**­­­­­­­Setting**

**Cosmic:**

Somewhere in a universe, in a solar system, an alignment of powers in several parallel universes created a type of cosmic syzygy, and our particular world (Terra for now) aligned (Spiritually? Spatially? Hyper-dimensionally?) with this syzygy, pushing Terra into a cosmic frenzy of other worlds which themselves have been aligned for some time. Essentially, we are the newcomers into an established chaotic order. It is unknown in which universe(s) the alignment first began in, or what is causing it, but new worlds are being added every century to millennium or so to The Alignment. While these worlds are aligned, aspects of our world leak into theirs and vice versa. This has allowed for magic to exist in these worlds, as a given world’s laws of physics do not apply neatly to the other worlds.

**On Terra:**

The inhabitants of Terra are human-like, sexually dimorphic creatures, though they are slightly taller than humans, have lifespans of about 150 years, and have usual human complexions. The inhabitants of Terra know little about the Alignment.

The Empire to which Adyn belongs is ruled by King Philip II, who uses his Inquisition to squash all magic use within Ixpánta, the Empire.

Adyn lives in Amahn, a province of what was once Ahnikal (now Ixpanta), but was conquered by King Philip I about 100 years ago. He lives near the city of Maravilla, which was once Khanin.

**Within the Alignment**

Several millennia ago, there was a great war between some of the ancient races of the alignment and the demons, as the fabric between their realities was far thinner in those times, and demons had great influence over their realms, which often spanned multiple planets they had engulfed. According to some Alignment myths, one of the ancient races, perhaps the first in the Alignment, sacrificed themselves in order to seal away the realms inhabited by demons. This race supposedly did so using the knowledge contained within a great library that spanned an entire world.

The creatures in other worlds are often animalistic, some insect-like with antennae, carapace, large eyes, and huge variance in size and intelligence, some more like other mammals or reptiles, amphibians, even birds, and fairies (maybe a world of intelligent dragons?), some made of sentient clouds of gas, some ruled by immensely powerful beings (known for now as demons). Many of these creatures also have some range of magical powers, with common abilities including the ability to warp between worlds in the Alignment at will (world-hop) and the ability to astrally project into other worlds (dream-walk). Some of these species have evolved within the alignment, and they are extremely practiced in using these magics. Others have hardly more experience than humans by the time our protagonists arrive. Some of the abilities seem to be given to members of a species at random, while others anyone within the species can access, and these abilities vary from species to species.

**­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­Time:**

* On Terra
  + Medieval, but on the cusp of a new, magical and technical renaissance in some parts of the world, as peoples begin to interact with those of other worlds. Terra shifted into alignment with the other worlds about 150 years ago, though knowledge of this event only truly began to manifest globally about 100 years ago, when a massive shift occurred on the continent and Emperor X outlawed all use of magic within the Empire and any knowledge of dream-walkers to be reported immediately.
* The Alignment
  + Varies extremely wildly from hyper technologically advanced races to stone age races to primordial worlds with only bacteria-like life, though all seem to have life of some kind

**Planets (ordered chronologically by when we encounter them):**

Tarthus: Realm (actually 2 planets and a radioactive moon) named after the demon who rules it, where Elyse is possessed in the prologue.

Terra: (placeholder name for home world). Story initially begins on a vast continent on a planet similar to Earth, though with more moons, cuz heck yeah, moons, in a country currently called Ixpanta

Ol’kir’alkhai: a sand planet where Adyn first world-hops to, and meets his new best friend and ally, Zo, a Panglin, known as Olkira within the Alignment.

Pharphesis: A planet home to one of the most ancient fae (alien) species, containing a grand Alignment university where beings from different Alignment species can apply to study and hone their magical abilities.

**Additional Planets of Note:**

Core Worlds:

1. electrum - super electrically charged universe, humans will instantly die if they visit this world. Channeling laws from this world allow users to do things like create lightning and magnetize objects, though it is difficult to manipulate. Artifacts (gloves maybe) exist which allow a channeler to more accurately channel energy from this world for what effectively amounts to steel pushing/pulling. This planet is also the primary source for almost all powered objects in the alignment

2. light speed - world in universe with a speed of light hundreds of orders of magnitude higher, allowing for ships with pilots who can draw laws from this world to effectively achieve FTL in their universe

3. GravitumA - world with much lower gravity (planet is the size of a star as a result). The only stars are fucking enormous and relatively dim. Drawing laws from this universe allows channelers to ‘moon hop’ or even levitate with mechanical assistance (maybe boots with small thrusters?) Devices that utilize this world allow for things like floating cities, robots, and hover cars

4. Conduit - a world with a telepathic aether which allows for instantaneous telepathy between the members of the race which live on it. Devices which utilize Conduit’s network allow for inter-universal mobiles as well as instantaneous intra-universal communication (person A calls a center in conduit which redirects signal to person B through the aether instantaneously)

5. Alloisis – universe with odd laws of gravitation and interactions between heat and electromagnetic forces, causing stars to undergo rapid growth and death, making planets in this universe generally extremely rich in minerals. Alloisis was already fairly technologically advanced, with dense galaxies and an established galactic government. They assimilated into the Alignment quite well.

**Minor Worlds**

1. Dispersia - world with no strong force, world is pure plasma, hopping here will instantly annihilate you, dream walking here will instantly dissociate you and throw you out. Artifacts which pull laws from dispersia create disintegration bombs (nukes). A channeler who draws laws from this world will instantly nuke themselves

2. Slither - world with extremely low coefficient of kinetic friction, allowing a channeler to slide across any surface and through any gas without slowing down

3. Irradia - universe with incredibly unstable atoms, and rife with radiation (less extreme version of dispersia), can make regular objects radioactive (for insidious poison)

5. Silence - world where concussive waves are always critically dampened, eliminating almost all sound. Channeling this allows a user to make virtually no noise, as well as block out outside noise

6. GravitumB - world with much higher gravity, planet is moon sized and humans would be crushed if they came here. Manipulating laws from this planet allows for pulling objects together or crushing them

7. Lumina - planet where all objects emit bright light in all frequencies. Allows user to glow extremely brightly, and artificial glasses or cameras drawing laws through this world can effectively allow a user to see through any thickness of layers of an object (aka X-ray glasses). Highly dangerous to use as radioactivity is strong

8. Magna - universe with plank length several orders of magnitude greater, drawing laws from this universe destabilizes reality, allowing for extremely chaotic quantum tunneling to occur on large scales. Can be used to achieve certain impossible tasks but is extremely dangerous, as a channeler might simply pop out of exist or manifest any infinite number of possibilities

9. Nox – a world in which light cannot interact with matter and is thus eternally dark. Channeling laws from this world allows the user to make themselves or objects invisible, as light will pass through them without interacting with them.

**Political Landscape**:

* **Ixpanta** is a vast Terran empire, ruled by a Pope-like figure in a Theocracy. He rules with an iron-fist, employing an Inquisition-type organization, routing out any attempts at interacting with the other worlds in any way, though there are rumors that the Inquisition uses magic themselves to accomplish their means (which they definitely do. Hypocrites.) Countries which have been conquered and pulled into the Empire supposedly follow the religion of the empire and condemn magic, but several practice ‘occult’ traditions in secret. Elyse and her mother were some of these occultists, as they were both born with the ability to dream-walk. Dream-walkers have been forming societies in other worlds since the magic ban in the Empire, and they can meet each other in these other worlds, forming cults.
* **The other nations of Terra** have a variety of governments and types of civilizations. None of the others follow the strict religion of the Empire, though some do have their own aversions to magic. (Think, treatment of male channelers). Some, however, practice magic more freely.
* **The Alignment** (government/gov) is a ‘peaceful’ coalition of worlds in The Alignment (celestial event/cel). (I’ll probably change the names to make this less confusing, but I kinda like it confusing for now.) The government is a representative senate-based one based loosely on Star Wars’ Republic, with each world within the Alignment(gov) having some representation. Demonic worlds are obviously absent, as are many other worlds who lack species intelligent enough to join or that are found to be too violent. As of yet, Terra has not joined, as humans are thought to be dangerous and unstable, and they have only recently aligned.
* **Demons** have their own political landscape, (not unlike the Forsaken), in which they will often work together, or war with each other, scheme, plot, betray, etc, as many are in a constant struggle to elevate their power. They form temporary coalitions often and have their own set of abilities that allow them to interact with one another. As such, information about other rival demons is a valuable commodity, and demons are often willing to trade great power for these secrets.

Religions:

* Ixpántan religion – Otuism
  + God of War, Life, Order
  + God of Growth, Death, Chaos
  + Creed 1: From life, war. From war, order. From order, life.
  + Creed 2: From death, growth. From growth, chaos. From chaos, death.
* Elyse’s religion: Pantheism
* Zo’s religion: Pagan worship
* Alignment: Atheist / Monotheistic

**Magic Outline**

**General Channeling steps:**

1. Clear mind and find the chaotic jumble that is the collection of *zhai* (spiritual signatures) of all worlds in the alignment.
2. Isolate the *zha* (which manifests as sound for Adyn) of particular world from the chaos
3. ‘Grab’ the *zha*

**To channel laws:**

‘Pull’ that *zha* mentally to pull laws through from that world to yours

1. Can pull on multiple worlds at once, but the more you pull from, the weaker the channeling will be
2. Channeling laws, particularly multiple at once, requires much practice
3. It is possible to ‘pick and choose’ laws from another universe by intensely envisioning the desired effect, this also usually requires practice

**To project (dream-walk):**

‘Push’ on that zha to project into that world. Can only push on one world at a time. A soft push will project the channeler through to that world, but they will be unable to influence that world (think 3-eyed raven, THIS is dream-walking)

**To world-hop (to a safe world):**

Push until the body physically warps through to the destination. This process is often helped by attempting to trick the body into believing it is in the destination (focus on temperature, humidity, luminosity, ambient sound, texture of ground, air, etc.)

**To world-hop (to a dangerous/unknown world):**

First employ steps I – III to maintain a 'grip' on one's homeworld (or any world with laws of physics which are amiable to the channeler's species), and then repeat steps II - III for the destination world.

1. By maintaining a 'grip' on a safe world, and then pulling one's body through, one can hide in a bubble of safety, in case the destination has laws dangerous to the channeler's species.
2. If the destination world is discovered to be amiable, maintaining the grip on the safe world is not necessary, though it can be useful in case the user might want to hop back more easily (they can skip steps I – III).

**Demonic:**

Demonic channeling involves allowing a demon to channel magic directly using the channeler’s body as a vessel. The source of the demon’s magic is unknown and is sometimes referred to as “true magic” by scholars, as it is the last understood of the magical forms. Demonic channeling is most often done by rogue dream-walkers who have been possessed by a demon they accidentally encounter, as in the case of Elyse, but not always. Beings may bargain with demons and an exchange of ‘goods’ may occur. This exchange often involves knowledge, as demons are crafty and are always looking to elevate their power. Demons also have limited ability to influence the peaceful Alignment worlds and will sometimes “bond” with beings in those worlds whose goals align with theirs (usually destruction or mayhem, think someone with a mass shooter disposition bonding with a powerful being with a desire to sew chaos). Those who are “bonded” are the most dangerous, as the demon will not simply unleash wanton destruction and be quickly put down, knowing their time is limited before they effectively cook the mind of the vessel. Instead, the partnership allows for far more insidious goals to be accomplished over greater periods of time, even centuries or millennia.

**Characters**

**I. Humans**

**Elyse**:

Elyse is a fourteen-year-old dream-walker of great skill. While searching for a mythical world containing a vast library full of ancient knowledge on demons and magic, she accidentally stumbles into a world ruled by a powerful demon, Tarthus. He crushes her mind and possesses her body, causing her to unleash massive destruction in her hometown with magic fueled by his own power. Over a hundred died, including her entire family, save her brother Adyn, before she was killed by an old sorcerer, Bonwyll, who lived in the town and subsequently fled, as all magic was illegal and even his heroism would’ve been a death sentence under the King.

**Ayva:**

Elyse’ sister, and the only member of Elyse’s family who is also a member of the dream-walker’s guild.

**Bonwyll:**

A sorcerer (channeler) who lives in the town Elyse and Adyn are from. He was aware of the dream-walkers in his village and kept close watch on them. When Tarthus began to rampage, Bonwyll was able to destroy Tarthus’ vessel (Elyse’s body), save Adyn, and deliver him from the village to a new home before fleeing himself, as any news of his sorcery would have been a death sentence if the Inquisition found out. TBH I’m not sure if I even need this character, I’m not really look for a wise old man archetype in this series. Maybe I can introduce him early and he can be a good false wise old man until he like dies stupidly or something early on for the trolling factor.

**Adyn:**  
  
Skin color undisclosed, dark hair, average height and weight for a human male. Not particularly muscular. 18 years old. One of the key protagonists of the series, Adyn is the brother of Elyse. Like his sister, he was born with strong dream-walking abilities that began to manifest in his adolescence, but he is terrified of using his abilities, and subsequently, of sleeping. Throughout the course of his story, he discovers he is not only a dream-walker, but a world hopper, and can physically enter the other worlds at will. Adyn is also bonded to a lesser demon, Narzha, though the nature of the bond is extremely unusual.

**Tullymar (Tul):**

One of Adyn’s best friends at the beginning of book 1. He’s a loveable jokester. What a sweetie pie. He gets gutted by a soldier early on. F.

**II. Fae**

**Zo**:

Bipedal, about a head taller than Adyn, humanoid, though covered in shiny glossy brown scales which fuse to a lighter bronze-colored more human like skin around the belly, inner arms and thighs, face and neck. Lean body, no abrupt protrusions. Wears a garment similar to a loin cloth, as well as a veil that covers the mouth. Solid black eyes. 16 years old. A young, genderless fae, Zo is one of the protagonists of the series, introduced after Adyn first world-hops into Ol’kir’alkhai. Zo is part of a species that are all extremely accomplished world-hoppers, and has some skill with a blade, though no true mastery (yet), and they are unskilled at channeling, as they come from a poor, uneducated home. Zo helps guide Adyn through the process of mastering world-hopping.

**Ixen:**

Zo’s watcher/*waka*, a stubborn teng of golden complexion.

**Oza:**

Zo’s bearer/bara, a more soothing teng of onyx complexion.

**Malfoy:**

A male fae who is a total asshole to Adyn and Zo. His name is not really Malfoy. His rivalry with Adyn is constantly escalating to new heights.

**III. Demons**

**Narzha:**

Humanoid, slightly taller than Adyn, violet hair and skin with emerald eyes. Has fangs, tail, forked tongue. Clothes inspired from Roman garb. Appears to be about 30 human years old. ~7500 years old. A lesser demon who marks Adyn in book 1 and begins to manipulate him. It is unclear what Narzha’s intentions are in book 1, and how she is aligned. She is very chaotic, often trying to tempt Adyn to do outlandish things. Over time, it becomes apparent she is not necessarily evil, she simply doesn’t understand things like decency, customs, or pretty much anything to do with humans. She can read Adyn’s thoughts and is always flummoxed by his unwillingness to act on his base desires, urging him to act without careful thought. She also has an extreme aversion to any members of the Theocracy (placeholder), the government which rules the Empire (placeholder).

**Tarthus:**

Greater demon who destroys Elyse in the prologue, though he is powerful, he is not our primary antagonist. ThEn WhO iS?! He will likely end up bonding with Malfoy to form an early antagonist. Tarthus is much stronger than Narzha in raw power, putting Adyn at a distinct disadvantage.

**Xoel Phered**:

Chameleon species who appears to all who look at him like an older member of their own species. To Adyn, he is a dark skinned bald man with a trimmed gray beard, and wears ornate robes. To Zo, he is a dark scaled member of their own species. Nobody knows how he does it, or which world he comes from, though he has been at the university for as long as any can remember and does not speak of his past.

**Events I want to Happen (in this order most likely):**

**Prologue:**

* Elyse dies, while searching for The Library. More on her past, her goals, her allies, how she was betrayed, TBD.

**Terra (Part 1)**

* Adyn is introduced as a protagonist, he does boring farm stuff or something, idk. Maybe his profession will actually be useful to his powers, giving him some edge.
* Adyn starts having odd dreams and fears them.
* At some point, he is ‘marked’ by a demon named Narzha in a dream (though he doesn’t know her name). After this moment, Narzha can see through his eyes and will occasionally speak to Adyn or attempt to influence him to do something against his will
* Narzha notices Adyn staring at the girl he likes as she’s working and fantasizing (not graphic or anything) and tries to compel Adyn to spontaneously grab her and kiss her, and Adyn struggles to keep control, leaving Narzha grumbling when Adyn controls himself and pulls away
* In a separate event, compelled by Narzha, Adyn challenges a bully much stronger than him to a fight and does okay at first but ends up in a compromised position, where the bully takes things too far and is about to bludgeon Adyn with a poker. Narzha is hissing in his head to let her take over, and he does, and that instant, the poker sears the bully’s hands, causing him to wildly thrash it around until it falls off, tearing some of his skin off with it, filling the air with the smell of smoky pork.
* After this, all the kids avoid Adyn except his closest friends, and the girl he was interested in averts her gaze when he tries to catch her eye.
* One day, when the army is recruiting in the town, an Inquisitor notices the mark on Adyn (which we see from Adyn’s perspective as the Inquisitor staring curiously at Adyn, then frowning and whispering something into his superior’s ear, who looks at Adyn and grimaces.) Narzha hisses when she sees the Inquisitor, and tries to get Adyn to attack the men, though Adyn resists.
* That night, Adyn has an important foreshadowy dream
  + Dream: Adyn ‘awakes’ in grassy rolling hills, under a great sentient tree (God, maybe? Idk yet, possibly even another great demon, with an Odium-like temperament, fooling those who encounter him into thinking he’s benevolent. Or maybe not. Idk. Possibly like king Demon?) Adyn hears a voice in his mind that he knows is coming from the tree-God-thing and engages in conversation with it. The tree at first is sympathetic as he notices Narzha’s mark, sadness in his voice, but tells him that he senses that the mark will not bring only evil into the world, and wonders ‘what is Narzha about with this one’ [This is the first time Narzha is named, though Adyn can only (correctly) guess that he’s referring to the demon who marked him]. There will probably be more to the conversation of relevance in later plots. However, Adyn is unnerved when he hears screaming in the distance and turns to look but sees only the serene rolling hills with mountains in the distance. The tree makes a sighing noise as a great wind blows past and Adyn is awoken.
* Adyn is awoken from this dream to the sound of the screaming coming from outside his home. He peeks out of his hovel to find his village is being pillaged by the Empire’s armies, who are torching homes, cutting down/crossbowing fleeing villagers, and kidnapping girls indiscriminately. At first, he tries to flee, but witnesses one of his best friends, Tul, getting speared and gutted as he tries to defend his home with a rusty sword. Adyn is in a daze (in shock) and idly wonders where his friend got that sword. Was Tul’s father a solider? Adyn never knew that. Dazed, Adyn stumbles into a stable, thinking he might find a horse to flee on, though he all the horse’s throats have been slit. The door of the stable slams shut, and we hear something like, “AHA! The boy’s in there, sir.” The stable is set on fire and Adyn has no way out. We find a scene to parallel the prologue where Adyn is on his knees, desperately trying to call upon Narzha to help him, though the only response he gets from her is a cruel laugh. Tears begin to leak from his eyes as the room gets brighter and brighter and he feels the warmth begin to surround him from the flames…but then realizes with confusion that the warmth is not searing him. The room is still extremely bright, but Adyn realizes the sound of the pillaging has changed. There was no more screaming, but plenty of yelling…and he realizes, not in a language he recognizes. Adyn opens his eyes to find he is kneeling on a sandy, dirty road, and looks up through squinted eyes to find himself in the middle of a bustling bazaar populated by the strangest creatures he’s ever seen.

**Olk’ir’alkhai (Part 2)**

* At this point, we change perspectives to Zo, a genderless alien who lives on the planet that Adyn will soon be world-hopping to. But before that happens, lets learn a little big more about Zo, shall we….
* EVENTS ABOUT ZO
* Adyn meets Zo in the bazaar, and Zo uses a translator device to communicate with Adyn, who is still in shock and is now basically in double shock.
* Zo begins teaching Adyn how to world-hop intentionally, which is a long process full of hijinks. (Think kaladin in the chasms with bridge 4).

**Pharphesis (Part 3)**

* Adyn and Zo make their way to Pharphesis somehow and somehow get accepted, still have a lot to develop about Adyn and Zo
* We establish friendships and other side characters, rivals (Malfoy), and some cool teachers \*cough\*
* Herid Fel. Nuff said.
* Adyn totally humiliates Malfoy in a big public showdown, using help from Narzha, and Malfoy notices something odd about how Adyn accomplished the feat. Malfoy slinks away to lick his wounds and plot.
* Denouement

**Other Notes:**

* I like the idea of a scene where he plays for a few hours at the inn, the patrons at the inn transfixed, and when they leave it’s morning and everyone’s confused but writes it off at him just being that good at music, when he was actually playing the song from a universe where time moves faster

Book 1 Part 2:

Zo enters the bazaar on business, disappointed as they learn that they will unlikely be able to afford passage to sand\_city\_b. A sudden flash makes Zo (and several others in the bazaar) quickly turn to see Adyn kneeling on the floor in the middle of the street, dirty, sweaty, bleeding from some cuts, and weeping. The bazaar bushes as Adyn looks up and some parents pull their children close, hesitant and wary. Zo is confused by Adyn’s demeanor, unsure how to interpret the tears, but their curiosity (as a world hopper in training) overwhelms their wariness and they approach Adyn and ask if he’s okay, sensing from the prostrate position and general ragged appearance that Adyn is in distress.

Adyn looks up to see the startled crowd of the most bizarre creatures he’s ever seen. Scaled creatures of various shades of metallic brown and steel, wearing long pale skirt like loin cloths and veils covering their mouths. He can sense from their body language that they are afraid and he himself is terrified. One of them, he can sense it is a younger one, approaches him and says something in a snake like hissing language. Adyn scuttles backwards a few steps and stutters, “Wh...what?” The alien blinks quickly and shakes its head and reaches out his hand to Adyn. Adyn, now in shock, reaches out his hand and lets the sleek, but surprisingly strong alien yank him upward. The alien gestures with an odd wave and starts walking determinedly, gesturing again as Adyn stares in stupefaction. Eventually, the alien grabs him again and urged him forward, and Adyn, not knowing what to do, follows the alien out of the crowded marketplace.

[use their short journey to vividly describe sand\_city\_a]

They approach what Adyn describes as a floating metallic lion, which roars with a steady low vibrating sound. Zo gestures for Adyn to get on, who shrinks back. Zo raises his eye scales and blinks, then hops on and gestures towards other aliens on their hoverbikes, hops back off and again gestures toward his clunker. Adyn gets on hesitantly, Zo helping him settle.

Zo is confused by the world hopper who is acting absolutely terrified, and realization is dawning on them that this figure may not be as powerful as Zo first anticipated. They climb up behind Adyn and settle their feet onto the pedals, and are slightly stymied as they realize Adyn is too short to reach the foot supports, and they’re reach around to hold Adyn around the waist to hold him close. Zo hopes that the gesture is not too intimate, for they know nothing about Adyn’s species but in their studies learned that many species have odd notions of propriety and personal space.

Adyn stiffened as he felt a snakelike arm wrap around him and pull him close to the warm alien. He could smell from Zo what he could only describe as a muted herbal scent, like a bunch of assorted herbs, salted and left to cure in the sun. He realized with dismay that he himself probably smelled quite smoky and sweaty

[insert more description while Zo hisses away in their native tongue and Adyn starts to come to his senses and snap out of his shock]

Book 1 part 3:

Classmate is corrupted by demon and kills some students and a teacher before being taken

**Miscellaneous Notes:**

* The cult Adyn’s family belonged to was determined to find a legendary world spanned by a great library, with powerful occult knowledge that might be used to banish the demons from the Alignment, or at least stop their influence from leaking through to other worlds. The planet was protected by extremely powerful wards, however, and knowledge of how to find, let alone enter, the planet, has been lost for millennia.

**First Draft of Prologue (no longer fully relevant):**

Elyse found herself standing at the edge of a steep mountainside overlooking an enormous valley at night. Dark clouds blanketed the sky overhead, but they merely drifted silently toward her. The air was chilly, but there appeared to be no movement in the dark expanse before her, and she wondered why the Vision brought her here. It was nowhere she recognized, and she knew most of the sites of any significance. She was about to send a Calling out to Ayva to awaken her from the Vision, when the clouds parted enough for rusted Zara, the smallest of the moons, to dimly illuminate the valley with her red glow for a moment. It was enough, however, to let her to see what lay in the darkness, far off in the distance.

Her heart skipped a beat, then sank as the blood rushed from her extremities. In the distance loomed the shape of a massive man, taller than a mountain, lean and sinewy, standing still with arms outstretched to his sides. Blood leaked from wounds covering his pale body, but he seemed to revel in the pain. He wore nothing but a wide, cruel smile as his dark eyes stared at her, his knowing gaze immediately forcing its way into her mind. Frantically, she began to form the words for a Calling, gesturing with her cold fingers to form the first *zhatra*, when his smile became a mocking sneer, and his mouth began moving soundlessly with his own chant. She felt what little warmth she had left leech from her body as the air grew icy around her, and she knew she wouldn’t be fast enough. She made it halfway through the second *zhatra* when a shiver caused her icy fingers to spasm for a moment, breaking the Calling. She knelt with a whimper, closing her eyes on forming tears, beginning a final prayer to Ämalie that she be granted a swift death.

But despair tore at her attempts at finding peace in the prayer, as she knew the demon would never grant her that mercy. He would break her and use her to sow as much destruction in the Waking world as possible before the priests could capture her, exorcise the spirit, crucify her body, then burn whatever was left of her. She whispered an apology to Ayva for the things the demon would make her do, though she knew her sister would never hear it. Even if she could, it could never be enough. Her sister would be dead within the hour, assuming Elyse could last even that long. Her last sane thought was of her younger brother Adyn, who was out in the woods with the flock. Perhaps he might survive. The demon’s cruel words overwhelmed her mind, and she screamed, crumpling to the floor as the first wave of icy agony racked her.