

GROZORG
THE FALL

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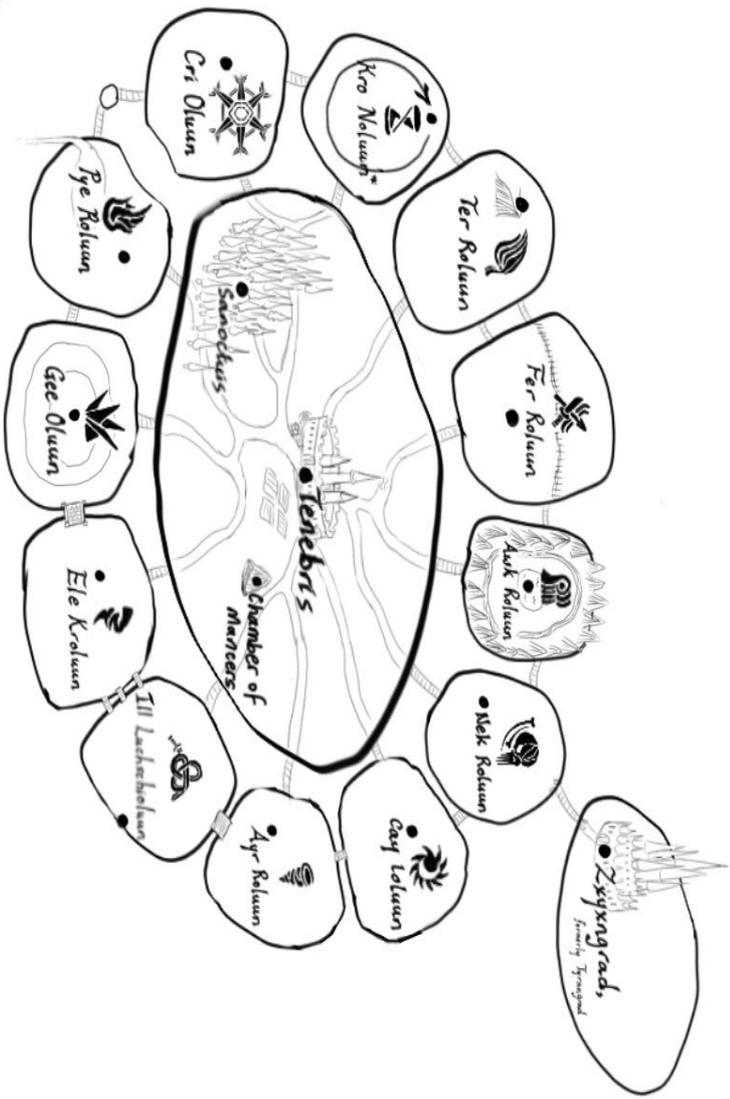
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For Mom and Dad



* The Chronos Capital, Kro Noluun, revolves around the island every day

An Open Letter

I have taken it upon myself to document the events that had forever altered the course of Grozorg. It is my duty to inform, to warn, to plead.

To whomever this dossier may come across, please dwell on these five simple words for a moment:

Your life is at stake.

There is no stopping the plague now, but you still have time to act before it gets the best of you; your friends, your family, your nation.

What does it all mean when everything I, Prokun Ulterium, have done comes to nothing? If the acts of my life fail to convince you, if the countless life changing acts of my story fail to persuade you, at least think of the ones you love.

You can never get the ones you love you lose back.

My father had always said, “Ulterium, take it all in and discern for yourself. The good, the bad, the right, the wrong, take it all in and discern.” So now, I have repainted the memories through a descriptive first-person perspective in hopes of appealing to you the legend of our great nation divided; the good, the bad, the right, the wrong. From my first-hand experience to the eyewitness accounts vividly described to me, I have created a sole chronological tale in hopes that you would come to our aid against the final frontier of Ultyrannust’s blight.

Please listen to my story. Our story. It begins with fourteen islands, once peacefully drifting along the unknown rim of the galaxy in unity. The entire utopia, formerly known as Growzorg, advanced into a complicated, mutual society renamed Grozorg.

Each island represents a different element, each element vital in the formation of the nation. The domains are chained together by bridges, upheld by an unseen force and protected by a serpent simply

titled “The Gravity Dragon” and four ancient titans few had lay eyes on before. Every island is governed by a more-or-less monarchical system with a ruling lord, descendants of the high lord.

Twelve elemental islands encircle a main, larger piece of land. Twelve lords rule the twelve smaller islands, while a king governs the main central land, granting it the soliloquy Mainland Grozorg. Apart from the thirteen domains floats another island, which houses the high lord. He is responsible for overlooking every island, as opposed to a lord ruling his or her sole island. To the north of Mainland Grozorg drifts the domain of metal. Heading eastward comes the domain of water, life, space, air, illusion, electricity, rock, fire, ice, time, and nature. The central island and the furthest island, however, represents no element.

The twelve elemental islands also house an individual that has perfected their element, working at the side of their lord. The elemental masters could summon or control their respective element at ease, known throughout Grozorg as Mancers. The twelve Mancers were also representatives of their nations, and they would hold regular meetings in the Chamber of Mancers, located on Mainland Grozorg, to discuss the wellbeing of the nation. When they were near death, they would select an unknown individual to pass on their esoteric trade and title.

I do not wish to bore you any further; only to inform you of the bare basics of our former glory. Grozorg has lived at peace for centuries and centuries in the seemingly perfect system until history took a dark, dark, turn.

He has shattered the harmony in his search for power, destroyed every family in his selfish act, trampled peace in his corrupted conquest.

And he is coming for you.

Prologue

His father's room stood in front of him; the royal bedroom. Prince Tyrannust VI confronted the door, gazing deeply into the reinforcing iron bars that embraced the heavy wooden entrance.

The Prince had a simple thought. A devilish grin smeared across his nonchalant face.

With a silent wave of his hand in the air, the hard wood in front of him gave way to a slight crack. A snap followed the wave from the Prince, causing the door to burst into splinters.

"Who's there?" the High Lord queried tiredly. He had just woken up from a restless night of agonizing visions. Moreover, he had had a dynamic feud with his son that persisted late after midnight.

The Prince gave no reply. He slowly prowled towards the royal figure that was lying stationary on the unkempt bed. The floorboards creaked under his heavy footsteps, and his determined face emulated his apathetic heart.

"Son," his father noticed, with no tone of dispute left from last night's fight, "is there something wrong?"

The High Lord made an effort to turn towards his grim-mannered son. With a grunt, he heaved himself to a right angle and rubbed his eyes. His wrinkled skin displayed the priceless experiences and wisdom gained, but his visions of prosperity and wealth for the lands had faded since the last few centuries of ruling Grozorg. He knew he was old, but if time admitted, he would rule for another century or so before handing his position over to the next heir. His wife had died a decade before, a sudden and tragic loss the entire kingdom mourned over. Already burdened with the kingdom's rapid growth and the threat of otherworldly attacks occurring unexpectedly, he was undoubtedly more concerned for his only son's well being.

"What is it, Tyrannust? Is there something bother--"

He got no further. The Prince pounced forward and clutched his father's throat, raising him high above the bed.

“Son!” the High Lord choked with a shocked startle. His eyes widened as he flailed his arms in a desperate attempt of escape, attempting to pry free from his son's iron grip. His broadsword was two meters away, helplessly tumbled on the ground. The High Lord was weak now, compared to the powerful Prince.

“Make me king,” the Prince demanded suddenly, firmly.

Two armoured men rushed in through the gaping hole in the wall. “Lord, is there something--”

Before the Royal Guards could intercept, they were engulfed in a black flame spewed from the Prince's Red Dragon. The dragon had followed his master to the royal bedroom, lurking in the dark shadows of the hallway.

“You are of no use anymore. Where were you when mother died? You were ‘busy’ in your planning room, not admitting that it was you who ruthlessly poisoned her!”

“It...wasn't...me...” the High Lord struggled to enunciate. Gasping for air, his son tightened his clutch. “Is... Is this what this...this is all about?”

The Prince decided to aside the accusation into a different direction, which still led to the same conclusion.

“Where were you when I needed you? I had to fend myself from the dangers ever since I was born!” The Prince roared. “What did you do? Gift me a dragon to take your place? Grandfather did a better job than you! You... fool! You paid for the weak and allowed the rich to bypass their debts!”

On the contrary, Grozorg had been a much happier place following the death of High Lord Tyrannust IV. The outgoing personality of Tyrannust V, along with his insisting aid for the lower class to create equilibrium amongst the other classes had earned him commendable praise - although mostly from the powerless peasants.

Prince Tyrannust VI seized his chance now. His father had received a crippling blow to his right leg about a month ago from a small rebellion led by the higher-ranked warriors, soon resolved through a mass execution, leaving only a few tractable nobilities.

Along with his father's deteriorating age, the Prince saw a spark of opportunity and seized it.

"Son...please!" the High Lord gurgled, eyes rolling back.

"I won't let you die like this," the Prince spoke mercifully.

Releasing his father, he reached for the High Lord's sword and pointed its tip towards his father's throat, giving him no time to escape. Blood trickled down the High Lord's frail neck as he froze in action of gasping for air.

"Even your closest officials have betrayed you," the Prince hissed, "they all look up to me!"

The Prince leaned in, finally speaking the truth behind his actions. "When you placed that man in power, you left no room for me. You gave my rightful possession away - you made me another one of your servants! I deserved the throne...but I got nothing!"

"Is that what you want? A title? My title? I'll give you anything! Anything!"

The High Lord was drenched in fear, frozen in an awkward slump on his bed.

"Anything?" Tyrannust VI asked.

"Tyrannust, you're better than this!"

"Anything?" the Prince pressed unrelentingly.

The young Prince cackled wickedly as he shifted the blade lower. "Then let me be the Highest Lord of Grozorg!"

Frigid shock swept across the High Lord's face as the sword pierced his heart.

I

“It’s heading left,” Kadava whispered. He was dressed in a simple sackcloth shirt with a patched leather vest tossed on. It was his typical outfit, and nothing I said could change what he wore.

“The marks are getting deeper and deeper; is it slowing down?” I inquired. The parquet bear-like paw prints that scattered evenly across the glistening freshly fallen snow led deeper into the foreboding forest.

“Well, at least it’d be easier for us to track it down, especially in this damned wasteland of trees.”

“Ulterium,” Foku spoke on my left. Through most of the trek, he had been the quietest, focused only on the game. He wore his purple silk top hat and a matching violet cloak, a sense of mystery shrouding Foku, armed with his unique signature lance strapped to his back. “Look over there,” he pointed rightwards.

A flash of gray was followed by a heavy bustle through a distant withered bush as it attempted to escape. Though it was only visible for a split second, I caught a clear glimpse of its features.

“That’s...a lykos,” I breathed in amazement. “All along the lykos was trying to fool us, creating nonsense twists and turns to divert our attention, trying to tire us out! That’s what they would do to any hunter. No wonder it took us so long to keep up with it!”

“You said ‘lykos’...” Kadava trailed off disbelievingly.

“It’s the only four-legged beast cunning enough to deter a tracker. This would make us a fortune if we hunt it down!”

“Aren’t lykos supposedly extinct? They all disappeared after Zxyx’s reign, didn’t they?” Foku hesitantly asked.

“We seldom hunt on Lord Cryann’s island; you’d never guess what still resides in this wretched forest. In fact, I’d admit this forest creates somewhat of a palisade to the beasts within. If we catch this lykos, and it’s a big one too, our names would be known across Grozorg!”

“Our names are already known across Grozorg,” Kadava scoffed. “We’re *bounty* hunters, not hunters.”

“Hey,” Foku interrupted. “What if we cut straight across the forest? If the lykos keeps up with this pattern, we might be able to outpace it!”

Frankly, I was too busy talking to have noticed a trackable pattern of the lykos.

“That’s a pretty big risk though,” I spoke, raising an eyebrow, “but it’s worth a shot,” I resolved with a smile. “After you.”

Picking up our pace, we traced the hypotenuse of our game’s detour, leading deeper into the heart of the forest.

“Um, Ulterium,” Kadava said, breaking the silence. “You thought we were hunting a boar.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

“Even a boar would take three grown men to hunt and handle. Now you’re talking about an *adult* lykos!”

“What, you don’t think we can handle an *adult* lykos?”

“Have you not heard of the legends of lykos back in the days?”

“I have, yet you haven’t answered my question yet.”

“King Fulcan required the best squadron from his elite legion to pin down a single lykos!” Kadava’s voice rose. “Even then, it took an hour and a half until his broadsword could penetrate through the muscular derma and pierce the heart of the beast! You know that lykos aren’t only cunning; they’re strong and vicious as well!”

“I’m sure that’s all exaggerated. Besides, the High Lord Tyrannust V trained his own pack of hounds to hunt and take down lykos after Fulcan’s experience. Surely lykos aren’t that strong. Now if you don’t mind toning down a bit.”

“Exaggerated?!” Kadava shouted. His voice rang through the desolate branches as a few birds quickly fluttered overhead.

“Quiet!” Foku hissed, interceding Kadava and I. He pointed to the right. “We shifted too much to the left, now we’re getting farther away from the lykos!”

He lowered his fingers, revealing a parallel path a good twenty meters away. In between the two snow-blanketed paths, shriveled plants litter the ground with sharpened twigs and furnished thorns.

“It’s further down that other track over there,” Kadava indicated. “Right there!”

A gray blur shifted evenly farther and farther in the distance, under the dim rays that penetrated the dense canopy.

“Look, Kadava. I get your concerns,” I spoke with understanding as we shuffled onwards. “The reason I specifically chose you and Foku to hunt with me, the same reason why you both are my first mate and second in command, is because of your uncanny skills. Both you and Foku were well disciplined in mastering your strengths, and only with your crazy vision and his deadly accuracy will the guild continue to thrive. But your skills don’t determine your success, your will determines your success.”

“Was that prepped?” Foku teased with a slim smile. I rolled my eyes.

“So... you’re saying that we have the capability of actually handling the lykos,” Kadava said dryly, eyes narrowed.

“You wanna go back? Your call, but I’m not leaving. Worse comes to worse, we...”

“Improvise,” the two finished in unison.

“You already know,” I smiled. “Besides, we’ve almost caught up to it.”

“About that...” Foku responded slowly. “We didn’t catch up to it, it caught up to us.” Abruptly ceasing to a halt, Foku softly continued, “turn around slowly, and evade any eye contact.”

A trembling growl ripped through the underbrush behind us. A low grumble shook the dead dense woods from the rumble of the lykos’ powerful muscular chest.

“Blades up but don’t take your sheathes off. If a glint of light reflects off the metal and frightens the wolf, we would be in deep trouble.”

We occasionally stole glances at the lykos. It was astounding -- the body built bigger than a full-grown lion, teeth bared revealing slender fangs ready to seize any victim, and muscular forelegs paired with powerful forearms. It wasn't any regular wolf; it had an elegant lucent silk coat that radiated under the weak sun, and sharp ears perched backwards on its pointed skull.

Kadava equipped his pair of battle kunai, blades wrapped with torn linen. I pulled out my dual sheathed crises as Foku prepared his electrical lance.

We were fully armed and prepared, when my mind started to race. I had no idea, nor personal experience, with a lykos. It slowly clawed closer to us, jaw gaping wider, baring more razor fangs. Kadava's doubts soon became mine - a lykos? Was I crazy? Sure, boars were easy and bears achievable, but...a lykos?

"Prokun! What do we do?" Foku hissed. "It's getting closer!"

Racking my brain, I recalled different methods on taking down beasts.

"What did King Fulcan do to kill that lykos in the legends?"

"First of all, he had a squadron of a dozen elite soldiers,"

Kadava innocently reminded.

"He also had his acclaimed broadsword," Foku added, glaring at the two short blades poking out of my hands.

The beast was now less than two meters away, crimson eyes locked somewhere on me. I knew it could pounce from there, and if any of our eyes met with its eyes, it would be over.

"It's gonna maul us anytime now," Kadava hissed with a rising panic. "Normally, I would stick with you till the end, but I'm ditching if you don't do anything."

Kadava was probably the only one in our entire guild to have dared spoke a thing like that to me, head of the Blood Guild. I had known him since we were young classmates. The reason I recruited him was for his exceptional ability, as well as his steadfast loyalty - well, except now.

All there was to do now was what I excelled at, what I was known for.

Improvise.

“Triperikleio formation,” I started. “Kadava flank right, Foku, left.”

In an instant, we positioned ourselves in a triangular formation around the lykos; Kadava on my right side and Foku on my left. The wolf spun around aggressively, realizing it had been outnumbered.

“Be quick because if it jumps, a man’s sure to go down!”

“Foku, shock second, I distract. Kadava, search!”

I had to risk it now. Standing firmly on the muddy ground, I looked up to meet its eyes. Immediately, the crimson eyes filled with rage and the muscular beast tore through the damp air towards me.

“Sheathes off!” I spat. “Foku, now!”

A beam of electricity blasted from Foku’s mystical pole arm, stunning the magnificent beast midair.

“Search!”

Lee quickly pranced around the lykos, examining the wolf in search for a weak point that would grant us an advantage over it. Sometimes the weak spot resulted from a previous accident. Other times, a weaker point on the beast was due to a birth defect.

“Right forearm back, left ear back!” Kadava quickly shouted.

As the lykos crashed into the ground, a sudden arrow whizzed past my right ear.

“Heads down! Ambush!” I cried.

“Who is it?”

A low voice broke through the bushes in reply.

“Sorry, I was aiming for the lykos,” the voice sneered.

I recognized that damned voice instantly. Turning around, I faced the bowman with a second arrow nocked on his bow. Somebody stepped out beside him, confirming my recognition - none other than the one and only Octavius Tarsus.

“What are you doing here?” I scowled at him, all thoughts of the lykos dispelled. “You nearly shot my ear off!”

“If I had a less professional ranger recruited, your ear would have already been off,” the voice cackled.

“And if you were well aware of the law, that would be eligible for two months in prison!” I snapped back.

“This is our lykos! Get outta here!” Kadava shouted angrily.

“Not anymore!” Tarsus laughed.

Instinctively, I turned back to where the beast once lay stunned at Kadava’s mention of the lykos. It had awoken from the shock, now prancing a couple meters away, leaping deeper into the forest.

“The law also states, ‘The first party to kill the beast has full ownership of the prize,’” Tarsus finished. “After it, men!”

A group of five leapt out of the bushes at Tarsus’ command, following their leader and his ranger towards the large wolf.

“They used us as pawns! We can’t lose! Let’s go!” I barked, enraged. Tailing Tarsus’ group, we sprinted towards the escaping lykos.

Octavius Tarsus was the head of a second guild, the Night Guild. There were only two guilds on Grozorg, and without a doubt, ours had always been in constant feud with his guild since the beginning of time. Moreover, there was a personal conflict between Tarsus and I -- problems overlapping problems every time he interfered with my doings. It seemed nearly impossible for him not to go where I went, and I should have known better today.

The Blood Guild, my guild, was founded by my father, passed down to me after his disappearance. Tarsus, alternatively, opened his guild after I inherited my father’s head position during the corruption of Lord Zyx. Both guilds contained a variety of different classes, but stealth was the main attribute a guild searched for. It was no surprise Tarsus would hire an Arretan ranger, perfecting the bow and the blade; a master in the shadows. The specially trained longbowmen could only be found in the Terramancy domain, the domain of nature.

As we darted through the forest, the ranger nocked another arrow whilst keeping up with his guild, raising and aiming towards the hind leg of the lykos.

“Foku!” I quickly called. “Shoot his bow! Try not to hit him - but if you do, it’s all the same!”

We were a good ten meters from Tarsus’ last man, and another twenty behind the lykos. At even twenty meters, it was a guaranteed, if not fatal, shot performed by any skilled ranger. With a spark and a crackle, Foku’s lance blasted a neon beam.

A sequence popped into my head as I quickly spat it out. “Kadava, right, rendez-vous Tarsus! Foku, center disguise! I left, parallel Kadava!”

This sequence was one of our most practiced three-men formations, and our best as well. As Kadava ran right to flank Tarsus, I sprinted to Tarsus’ left, while Foku set up two illusions of me and Kadava beside him, so if anyone did look back, it would appear as if we were still together. This made Foku a valuable guildsman; his training in the Illusiomancy Domain taught him the arts of mind manipulation and, well, illusions.

Kadava was primarily our scout, and I, more or less, an assassin. The official title was an “experienced hunter”, but I preferred “assassin”. With strict perseverance, we began to outpace most of the Night Guildsmen, although Tarsus surprisingly matched our pace; he remained at a constant distance ahead of us.

The ranger halted to recover his priceless bow, ripped out of his hands but not damaged by the sudden burst of electricity from Foku. At least he was now no longer a threat to the lykos. Tarsus released a frustrated cry towards his ranger upon glancing backwards to check on our positions. Pulling out his unique shuang gou as we neared the tiring beast, he linked one hooked end of the blade to the other, swinging it faster and faster above his head.

We were kept at a five-meter gap behind Tarsus, and Kadava was still nowhere to be seen. The lykos had slowed down from exhaustion; it wasn’t the swiftest of all Canidae, yet it was still persisting a hard ten meters ahead of us.

If the swinging blade of Tarsus caught any part of the lykos, it would most definitely be a lethal blow, penetrating deep into the flesh

of the wolf. His blade was probably forged in the Ferromancy Faction, where the strongest of all metals were welded. My blade was developed from the same faction as well, but the momentum of his special weapon gave a greater advantage in taking the lykos down.

Tarsus peered back occasionally, noting to himself that all three of us were still far behind him. Foku was doing an excellent job and I smiled devilishly at the oblivious Tarsus. He gave another frustrated cry as more of his guild members vanished behind the horizon of the dead trees. Foku kept a nice and steady pace to convince Tarsus that we had no chance of catching up, when in reality Kadava and I were about the same distance to the wolf as Tarsus.

A shadow silently shifted some thirty meters away on my right, and a vague silhouette drew closer, resembling a human figure. It had to be Kadava, still sprinting in the trees away from Tarsus' line of sight. We were only a few meters away from the guild leader, disciplined in enduring long miles of running. I made a movement with my two short blades, crossing them above my head followed by pointing them towards Tarsus. Quickly, I reinforced my code by mimicking a quick spin with my blades above my head, pointing my two silver blades towards Tarsus' weapon once more. Kadava repeated my actions quickly but clearly, stating his comprehension. This was the basic "render and repeat" protocol everyone in my guild had to learn. We couldn't give ourselves away until the last moment - the devastating art of surprise.

Tarsus gradually slowed down, assuring himself that we were still far behind. The lykos had begun giving in to exhaustion as well, pace staggered and decreased in speed. It knew it couldn't fight back when it was outnumbered by this many.

At last, the wolf tumbled down, tripping across a mossy branch that had fallen on the forest floor. Seizing the perfect timing, Kadava hurled his battle kunai towards Tarsus' swinging blades, knocking the smooth rotation off balance. In smooth succession, Kadava leapt out from the trees and overtook Tarsus, both men dropping down onto the dusty ground. The shuang-gou was ripped out of Tarsus' grip, sliding

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