

ALLEN THE ORACLE

Past

You have devoted your whole life to following the teachings of the Oracle, isolated from those Regents you would one day be called to counsel. As the last heir designated by your master, you spent years between solitary meditation and the study of ancient texts, preparing to renounce your name and become the sixty-fifth Oracle. Until the death of your master caught you unaware, changing everything.

And to think that barely a month ago the tranquillity of the Monastery, now solely inhabited by you and the Oracle, had just been shaken by news as unsettling as they were magnificent: the triumph of Regents Giraut and Renier over the Great Dragons. Jubilant, you ran to your master to celebrate the final defeat of the enemy, only to be bluntly dismissed. For days he did not speak a word to you, with a single exception: the order to summon Faramond, the Wandering Regent, at once. Yet the Oracle's reticence did not end, not even after this encounter, and the shadows playing over his face only kept darkening. Then, two weeks ago, he collapsed in front of you.

His breath was short and his eyes could barely see you, yet he grabbed your collar with all his force: «Dragons are no longer the real threat. He has returned. Summon them all, look for him in their midst. He has killed Cerdic as well, I can feel it. Find him or our land will perish. Stop him».

Then he coughed. Blood. He died in your arms, looking almost incredulous.

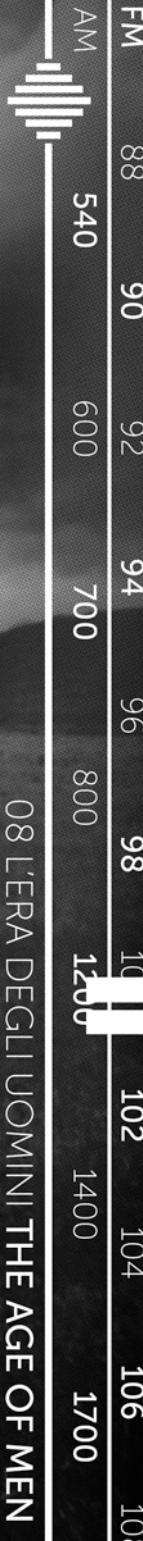
Present

True to your master's last will, you have summoned the Regents. They all answered your call, all but Cerdic, murdered as expected. Before confronting them, you had an inner battle to fight: You had never faced death before, and you withdrew to the Oracle's study looking for answers. His study. Through your tears you found the first book he had ever shown you as a child, only to hide it from your eyes for the rest of your studies.

The gilded letters on the cover read Deities and Legends. You recall the Oracle's warnings: «We live in desperate times, where the minds of Men are engulfed by fear of Dragons. Thus the book was banished from the Vale, and this is the only copy left. But you need to know, child, that this world is much more vast and full of wonder than you could ever fathom».

Finally free to leaf through the pages, you were intrigued by a chapter your master had crammed with notes. Its title was Equilibrium, and as you read it again and again you felt the seed of doubt take root within you, growing until it overwhelmed your sorrow. How could the Oracle not predict his own death? What could he have feared even more than Dragons?

Feeling like a fool for the time you'd lost, you ran to the library to consult the medical section and confirm your sudden suspicions. In an old tome you found mention of the King of poisons, more lethal than any other. It requires rare herbs which grow scattered across the Vale and a vast alchemical knowledge. All things Faramond, the only Regent to have met with your master shortly before his death, has easy access to.



But why would he have killed the Oracle who held him in such high regards as to train him to be the eighth Regent, an unprecedented decision? Did he dislike his role as a sentinel, and lust for a Fiefdom of his own? This could maybe explain the death of Cerdic, Regent of Zamar, but how could this be tied to your master's last words? The storm of questions left you quaking in rage and you swore to yourself you would find the culprit.

The Council you just summoned will allow you to hide your suspicions behind the curtain of tradition. As the Regents focus on the election of Cerdic's successor, you will unmask the traitor.

Future

Lylie: The Oracle always thought her to be a gentle soul, so he chose to share with her, and only her, the Rite of Ascension, a ceremony to gift a spirit with life after death. A privilege restricted to Oracles and Regents, for as was explained to you: «Only a spirit capable of understanding Magic can strive for eternity».

There is no mention of the Rite in any ancient text, and now that you have asked Lylie to perform it for the souls of Cerdic and your master after the Council, you cannot help but wonder whether she is capable of doing it on her own. The mere thought of the secret to eternal life being lost to humanity is unacceptable.

Giraut and Renier: Both brothers to Lylie, they triumphed over the Great Black Dragon and the Great White Dragon. No other Regent has ever been capable of such a feat and you are more than impressed: They have astounded you.

Solomon, Ninon and Wilhelm: The Regents of Shield, Flame and Thunder. You know nothing else about them.

You barely know the Regents; you did not expect to take up your duty as a guide so soon. You need to make up for your neglect, if you want to succeed in the task.

Drystan: Herald of the deceased Regent Cerdic and captain of Zamar's army. Only a few months ago the Regent had written to the Oracle, to avail himself of a never-before-exercised right and name Drystan, a common man, his official representative. Did he know he was in danger?

According to your master's last words, his suspicions went to the Regents. You need an ally in your hunt for the traitor and you might find one in Cerdic's pupil.

Faramond: The Wandering Regent, closer to beasts than men. The only one without a Fiefdom of his own.

Why did the Oracle summon him, two weeks before his death? Why did he choose to take in an eighth child in spite of all traditions? And if he really is your master's murderer, a threat worse than Dragons, why did the Oracle not tell you so with his last breath?

Action - Restricted to Allen

Cut this out and read the text right away. Insert this page into your book, if you have one.

Chapter titled Equilibrium from Deities and Legends, the Oracle's book.

Everything was born from the Dreaming One, who delighted in giving form to new worlds during his waking hours. Ever since the dawn of time, he works on one creation and lingers on it in contemplation. Yet he is never fully satisfied with the result. Thus he unmakes the world and falls asleep once again, looking for inspiration in his dreams, only to wake and shape more realities, in constant search of perfection.

He created myriads of worlds before dreaming of life, in the shape of plants and beasts. Yet he was still unsatisfied, for that creation was ruled by mere instinct and chaos. Thus he fell back into sleep, and for twelve times he dreamt of himself. When he awoke he shaped a new world and filled it with plants, and beasts, and twelve creatures in his image, capable of manipulating the rest as they pleased.

Yet he was still unsatisfied, for those twelve creatures were no more than spectators of his creation. Thus he fell back into sleep, and he dreamt of setting them free. For the first time, he had not unmade his creation: having grown fond of the Twelve, he gifted them with the free will he had conjured in his sleep. Lastly he gave form to an animal, the only one to share the privilege of freedom. Man.

From that moment on he slept no more, lingering in watch of his creations until he learned from them of the existence of Good and Evil. He was fascinated by the clash of these two forces, for neither ever seemed to prevail over the other. Yet he needed to understand which of the two was strongest, because he was already imagining a new world, shaped around the winning principle. Thus he decided to put them to test.

To begin, as the Twelve lay in sleep, he took from them part of their power, tearing it from their flesh to send it soaring through the sky. Then he combed through the stars, letting them fall over the world like a rain of stones, some shiny and some soiled. As each star fell it caught fire, spreading terror and destruction over the world.

Finally he took from his satchel three seeds he had stolen from Men, and hid them back in their midst to grow slowly over the ages.

One seed would give birth to the incarnation of Evil, holding only a tiny sprout of Good. Another would give birth to the incarnation of Good, holding only a tiny sprout of Evil. The third seed would give birth to the incarnation of Balance, capable of nurturing the hidden sprouts of the other seeds, to keep the world teetering between the two great forces. As he waited for the seeds to bloom into the answer, the dreamer once again sank into sleep.