I admire the principle. I agreed to listen to
you, didn’t I?" Her memory flashed back to her own fears of assault from Feezuu
– although the Ogre’s proposition would have done little to protect her.

"Under much duress," Shomei said snidely. She shifted uncomfortably in her
chair, the scars from her exchange with Titivilus still apparent. "Besides, its not
as though you will be the one to suffer the consequences of it."

"It is a tedious waste," the Savant answered. "And I still don’t understand why we
can’t perform the ritual afterwards. Or why the clauses regarding summoning and
wizards assailing other wizards can’t simply be dropped. There will always be
extenuating circumstances."

"Not any more," the Ogre replied. "The Injunction will now be watertight."

"Nothing is ever watertight. Mostin won’t like this." Mulissu sighed.

Shomei laughed. "If there are any loopholes, he will find them."

"Mostin has hardly been an exemplar in observing the Injunction," Jovol agreed
wrily. "Which is why I have decided to include him. I’d rather have him in on it,
than trying to wriggle around it. Besides, we need his input to fuel the spell. I
have already sent written copies of the proposal to Waide, Tozinack, Daunt and
Hlioth – a quorum is desirable."

"Mostin means well," Mulissu sighed. "But will be reluctant to surrender his
sovereignty to an abstraction." A worried look crossed her face. "You’ve made a
powerful case, Jovol, but I fear that what you suggest will rip the heart out of
magic in Wyre."

"It will merely relocate a certain aspect of it."

"And Hlioth? She is hardly reliable."

"You do not know her as I do. I’ve shown you the Web of Motes."

"It is indecipherable to me," the Witch said, waving her hand in a dismissive gesture. "I must take your word for it. And what happens if you receive a blanket refusal from all of those whom you have asked?" Mulissu probed.

"Then I will Gate in half a dozen Solars and they will help me instead," Jovol grumbled. "One way or another, this will happen."

"Have you decided upon the Enforcer?" Shomei asked. "One of the Akesol/*** could be bound with this spell."

Jovol shook his head. "They are too political," he said. "And to co-opt them would cause too many ripples. But I concur with your reasoning – something Diabolic would seem to fit the bill, but something outside of the established order – I am leaning towards Gihaahia."

"That is certainly a terrifying prospect for potential violators," Shomei nodded.

"An infernal magnate?" Mulissu asked, uninformed about the nuances of the Diabolic hierarchy.


"She is not dead," Jovol smiled. "She dreams with the others."

"In any case, Gihaahia is an abhorrence. An atavism from a previous reality."

"Your concept of reality is quaintly rational," Jovol chided.

"And yours is numinous bunkum," Shomei retorted. "But I am not here to argue metaphysics – or transmetaphysics, before you say anything."

Mulissu groaned and looked bored. This was precisely why she had isolated herself for so long. "I will fetch Mostin," she said, and vanished.

**

The Alienist seethed, looking at the huge, carved marble slab.

"You have no right to do this," he snapped.

"I have the power," Jovol replied calmly. "And the foresight. And a responsibility to the future. That is enough."

"And you?" Mostin looked incredulously at both Mulissu and Shomei. "Have you lost your wits? You of all people, Shomei. You live for this. You cannot ban an entire subschool of magic."
"I accept the limitations as part of a larger set of rules, Mostin. Jovol will not move on any of them. Besides, it will only affect those who cannot perform their summonings elsewhere."

"That is precisely why it won’t work," Mostin sighed. "Those who wish to will simply go elsewhere in order to do it, and then order their creatures into Wyre."

Jovol touched the slab. In response to his words, a minute paragraph carved upon the huge tablet glowed, and seemed to grow in size. Luminous runes hung in the air.

33.6(e)...this prohibition extends to the calling or summoning of creatures outside of the excluded area, and their subsequent deployment within it. Such violators will also be subject to the Enforcer.

"Pah!" The Alienist snorted. "What about the didactic implications? To remove summoning from a mage’s repertoire will impact the understanding of magic in general."

"I have the same concern," Mulissu nodded.

"And I am concerned about defense," Mostin said. "What happens if a Wizard is magically attacked, and his or her specialty is conjuration? He can no longer summon creatures to protect him."

Jovol smiled, and touched the tablet. "Observe..."

5.0 No Wizard shall, at any time or in any way, assail another Wizard by magical means...

"That’s pretty radical," Mostin said.

"The theory of summoning is not banned, nor is the practice beyond Wyre’s boundaries. Please, Mostin, do not get stuck on this one point. Read the tablet in its entirety. There are clauses to cover every contingency, and even an appeal clause in the case of possible miscarriage."

"Appeal? Appeal to whom? To you?"

"To the Claviger." Jovol replied.

"What the Hell is the Claviger?" Mostin asked.

"You are looking at it," Jovol said, a wide grin appearing on his huge face, and exposing rows of enormous fangs, "at least, in a manner of speaking. The Claviger inhabits the tablet upon which the Injunction has been scribed."

"The tablet is sapient?" The Alienist asked in disbelief.

"Profoundly so," Jovol nodded. "It can also independently manifest itself. The Enforcer will be bound to the Claviger, and will act as directed by it."

"What is this ‘intelligence?’" Mostin asked. "Where did it originate?"

Jovol laughed. "Dream," he said.

"It is the Claviger," Jovol said simply. "And it has agreed to my suggestion."

"To inhabit this piece of rock? It must be crazy. I am disinclined to trust it."

"Trust is inconsequential," Jovol sighed. "It is not in the nature of the Claviger to manipulate others for its own ends. It does not have an ego or a personality, in the conventional sense. As to its order – deific would be an understatement. It perceives the magical continuum at all times. It will instantly know of any violation."

The Alienist’s jaw dropped. "This is outrageous," he said.

"I told you he wouldn’t like it," Mulissu groaned. "Perhaps we should have asked Jalael and Troap."

"To do what?" Mostin inquired suspiciously.

"To help us bind the Enforcer," Shomei answered.

"And what will the Enforcer be?"

"I am leaning towards Gihaahia at present," Jovol answered.

Mostin wracked his memory, until he recalled the name. The blood drained from his face. "Please wait for a while."

He scanned the tablet minutely for one hour.

"You’re all cracked," he said, and then laughed loudly, as an epiphany struck him. "But count me in. I’ve a feeling you’re going to do it anyway, and if there will be no more summonings, I’d like my last one in Wyre to be a big one."

"I was hoping you’d feel that way," Jovol nodded. "But we are not calling Gihaahia. We will be going to her, in order to bind her."

"That would be less arduous in terms of the magic required," Mostin nodded. "Are co-operative spells a particular specialty of yours, Jovol?" He asked archly.

"They were once," the Ogre nodded, seeing the knowing look upon the Alienist’s face.

"Thought so," Mostin said. "One last thing," he asked, "I was planning on calling two Balors tomorrow..."

"My Web of Motes indicated the possibility," Jovol answered. "If you proceed, you should make sure that you are outside of Wyre, and do not force them to act as your agents within it."

"I assume that extradimensional spaces are not excluded?"

"Of course not," Shomei replied. "You see? It will have little impact on you and I, so long as we exercise prudence."

"When do you propose to bind the Infernal?" Mostin asked.
"Is your highest valence available to you?" Jovol asked.

The Alienist puffed out his cheeks, and nodded.

"Then now is as good a time as any. I will contact Waide and the others. Mulissu?"

The Elementalist agreed, and looked sadly at Jovol. Here was one whom she had barely begun to know, the passing of whose friendship she already lamented. The Ogre had indicated that there was a ninety-six percent chance that he would be dead within two days.

Jovol smiled quietly to himself. His prescience had seldom failed him.

**

Nwm circled overhead, ready to conjure elementals in order to tear down Morne’s South Gate if necessary. Below him, Eadric sat upon Contundor amid three hundred Templars – those of particular holiness and devotion who acted as channels for their deity’s power.

A deity whose proxy was within the Temple walls, Eadric thought to himself.

At that moment, a roaring noise – masonry cracking and falling – echoed across the city and to the gates. In the sky, Nwm screeched at Gheim, and the eagle plummeted downwards, broke its dive, and alighted upon the pommel of Eadric’s saddle.

"Part of the Temple just collapsed," Gheim said in a matter-of-fact way. "It is on fire. There are other fires within. Men, women and children are murdering each other on the streets."

Eadric felt sick, and motioned to Jorde, who bore the horn of the recently burned Hyne around his neck. It rang out, to be quickly followed by several more amongst the Templars.

Perhaps a dozen arrows and bolts issued from the towers above the gate, and clattered off of armour and barding. A rather half-hearted response, Eadric mused to himself. Perhaps the others were being deployed inside the walls. He waited. Within the walls, another horn sounded. Moments later, the gates opened.

The Paladin, half-expecting a charge directed at him from within, braced himself for the assault. Instead, numbers of Morne’s inhabitants surged outwards, carrying children too young to walk, and those few possessions which they felt worth saving. Most simply fled. Others seemed to be randomly killing those attempting to escape, or each other. It was impossible to determine who were the victims, and who the attackers. Who was enchanted, and who was not.

"Apprehend anyone behaving aggressively," Eadric’s voice boomed out. "Knock them out and tie them up. We can decide what to do with them when we’ve subdued them." He prayed that it would be enough. Motioning to Brey, Sercion, Jorde and a dozen others, he rode through the gate and headed for the Temple.

The scene which greeted him on his procession was more barbaric, more
obscene, and more painful than anything he had ever before encountered. Mutilated corpses were strewn around. Burned. Impaled. Dismembered. Screams of pain echoed across the dust and smoke-filled streets.

As they proceeded, Eadric recalled the words of Titivilus, his appointed Tempter, at his own insistence that Celestials would not permit something like this to happen: *Would they not? Are you confident that you understand the Mind of Oronthon that clearly?*

Apparently, Oronthon *had* permitted it to happen.

He grimaced. The old paradox again. Have I come so far, only to be confronted with that same doubt? Eadric emptied his mind, and allowed his wavering to pass. He recalled the place where all polarities cease, and drew strength from it.

*I will have your head for this, Demon.*

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*I.e. Clerics, Paladins and spellcasting Prestige Classes.*

** As a Prince of the Blood, Tagur is not required to address the King by the honorific ‘Majesty’ – he may use ‘Highness’ instead. By doing so he also asserts his precedence over those others present.

***The "Pain-Bringers," a group of nine unique Devils charged with administering Amaimon’s justice. My infernal organization is only loosely based upon official D&D canon – I can include it as an attachment if anyone is interested.

**POST 4: THE NIGHT BEFORE**

*Posted by: Sepulchrave II at ENWorld on 27th February 2003, 02:42 AM*

"Last season’s style looks good upon you, Mostin," Waide said drily, adjusting his cravat.

The Alienist scowled. "It’s a shame that you’re too fat to do justice to the current one." His dislike for the other Wizard was based mostly on their all too-similar temperaments (Waide was as tight-lipped and pedantic as Mostin himself) – combined with Waide’s disdain for all non-transmutive spells and processes.

Waide smiled thinly. "Thus endeth summoning in Wyre. How do you feel about that, Mostin? What will you do with yourself?"

*Wait until you venture outside of the proscribed area before I unleash the Pseudonaturals on you,* he thought. He shrugged. "I’ll get by. This is only one small part of one small reality."

"Quite so," Shomei interrupted. "We are still waiting for Hlioth and Daunton. Would you care for some refreshment, Waide?"
"Hlioth? That mad old crone won't come. She's long past it. I'll have a herbal infusion, thank-you"

"She will come," Jovol said smoothly, entering the drawing-room.

"Where is Tozinak?" Waide asked. "I assumed that he was to be included."

"He is. He is currently experimenting with object-identification."

A small credence table nearby shifted into a more recognizable human form, spilling the drinks which sat upon it onto the floor. The ever-shifting features of Tozinak appeared beneath his characteristic hooded yellow cloak. He bowed dramatically, and when he rose, he had grown a long beard and his skin had changed colour.

"So we are going to Hell, then?" He asked brightly.

"Not exactly," Mostin said. "Although close enough. Gihaahia abides in the blasted regions abutting Avernus."

"Ahh, an exile," Tozinak nodded sagely.

"It is more complex than that," Shomei said irritably. "In any case, there will be eight of us: You, I, Mostin, Mulissu, Waide, Hlioth, Daunton and Jovol."

"Eight is an inauspicious number," Tozinak said. "Seven or nine would be better. What of Griel?"

"He is unnecessary," Jovol said. "Eight will be enough."

"And you are sure that we have sufficient power to accomplish this?"

Mostin nodded. "Shomei and I have both inspected Jovol's calculations. We should have no problems. Gihaahia is vastly powerful and ancient, spawned in a forgotten aeon between a Prince of Hell and a Goddess of Nothingness. But we can bind her."

"Are we opening a Gate, or shifting straight there?" Waide inquired nervously.

"I would suggest an Astral Spell," Mostin offered, "although someone other than I will have to cast it." He was in no particular hurry.

Jovol shook his head. "I will Dream us there."

Mostin raised an eyebrow. "Isn't that rather unreliable?"

"Not at all," Jovol replied. "And it is much more discreet. It will only take a few minutes.

"And casting the spell?" Waide asked. "Will she just stand there while we bind her?"

Mostin groaned. "Where is your sense of adventure, Waide? You're so boring. In answer to your question, no. Which is why we will cheat. Jovol will create a temporal bubble before we encounter her – we will not be in the same time-stream."
"That is a sensible precaution," Tozinak nodded.

"Trust me," Jovol said. "It will all be very anticlimactic. The only other thing I should mention is this: we will all sustain backlash from the spell, with the majority of it falling on me. And each of us will invest a small portion of our personal reservoir in addition – again, I will bear the brunt."

"Wait a minute..." Waide began.

"You are so selfish," Mostin chided. "Have you no thoughts for posterity? Can’t you see beyond your own small world? Great magic suffers because of atrophied minds such as yours."

"What is ‘small’ for Jovol, may be more than I can render!"

"Tish!" In fact, although the Alienist himself was distraught by Jovol’s request, the chance to criticize Waide’s reluctance in front of those others present almost made up for it.

**

Eadric rode through the streets of Morne with a dozen of his most stalwart followers, appalled at the scenes which he witnessed. The bulk of the Templars, Ortwin and Iua – together with the circling Nwm and his two eagle companions – were left to deal with the chaos around the south gate and the mustering grounds within the city’s tall walls. Identifying who was affected by the compulsion was near impossible, and as Ortwin clobbered random people over the head with the pomme1 of his scimitar, he wondered how long the mass subdual would take.

Fortunately, Nwm intervened. With a spell that made many of the Paladins and Clerics shake with the memory of what had transpired on the Nund meadows, the Druid conjured a writhing mass of poisonous vines which entangled the limbs of those present. More than three-quarters of the crowd were pinned, and many succumbed to the paralyzing effects of the burgeoning vegetation.

The work of the Temple knights was made considerably easier – the vines covered an area of more than two acres – and at the Druid’s command, they next wrapped and bound around five hundred of Morne’s hapless citizens. Seeing the success of the conjuration, Nwm squawked and flew in search of other pockets of conflict, preparing to cast as many entangle spells – and variations thereof – that he could muster. He was joined in the air by both Ortwin and Iua, taking advantage of the perspective that it offered, and grimly observing the wreck of the Temple quarter – from the air, the pattern of death and violence seemed to radiate outwards from the Fane itself.

Night was falling. The Temple compound itself was eerily quiet. Several outbuildings had been torched, and they burned steadily. Dust still hung thick in the air from the recent collapse of the Great Fane’s south face. The bodies of Templars – many of those few dozen who had remained in Morne – were scattered across the blackened lawns and terraces. Eadric ordered his followers to attend to those few that were still breathing – but only after they had been bound or restrained. He dismounted and, followed by Brey, Sercion and Tatterbrand, passed through a blackened door into the sacristy.
Heaps of torn and shredded chasubles lay within, and vessels lay strewn around. More bodies – priests and acolytes – lay in unlikely postures, where they had struck each other down with ceremonial staves or swords when the spell had taken effect. Before they exited into the ambulatory, Brey's sharp eyes caught a movement beneath a pile of heavy vestments – he said nothing, but gave Eadric a meaningful look and flicked his eyes towards the robes. The Paladin drew Lukarn, cautiously approached, and pulled the coverings aside. The rather pathetic figure of the Bishop of Hethio was revealed, quivering uncontrollably. Upon meeting Eadric’s gaze, he made a number of ineffectual warding motions.

"I am doomed," he groaned. "The Adversary has come for me."

"Get up," Eadric commanded.

"Leave me, Devil. Get you gone." He brandished a pendant displaying an eagle at the Paladin.

"GET UP. You reek of taint," Eadric said, grabbing the Bishop’s hair, and dragging him towards the door. "You are an assassin, a liar, a manipulator and a coward."

Hethio screamed in pain as he was pulled along. "Will you sacrifice me?"

"No indeed, Eminence," Eadric spat. "I will take you to see God – which is neither more nor less than you deserve. Why you were spared from this is beyond my understanding. I assume that he has some purpose for you, so I won’t sentence you to death. But be warned – I am in a very, very bad mood."

So Eadric, Brey, Sercion, Tatterbrand and the – albeit reluctant – Bishop of Hethio made their way to the chancel and the Archiepiscopal throne. The Paladin recalled his premonition of the scenes along the Temple corridors. The reality was a thousand times worse than his vision could have possibly suggested.

*

Nine thousand dead, Nwm thought to himself as his mind reached outwards and took a grim tally. He groaned.

A vine mine contained an episode of looting and violence in the Street of Goldsmiths, but by the time that the Druid had circled the city for the third time, he saw that most of the outbreaks were localized and involved only a few people. Tagur had committed soldiers from the defense of the city to arrest any others who were under the effects of the compulsion, and Nwm turned his hand to dousing the flames within Morne. Again. Periodically, he would commune with the Green in an effort to locate any other demons, but they were either out of his range or warded from his inner vision.

The Satyr and the Duelist descended into the outer courtyard of the Temple compound, where Jorde was directing the restraint and healing of any survivors of the Wave of Hate. Even Ortwin, a staunch opponent of Temple policy and activity since long before the current crisis had begun, found the scene depressing and unnerving.

"Where's Ed?" The Bard asked.
"The Ahma has gone to seek the Sela," a Paladin replied gravely.

"Where’s Tramst?" He asked irreverently.

"The Sela is most likely within the chancel," the other answered with more earnest piety than Ortwin thought necessary.

The Bard turned to Iua and grinned. "Wanna go and see a god?" He asked flippantly. "Its okay – he’s harmless. His head stooge is a old friend of mine."

Jorde sighed. He, at least, was used to Ortwin’s idiosyncrasies. "I think, perhaps, only the faithful should be permitted within for the time being."

Iua was about to say something, but a look of ecstasy combined with contrite horror passed across Jorde’s face. "Yes, Lord," he mumbled to himself. "Forgive my presumption."

Ortwin raised an eyebrow.

"The Sela will receive you before the throne," Jorde explained nervously. "He apologizes that the main gate to the Fane is in ruins, and suggests that you use the entrance through the vestry."

"Quite right," the Satyr said facetiously, staring at the wreck of the South Transept. Inwardly, he swallowed, and wondered whether it had been such a good idea after all.

**

Tramst sat beneath the immense symbol of Oronthon – the Eagle-and-Sun which reared in the centre of the Fane. Large chunks of masonry lay scattered within – ornate carvings which had fallen from the ceiling and shattered the pews and cracked the smooth flags of the floor. Yet more bodies lay there, and aside from a handful of Temple officiants and lesser clergy, the Sela was alone. The few present seemed enrapt in some mystical state. Somehow, the Proxy seemed even more mortal and even less divine than before.

Eadric approached tentatively. Despite his best efforts to stop it, his mind swam with questions. How could you allow? Why did you? Why did you not? What was the purpose? He grimaced and tried to make the queries go away.

Do not repress the doubt in your mind, Ahma. You know better than that.

*I wish there had been another way.*

Do you mean, "Was there no other way?"

*(Ruefully)* Yes, Holiness.

Not all Truths are unequal, Eadric. Consider this question: What if Graz’zt acted as the unwitting agent of a wrathful Oronthon, dispensing ire and justice upon those who defied his will?

*Is that so?*
That is one interpretation. Here is another question: Presently, an Eagle flies above Morne. Where it acts, those who suffer from the madness are restrained and can do each other no harm. What if this is the mercy of Oronthon, bringing succour to those who deserve it?

I understand, Holiness. The fact that it is Nwm does not diminish the fact that certain people will perceive it in a certain way.

It is no less true, in fact: the Sophists would claim that Uedii and Oronthon are one and the same. Equally, it is true to some that you are the agent of the Adversary. You brought ruin upon the Temple. Your desire for a demoness signalled the death-knell for Orthodoxy. Have you accepted that truth yet?

(Wrily). That is harder.

Why, if the Adversary is an aspect of Oronthon?

That is only one of many conflicting truths.

Ahh, saizho, Ahma.

What must be done now, Holiness?

There are still loose ends to be tied up. Events are not resolved. When they are, we begin the process of rebuilding. First we must deal with tomorrow: it will bring yet more pain.

I still have yet to see my role in this, beyond vague ideas.

The Magistratum will be consolidated into one body – the names ‘Mission’ and ‘Inquisition’ will no longer be employed. ‘Temple’ will become the catch-all term: it is a trend well-underway, in any case. The troops in Iald have already been ordered to disband. Eisarn is withdrawing back to Morne. I need to speak with the Royal Council. I will need your diplomatic savvy.

I promised disestablishment.

They will have it.

(Embarrassed). I vowed to the Uediians that I would strive to end indentureship, and the Temple would recompense them.

Our coffers are not limitless, but I will honour your promise first.

I am also concerned of reprisals from the secular aristocracy directed against Hullu’s faction.

Sihu will not act: she is devout, if misguided – this can be corrected. Tagur is an ally.

Tagur is a rationalist, Holiness. As much as I respect him...

I have shown Tagur. It was he who ordered the gates open for you.

(Surprise). And Foide?

Foide will remain a problem.
There is also the issue of Trampa. Soraine’s death will leave a gap, and squabbling nephews will soon begin their maneuvering.

You could claim the Duchy. You have the support.

_I have neither the time nor the inclination to administer it. My spiritual position would also be compromised by temporal concerns. Given the effort that I have made to separate the two, this might be interpreted as somewhat hypocritical. I would have supported Ryth, if he had made a claim._

You may yet be forced to intervene, to prevent more bloodshed. Such is the weight of responsibility.

_(Confession). You have granted me time to act, Holiness. I purpose to assail Graz’zt. I have yet to determine how this is best accomplished._

_(Amusement). That is a formidable task. If you ask for my blessing, I cannot give it: vengeance and retribution are not within my purview. Are they yours?_

_I don’t know. Perhaps._

*

Tramst turned to look at the Bishop of Hethio, who stood between Brey and Sercion. Each of the great Templars held an arm of the clergyman, whose eyes had remained closed and whose lips had muttered fervent prayers during the silent exchange between Eadric and the Sela.

A brief communion occurred. Tramst made an offer.

In doubt, and fear, and spite, and self-hatred, the Bishop declined.

A look of sadness passed across the face of the Sela. "Let him go," he said aloud to Brey and Sercion. "Depart, Hethio. Go where you will. At any time, you may approach me again. I do not judge, I merely teach."

But as the Bishop departed in haste from the chancel, Tramst spoke to him again. "You may be disappointed if you return to your see, Hethio. Your palace will be mortgaged, and your estates dissolved: I would hate to burden you with material concerns when your spiritual welfare is at stake."

Hethio grunted. Oronthon’s Proxy turned his attention to Sercion and Brey.

"When the Ahma departs, it would behoove you to remain. There is much that you need to un-learn."

Somewhat daunted, both Templars bowed.

As Eadric exited, picking his way through the rubble and smashed benches, he encountered Ortwin and Iua, both of whom, apparently, were walking towards Tramst. A quizzical look crossed the Paladin’s face.

"Hi Ed," Ortwin said. "Just thought we’d come and take a peek. I’ve never met a god before."
Eadric sighed. In matters religious, would Ortwin never be anything but a casual tourist?

**

*What is this place?* Mostin wondered, as phantasms floated past his vision for what seemed like hours. Half-formed dreams and reflections, insubstantial yet strangely real. Trees, roads, skies, a vaporous castle, a silver void. He looked around himself.

They didn’t seem to be moving – he, Jovol and the others – although the dreamscape changed in a pattern that he could not quite discern. After a period of intense turbulence, where scenes and sounds manifested in rapid succession, he felt that he had descended into someone else’s nightmare.

*ANGERPAINDEATHPAINTORTUREVIOLENCE. CRUELTYLOATHINGMALICESPITEUGLINESS. BURNINGHATREDDWITHOUTEND.*

Such hatred. It staggered him. His mind span as he strove to maintain his focus. He shot a concerned look towards Tozinak, who of the others there was finding the current strands of consciousness hardest to deal with.

"It will pass," Jovol assured them. "It is merely an echo of an event long past, or one which happened in another time – depending on your perspective. Dream remembers all potentiality – realized or not, past, present or future. Parallel, perpendicular, or extending into an infinity of dimensions."

"What is/was/will be the event?" The Alienist asked, careful not to frame his question in the language of conventional linear time.

"That also depends on your perspective," the Ogre grinned. "The Prime Nodality. The beginning of dualism. The birth of the dialectic. The planting of the seeds of knowledge or damnation."

"The Fall," Shomei said.

"If you subscribe to that particular paradigm," Jovol nodded. "For the moment, we should adopt it whatever our respective world-views: it is relevant to our situation. Let’s just assume that it’s provisionally correct, and act accordingly. We are on the fringes of Hell."

"And Devils dream?" Mostin asked incredulously. "I’ve never seen one sleep, and I’ve known a few."

"Everything dreams," Jovol answered.

"Twaddle," Shomei muttered.

"But why do we feel the ripple here and now?" The Alienist pressed.

"There has been a sympathetic vibration, which hearkened back to an aspect of the Original Nodality."

"Ahh, Graz’zt."
Jovol nodded, sighed, gestured, and modified the passage of time.

*

In her abysm, where she had dwelt for untold aeons, brooding in bitterness and corruption, she stirred. Unlike those who had their place in the Adversary’s grand, despotic regime, she was an outsider – too potent to overcome, too alien to harness. A monstrosity conceived between a fallen Seraph and a forgotten deity who predated existence. Shadows swarmed about her. The fire that burned – within her and around her – both tortured and assuaged her.

The inkling that she had was vague and indistinct, but nonetheless present. A threat, certainly – although from what was impossible to say. It had been an age or more since Devils had attempted to woo her or eliminate her. Instinctively, she wreathed herself in void and vanished, shedding hatred and malice in waves which pulsed from her form. She pulled four Pit Fiends to herself from Hell’s deepest layer, and waited.

It was to no avail. In their temporal bubble, linked by Rary’s Telepathic Bond, the Wizards acted in uncanny coordination – an organic unit, from which potency flowed. In her Fiendform, Shomei’s eyes pierced the darkness. Their collective sight dispelled the veil of Invisibility.

Gihaahia, and her attendant Devils, appeared frozen in time and space. Jovol spoke the words, and raw power coursed through them all. Mostin’s head span ecstatically, and he resisted the urge to giggle.

The backlash was terrific, causing the Alienist’s skin to crack and his teeth to rattle in his head. Blood vessels across Jovol’s temples, down his neck, and along his arms ruptured, spraying blood over the other Wizards. He groaned, and pulled open the portal to Dream again.

The cabal vanished back into the unconscious world.

Gihaahia noticed nothing until it was too late. She would be called to the Prime, and serve the entity called Claviger.

Strange, she thought. It almost felt like some form of compulsion – not that she had ever experienced one. There were, after all, no compulsions capable of affecting her.

*

And so it transpired, as Jovol had either foreseen or determined – when a Wizard is an actor in his own visions of the future, who can judge whether it is ordained or not? Mostin, Shomei, Mulissu, Waide, Hlioth, Tozinak and Daunton submitted themselves to the Ogre’s direction, and wrought a spell that would change the future of magic in Wyre.

In that moment, when Gihaahia – scarce less than a demigoddess in her power – was bound to the Claviger, Mostin experienced first-hand his own theories of Will, and the power to make it manifest. It was true. Anything was possible. Anything.

Henceforth, the Claviger would reside in a cave in the weathered hills of Mord, south of Morne. Its location would be unknown to those who were not initiated –
arcanists of sufficient power and reputation – but would exist as a rumour amongst those who aspired to be counted among the great.

Those Wizards who were vexed by dilemmas regarding their actions could approach the Claviger, and ask it for guidance. In its faultless interpretation of the Injunction, the Claviger would relay its adjudication in a sombre voice, issuing from the tablet upon which Jovol’s words were scribed.

Occasionally, those who spoke with it would encounter a small child in the chamber – this was generally considered to be the Claviger itself, and was interpreted as a favourable omen by the lucky petitioners. Less often, a woman of singular beauty would relay the Claviger’s stern remonstration to those who, for their own ends, attempted to interpret the letter of the Injunction against its spirit. This was known to be the Enforcer, whose manifestation was recognized as a dire warning, or worse.

Even with his own great foresight, Jovol could not have guessed that a Mystery cult would eventually develop around the site. The need for religion is incomprehensible to most Wizards, and despite Jovol’s friendship with celestials, and his concern for the welfare of Tramst, he was no exception.

As for those Wizards who, in fact, violated the Injunction, they would feel the wrath of the Enforcer in measure to their transgression. This was determined by the Claviger, which possessed a near-omniscience with regard to all things magical. Punishments ranged from confiscation of minor items from the Mage’s possessions, through subjection to a symbol of insanity in the event of a more major breach, to summary execution in the most serious of cases.

The first to fall to the Enforcer would be Jovol himself, when, in order to prevent a larger catastrophe, he slew the mage Kothchori.

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**POST 5: EPILOGUE. OF SORTS**

Posted by: Sepulchrave II at ENWorld on 27th February 2003, 08:53 PM

Quote:

that's not an end is it?

No.

This is an end (but not the end). I tied things up more quickly in writing than I had anticipated for the 'Rape of Morne.' I must admit, I'm kind of relieved that it's over.

BTW, the final posts only take us to October 2002 - game-wise. Yes, there is more coming (sigh). I suppose I'll have to start another thread. Oh well...

So I guess this is an epilogue, of sorts...
Epilogue. Of Sorts.

When dawn broke, and the rains abated, Eadric stood upon the cracked roof of the Fane, looked out, and inspected the damage. He grimaced. The swathe of ruin which emanated from the Temple encompassed a fifth part of the city. And still, although with increasingly less regularity, Templars and city guardsmen reported capturing those who suffered from the madness engendered by the Wave of Hate.

Nearly ten thousand dead, in all, if Nwm’s figures were correct. Material damage that would run to more than a hundred tons of silver. A wound in the collective psyche that would probably never heal.

And, ironically, neither new Temple taxes to pay for the rebuilding of the Fane, nor sufficient in the coffers to both recompense the Uediians and begin repairs. He sighed. The price of success.

To the south, beyond the walls of the city, neat rows of Temple tents – interspersed with a disordered riot of gaudy aristocratic pavillions – were plainly visible. His banners floated in the morning wind.

"They’ll want paying, you know," Ortwin said, fluttering down behind him in his winged boots. "At least the Ardanese. The Aristocracy will expect land-grants and tax breaks. The Uediians will want…"

"I know, I know," the Paladin grumbled.

"If you claim the Duchy…"

"I will not," Eadric snapped.

"You might have to, Ed. Even Tramst said you might have to. You don’t have to govern it directly – appoint a steward or something."

"Ryth would have made a good Duke."

"Ryth got burned up with the Duchess, if you recall. I doubt Soraine would have favoured him, in any case. Did she leave any clues to who she felt was suitable? Other than yourself, of course." Ortwin couldn’t resist the final jibe.

The Paladin shook his head.

"Who’s the technical heir?"

"Probably Skadding. But Trempa has always held with the bestowal of favour, combined with lineage. At one point, it advocated ultimageniture. It’s eccentric like that. Too close to Ardan."

"What’s Skadding like?"

"Young. Inexperienced." Eadric groaned. "And Foide’s son."

"Ahh," Ortwin said.
The Devil’s eyes narrowed when he learned of the news.

You sneaky old bastard, he thought, as he considered Oronthon. You keep changing the damn rules. Where’s the fun in that?

Gihaahia! He wondered who amongst the Infernal hierarchy had been privy to the likely course of events – or rather who the Adversary had deigned to inform for his own, inscrutable ends. Titivilus scowled, and wondered why he had not been one of them.

The sweet promise that the Accord had been relaxed for him – in order to facilitate the ongoing temptation of Eadric – was now sullied by the countermeasures set in place by Fillein, or Jovol, or whatever he called himself these days.

An Injunction carved in stone was no bad thing – those Wyrish dilettantes needed a measure of discipline in their lives. But a ban on summoning? He sensed the Bright God’s meddling hand in events, and wondered what deal had been struck between the Ogre and Rintrah. He also wondered who of the Wizards in Wyre might draw the same conclusion. But Oronthon’s interdict extended to the Infernal as well – at least in theory. And now she was the helot of some damned Dream-thing. Damn celestial double standards.

Titivilus recalled the deal that Shomei had forced upon him. It, also, was not to the Duke’s liking. Sneaky bitch.

He fumed silently.

He had thought that he’d had her cornered, that she had been foolish enough to return to him openly. And despite her rod, and the numerous wards that sat on her, he should have finished her there and then. It had been the first time that he’d used his sword in almost two hundred years, and had caught her off-guard. But she weathered the assault and vanished.

Fifteen minutes later, Titivilus had been dragged into a pocket dimension and trapped within a thaumaturgic diagram. At that moment, both of them had known that she could ask for anything and he would be forced to yield: to miss his appointment with the Ahma would have been inexcusable.

The Devil relaxed, and smiled. She was audacious. He couldn’t help but admire her.

Not that that will stop me from killing her, when the time comes, he thought.

"What do you mean, he’s dead?" Mostin was livid. "That’s impossible. He was a little shaken up yesterday, but that’s hardly surprising given the magic that he harnessed."

Mulissu shrugged. "He knew he would die. He merely needed to choose the way
in which it occurred – to maximize the potential for order, and to maintain the
Injunction."

The Alienist blustered briefly. "Well, what happened? Was it the backlash?"

"Oh, no. He’d fully recovered by about midnight. He killed Kothchori, and the
Enforcer annihilated him."

Mostin’s jaw dropped. "But…"

"Kothchori was about to open a second Gate. Jovol’s prognostications revealed
that had he done so, even the death of the other mage at the hands of the
Enforcer would have come too late – Graz’zt would have made a second transit
and…done something which Jovol felt was unacceptable, I suppose. Rimilin was
present also, and Griel, but Jovol didn’t kill them."

"Griel? What the…? How did he find them?"

"I guess Griel was not Mind Blanked and he inferred their location through his
Web of Motes."

"But I wanted to talk to him! I never had the chance to speak with him, to
question him. Jovol was Fillein, you know."

"Fillein? Mostin, you need a drink. Fillein has been dead for…"

Mostin sniffed, feeling rather snubbed.

"And, yes, he left something for you, Mostin. It is very heavy." The Witch
snapped her gloved fingers, and an ornate box of carved wood appeared beneath
her arm.

The Alienist raised an eyebrow. "What is it?"

"I don’t know. It seemed a little rude to sneak a look."

"I’d have looked," Mostin said honestly, unlocking the silver clasps. The lid
opened smoothly, to reveal a stone tablet wrapped within red silks.

"I hope it’s not a copy of the Injunction," Mulissu sighed. "That would be rather
tedious."

The Alienist pulled the fabrics aside and swallowed. The tablet was weathered and
cracked, but still quite readable. "It’s a spell."

"Mmm?" The Savant said in a distracted voice, attempting to sound disinterested.
"What’s it called?"
"Graz’zt," Mostin replied, shaking.

POST 6:

Posted by: Sepulchrave II at ENWorld on 28th February 2003, 12:32 AM

Quote:
Just want you to know that we all appreciate you sharing your story with us, but you shouldn't feel like you have to make the updates. I hope it has been as fun writing the story hour as it has been reading it.

Actually, it has been immensely rewarding.

Sometimes fun. Sometimes very, very frustrating. I am actually looking forward to starting the new thread - I guess that I felt that winding up the current one to my complete satisfaction was necessary before I could come at the new one 'fresh', as it were. That was hard.

It has also required more self-discipline that I thought myself capable of. Time is a big constraint - I don't have anything like as much as I need, and stealing the odd hour here and there was an unsatisfactory way for me to write. I am beginning to adjust, however. I need to 'get it out' and down on paper (or a WP screen, in this case.)

Thanks to everyone for your support - I really couldn't have done it without you. If I've seemed absent, or unresponsive to your questions at times, then I apologize but time, time, time....

Now I have 3 tasks:

1) Begin the new thread. This will be a pleasant break from...

2) Edit the master document for Virtue, Heretic and Rape into something publishable - as noted by Taren Seeker. This will be arduous, and frankly, I dread it - I'm more critical of my work than anyone else. It is necessary, however. It will take a long time.

3) Update 'Divertimento' when the other stuff becomes too overwhelming. The pace is different, and although it has only been five or six very infrequent sessions, the game has a lot of potential. I judge that updates to this thread will be very, very infrequent.

Thanks again for many kind words, and continued support.

No doubt, see you around soon.

Jim.