

CHAINED REVERENCE: ECHOES OF BELIEF



oneirostoria.com

Prologue

Cosmology

In the midst of eternal Chaos, within the tempest and the silence, there exists a Reality of belief and hope; a stage of mortality and reverence.

The focus of this stage is the world of Ysælor, where the proactive find fortune, the reactive cheat fate, and conflict determines the very nature of existence, thus illuminating the vicissitudes of life.

It is a world where mortals and immortals both serve and rule, forever apart and a part of each other.

Where even the dead have a role to play; death foreshadowing the Great Beyond.

The spark of the mortal Soul shines bright in Ysælor, illuminating not only their dreams but also seeds of their hopes and fears, their desires and despairs.

Warmed and nourished by this light – this spark – these seeds give rise to the Revered, powerful immortal beings receptive to belief and faith.

Thus, the Revered arise as both gods and servants, watching over the frail mortals that grant them existence – the Revered's might and very forms forever bound to the capricious nature of mortal desires.

Moreover, just as light casts shadow and sound precedes echo, so too does Ysælor itself beget the Periphery.

But the Periphery is neither akin to shadow nor echo, but rather a tangible facet of Ysælor's complex structure.

Describing the Periphery as separate would be a fallacy, a convenient act of self-deception to claim comprehension of a truly unified duality.

For, it is as true as the deepest ocean, the tallest mountain, or the most distant star.

Yet phenomena within linger at the edge of mortal perception, eluding awareness like dreams lost to dawn's light.

And so to mortals, it is indeed a hidden place where their gods, spirits, and those that have passed on, dwell.

Furthermore, beyond the multifaceted architecture of Ysælor drift the esoteric Outer Realms: the homes and sanctuaries of the Revered and mortal dead.

Paradises and purgatories, dreamscapes and nightmares, rapture and misery; some precise in intent, others fickle expressions of their creator's whims.

And encompassing the disparate, yet interconnected spheres of Ysælor and the Outer Realms, is the Totality, a cosmic void against which creation gleams like stars in the night sky.

A void of eternal nothingness – the parchment upon which the saga of existence is writ, a catalyst for dreams.

Prologue

The Soul

Souls are immutable essences of potentiality, forming the foundation of both mortal and Revered existence.

All life originates from a Soul, reflecting that Soul’s complexity and depth.

The more profound the potential, the more dynamic the actuality.

From plants to animals, from humans to Revered, Souls are structured thusly:

First, nutritive Souls, found in plants, provide the foundation for growth and propagation.

The sensitive Souls of animals encompass these same aspects, along with mobility and sensation.

Furthermore, the rational Souls of humans possess the capacity for thought and reflection.

Last, Revered Souls embody all these aspects, coupled with unbounded growth, fuelled by the potency of belief.

Upon death, the Souls of plants and animals return to the great cycle, existing beyond the reality of Ysælor and the Outer Realms.

Human Souls, however, journey to the Ysælorian Outer Realms, where the Revered watch over and nurture them.

There, these human Souls exist as Manes – Ghosts, Phantasms, and Spectres; reflections of what they once were.

As for Revered Souls, what transpires upon their departure from this reality remains unknown.

In fact, the truth of Souls remains hidden from even the Revered.

Despite their power, they are unable to affect a Soul’s immutable essence – they cannot bring forth true life.

Thus, all natural Ysælorian life is born from a Soul, seemingly similar to our own.

In contrast, life considered Unnatural or Mythical, arises from Revered distorting and transfiguring it for their own desires.

For the Revered, all mortal life – human, pig, cow, mushroom, tree, Naga, Fengli, Langmeitong, Hydra, Minotaur – is there to be governed and commanded.

The Revered

Reverence and the Revered

The birth of a Revered is akin to the materialisation of a dream.

In the moment when collective belief and passion coalesce within the Soul of one, crystallising into a pure, transcendent ideal – in that moment, a Revered is born.

They suffer not the frailties of mortal flesh.

They neither hunger, thirst, sleep, nor breathe.

They suffer not illness or injury, and know not the helplessness of childhood or the fear of ageing.

They are born with the certainty of what they are, and what is expected of them.

They traverse and inhabit Realms beyond mortal comprehension, shaping and subjugating reality to their will.

The Revered

Origin and Existence

Upon birth, a Revered is instantly aware of who, what, and where they are; what they are capable of, and why they exist.

They suffer no period of grogginess or uncertainty; they may instantly act or even be mid-act.

Indeed, they are not always formed during quiet prayer; they manifest in any moment a mortal's beliefs transforms into unwavering Faith.

Whether it's the moment a bandit raises their blade, a child falls in a river, or as the pure light of the sunrise falls upon the autumn leaves – any instance a mortal's heart truly embraces belief in something greater than them, a Revered manifests.

However, while a Revered may inherit much from the mortal that envisioned them, they are more than mere reflections of that mortal's inner self.

As a painting may begin as a sketch within a single Soul, it is the collective brushstrokes of communal belief that endow the final image with hues, shades, and nuances.

Thus, the Revered are distinct, vibrant entities capable of their own thoughts, emotions, and desires.

Even after creation, they continue to be affected by mortal belief and perception.

As these shift and change, so too will the Revered's form and powers, reacting to the mortal's expectations of them.

Their power and majesty sustained and shaped by mortal belief and perception.

For, without mortals, a Revered would simply fade from existence.

A fading that cannot be undone.

Even if the same mortals were to give rise to a new Revered, it would be distinctly different – a new embodiment of belief.

Yet, while mortal emotions spark the birth of a Revered, not every fleeting hope or fearful tremor leads to genuine belief.

Likewise, not all belief leads to the Revered; many Ysælorian religions worship hollow gods and idols, or those once worshipped having long since faded.

Conversely, not all Revered lead to a religion.

When first formed, the Revered are akin to spirits, watching over and guiding the few mortals that sustain them.

For generations, they may continue this way: stories of the family guardian passed from parent to child, or the rumours and folklore that speak of the good fortune certain offerings bring.

The Revered

Belief's Manifestation

True belief is not a conscious act.

It cannot be forced or manufactured.

It forms deep in the Soul when a mortal truly recognises the existence of a power greater than themselves.

Thus, the birth of a Revered is a truly rare occurrence.

When Revered do manifest, they take on forms as manifold as imagination itself.

If mortals believe them to be a mighty hunter, dignified noble, small child, or even a primal embodiment of the seasons, then this is how they will appear.

While many are perceived as gods in the traditional sense, they may be born from other beliefs – Taniwha, Djinn, Yaksha, Fae, La Llorona, even children's bedtime monsters; a myriad host of otherworldly entities personifying mortal imagination.

And, as the outward form of a Revered reflects the beliefs of their Followers, a shift in belief is a shift in form.

Yet, such changes do not occur quickly; they are gradual and subtle, as the new countenance pervades and ripples through their Followers' minds.

Many Revered are anthropomorphic, reflecting limited mortal imagination; however, some do have bestial, elemental, or even nebulous forms.

Most are capable of speech and rational thought, though some are wholly feral and intuitive.

Forming from mortal belief, feral Revered materialise not despite fear, but because of it; after all, belief is not a conscious act, but rather a profound, Soul-bound reaction to the world.

If enough mortals truly believe, a feral Revered may be born, becoming monsters of terrifying power.

A group of villages that fear the beast lurking within the forest may unwittingly create a Revered, who, like all its kind, wishes to fulfil the expectations of it – raze the villages, devour livestock, and kill loved ones!

Yet, on some instinctual level, even these feral Revered may be aware that it is the mortals that sustain them, so the truly cunning kill only a few, allowing others to tell their tale...

The Revered

Imperfect Perfection

The transcendence of the Revered is evident in all that they are, though it is not as complete as they choose to believe.

Born of the Periphery, they exist as part of, and yet separate from, Ysælor.

Thus, they may pass unseen by mortals, while still limited by the physicality of barriers and obstacles around them.

They are immortal, never succumbing to the passage of time, and invulnerable to the mundane dangers of the mortal world.

Weapons do not harm, fire does not burn, and while a collapsed building may cause inconvenience, it will not bring injury or death.

Within Ysælor, the Revered may don a mortal guise, aiding in the observation and safeguarding of their wards.

Mortal prayers and pleas are heard and answered, guiding the fate of all that live.

Auguries and omens are bestowed, serving to call the mortals to pilgrimage, worship, or the fashioning of Artefacts.

Commanding Ysælor itself, the Revered have divine magic – Theurgy – allowing them to bend and subjugate reality to their will.

Yet, for all their glory, the Revered are not paragons of flawless perfection.

They are after all, silhouettes of the mortal spark that realised their existence.

Swept up in the torrents of love or blinded by insatiable curiosity, they too can stumble and fall.

Vulnerable to rage, haunted by fear, and tarnished by jealousy, their hearts may bear the same indelible scars as mortals.

Even beneath their donned mortal veils, the Revered remain immortal, their intrinsic nature as a wedge setting them apart from the mortal realm they inhabit.

Despite proximity, despite walking the mortal world, true comprehension of the mortal state eludes them.

For their Theurgies, mortal perception defines them; Revered born from the idea of fire may conjure forth and control flames, while guardians of the heart may command emotions.

Mortal perception, as always, restricting and defining the power of the Revered.

And yet, within these imperfections, they may find beauty, their own sublime existences reflecting the subtle nature of mortality.

The Revered

Echoes of Devotion

A Revered’s Soul is in perpetual flux.

The paradox of servitude and rulership, the dichotomy between mortal and exalted, is tenuously held together by the golden thread of Faith.

Faith, an ethereal, ineffable force, is a testament to the adoration, awe, and veneration mortals hold for the Revered.

As mortal Followers flock to the Revered, Faith grows; elevating both the Revered’s Soul and status.

Yet, the same belief that infuses and empowers their very being, also serves to elevate them beyond the mortal world.

Truly powerful Revered may no longer tread upon the land of Ysælor – their mere presence, a danger to all within.

Instead, they become confined to the Outer Realms, forced to become distant rulers – risky, for as they say ‘Out of sight, out of mind.’

Indeed, belief is forever ebbing and flowing, as mortal perception changes; vulnerable as they are to the ravages of time and the vagaries of birth and death.

Yet, while the accrual of Followers leads to the strengthening of Faith, their loss does not cause its decay – the intricacies of the Revered are rarely that simple.

For a Revered, Faith becomes a mark on their essence, etched into their very Soul.

Though these marks may endure, they will fade in time without the continued nourishment of mortal belief.

However, even Revered without Followers are not without recourse.

First, once taken within themselves, the Revered may gift the energy of belief – Fulgur – to another.

Furthermore, amid the convictions and dogma of mortal belief are hollow religions; prayers and worship ringing out to an emptiness echoing only silence.

Devoted to gods that exist only in the fervour of dreams and the rantings of the deluded, these prayers drift, unclaimed, into the Realms.

Yet, as each mortal is unique, so too are their prayers.

Thus, the prayers of the misguided quickly turn sour, causing disharmony in those not meant for such offerings; once sweet nectar, unpalatable and rotten.

However, what was once pure, may be made so once again; for within the Outer Realms, these stale remnants of misguided belief can be remade anew.

Though the Souls of the dead – Manes – lack the spark to ignite true belief, they remain devoted to their protectors and shepherds in the afterlife.

The Revered may exploit this devotion to purify stale Faith, offering them a means to sustain themselves in the Outer Realms.

There too exists rare, natural deposits of coalesced stale Faith within the Outer Realms – Fulgurite.

Fulgurite is a potent, eternal supply of Faith, and its discovery incites fierce battles for control of any sources.

The Revered

Regalia & Alliances

While the esoteric power of the Revered infuses their very being, even they must rely on outside aid from time to time.

At such times, the Revered may forge powerful Artefacts – enchanted items of awesome might – enact Oaths – solemn agreements that bind Souls – or enter into Pantheons – alliances centred around a shared ethos.

Artefacts

Artefacts contain and harness the power of the Revered whatever their form may be: Armaments, Relics, or Kin.

Armaments are the weaponry and armour of the Revered; infused with such power that even the immortality of the Revered crumbles before them.

Relics echo the myriad Theurgies of the Revered, endowing tools, gear, and objects with their power.

Kin are sentient cohorts and companions that walk the line between mortal and immortal existence – they may be created sentient entities, or mortals Ascended to a higher state of existence.

Artefacts stand as testament to the union of mortal ingenuity and Revered might, their power wieldable by all.

Thus, only the most careless Revered would allow them to fall into mortal hands, lest the power of the Revered be turned against them or allowed to run amok within Ysælor.

Yet, while the Revered may forge Artefacts in solitude, the involvement of mortal hands – more importantly belief – makes the process of imbuing easier.

As mortals manufacture the physical form, their dedication and commitment infuses the Artefact-to-be’s mundane form with belief making it more receptive to the Revered’s power.

When forged in solitude, an Artefact risks being damaged by the Revered’s immense power – both wasteful and dangerous to Revered and Ysælor alike.

Even Kin, sentient companions and cohorts, are easier to imbue with power if they were once the focus of mortal belief.

The Ascended are a unique form of Kin; elevated from the mundane, they exist in limbo between mortality and immortality.

Ascended beyond mortality, they carry with them the memories and bonds of their former lives.

Once mortal, they can navigate Ysælor far easier than any Revered; spreading influence, executing tasks, or acting unnoticed by rivals.

The power bestowed upon them, may be but a shadow compared to the Revered’s own exalted might, but as the saying goes ‘power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.’

The Ascended’s power and existence is far beyond any mortal imagination, and can easily overwhelm any sense of self, morality, or ethics previously held.

An Ascended mortal may also never return to their previous lives – though some are taken just before the moment of death, others are taken in their prime.

Being irrecoverably torn from loved ones can readily sow the seeds of resentment or doubt within them.

Thus, the Ascension of a mortal is a heavy responsibility for any Revered to bear, and may prove to be their undoing.

The Revered

Oaths

Oaths are more than mere promises or vague intentions; they are solemn vows woven into a Revered’s very Soul.

They join destinies and fortune, granting Oath-takers newfound power, insight, and knowledge.

The enactment of an Oath places a heavy burden upon an Oath-taker’s Soul – a small piece given with each new Oath.

Tempting as it may be to gain esoteric Theurgical knowledge, Followers and Faith, or entry to hitherto impenetrable Outer Realms, caution must be shown, for each Oath brings restrictions.

Betraying an Oath, breaking these restrictions, has consequences, causing harm not just to the Oath-breaker but potentially their Followers as well.

In extreme cases, such treachery can even end their very existence.

Thus, while Revered may enter into a multitude of Oaths, they must tread carefully, lest they become ensnared in a labyrinthine web of their own devising.

The Revered

Pantheons

There is great potential and prestige in joining a Pantheon – unions and alliances of shared ethos and purpose.

A Pantheon of a solitary Revered is an oxymoron, a shadow of its true potential.

Once joined, Pantheons become both a part of and separate to a Revered’s Soul.

Prospective members must take an Affirmation, promising that they will uphold its ethos and work in its interests.

Pantheons themselves are a liminal space woven within and without, where Fulgur and thoughts ebb and flow – the powers of all, available to the one.

However, this liminal space is unstable, and must be carefully nurtured – its structure like delicate fabric, a weave of energy and ethos, straining and struggling against the power held within.

So, it must be carefully maintained lest it rupture, the power within bursting forth to endanger all.

Should this happen, the energy seeks to stabilise itself within the most powerful member, who must risk all to bring it under control.

Failure results in great harm, and likely destruction; the energy arcing from member to member until it finds one with the strength to tame it.

Alas, history records more than one Pantheon annihilated in this manner.

Fortunately, a Revered powerful enough to establish a Pantheon, is also powerful enough to hold it together – hopefully.

This Revered is known as its Monarch.

They wield absolute power over the Pantheon and its members, issuing commands or reforming the Pantheon as desired, all with near impunity.

This absolute power comes at a cost, however; the Monarch must contend with holding the Pantheon together, both literally and metaphysically.

Their duty is to oversee its members, define roles, arbitrate disputes, and most importantly, ensure all follow its ethos.

To assist, they enlist members, forcibly if need be, to perform any required duties.

Chief among them is the Vassal.

As any Revered powerful enough to establish a Pantheon is likely confined to the Outer Realms, Vassals are empowered by the Monarch to act on their behalf.

They are the most trusted among the Pantheon, acting as the Monarch’s advisors, confidants, and enforcers.

Beyond the Vassal, a Monarch bestows upon members powers and duties for any purpose required; guardians, messengers, spies, whatever is required.

While members – even the Monarch – may change, as long as its founding ethos is upheld, a Pantheon endures.

There too are societal benefits of union and amity; Pantheons serving as guilds and alliances within the Outer Realms.

Indeed, as a union holds the Pantheon together so too does a union establish one with greater ease – a Monarch may lead, but they can only do so if there are others.

Thus, many Pantheons are the result of informal collaborations, political concourse, and agreements over the founding ethos long before the Pantheon is officially established.

The Revered

Fragility of Faith

For the Revered, the cultivation of a distinct belief or persona within the mortal realm is paramount.

They gain control over their own forms, Followers of a particular temperament, and the nature of their Theurgies.

However, direct contact with any mortal, let alone their own Followers, can be nothing short of perilous.

No matter how cautious a Revered may be, a single misdeed can resonate like a discordant tone through mortal belief.

There is also the almost infallible capacity for mortals to misunderstand and misinterpret the truth of what is.

So, while it may begin as but a soft echo in the Revered’s own Soul, the risk lies in the crescendoing of these dissonant tones.

As stories of the encounter reverberate through mortal consciousness, each may add their own disharmonious note.

And so, a Revered may find their form and powers shifting, their identity lost in the cacophony of altered perceptions.

For this reason, many Revered opt for a more enigmatic presence.

They communicate their desires and edicts through veiled omens and cryptic dreams, communicated only to their most devoted Followers.

These messages become oral traditions, whispered rumours, or even sacred texts that shape the understanding of the Revered among the mortals.

Indeed, while miracles exist, and some mortals practise Thaumaturgy, most are unlikely to experience either.

Thus, the Revered learn to be cautious when interacting with mortals, whether they be their own Followers or not.

For when faced with what they fail to understand or frightened of the unknown, many mortals turn to their own gods for aid and succour.

These gods – these Revered – protective of their wards, may react badly to those that endanger them, sending aid or even arriving themselves, in times of distress.

Such situations can often lead to uncertain and dangerous encounters with fellow Revered, especially as first impressions often last a long time for those that are immortal.

The Revered

The Domains of Gods

Across Ysælør, the spark of mortal Souls radiates their light and warmth – ever constant sources of dreams and beliefs.

Alone, each is but a solitary candle’s glow, offering little comfort against the void’s encroaching, eternal gloom.

Yet, rarely are they alone; yearning for the warmth of others, mortals are driven to seek unity and shared purpose.

From mere sparks, beacons of unified belief ignite – lanterns brave the dark, hearths warm homes, and braziers embrace huddled communities.

Where mortals gather, these flames of belief exist and thus so do Domains: the Ysælorian regions of Revered influence.

Therefore, to the Revered, Ysælør is set ablaze with constellations that chart the course of their Followers lives.

Towns and cities blaze with brilliance, villages and hamlets offer warm radiance, while travellers and wanderers move like lone, falling stars in the night sky.

Nourished by these flames, Revered are empowered; Followers provide aid, the land is known, and reality bends easily.

But in the cold, they are alone; their Followers distant, the land bleaker, and reality bending to other masters.

Thus, wise Revered often seek the flames of their Followers’ Souls.

Especially, though mortals may not believe it to be so, Revered can, and do, fall foul of injury and harm – though nothing so visceral as material wounds.

For when a Revered is injured, it is their very essence that is rent, their very Soul twisted and mangled.

In these times, only the warmth of the mortal Soul – their inner spark – may soothe and mend such intimate injuries.

These flames, however, flicker and flare as mortal emotions clash or harmonise.

As their belief swells with dedication or subside with doubt, a Domain’s edges ebb and flow.

Victory in battle, holy days, or a festival of celebration all serve to bolster the fervour of mortal belief.

Likewise, loss and despair, defeat and humiliation all serve to diminish mortal belief and the trust in their gods.

As with mortal belief and prayers, each Domain answers to but a single master – its warmth and light nourishing but one.

However, the presence of one Revered’s Domain does not diminish another.

Mighty Revered may rule entire Empires and Kingdoms, but their forests and mountains, towns and villages, also bend to the wills of fledgling Revered.

Such incursions are tolerated, possibly encouraged – as long as the mortals pay homage to every master there can be no grievance.

Yet, the lives of mortals are brief, their worldly view limited.

As they experience but their small corner of Ysælør they may come to believe only in their narrow view of existence.

They come to believe only in what they see and hear; the guardians and protectors of their own little world.

So, fledgling Revered must tread carefully; attracting new Followers may dissuade them from another, drawing the ire of the more powerful.

The Revered

Sanctuary: Thoroughfare

Though born of the mortal Soul and sustained by their belief, the Revered nevertheless stand unparalleled among the mortals.

Even amongst their own kind, each has distinct origins and drive; the mortals and moments of their birth unique, never to be repeated within history’s flow.

Yet, in their connection to the Outer Realms, they find unity

Beyond Ysælør, the Outer Realms serve as Revered havens and playgrounds.

Within the Totality they drift, their presence shining bright against the eternal void.

Unfettered, they would be lost, devoured by the void’s nihilistic nothingness.

Yet, the Realms remain steadfast; held fast by a labyrinthine web of pathways and roads binding and anchoring them to the mortal world.

They provide passage and safety for the comings and goings of the Revered and a conduit to the afterlife for the Souls of the mortal dead, the Manes.

The origin of these paths is the Realm that lies closest to Ysælør: Thoroughfare – both the Realm’s name and of a small town that sits at its centre.

If there is one place within all of Ysælør and the Outer Realms that could be considered a natural home to the Revered, it is Thoroughfare.

Here, the Revered find camaraderie, respite, and succour.

The town has a bustling market, a serene port, and roads that wind and weave their way throughout the surrounding lands.

Beyond Thoroughfare the land itself is a mixture of diverse regions existing in impossible juxtaposition to one another.

A snow-covered mountain range, a deep forest, a scorching desert, a frigid tundra, a crystal-clear ocean, and a flatland of lush crops all stretch off as far as the eye can see.

Each region has its own unchanging sky, and moving between them sees the sky fade and transition from one to the next.

The flatlands are bathed in the dawn sun, while the ocean waters are gently caressed by a mild breeze and heated by a mid-morning sun.

A scorching midday sun burns the desert, and the forest is bathed in the evening sun of a cool autumnal day.

The mountains are silhouetted against a setting sun, and in the tundra, the three Ysælorian moons hang motionless in a perpetual star-filled night sky.

Thoroughfare itself is cool and overcast with a pleasant breeze and amicable weather, with the regions fanning out from Thoroughfare sitting at their centre.

When entering from the Periphery, a Revered does so upon a region’s pathway best suited to their nature.

Those venerated as hunters walk the forest paths, aquatic Revered sail or swim into the harbour, and chthonic Revered emerge from caves in the mountains.

Similarly, leaving is done along the pathway best suited to the traveller’s destination; Thoroughfare slowly fading away and the path becoming the sole, precarious protection against the Totality.

The Revered

Duty and Reverence

A Revered’s Soul is forever in imbalance, a dichotomy forming their very essence.

Chains of duty and reverence bind them to Ysælør and the Outer Realms alike.

One chain, sombre and Ysælorian, keeps the Revered bound to the mortal world.

Forged from belief, it forever drags the Revered downwards – inescapable burdens of duty and obligation.

Yet, the other chain, resplendent and divine, draws the Revered to Realms of unimaginable splendour.

Forged from covenants and prayers, it seeks to elevate the Revered – radiant promises of glory and transcendence.

Though this transcendence is not without a measure of celestial irony.

For with veneration, the weight of the mortal chain lightens and the pull of the resplendent chain intensifies.

Finally, with grim inevitability, the tether to Ysælør is lost.

Thus, the truly powerful may no longer walk Ysælør, their essence too radiant and a danger to mortal flesh and bone.

The venerated are thus compelled to watch over their wards through emissaries sent to Ysælør in their stead.

These emissaries become their eyes, their hands, and their voice in the world they can no longer walk in but are forever bound to watch over.

For those still able to freely traverse Ysælør and the Outer Realms, travel between them is as familiar as a well-told tale; a narrative intrinsic to their Soul.

Yet, the journey is not a mere traversal of space, but a profound act of introspection; a choice to forsake one calling, to fully embrace the other.

Thus, to reach the Outer Realms the Revered must gently loosen the chains of their mortal burdens.

Gently, but deliberately, they embrace the allure of the Outer Realms while grasping tight the mortal chain for their eventual return.

With this act, they depart from Ysælør, becoming eternal travellers of the infinite.

The Revered

Revered Societies

Beyond Thoroughfare, the complexities of Revered society rival, and even surpass, those of any mortal empire or kingdom.

Alliances are forged, rivalries fought, and pleasure pursued, all contained in an elaborate stratified society of morality, commerce, and governance.

The foundation of this society lies in one underlying principle: the truth of power.

At the top, grand Revered, likely ancient, pass their judgement on all below, enforcing it through might and tradition.

Beneath them, are the ever-changing strata of economic coalitions, political alliances, and military stratagem.

It is from these factions, ruling Revered choose their emissaries and allies.

At the bottom are the Souls of the mortal dead, the Manes, where they serve much the same function they did in life – servants and patrons to the Revered.

However, the Manes also pose the greatest threat to Revered society.

All mortals eventually become one of the Manes, and all Manes eventually decay into one of the twisted Immanes – entities deadly even to the Revered.

Immortal and innumerable, governing the ceaseless tide of the Manes is thus an ever present concern for all Revered.

Fortunately, their decay is tempered by the mere presence of the Revered.

Thus, the Revered shelter the Manes, not only to safeguard the foundation of their power but also to remain vigilant against the ever-present threat they pose.

Temptation

Balanced on the precipice of the eternal void – the Totality – Ysælør and the Outer Realms remain ever protected.

Ysælør is held in the protective embrace of the Periphery, and the Outer Realms owe existence to the ceaseless vigilance of the Revered.

Yet the void’s pernicious essence is patient and insidious; oozing through the tiniest crack in the armour of the mortal and Revered Realms.

Though the Totality is nothing, its interaction with Ysælør and the Outer Realms creates a paradox: Ousia – a substance comprised, at once, of both nothing and yet all things.

It manifests in myriad forms – luminous pools reflecting cosmic secrets, serpentine tendrils of light and darkness that writhe like phantoms, even ethereal sounds that hum the dirges of forgotten worlds.

Its form may be mercurial but its essence remains the same – corrosive, corrupting, and captivating.

For mortal and Revered alike, Ousia is an untapped potential of power; it may birth new constellations, shape reality, and even breathe true life into inanimate dust.

Humanity and Ysælor

Mortality and Mortals

The birth of a human is akin to a candle flickering in the dark.

In the moment a Soul’s potentiality ignites and flares into actuality, dreams are made flesh – in that moment, a fragile life is born unto Ysælor.

They are born weak and pitiful, bound by the limitations of mortal flesh.

They require sustenance and warmth.

They suffer illness and injury.

They live with questions and confusion clouding their path.

They agonise over the dread of ageing and the vulnerabilities of youth.

They laugh and cry.

They hope and fear.

They live and die.

Yet their fragility is accompanied by strength, an indomitable, unyielding will to survive and endure.

Gods and Passion

For all their limitations, humans are not content to suffer meekly.

Driven by belief, possessed of steadfast wills, and guided by moments of grace, they rise to the challenges of life.

Yet, do they truly face these trials alone?

Surely, even the most sceptical would struggle to deny the existence of the gods?

For the humans, the gods are the very power that sustains the world, supporting their lives and protecting them even beyond death.

However, though the gods may be an ever present force within the world, few know with certainty that they exist at all.

Instead, they believe.

They believe the gods are there, guiding, protecting, and watching over them.

They believe there is more to what their eyes and ears tell them is all around.

Why does the Sun rise and fall every day? The gods.

Why do the waves move across the ocean? The gods.

Why do stars shine brightly in the night sky? The gods.

Why does death befall the good and just? The gods.

For many, the mysteries of their world can be explained by the existence of gods.

Yet, even as they pay respect and offer veneration, humans themselves are far from powerless.

Humanity and Ysælor

Devotion and Dedication

Those who follow the gods, those who truly believe and dedicate their lives to dogma and faith, may, if favoured, draw upon a portion of divine might and magic as their own.

However, some humans learn to weave their own magic free of the obligations and trappings of religious devotion.

For these humans, Thaumaturgy is a devotion unto itself.

Through study, practice, and sacrifice, they learn to draw upon obscure energies and natural laws of Ysælor.

Though it remains a concealed art: accessible to all, yet revealed only to the most trusted few.

Though they believe in gods, humans are also gifted with curiosity, and the often grief-earned insight that not even divine powers can protect them from every hazard of Ysælor.

Yet, this awareness does not dilute their belief; it enriches it.

They construct grand civilisations, explore untamed lands, and advance their societies, not in spite of the gods, but perhaps because of them.

For who else would have granted them the fortitude to survive, and the will to conquer their challenges, if not the gods?

So, while they may worship, humans also draw upon their own innate skills to navigate the dangers of Ysælor.

Thus, their self-reliance often serves as a living tribute of reverence – surely the gods send these hardships as trials, wishing only to strengthen humanity?

The very act of surviving and thriving in a perilous world is thus an affirmation of the gods’ influence, a manifestation of humanity’s beliefs.

Humanity and Ysælor

The Ysælorian Tapestry

Ysælor is a world vast beyond reckoning, a sprawling expanse of land and sea that defies the simplicity of any charted map.

It is not a world that welcomes humanity with open arms; it challenges them each new day.

It is a place of extremes in both flora and fauna, and of climate and conditions.

Here, the familiar – the laughter of humans, the barks of dogs, the whinnies of horses – resound alongside the cries of the unknown – screeches in the night, rumbles beneath the waves, and howls in forgotten, dark places.

The Ysælorian geography is a tapestry of ever changing natural wonders and perils.

The deserts’ scorching dry heat gives way to the icy tundra’s biting cold.

Verdant, serene flatlands yield to rocky, perilous caldera, before giving way to temperate forests.

Towering mountains pierce the sky as if in sacred supplication, while the endless oceans sing siren’s songs, beckoning all to embrace the deep.

Yet humans rise to these challenges every day, each dawn bringing new discovery or, more often, new danger.

While some build their homes behind fortified walls, others venture forth as pioneers to the unknown.

For some, law and order bring comfort, while for others, striking out in search of glory and adventure is all they every wish to experience.

For these seekers of adventure, Ysælor is a world that rewards curiosity and courage, a world where each new hillcrest or ocean wave promises vistas of untouched beauty, long-forgotten ruins, or riches yet claimed.

For all its challenges, it is a world humanity proudly calls home.

It may be harsh, but it is theirs.

Humanity and Ysælor

Ysælorian Dreams

In the firmament above, a solitary Sun reigns, shedding light, and shadow, on the variegated landscapes of Ysælor.

In its celestial march, it is accompanied by three moons, treading their own path not just through the sky but also through human imagination.

Ysælorian scholars have long peered into the night sky, unravelling the intricate arcs of these heavenly bodies.

Through meticulous observation and wisdom handed down through generations, they understand their world’s place in the cosmos: a globe in orbit around a fiery sun, with moons that encircle their home in celestial procession.

To mark the inevitable march of time, Ysælorians rely chiefly on their Sun and the largest moon.

A year – defined as a singular journey around the Sun – is split into four distinct seasons.

Each season defined by the phases of the largest moon completing four lunar cycles.

These cycles are further broken down into weeks, each composed of seven days – a reflection of Ysælor’s full rotation upon its axis.

In human terms, an Ysælorian year stretches across 448 days, or 64 weeks.

Each season, characterised by its own unique natural tapestry, lasts for 4 lunar cycles.

A lunar cycle consists 4 weeks.

However, the passage of time in Ysælor is not merely a measure of days and nights; it is a living history that shapes the rituals, beliefs, and ambitions of its inhabitants.

Life After Life

Mortal Echoes: The Manes

The birth of a Manis is akin to the fading of an ember.

In the moment a Soul’s spark dwindles and dims, it fights to live on, lingering between mortality and eternity – in that moment, a Manis is born.

They are bound not by the limitations of mortal flesh.

They are bound not by the limitations of Ysælorian horizons.

They feel neither warmth nor passion, dwelling only in numbness and silence, save for the call of the void’s embrace.

They are eternal and still, yet decay inevitably to chaos and madness.

Journey of the Dead

Upon death, mortal Souls shed their flesh to embark on a new journey, existing as mere shadows of their former selves.

Arising anew in the Periphery, they are now one of the Manes – for many, their first glimpse into Ysælor’s true ontological nature.

The Manes are ethereal and immaterial, and thus neither harmed by mundane dangers nor, unlike the Revered, hindered by the physicality of Ysælor.

However, this new found freedom comes at a price; while free of physical danger, their psyches face new threats.

While they may yet wander Ysælor, the Manes are forever apart from the warmth and familiarity of their former lives; a tantalising reminder of all they have lost.

Yet, the true threat to the Manes is not the torment of distant closeness, or the agony of cold warmth, but the call of the eternal void – the Totality.

Life After Life

Death’s Lullaby

Totality’s call is unrelenting and potent: an ineluctable song, luring the Manes’ psyches to accept their mortal death.

Only volatile bonds to their mortal remains and the memories of their former lives keep the Manes shackled to Ysælor.

Without such bonds, slowly, but surely, all Manes heed the call to accept death and welcome Totality’s embrace.

Yet, the mortal Soul cannot be destroyed.

To be embraced by the Totality, affords a fate far worse than oblivion.

Exposed to unfathomable horrors and profound agonies, the Manes’ humanity is twisted and distorted, torn and shredded.

Ultimately, they emerge in the Outer Realms reborn as one of the Immanes – twisted and pitiful Souls, chaos and madness incarnate.

Venerated Shepherds

The cacophonous silence of Totality’s call, may be masked only by the harmonious tones of the gods.

The Manes finding shelter and guidance in their faith – their gods granting safe passage through the treacherous void.

This journey’s steps are laid by the Manes’ final heartbeats, their most venerated god inheriting the duty and honour of granting eternal oasis – unless a debt is upon their Soul.

Once safely through the void, the Manes emerge amid new, unimaginable Realms.

Realms so vast, civilisations so intricate, that they dwarf any mortal society; the limitations of the Manes’ erstwhile mortal imagination humbled and eclipsed.

Within these new homes, as they did in life, the Manes serve their gods, providing entertainment, labour, and worship.

In return, the Manes are given paradises and experiences beyond imagination, to dwell within for all eternity.

Theirs is not an existence of toil or want; they may pursue their passions and dreams while all they need is provided.

Yet, even within the protection of their gods, eternity casts its own dark shadow upon them: while their forms are eternal, their psyche are not.

Life After Life

Eternity’s Shadow

The birth of an Immanis is akin to the agony of a silent scream.

In the moment pleasure begets pain, love begets hate, and dreams beget despair – in that moment, an Immanis is born.

They suffer not the frailties of mortal flesh – **“Rend, devour.”**

The suffer neither illness nor injury – **“Corrupt, slice.”**

They are chaos and madness – **“Peace, sanity.”**

They require neither sustenance nor warmth – **“Starve, buuuuurn!”**

They are fractured and broken – **“Power, power!”**

They laugh and cry – **“Ne-hahahaha-haha.”**

They exist with the certainty of their actions – **“pain, heeeelp meeee...”**

They know not the helplessness of childhood or the fear of ageing – **“Smother, choke.”**

They dwell only in numbness and silence, embracing the call of the void – **“Forsaken? salvation?”**

They are eternal and still – **“Oblivion, rage.”**

They hope and fear – **“Kill meeee!”**

They traverse and inhabit Realms beyond mortal comprehension – **“Defile, desecrate.”**

They shape and subjugate reality to their will – **“Vengeance vengeance unity truth truth love, nothingness.”**

Dark Mirrors

The Immanes are destruction and death, chaos and insanity, but more disquieting than that, they are reflections of the self.

All Immanes were once frail, flawed mortals, and their mere existence reminds all that witness them, that there is such weakness and horror in their own Soul.

For the Manes, they reveal, even with the grace of their gods protecting them, what they may one day become.

For the gods, they are a reminder of their own failures: to protect their Realms and wards, but above all protect themselves.

Though none understand how, the Immanes possess their own means of warping reality – they may kill even gods.

Worse, the wretched Immanes are each as unique as the Manes they once were.

The transformation into an Immanis warps all that a Manis was; their *flesh* and forms, psyches and selves twisted and distorted beyond sanity.

Lumbering brutes, cadaverous horrors, skittering nightmares, and monstrous beasts; all once human, now inhuman.

Yet still, most disturbingly, are those capable of masquerading as the Manes they once were, their true visages hidden beneath veils of subtle deception.

The gods theorise that the uniqueness of each Immanis reflects the emotions and experiences of the Manis they once were.

Certainly any attempt to record such creatures would itself require the lifetime of a god; that is to say, eternity.

Sadly, once lost to the madness of an Immanis, no Manis can be saved; at least, no record of any successful attempt exists.

Epilogue

Slaves and Rulers

And so, Ysælør is a world of paradox, where both the mortal and immortal landscape and experience is replete with conflict and contradictions.

Mortals, having conquered vast swathes of Ysælør through great self-sacrifice, pay homage to the gods that *allowed it to be*.

They surrender free will, devoting their lives and civilisations to religions, all the while killing their own flesh and blood in their gods’ names.

And, while they are the source of all divine power, they freely give it away believing themselves to be powerless.

As for the gods – the Revered – though they embody the eternal nature of dreams, their immortality yet depends on the fragility of mortal flesh.

Though they are reflections of collective belief, they possess their own distinct, inscrutable thoughts and emotions.

Though they stand as transcendent, sublime beings of untold potential, they are yet limited by the ignorance of mortal comprehension and imagination.

Yet, amid Ysælør’s contradictions and paradoxes, perhaps there is a single, unassailable truth:

That gods and mortals are but reflections of the same conflicting desires – to be at once, both sovereign and servant.

For do we not all seek to forge our own destinies, yet also yearn to surrender the burdens of dominion for the peace of submission?