

powerful demon to angry goddess, then killed Curchanus and stole part of his dominion. The gods realized that not only was the world vulnerable to strange powers, they too could become prey. Any overt plans they made in regard to this are unknown.

Earthfall brought a thousand years of darkness to Golarion and an age of strange godly births. Dou-Bral, now called Zon-Kuthon, fulfilled the conditions of his banishment and reclaimed a twisted aspect of his old powers. Orcs emerged upon the surface world and battled humans, and the god Gorum made his first appearance during these wars. The ice creature Thremyr awoke from its slumber and its frost giants worshiped it in thanks. These new gods made the elder ones realize that their position as masters of the world had been challenged. As before, their plans to deal with this are unknown.

When the darkness left the world, mortals rebuilt their civilizations, aided by Erastil, Torag, and others. The most remarkable event of this period was the elevation of Aroden to a living god through the power of the *Starstone*. The existing gods took no action to prevent this usurpation of their divine prerogative with mortal magic. The following millennia recorded the ascension of Norgorber, Cayden, and Iomedae with the help of the *Starstone*. Aroden made Arazni his herald, champion, and a goddess in her own right. Irori became a god without external help. The older gods revealed nothing of their thoughts on this trend of mortals becoming living gods, even evil gods.

Late in this age, mortals and deities alike were shocked when the Whispering Tyrant (technically a mortal undead and certainly not a god) killed Arazni. Never before had a god been slain by mortal hand, and the gods realized they were more vulnerable than ever they had feared. Many drew together to create the mantis god Achaek to protect them from such threats, but for most deities, the solution was more simple—they chose to only act through emissaries thereafter, limiting their appearances to visions and images rather than actual manifestation.

The disappearance and death of Aroden rocked the world in a physical and metaphysical sense. Even more so than the mortals, the gods themselves were stunned that one of their esteemed number (for after nearly five thousand years they certainly counted him as an equal) might die for unknown reasons and completely unexpectedly. For ages they were guarded, and then reticent, and now the gods knew fear. Were they doomed to sudden and unpredictable destruction? Was this a flaw in the *Starstone*'s gift or was any god susceptible to it? With the loss of prophecy, none of them knew... except Pharsma, for death is her domain, but she has little to say on the subject. A century passed and the gods had no answers and no new plans. Yet the day-to-day workings of the mortal and divine worlds proceed.

BECOMING A DEITY

For ages, mortals believed the only way to become a god was to be “born” one (in the sense that one or more deities agree to create another of their kind) or for the gods to elevate a mortal to godly status. Then again, powerful demons are known to grant spells in the manner of gods, and Lamashtu managed to gain a foothold on divinity through an unknown process—perhaps mortal worship, perhaps by sucking raw power out of her slain foes. Can the ritual sacrifice of a million powerful demons propagate one of their number to godhood?

Then there is the sudden appearance of Gorum, said to be a manifestation of the battles between orcs and humans—a purely spiritual entity, the Lord in Iron was not created out of nothing by another god (at least, none have confessed to it) nor was he once a mortal that transcended his mortal flesh. Sages are aware of the worlds beyond Golarion and the planes surrounding it, pointing at the Great Old Ones and the alien entity controlling Zon-Kuthon, and speculate that actions in the mortal world sometimes create a window or even a doorway that allow these otherworldly forces to observe or even influence events in Golarion, and that apparently-spontaneous apotheosis is actually a result of these external factors. In most cases this power is not strong, only enough to warp reality somewhat, while in others it can create minor godlings like Zyphus (supposedly born of an utterly meaningless death), or the god-cocoon that spawned Ghlaunder.

Some scholars feel that gods such as Irori and Urgathoa derive from this concept as well—lucky individuals in the right place at the right time. Yet it was Aroden’s achievements that were the most impressive; not only was he a mortal that became a god without divine help, but he made it easier for others to do so by placing the *Starstone* where others could reach it. Of course, “easier” is a relative term, as countless mortals have failed the Test of the *Starstone*, but only a few have passed—a handful of ascended mortals who would not have become gods under their own power.

Divine inheritance, otherworldly influence, ultimate will, or by means of an artifact—these four methods are just the ones commonly known and potentially verifiable. Others speculate that a sufficient cult of personality can make a mortal a god, or that slaying a god elevates the killer to godhood (though the Whispering Tyrant’s murder of Arazni belies this suggestion), or massive human sacrifice (though, again, Tar-Baphon’s actions did not accomplish this), or some master spell requiring a lifetime to cast, or even stranger ideas. Such things are tavern talk, old wives’ tales, and a means for bards to earn a few coins—possibly true, but in ten thousand years there is no proof of any of these ever happening... but likewise no proof that it is impossible.