A frantic knock at his door awoke the Elder Seer of Kassa Priory from his slumber.

Another knock compelled him to stagger from his bed, pulling his nightgown to cover the shame of his wrinkled, graying fur. As he opened the door a crack, he sighed upon seeing the fellow folven. Albeit a much younger folven who didn’t wince with each flutter of his eyelids.

“What in the name of gods is it, Brother Maxwell?” he asked tiredly.

“They’re here,” he gasped out. “The entourage is here, Elder!”

The canine suddenly found himself awake. Horror flickered over his expression, appearing and disappearing as fast as candlelight in the wind.

“He’s here?” the Elder warily asked. “A day early?”

“The watchmen have spotted their caravan a mile from the priory,” the apprentice monk stammered between deep breaths, wiping sweat from his forehead. “What shall we do?”

“Welcome them, of course!” The Elder growled, doing his best to hide the fear laden in his own voice. “Gather our brothers and sisters, at once! Have Brother Bodram and Sister Amalia greet the Realmtraveler. If I am late, tell them I do not mean any insult to them—or His Majesty, if a knight is present!”

The younger folven meekly bowed. “As you wish, sir!”

With that, the Elder Seer of Kassa Priory closed his door, but not before lighting some candles around his room to provide light. Due to the seasons changing and autumn finally arriving late, nightfall still covered Anthraea instead of dawn. Even so, he dutifully dressed himself and performed the morning rites, thanking the gods for another day as well as praying the caravan didn’t face difficulty on their journey.

Mostly, he prayed for the previous night’s prophecy to be incorrect.

By the gods, the Elder Seer prayed for it to be absolutely, positively wrong.

Truth be told, he immensely disliked politics. He despised it almost as much as war or natural disaster, to the point he rarely wanted to know about current events in the world. Such topics only caused the older folven to feel more disheartened of the future. Specifically, the future of all seven races in all of Anthraea.

Spanning most of the known world from glacial south to arctic north, Anthraea hosted many kingdoms and independent provinces over the course of millennia. Yet none of them compared to the sheer size or diversity of Azureth—the most powerful kingdom yet to control half of the continent. Other powerful nations included the Draconic Lords (and their countless kobold subjects), who ruled over the Obsidian Mountains to the southwest. To the southeast of Azureth and eastward of dragon territory lied Fortunado’s Country, a fledgling nation-state founded by its namesake as a sanctuary for exiled kobolds and other discriminated/shunned peoples. To the south of these mountainous nations were a lawless region called Wolves Vale.

To the east of Azureth’s claimed territories and beyond the Midland Basin Plains could be found a rivaling empire called Chathamal, the largest of literally dozens of other city-states and villages, who often battled for control over Anthraea’s eastern coastline, as well as its smaller islands and archipelagos. Then, to the north of both countries were the Ursine Tribes of Crimson Heath (named so, because every plant in the region turned blood red throughout autumn), a tribal confederacy of bears who occupied northern Anthraea beyond the twin mountains of Medva and Mishva Peaks.

And finally, to the far east of Chathamal and yet divided from it by narrow isthmus, lay the Cliffsea Commonwealth, an ocean-faring nation ruled over by the inventive sea otters.

The Elder glimpsed momentarily out the window of his room, gazing out to the first rays of morning light peeking over the horizon. Ready to reflect off Azureth’s Great Lake, where the Priory stood. The future did not look bright, not to him or anyone.

And from what he had already known, the Continent of Anthraea found itself trapped in political, social, and cultural upheaval. The Chathamal Empire, Azureth’s oldest enemy, vied for control over the Midland Basin, following the bloody murder of the previous emperor. Famine and hunger still rocked the outlying towns within Azureth’s territories. The dire jaguars within the jungles would not cease their attacks in the outlying villages while Cliffsea’s navy often enforced their watery borders through unenforced piracy against both Chathamal and Azureth, or whichever vessel veered too far from navigational course. The Draconic Lords continued to overwork their kobolds and were repeatedly threatening to take back Fortunato’s Country from the freed kobolds, then divide the spoils. Then, there were the horrific storms which destroyed coastal cities and a brutal fire that consumed the Grand Library of Azureth the previous year. Not to mention a series of crushed rebellions and uprisings in Azureth’s southern and eastern border worried the Elder too. The Elder Seer wanted to ignore it all!

However, the unsealed royal letter from Azureth’s king, the same one displayed atop his cluttered writing desk—it could not be ignored. A new Realmtraveler had appeared. The Continent of Anthraea once again had an otherworldly savior to help its people survive their darkest hour! Not only that, but according to the royal letter, the Realmtraveler wished to learn the full prophecy of the gods.

Walking from his room down the corridors, fully dressed in his ceremonial robes, the Elder Seer recalled tales of previous Realmtravelers; mortals from other realms beyond, gifted with unbelievable magic and runecraft from the gods to solve an impossible undertaking. One which could not be solved by a mortal of the Elder Seer’s realm.

He wasn’t late. The Elder Seer stood with his fellow monks and oracles but dreaded the approach of the caravan. Once its occupants exited, he already recognized one of them as the Realmtraveler; a full-blooded wolf of twenty-odd-years with a hunched stature, gaping in awe with wide green eyes at the Priory’s architecture and ambience without consideration for greetings or tradition of how to approach. Not the first Realmtraveler to be blasé towards custom, not likely the last.

At least, the other Seers and the royal officials assumed. As they chuckled or hid their amusement at the bumbling Realmtraveler’s attempts to be formal, the Elder spotted something they did not: darkness behind his emerald eyes.

The boy had experienced great hardship where he came from, wherever it was.

When he stepped forward to welcome the travelers, the Elder Seer suddenly stood in frozen fear. His irises were circles entranced in horror towards the otherworldly wolf. Staring back into those green eyes caused the Elder’s paw to become stiff as wood, and the Realmtraveler’s seemingly friendly smile reminded him of the gods’ prophecy the previous evening. A memory he wished to forget one day.

Surrounded by ancient incense and gazing into the abyss of time, the future revealed itself to the Elder Seer. Aching bones. Regretful conversations in another language he could not interpret or comprehend. Stressful days in a maze-like castle composed of metal and stonework.

Sleepless torment. Cuts and bruises. Tears. Screaming. Tired nights and depreciation worthy for a slave. Then, to the future, the Elder gazed upon fire spreading from city to city, town to town, nation to nation. Brimstone and returned hatred a thousand times over. Blood upon blood upon blood. A tyrant’s mad laugh, sounding much like the Realmtraveler’s own voice.

Then, tapestries of countless dead and flashes of blinding, unnatural light which consumed the world. The gods beyond told the elderly folven:

*Bequeathed with plagues and gifted death upon the endless strife,*

*Under one banner shall Anthraea be freed, and peace returned to life.*