

PHANTAMMERON

BOOK ONE



MITCHELL STOKELY

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— *for Simon*

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[This is an excerpt of the first two chapters]

Three there are that undying dwell,
the tree, the mist, and the ancient well
They alone in dreams are cherished,
three that long ago had perished

THE ESSENCE ETERNAL

There was nothing in the beginning. No darkness or light. For the black Wings of Night had yet embraced the starless Heavens. Only a silent fog floated upon the ruin and waste that filled the cold and empty space. Like a pale shroud, that solemn cloud lay upon the fallen corpse of the world. Its hollow husk then collapsed back into dust and the dreams from which it was made.

But the dreams that ebbed and flowed beyond that shattered world had returned to fill the empty gulf with its ethereal seas. And the Great Mother, whose spirit bore its sleepy tide, washed clean again its celestial shores. Thus began the Anakra, the Dreamtime of the Great Mother, whose broad and hopeful vision was born again in this world.

From out of that yawning gulf rose forth the Essence Eternal, he who was made from the Spirit Divine. He had come from the old world, rising up from its ashes, until his argent wings unfurled and stretched forth across the barren waste. Like a beacon shining out, clear and bright from the depths of night, his radiant wings cast their sanguine light down upon that fearful world. The hidden splendor and glory of the shining Heavens was then revealed to him.

Descending into the depths, the Essence Eternal filled the hollow spaces of those valleys with the brilliant lights of his shining spirit. He commanded the mighty Mountains of Heaven to rise up from the firmament before him, until their towering heights pierced the Heavens and rent its roof asunder. Sublime in their majesty, the shimmering peaks stood proudly against the sky, looking down upon their sister-valleys below. The Heavens then rejoiced. For the shadows of the night had retreated back into the depths from which they were spawned.

But there were two that had lain hidden in the darkness of that decrepit world. The sinister twins, Emptiness and Nothingness,

had long dwelt unchallenged in the gloomy spaces below, slowly consuming the last of the shadows and lights of Heaven that had remained. But those terrible twins fled in terror. For the light of the Essence Eternal shone forth with great force, blinding and burning them with its insatiable flame.

Driven forth from that illuminated world, they fell into the unending abyss that lay in the farthest reaches of the Great Beyond. There they dwelt concealed, far from the radiant beams of dawn that wrapped about the world, and lapped the wounds wrought upon them by that angel of light. Their foul pit soon became their prison. And they were bound to it, though it was of their own making.

The Essence Eternal now began his greatest works. For there burned within his spirit the Creative Flame, which ever consumed him. And there flowed within his heart the Sacred Waters, which had bestowed within him the gift of life. With strong hands wielding mighty tools, he carved out the hollows of the Arch of Heaven, like waters weaving their way and wearing upon the rocks. And with his spiritual fire, he forged from the mountains the Pillars of Heaven upon whose weight the Arch would rest.

He too built the silent Halls of Time, which stretched endlessly into the immeasurable depths of space. Within their hollow hallways he made the wide Corridors of Darkness, upon whose great gates he hung the black Veils of Night, beyond which no light would shine. For they guarded the Lands of Midnight, that wicked realm of boundless gloom that stood between the Heavens and the Great Beyond.

When his work was done, he climbed the shining Mountains of Heaven. Standing upon their summit, he looked down with wonder upon the sublime grandeur of all he had wrought. Weary from long labor, he rested his spirit in the shadow of the mountains. But as he slept beneath the twilight Heavens, a tiny ray of light shined forth from beneath the roots of the mountain. The secret fire of the Sacred Light had awakened once more, shining out its golden beams from within the hollows of its grave.

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Thus, in the Dreamtime of the world were the Heavens remade and forged anew by the noble spirit that had come to dwell therein.

The Essence Eternal awoke from sleep. For he heard voices echoing up from the depths of that which he had made. They were the lonely cries of his children, calling up from the dark waters that lay hidden within the heart of the world.

Reaching out, he held their tiny lights in his hands and breathed into them the fire of his own spirit. They were now cast from the Spirit Divine, of which he too was made, taking form and shape as sons born unto him. Yet were they also of him, as his divine immanence, through them, took form incarnate. So would he, forever after, remain whole and inseparable in all his children. Through their various forms and works would they be known to each other, while through their spirits would they be known to him alone.

Many children were born unto the Great Father. Yet, only five came to him in this world. These were the Primordial Ones, who now gathered before him in his mighty halls. He revealed to each of his children the cherished gifts he had granted unto them. For he had known of their coming and had prepared their various forms and powers, which were once his own. These he had equally divided among them. They knelt before him and were thankful. The Great Father then looked upon his children with love and joy. For of all that he had made, they were his greatest creations.

He then told them that he would soon perish and depart this world, never to return. For he had planted his flame within them, desiring only that they work in harmony as one to finish what he had wrought. Upon its completion, they would return to him and dwell in a house prepared for their keeping. His sons then wept for him. But he comforted them, telling them to go forth and begin their various labors. For through their creative works alone would they find salvation. His sons then departed for their given domains, which he had prepared for them long ago.

But discord soon rose between them, born of the jealousy, greed, and desire for power that had grown within their darkened

hearts. For their own secret passions, borne by their gifts, soon consumed them, driving them against each other in vicious and violent conflict. The world their Father had created fell into ruin, and much that he had made was undone.

Within the gloomy Halls of Time, in the secret chambers of his house, the Great Father grew weak until the time had come for his spirit to leave that troubled world. The Creative Flame that once had burned bright within him was now nearly spent. From within his empty halls, his voice cried out, calling for his children to come to him. For he desired to speak to them as one. But none answered his call, nor came to him in his time of need. For they were blinded by their burning hatred, and deafened by the clamor of continuous war.

Upon the eve of his passing, one of his sons came to him at last. For beyond the Mountains of Heaven, deep within the secret realm in which he had dwelt, the gentle child had felt his father's sad heart beating within his own.

With woeful eyes, the child sat beside his father, telling him of the many sad deeds which he had committed against his siblings. The Great Father looked upon his son's doleful face and saw in him a shattered spirit. And he saw too the sorrowful fate that would yet befall his son, born of the fruit of the dark seeds he had planted within him. For his son's spirit burned bright with the Creative Flame, a presence wild and untamed, which he too possessed. And he knew that soon all his children would be consumed by the fires of their own passions.

But as he lay dying, compassion and mercy filled his heart. He felt the humility and love that yet remained in the heart of his child, and gave unto him the last of his essence, whose silver waters he now held in his aged hands. These, the Sacred Waters of the world, were all that remained of the Great Father. These hidden waters alone had sustained him with their hopeful presence. And yet the memory of something dark dwelt within.

He told his son that in those waters would the fates of the children of the world now lie. For in his hands swirled the waters

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of an ancient pool—the spiritual waters cast away from some other world destroyed long ago and forgotten.

These he gave to his son, who took them as a treasured gift, though he knew not their meaning or purpose. The child then looked into those strange, twilight waters, seeing only faded lights and shifting shadows. He then looked upon his father's eyes, one last time. But as he did, he saw hidden in their shining depths the shade of a darker spirit he had not seen before.

His father's face now faded from view, and the last of his spirit drifted away. The Spirit Divine of the Essence Eternal fled forth into the night, beyond the heights of the Mountains of Heaven, until its distant light disappeared beyond their peaks. His son then wept bitterly for his father.

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The golden dawn of the new world had returned to dusky gray. And the Primordial Ones, now dwelling far apart, hid in their own dim realms which their father had given them long ago. In their dark and twisted minds their hatred for each other grew ever stronger, which in turn spawned poisonous plots of deception and darkest treachery. For many ages they had waged war upon each other, brother against brother, for dominion over that world, until the Heavens had fallen, once again, into waste and ruin from the savagery of their struggles.

With the fading of the lights of the Spirit Divine, the Heavens became trapped in the gloom of the fogs that had once filled it. The Primordial Ones then saw the last gleam of Heaven dim before them, and the memory of their father hung heavy in their hearts, his words echoing in their minds again. They then abandoned their wars against each other. And the wrath wrought upon the world waned for a time, though the guiding light of hope would never again shine brightly upon it.

Beyond the distant fringes of the shadowed Heavens, past the Veils of Night, which hung like ragged drapes before Time's war-torn halls, there stretched a vast realm of darkness and dolor called the Lands of Midnight. Beyond the Corridors of Darkness, within a fortress forged of pitch and might, the first-born son of the Great Father had dwelt, he who is named the Endless Night.

Most blessed was this child of shadows. For the Great Father had given his son a divine gift bearing great purpose and design. By the Wings of Night given unto him would the faded sky be born anew under the satin sheet of midnight, and bound unto the stars of Heaven, yet unborn. In that black mantle would the light of a million suns come to dwell, and within its black cloak the Children of Heaven shine forth in all their glory, joined as one to

that single shade in purposeful union. This had been the one labor the father had given his shadowy son to fulfill.

But even before the death of his father, the Endless Night had succumbed to his own dark and decadent desires, seeking to envelop the world in his vile shadow, and devour the last of his father's lights that yet gleamed in the Heavens. For he proudly wielded his father's ebony flame, that which now burned brightest in him. This fire was of the Glourun, a dark glamour whose enchantment masked all things by its black beauty. But the Endless Night had remade this dark power so that he might hide, by their seductive shadows, his lies and deceptions from his brothers and the all-seeing eye of the Spirit Divine.

With the Wings of Night he had corrupted, he drew them about his form like a cloak. He then cast their black veil over the dying light of the world, so that only the feeble glow of Heaven remained unconcealed.

With his new powers he then summoned forth sinister servants from the lands beyond. To him came many evil spirits that had lain hidden in the shadowy pits and pools of the world. Mightiest of these was a strange monster called the Nightmare Unending. It had been birthed from the depths of the Endless Night's own perverse mind. Yet it had grown from a seed unseen and planted by the hands of a sinister source that dwelt beyond the fringes of this world.

A servant to the Endless Night, this foul spirit had been created to fulfill a more malevolent will. For in that being dwelt the inner shadow that pollutes the heart and mind in endless heartache and anguish, dimming the light that shines from within the living. A depraved creature, it had the penetrating eye that sees that which the heart must hide. Feeding off the suffering of the living, it sought those trapped in the unending agony of life who, struggling to find the will to defy temptation, must endure or fall to their heart's unbending darkness.

And so the Nightmare knew more than any other being of the secrets that lay buried within the hearts of the children of the world. This creature the Endless Night carefully nurtured. For

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through its dark powers and treachery, the Night had sought to pollute the minds of his brothers, perverting their dreams and destroying their hopes until, weakened in spirit, they would serve only his will.

The Endless Night sent the evil essence of the Nightmare Unending into the world, deceiving and corrupting the minds of his brothers until they fell into a frightful sleep. Black seeds of terror were then planted within them, growing freely within their clouded minds, until its dark roots had pierced their hearts and drank the sacred lights of their spirits. Trapped in fear and tortured by terror, they cowered in their own beds, bound to the will of their brother and his conniving servant.

The Endless Night then summoned forth his bat-winged children, driving them from the Lands of Midnight, and sending them flying forth into the Heavens. His armies beat the skies with their ebony wings, until their dark forms stretched across the heights of Heaven, drowning the valleys of that once-shining realm in utter darkness. Their endless streams, like long black vines, stretched beyond his realm, entangling his brother's lands in their boundless shade. The Endless Night then opened forth his wide wings until their terrible shadow enveloped the very Mountains of Heaven, cloaking every corner of the cosmos in darkness. The dark lord watched with perverse joy as the last lights of Heaven faded from view.

He then looked down upon that bleak, broken, and baneful world with a contemptuous eye. For the mighty spheres of Heaven were now bound to his will alone. Completely clothed in his grim shade, to him were its children now enslaved, hiding in terror under the gloom of the horror-filled skies. Then was realized by all whom dwelt under him, the true nature of the Glourun, his cursed shade. For the infinite silence of the sinister night had drowned the very spirit of their lives, suffocating the sound of every last beating heart in its great shadow.

The Endless Night stood proudly upon the summit of the Mountains of Heaven and proclaimed, "Come, my children, and bow before me. For I am the Lord of Darkness, overlord of all that

dwells under the shadowed Heavens.” To his many black servants, he then decried, “In this world, no dusk shall ever fall or dawn ever rise, no star ever dwell or sun ever shine.”

The world would have remained bound to his eternal shadow. But the vile servant of the Endless Night, the Nightmare Unending, had come upon its master unseen. It watched as the Endless Night had lain with a witch-queen most foul, whose spirit and form the Endless Night had summoned from the dark waters that billowed up from beneath the world.

By his seed, in secret, she had brought forth a son and daughter, the Shadow and the Shade. To these children the Endless Night then bestowed his greatest gifts and powers. For he had conquered this world for them so that, like him, they might make it in their own image upon his passing.

But the Nightmare Unending saw that within its master’s dark heart had grown the faint glow of love’s undying flame, fostered by a father’s unfaltering hope that its enduring light might someday shine bold and bright again within his children. Enraged, it fled from his master as one betrayed, its vile spirit departing from those he had enslaved in the unending horror of their dreams. It then found the Shadow as he slept, the first-born Child of Night, and placed within the eldritch son its own corrupted spirit, so that the fate of this world and its shadowed child, forever after, would be bent towards its secretive will.

For the Nightmare Unending had no hope for itself or this fallen world. And within that precious child it had seen a truer source of this world’s hopelessness and despair than in the father. From within this fallen son would soon arise a greater evil, whose hateful violence and wrath would be inflicted upon this world. By its vow to leave behind its cursed spirit, the Nightmare Unending was now free from its long servitude to the Endless Night. It fled into the gray fog, returning to the hateful hollows from which it was spawned.

Free from their night terrors, the Primordial Ones rose from their troubled sleep. Seeing their world wrecked by the great shadow that lay about it, they gathered as one to destroy the

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Endless Night. They wrought great wrath upon him, casting his dark armies back beyond the Veils of Night that guarded his lands. The Endless Night then fled forth from the fray, beyond the walls of his great fortress, disappearing into the catacombs that lay beneath it.

There he dwelt alone, crying out in pain and tending to the terrible wounds inflicted upon him. But his brothers came and cruelly stripped his own troubled children from him. They in turn were imprisoned in the pits of the world, far from his knowledge and reach. So was the Endless Night and his kind banished from this world, and his dominion over it broken, forever.

The Endless Night climbed forth from the black labyrinths below his keep and stood upon the edge of his battered lands, his black claws clinging to the crags that hung above its shadowed shores. He wrapped his ragged wings about him, and with eyes glowing like red embers, looked down upon the remains of his ravaged realm.

Weak and in despair, he vowed never again to bathe his father's domain in darkness, nor consume the last of the feeble lights of that world. Nor had he sought revenge upon his brothers for their cruel acts. For he was now weakened by war, and weary with regret. But in the silent hours, he thought upon the fate of his lost children and the mystery of their imprisonment.

Yet, unknown to him, evil had been sown in his son's heart by the hand of the cruel Nightmare Unending. For that creature had planted a secretive seed into the Shadow, whose own hate, like a dark tree, would soon grow forth and bear foul fruit.

* * *

Beyond the Veils of Night, past the gloomy Corridors of Darkness that wound their way through the Lands of Midnight, there lay a wrecked and ruined region called the Realms of Oblivion. Chained to the unforgiving shade, this sad realm lay permanently stained by the ever-lengthening shadows that crept into it from the neighboring domains of darkness.

Here, countless menacing mountains stood, rugged and savage, their horned peaks thrusting up like daggers of obsidian through

the belly of a tumultuous sky. Bound by black ice and pelted by frigid rains, their unrelenting winds chewed away at the weathered rock that lay exposed upon its heights. Their barren crags and cliffs looked down with pity upon bottomless pits and chasms of blackest night, whose unknown depths, cloaked in a cold gray fog, no living thing had ever seen or fathomed.

Here lay a domain much maligned, spawned by the mind of a being born of ultimate destructive and evil intent. By its crushing hand had that land become a place beyond all measure of cruelty fashioned—a world of blight, famine, and pestilence which had risen forth from the violence and destruction that had eternally plagued it. The gloomy valleys of this ominous realm had long remained imprisoned in the grip of the dead and the dying. For about its expanse remained the wreckage of a vast and unending war, whose fierce conflict, unleashed over many eons had nearly consumed it.

Yet upon the slopes of the shadowed mountains slept the sparse remains of a once-divine city, rising up from a vast graveyard plain below, about whose foggy tombs of the dead trailed away countless stone stairways, down into the dizzying depths of its yawning pits. Above those ruins the remnant battlements of a mighty keep now stood, with walls of steel and stone, the last victim of some forgotten siege from which forceful fists had rent a brutal justice upon its many shattered walls and spires. For the Primordial Ones had bent all their might to fell that fastness and drive its malevolent creator from its hold. The fortress had then fallen with its defenders in a final crushing blow, so that a tangled wreckage of crumbling rock, twisted iron, and earth were all that remained.

Below those haunted battlefields of horror could still be heard the tortured screams and moans of the dying and the ghosts of the slain, their fallen enemies, continually roaring up from the cold depths of the shattered cities below. Only their pitiful cries of suffering now challenged the wailing winds in the peaks above.

Countless carved tombs and crypts of colossal stone had arisen from the rock, strewn about the pits and valleys to honor the fallen in a great City of the Dead. Forgotten by the living, the shattered

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city and its sister necropolis now stood empty and abandoned. Only an oily, black mist crept about its crumbling walls, curling about the stony streets, and crawling down and around the roots of dying trees, whose twisted trunks hung bent and broken into the valley below.

But the red and glowing eyes of sleeping beasts still blinked and rolled in the shadows of the haunted cities. For a few demonic beings crept there, lying hidden under slabs of stone, within cracks of walls, or under rocks and piles of rubble. These leaderless offspring of evil, the demonic enslavers of this land, had dwelt there in hiding for many lost ages. The last of their kind, they lay curled within the dark corners and spaces, bloodstained and blackened from ages of endless war.

Others had perished, but only in form. For their spirits had remained behind to haunt the desolate landscape. Though their phantom spirits were now cleft from their bodies, their ghosts had remained imprisoned in the trees and rocks until the time when they would be reborn into this world. These sad specters would wait for their master's return, when they would rise up again in flesh even more frightening, unleashing their wrath upon the children of the world yet to come.

Within the darkest depths of this fallen realm, a vile being had lain hidden, imprisoned in the bottom of its deepest pits. This was the cruel lord and callous ruler of that realm, he who is named the Limitless Void, the sinister second-born son of the Great Father.

The Lord of Destruction he was called, a colossal being of uncontrolled power and might, who had for ages ruled over this vast domain of death. Like the Endless Night, his older brother, he was a cursed spirit who had succumbed long ago to the temptations of his own evil designs and delusions. For he had sought to defy his father and take his brother's lands for his own. But the plotting of this cruel brother was more malevolent. For his villainous and violent mind was ever turned towards the utter destruction of the Primordial Ones and their children.

In the youth of this world, the Essence Eternal had given the Limitless Void a most sublime gift. Through him was bestowed

power over the dead and their consumption. And by his great appetite could he devour the waste of the world, returning all things to the primeval dust from which they were made.

He was the eater of the Vatar, the flesh-of-the-earth that is the body. Yet, by his will alone were their spirits spared utter annihilation, as through death could they yet live again. And so by his hand were they born anew. For the Void alone had been granted the power to devour the endless train of the dead that wound its way to him, unbinding both light and shadow from their forms, and sundering their spirits from their flesh with his shining sword Vatavand. Thus, the Limitless Void could return the spirits of the children of the Primordial Ones back to the world as a gift most precious. In flesh renewed could their spirits then be recast, as through death had the spirit of the world thus been remade. For this purpose alone had the Limitless Void been born.

But long ago, the Limitless Void had in secret sought to defy his father and destroy his brothers in both flesh and spirit. He first set about building his arsenal and armies of might to defy them. By the hand of his swarthy smiths were fashioned dark swords of death to cleave their spirits in two. Cursed relics of black magic and strange enchantments were also forged, which he used to bind the lost spirits that dwelt within Oblivion to even more frightful forms of dread. And so were the black hosts of Oblivion first summoned forth from the infernal pits of the underworld by that sinister son.

Within his lands he gathered his vast armies of might, commanding them to prepare for war. Great throngs of monstrous beings came before him, giving him their full obedience. His forces then flung wide the gates of Oblivion, creeping forth in one black mass to assault the neighboring lands of his brothers.

But in the fray they were cast back, again and again. For they could not match the strength and power of the Primordial Ones, or the will and might of their noble sons and daughters. And so hatred and vengeance against them grew ever stronger in the black heart of the Limitless Void.

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Then was heard by the Limitless Void a strange and agonizing cry, echoing up from the depths below his cities. Beyond his father's knowledge, he had travelled in secret to find its source—to the forbidden realms of the Great Beyond that lay upon the farthest fringes of his world. In that gray and infinite space, the evil twins, Emptiness and Nothingness, had lain hidden in their unending domain of death. For by their fear of the Sacred Lights of Heaven had those dire enemies of his father lain imprisoned in the sunless abyss of which they themselves were made.

The Limitless Void summoned them forth. Their terrifying forms then appeared before him. And he saw that his own empty spirit, like a cup, would be filled with the dark draught of their mighty powers.

Standing upon the edge of their grim abyss, the Limitless Void spoke bold words to the evil twins, saying, "Come before me, pale spirits. I alone know of your nature and of your secret desire for the world. If you will aid me in my war against my brothers, I will destroy the lights of Heaven wherever they might shine. And by their destruction shall you be free of your prison."

But the black storms of the evil twins boiled and blistered before the Limitless Void, ever-changing and most loathsome. Their booming voices then spoke, saying, "We will assist you in your time of need. But we do not as yet desire the death of the Sacred Light of the Creator. We seek only to devour the spirits of the living. When the last child of this world is consumed shall the Spirit of the World then perish and the light with it. My brother and I shall then be free to feed upon its lifeless corpse, as we have done many times before."

They then demanded he now sacrifice his own children to them. Only then would they grant him their many powers and servants of might.

Hearing this morbid demand, the Limitless Void recoiled in horror. For he saw their true nature—that they were conceived within some vile womb of violence, decay, and death. And so was revealed to him their appalling evil most foul. But his desire to destroy his brothers burned like an insatiable flame that would

never cease, so that he succumbed to their will, surrendering his own children to the black mouths of those vile beasts.

Before their doom, his frightened children had tried to flee, flying beyond the peaks of Oblivion. But they were soon sucked down into the vortices of the many vile servants sent to find them, the last of their kind crying out to their father, begging for mercy. Their flesh was then ripped from their bones, and their spirits obliterated forever from this world, devoured by the gaping mouths of the Emptiness and Nothingness.

With the annihilation of those spirits, the vile beings that dwelt within the Great Beyond rose up with even greater force, renewed and replenished by that grave sacrifice. Their frightening storms grew beyond their prisons, bursting forth into the world, defying the burning lights of Heaven.

The Limitless Void, seeing the immense power of their storms, climbed upon a peak and spoke to the Nothingness, saying, "The time for you to devour the world has not yet come. For though the lights of Heaven have begun to fade, the lights of the Primordial Ones and their children still shine brightly."

He then commanded the Nothingness and his brother to come into his form and dwell therein. By his guiding power, he would take them to the lands of his brothers so they and their children might be consumed by them.

The Nothingness rose up, and with his great gray face, smiled upon the Limitless Void, saying, "We shall now enter your flesh and become one with your spirit. But should you fail, you shall suffer the same fate that has befallen us."

The clouds of the evil twins then came into the mouth of the Limitless Void. Within him surged the unbridled strength and power of the evil twins, which they now bestowed upon him. By their powers, the Limitless Void could now obliterate all things in this world, if he so desired. And so in his prideful and devious mind, he plotted unbridled destruction upon his brothers and their kind.

In a vicious assault, the Limitless Void unleashed great wrath upon his brothers, so that their children fled before the ruin of his

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hateful carnage. From his monstrous mouth billowed forth storms and violent winds of savage destruction. For he had summoned forth the full powers of the evil twins, whose vast vortices could annihilate all who stood before them in futile defiance. Many of the last and greatest works of the Great Father then fell into crumbling ruin before the violent onslaught.

The Primordial Ones' many servants and shining armies fled before the frightful forces that the Limitless Void had now unleashed, until many of their own children fell before that evil, consumed into the gray mouths of the Nothingness and Emptiness, never to be seen again.

His brothers, in terrible fear and despair of the Limitless Void's vast and unlimited powers, seeing his alignment with the monstrous horrors that had long dwelt in the abyss, faced the full force of their brother upon the battlefields of space and time. For the Primordial Ones had risen up as one force united to challenge him. By their unity were they victorious. But not without great sacrifice had they won. For many of their strongest and bravest children had perished in that frightful war.

They then took the Limitless Void away in shackles. Chained to the bottom of his own pit, he now lay imprisoned. There he wept, tortured by unfulfilled desires and uncontrolled hungers, which he could no longer satiate. Within the rocky depths of that chasm he cried out in endless suffering, agony, and isolation.

With the fall of the Limitless Void, the terrible twins of the Nothingness and Emptiness fled forth from his weakened form, out into the Heavens, seeking vengeance upon the living that yet remained. But the Primordial Ones, seeing those mighty horrors rising forth before them, awakened the Sacred Light, which one among them had found hidden on the slopes of the Mountains of Heaven.

As they cast its mighty beams down upon them, the Nothingness and Emptiness were burned and blinded, once more, falling back into their prison, never to rise again. For as long as the children of this world yet lived, and the lights promised to them

still shined, the evil twins would be bound to the abysmal depths of the Great Beyond.

The Limitless Void now slept alone in the pits beneath Oblivion, anchored by long black chains to the rocks below. But in his misery, there remained in his heart the desire for freedom, and revenge upon his brothers.

But in the corners of his misty cavern, he came upon a strange pool filled with weird waters, black and poisonous. About that decrepit well stood a dark husk of a great tree, the dead and bent limbs of which hung, like long dark fingers, down into its silent waters. In his frustration and anger he took Vatavand, the spirit-sword his father had given him, and cast it into the pool. His eyes burned with a vengeful light, as he watched the shining sword sink beneath the waves.

The Limitless Void stood before the putrid waters of the silent well, thinking upon all he had lost, when he saw the image of a dark spirit shining dimly upon its surface. There then appeared the ghostly image of a dark queen, who revealed to him strange visions of future events and tidings of things yet to come. But as those images faded before him, a dark object shone forth from the depths of the pool.

Pulling it from the water, the Limitless Void saw it was a ring carved of darkest jet, whose great stone shined forth with an eerie light. But for fear of it, he would not wear it, as he sensed something cursed and baneful about it. But through his touch was his spirit strangely bound to that malevolent band.

He returned to sleep, where in dreams mysterious and haunting, there entered into his mind the image of the ring again. From his prison, he awoke, as in a sweat, crying out for the last of his winged servants, who soon came to him from the dark Realms of Oblivion above. One by one they flew to him in his prison. They then tried to free him, but could not. For those black chains were enchanted by an unbreakable magic. He then sent servants into the world, commanding them to bring news of his brothers' plights and the many secretive plots they had made against him.

THE TROUBLED SONS

To the Limitless Void then came the secret knowledge of his brothers' works and the labors of their last children in this world. This knowledge he gathered to himself, so that in time he could use it to his own benefit. By the dark works of his servants, he then placed before his brothers many traps born of their own temptations and carnal desires, which in time he knew would bring doom upon them. For by their own decadence would they plant the seeds of their own destruction, and by these acts, his freedom.

But the Limitless Void could not escape his prison. And in those terrible depths was he doomed to dwell alone for many ages, far from the Great Father's guiding lights, which still shone faintly upon the Mountains of Heaven.

This world now was spared the cruel hands of darkness and destruction. And the designs of evil's vile benefactors were stayed. Its two troubled sons now restrained, that embattled world fell into a certain, yet fleeting peace, once more.

