### Codex Essentia, Chapter 5: Eo

The Corruption of Eo, which now resides somewhere in the veil, takes the form of an enormous skeletal serpent. The form of a serpent is interesting as Eo, goddess of hope, was often represented as an owl swooping down upon the supposed manifestations of despair, generally depicted as a snake. The implications of this form indicate that either Essence has some will of its own, or more likely, that it’s shape is influenced by the strongest emotions within a being. In almost every case these emotions are negative- suppressed anger, primordial fear, greed, and others. Given this knowledge, we have at least some advantage over essence, furthering my hopes that we might one day channel it, and slowly return our world to how it was.

### Codex Essentia, Chapter 4: Hythinea

Hythinea, the warrior queen, and her kingdom Hythia, can all be found deep in the great mountain ranges of the north. In the days of old these lands were renowned for their fertility, and in the infancy of our civilisations were protected by Hythinea herself. Ferocious but fair, her traits were soon idolised by the people of her kingdom, who built their society around her values. Soon Hythia became the dominant kingdom of the five, and became infamous for their strength in the great war that precipitated the end of our world. Little is know about her Corruption, it has never been seen outside of the veil, or the world between the gates. However, given our knowledge of the other Corruptions, we can assume that personifies the opposite of her personality, most likely injustice, bloodlust, ignorance, and hostility.

### Codex Essentia, Chapter 6: Rhallos

The god Rhallos imbued solidity, determination, and resolve. It is not unexpected then, that the form of his corruption is that of a disparate hive of flying things. Some have seen it in our world, like a living cloud that passes over the land devouring any living thing with its hundreds of tiny jaws. Although not the most terrifying of the Corruptions, it instills feelings of absolute hopelessness in those who see it. Thankfully I have only heard this from third parties, or I fear I would not be able to write this down for even recollecting the events caused most of my sources to break down in tears, and in one case, turn completely rigid and unresponsive to anything around them.

### Codex Essentia, Chapter 33: Vidium

Vidium, or Moonmetal as it is sometimes known, is a peculiar alloy found only in meteorites. It is unknown if it could be found naturally before the Absence, but can now be found in relative abundance (for a rare metal) due to increased cosmic activity. Although essence appears to affect all things in at least some degree, Vidium has a strong focussing effect that apparently draws essence towards itself. For this reason alone Vidium is extremely difficult to gather, and even more so to manipulate. The properties of this pitch black metal are extremely desirable however, and is now highly coveted in the manufacturing of war machines and weaponry.

### The Order of Mystics, Appendix on Essence

The effects of Essence are always sudden, but not always apparent. The subtleties of its nature mean that rather than a sudden outburst against all nearby, or an immediate and incurable fear that causes a man to gouge out his own eyes rather than face the world, the influence of Essence can go unnoticed for extremely long periods of time. Sometimes the effect is so subtle, given a host of good character and strong will, that it never manifests outwardly (though it is extremely where). In other cases it grows over time, embeds itself in the subconscious, ultimately leading to betrayal, desertion, sedition, and murder. I believe this clearly demonstrates it is the hosts will that gives form to the Essence, and that the Essence itself has no ability to decide whether its manifestation is benign or malign.

### The Order of Mystics, Chapter I

I will document, for the purposes of posterity, the details of our order. After it became clear that the world was dying through no fault of our own, the learned people of the five kingdoms came together to form the Order of Mystics. Initially the group was loosely defined, it’s members came and went as the Essence exerted its influence across the world. I, and a few others, formed a small band dedicated to understanding the Essence, and how it came to be. It did not take us long to draw the conclusion that it was the absence of the gods that gave rise to the calamity that was before us, and that it was their presence that maintained some sort of balance in the Essence that exists within our world. At that time we were aware of the existence of Essence, but its nature was foreign to us, and we were not unanimously convinced of its existence at first.

### The Order of Mystics, Chapter II

Over the years our order watched the kingdoms of our world fight against each other, and one by one each fell. Whether in the tracks and weaponry of the battlefield, or by the slow decline of authority they all fell. It was becoming apparent that a great collapse was coming soon. It could be felt all around like the acrid taste on the tongue before lightning strikes. We resolved that our efforts to manipulate the Essence were paramount, that we must find a way to use it, or our entire world would unravel around us. We could see that the borders between the kingdoms were fading, the scars of war filled in slowly by the sands of encroaching deserts. Eventually, we knew, it would be impossible to cross between the kingdoms. It was then that the idea of the gates was born, we would utilise our technology and research on Essence to create a portal in each kingdom. Each portal would allow free travel to another kingdom, forming a spine, if you will, across the world. What we did not realise at the time, however, was that without a body capable of channelling essence, these gates would be useless to us.

### The Order of Mystics, Chapter III

The Necromancer was an idea that arose over a period of months, after we realised that the now complete gates were all but useless to us. Many of us gave up, threw our hands in the air in anguish, and simply disappeared into the wastes. Those that remained, myself included, resolved to find a solution. Though I cannot speak for the motives of the other Mystics, I resolved to do all I could because the alternatives were simply too bleak to consider. Without the ability to pass between the gates we would be without the ability to communicate with the now isolated communities scattered amongst the five kingdoms, and without the ability to restore the world. It is worth noting that our studies at this point had turned to what could at best be considered arcane and at worst sorcery. Manipulating essence is no simple matter. Through various testing methods we found that the most effective, yet unpleasant, way of channelling essence was through pain. I am sure that to whoever reads this account, assuming anyone is left to read it, will think us as sun-scorched mad men, making blood pacts and casting magic spells into the darkness. How I wish this were not so.

### The Order of Mystics, Chapter IV

It was in the Autumn of the year 3346 that we made our ultimate choice. We did not force anyone to stay, those who were in the dark were informed of our intentions, and given the opportunity to leave. Few did, some stayed out of loyalty, others because leaving was simply no better than what was ahead. One of our order was chosen, a young woman- an acolyte from the mountain kingdom. There has been no protest over what we are about to do, because there are no other options. We grew weak with every day that passed, and every day the essence spread further, rooted deeper, hung heavier in the air around us. I am sorry, reader, that we could not do more. This will be the last entry in my histories, if they can be called that. I do hope that there will be enough future to fill the remaining pages of this book.

With hope, Oranos.

### Court Memorandum

The King has given his orders, the captains have gone to relay them into the city. We are left here together, the rulers of this kingdom. The king sits upon his throne at the head of the room, alone and brooding. We are left to discuss our options, it is clear we are at war, whether it is in the best interests of our land or not, we are at war. My peers seem excited by the prospect, as if the encroaching bloodshed has somehow been expected and deserved. I have no doubts that the courts of the four other great kingdoms are issuing their own orders, and that their Kings and Queens have withdrawn into the same solitude as our own. I will not lie my own thoughts have been darkened of late. I fear there has been a change in us, all of us, across this entire world.

### Journal Entry I

Today we are marching on the great mountain kingdom of Hispella. Like my fellow soldiers, I have never seen war. I do not know if this world has seen war before. We have seen skirmishes aplenty, peacekeeping missions, suppression of dissidents, but never war. I am proud to serve my country, and my Queen. I will remember looking out from our battlements onto a sea of gleaming metal, and a sky streaked by the trails of our warships, what a glorious sight. I hear people say our Kingdom cannot be defeated, that our lands are too great and our military too vast. If they are right then the coming war may also be the last war, for we will reign eternally after our victory!

-Optio

### Journal Entry II

What a battlefield, what a battle. Our guns blazed unending for two nights, illuminating the retreating Hispellites. To think these men and women who called themselves our brothers and sisters would declare war on us. Now they understand their mistake. We have lost many, but they have lost more. Tomorrow I will take what remains of our armour and breach the walls of their keeps. By dawn we will have our victory, and stand alone in triumph in this great war.

-Optio

### Journal Entry III

Today we broke into the city of Hispellum, infantry following the path of our siege engines straight into their main square. Only to find the resistance we expected was absent. The city was silent, the defenders on the walls were silent now- dead or dying. But here there was nothing, no signs of flight, banners taken from their polls. It is as if it had been abandoned for years. We searched house after house, looked in the warehouses, the armouries, the keeps, all the way up to the court and even the monarch’s tombs. It was then, as we stood in the court of Hispellum, before the throne of the King, that a strange feeling came over me. It has been at least a decade since I left our fair city. A decade that me and my men have lived in the great battlefields that now scar the space between our lands. I worry that if I were to return home, that I would find our halls empty, I would find my family fled and my house deserted. We have fulfilled our duty, we have taken the city. But now we are without orders and there are now none to issue them. It is bitter sweet, this victory, for on the very day of our victory, we are turning about, and returning home.

-Optio

### Journal Entry IV

We did not make it home. As we crested the horizon, and the great towers of Pyrrha came into view, a cry of despair rose up. For we could see, even at this great distance, that our city was ruined and deserted. There was no life on the charred plain before us. Some of my brothers and sisters fell to their knees and would not be moved. Some ran for the city, others away. I did not stop anyone. There was no reason. It was clear my instinct was right- somehow over all these years, through all the battles and the roaring of thunder, we have destroyed ourselves. Our kingdoms have fallen, where our people are I do not know. What will become of us I do not know. What I do know, that I predicted all those years ago, and that has now been confirmed by the horrifying sight ahead, is that this war was indeed the last war of our world.

-Optio

### Burned note

It’s inside me. In my brain. I feel it ticking- tick, tick, tick, on the inside of my skull. It’s trying to make a hole in me, to let the darkness in. Tick, tick, tick. Constant. I’m alone now. Alone out here, amongst the rocks and dirt. High above them now. I hear the wind calling to me. “Come” it says. “Come with me”. It can’t get me, no, no it can’t, I’m too high, I’m too far from everything. Tick, tick, tick. It’s inside me.

### Unsigned letter

It’s been so long that I fear I won’t be able to remember your face, I do hope you can remember mine. You’ve been gone for five years now, we hear this and that about the front lines, about how everything keeps changing and we don’t even know who we are fighting. If you do come home, if you find this note, please come to us. The city isn’t a safe place any more, there is violence in the streets, and the guard turns a blind eye at every opportunity. We’re going into the forests, others are coming with us. We’re going to start a new life together, all of us. I will wait for you forever. I love you.

### Wall Etchings

Fear us, you who reads these words. These lands are under control of our lord. Any scrap searchers or wandering merchants must come to Black Dell to pay a tribute for safe passage. Anyone who thinks they can pass through without paying the tribute will be dragged by their ankles across the salt flats until the tribute is paid with their blood.

Ritualistic markings  
 On the 333rd day of the 333rd year, we, those who remain loyal to the order of mystics, convene to pay homage to the great sacrifice of our prophet the Necromancer. We commend our flesh on this stone to her, that we may be reborn in her image and cleanse this land of the sinful and the wanting.

### Inventory on vellum

Broken engines- 10

Repairable engines- 5

Working engines- 2

3 jammed annihilators

1 deepdriver

4 vials of essence

23 vidium rocks

17 slaves, 1 pregnant

Must requisition for thick oil and weapon kits to mend engines and weapons. Broken engines can be cannibalised for parts. Slaves sent to ore pits for work. Pregnant slave kept, child will be useful to clean under the machines when older, mother can be sent to his lordship.

### Sister’s Diary

We took in a young girl today, her arms were cut to pieces, and her skin awfully pale. It’s a wonder she found our priory in time. We bandaged her as best we could, but she is so weak it’s impossible to tell if she is already beyond the point of no return. She is safe now, deep in the mountain. The other sisters are caring for her now. If she recovers I am not sure how we will be able to look after her, we barely grow enough for us alone, never mind enough for a growing child. But then the alternative is unthinkable, to take her back out into the wasteland to eek out her life amongst marauders and devils? I will pray for answers tonight, the goddess always provides for her followers.

### Soiled Pages

Ma said not to go out onto the plains after nightfall, she says there are monsters out there. I told her of course there aren’t any monsters, that’s just a something scary they tell kiddies to stop them going out where there might be mines or bombs or other dangerous detritus from the war. But now I’m not so sure. When the sun is setting, and the line of the hill behind the house is black against the orange sky, I sometimes see things. Like inky shadows rising up from the ground and sinking back into it a moment later. Howls too, not like dogs, no, these are shallow, hoarse- like a dying man’s croak. Sometimes an animals gone by morning, no traces left, not even footprints, almost like they just vanished. I’ll be keeping the door bolted from now on, and nothing could persuade me to go out after dark to find out what’s been making that awful din.

### Wrinkled Letter

One of the priests came by the village today, said we had to leave, said that these lands weren’t safe any more. He told us that things would be coming, that they had been spreading across the world like a disease. Some of our neighbours scoffed and ignored him, busy with their own troubles. But he cried out to them, said that their crops would turn black, that their animals would either run, or die, or turn into unrecognisable things. He’s said many things over the years, not sure his head is even screwed on right. Still, he does hear a lot from passers by, and our fruits have been souring lately. My sister lives out beyond the woods, close to the deserts, though desert has probably reached her by now. I’m going to leave the animals with our Aunt and go out there for a few weeks, just in case. Going to see if I can borrow a gun from a neighbour too, see if they want to join me maybe. Either way, if you feel like coming to stay with us, you know where we’ll be.

- Your Brother

### A Warning

Take heed traveller- stay away from the dead cities. Those places are home to none but ghosts now. Though the call of ancient treasure might be great, it must be ignored. You will find only death if you dare to tread the ruined streets of the old world.

### A Child’s Letter

Dear Mummy,

Daddy says we have to leave home to find a new place to live in the countryside. He says we will be safe there. I told Daddy you are keeping us safe. Will you know where to find us when we move? I hope you will come home soon. I packed some of your things so that you won’t have to carry as much when you come. I took your bracelets and your picture of us and the stuffed pig that sits in the window because I know you think he is funny. I don’t want to move. Lots of my friends are still here. Daddy says they are silly to stay. He hasn’t been in a good mood since you left. It will be my birthday soon, so I hope you will be home by then.

Love you lots and lots,

Phoebe

PS I didn’t pack the dress grandma bought me because I hate it.

### Poem in a Journal

When the trees of the forest have lost their leaves,

And the only the crow call can be heard,

When the banners of war are still,

And the horns of battle go silent,

Will you come home to me?

When the peals of thunder have rung out,

And the grass takes root in the muddy tracks,

When I have waited ten years and a day,

And the days of death are only a memory,

Will you come home to me?