

One - Exordium One

## The Chronicles

**You sure he's not a hologram?**

Don't you dare.

**Hold that thought.<sup>1</sup>**

What the-

**I'm back. You were saying?**

Where'd you go?

**Had to make a footnote on the rostralateral, and stuff.<sup>2</sup>**

A what? Why? I will kill-

**Will you relax. It's fourth dimensional stuff, beyond your ken.**

I am your ken.

**No, you're my Costa. Ha! See what I did there?**

You fuck this up I'll never talk to you again.

**In your dreams.**

Go away.

**Why are we even here? What's this old fogey gonna teach us we don't already know?**

How to save our planet.

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<sup>1</sup> Hi, Cascadia here. Should you be wondering - which you will be in a matter of microseconds - the rostralateral is the front part of your prefrontal lobe. It sorts out all those nasty thoughts that keep you tossing and turning at night. Gotta run before she has a meltdown.

<sup>2</sup> For ye visual learners, I've deposited maps and stuff in the codicil. Any time you logophiles wanna check what the Hell she's on about click codicil, and voila. De nada. Or go to [www.willandcompany.org](http://www.willandcompany.org), and have it on your phone as you read. Hasta!

**Yeh, Righ-**

*Last warning!* Costa swiftly raised her open palms facing each other.

**Come on.**

Palm touched palm. Go. Away. Palm slowly started to rub palm. *Now!*

**Alright, I'm going! This better be worth it.** Cascadia, Costa's perpetual 'love you-hate you' inner self - the up and downside of being a genius - begrudgingly retreated into the sanctity of her rostrrolateral folds.

Taking a deep breath, Costa lowered her palms.

In truth, far from being blasé about it, Cascadia was bursting with expectation as to what 'the old fogey' would reveal to them. She switched to her contrite, devil take the hindmost mindset whenever her polyhistor<sup>3</sup> persona, Costa, grew nervous or afraid. Costa was both, and with good reason. The expectations the Council of the Lairds had placed upon her young shoulders were immense. Their planet, Botah, stood on the verge of total annihilation. Thus, she had been dispatched for a 'you better have a really good reason' audience with the only person in the Nine Realms who knew more than she, and might be able to set her on the path to overcome the cataclysm now close to pulverizing them all into extinction. Hence the reason she sat anxiously waiting for the arrival of the renowned Guardian of the Unknown Chronicles, the legendary, fear-inducing Kampion of Avignon.

In the vast Chronicles of Botah - the recorded history and legends of the Nine Realms of the Land<sup>4</sup> - there are two treasuries of tomes, the Known and the Unknown. The Known Chronicles are housed in the Library of Ebbinghaus, in the province of LeBoe, and can be accessed by all.

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<sup>3</sup> *It's a rank that means 'off the wall smarty pants.'* Thanks to me, she's a friggin' genius. The only other person who comes close is Hologram-boy.

<sup>4</sup> *Made ya maps of these too. Don't mention it. [codicil]*

The clandestine Unknown Chronicles are housed here in the mythical Temple of the Goddess Mnemosyne, Queen of Engram, located on the tiny Island of Splena.<sup>5</sup>

Magnificent, ceiling-to-floor embroidered tapestries drape from every inch of the temple's vast walls, unfolding the untold, secret history of the Nine Realms; the redacted story that only one person in all of Botah is permitted to know, the Kampion.

Upon his passing from the outer, cathedral-like Archives of the Arras into Meme's breathtaking temple, the tremulous polyhistor - her long, silk-black hair trailing down the back of her elegant, high-neck, red silk cheongsam - leapt up from her chair. Composing herself, and with all the grace of her ancient ancestry, she bowed deeply to the revered sage. "It's truly a great honor..." she nervously proclaimed, adding, in reverence to his esteem, "...Hlafweard,' the ancient rank for 'bread-winner,' the highest honor in the Nine Realms.

His chest armor crested with the insignia of the ancient imperial empire, his amaranthine robe - symbolic of his alchemic acumen - trailing to the ground, the exceptionally tall Kampion appeared every inch the renowned Wizard-Werre that he was. His exalted rank was confirmed by the long-poled 'moon blade' he grasped in his left hand; his reputation by the famed cicatrix - three parallel scar lines - carved beneath his right eye, and his renowned scholarship was borne out by the two papyrus scrolls he held under his arm.

"You are too kind, Polyhistor," the sanguine Kampion replied.

This threw her off. No one except the habitually formal Lord Chamberlain Hunsdon ever addressed her by her title. But then, no one, except this awe-inspiring, butterflies-inducing legend, had ever been the Kampion of Avignon. Like Cascadia, Costa had believed the Werre was no more than a holographic myth. Clearly not, for here he stood, greatness in the flesh.

Quietly humming his favorite aria, the Kampion crossed the sumptuous chamber to the empty, leather-bound cathedra opposite her.

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<sup>5</sup> *You'll find her in the gallery of the temple. She's stunning.*

Resting his moon blade on the back of the lavish chair, a wry smile crossed his lips as he noticed, woven into the tapestry, his younger self, pre-scar, astride his beloved roan stallion, Babieca. Deliberately placing the papyri at his feet, one neatly behind the other, the regal Kampion sat.

Though she'd been sent to proverbial Coventry, Cascadia couldn't resist. ***What are those for?***

*How would I know?*

***No, no. You know all, miss know-it-all.***

*Clearly not.*

***I can wait.***

"Ha!"

"Polyhistor?"

"Hlafweard, I'm so sorry."

Smiling, the grace of earned wisdom radiating from his being, the Kampion gestured to Costa's chair. "I don't bite, sit."

She sat.

"For what grave purpose has the Council chosen to summon me?" he asked.

Costa took a nerve-calming deep breath. "I need, Hlafweard, for you to disclose to me..."

***Are we really doing this?***

She felt her chromaffin cells squirt just enough adrenaline to make her heart race.<sup>6</sup>

***Say it.***

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<sup>6</sup> *These yummy rush puppies are found in your adrenals, right above your kidneys.*  
[codicil]

"...the Untold History of the Chosens."

***So cool!***

"The Chosens, Polyhistor?" His harsh reiteration of the words startled her.

***Does he not know why we're here?***

"Yes, Hlafweard," she replied, nervously.

"They are untold for a reason."

***Duh!***

"I am aware, Hlafweard."

"Under whose authority are you to be granted this sacred knowledge?"

"The Council of the Lairds and the Concord of the Ancients." The thrill of possessing such vast intelligence sent sensual shivers down Costa's polyhistor spine.

Sitting back, the Kampion studied her. She could feel his sagacious, sapphire-blue eyes peeling away her sheen of false confidence. He smiled, kindly.

Feeling the warmth of his compassion deliberately assuaging her trepidation, she instantly loved him.

***Wow! He's amazing.***

"You must be highly esteemed, Polyhistor."

"How so, Hlafweard?"

"For the Senate of the Sages and the Lairds of the Council to burden one so young with such a grievous Sword of Damocles."

"You know why they sent me?"

"If you bear the authority for me to unfold to you the shrouded secrets of the Chosens, it can only be that the Fourth Wave threatens. If this is so, we are in great peril."

She did not move a muscle. She was forbidden to answer his posit.

"And now I see their reason. With great power comes great responsibility. Clearly an adage you embrace." Again, he smiled. "I knew your grandfather, Kong Qiu."

*How is that possible?*

From her physiognomy, her almond-shaped eyes, her golden skin tone, and the thick cuticles of her jet-black hair, it was obvious Costa was genetically descended from the Lands of the Silkway.<sup>7</sup> But she had never shared with anyone that she was the granddaughter of the Great Sage of the Land of the Untamed.

***The transcripts from the trial.***

*He has access?*

***Hello! He's the Kampion of Avignon, he has access to everything. As will you, if you don't mess this up.***

*Then behave.*

***Then don't be insipid.***

*I am not-*

"Should I impart to you this vital history, Polyhistor, you are aware of its import?"

"I am, Hlafweard."

"You will accept the binding conditions of the Edict of Stocha?"

She took a deep breath. "I will. Will you?"

Her boldness made him laugh with the resonance of a seasoned warrior. He took a moment to consider. "I will. You would be the first."

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<sup>7</sup> Ancient realm in the east of Botah, renowned for its trade routes of silk. One third of Botah's population lives here. [codicil]

"I would." She glanced to the scrolls.

***Don't second guess. Ask.***

*He'll tell us when he's ready.*

***Chicken.***

"Very well."

"Hlafweard?"

"I find you apt." And so it was the Kampion of Avignon, Exalted Guardian of the Anamnesis<sup>8</sup>, unfolded to Polyhistor Costa of Spindle the fiercely protected secrets buried deep in the Untold Chronicles of the Nine Realms.

"To understand the coming of the Pathfinders, those we call the Chosen," he gestured west to the tapestries hanging on the Wall of Darkness, "it is vital we comprehend the cause of the Eruption of the Quakes and the Coming of the Waves, critical if we are to uncover the creation of the Chasm of the Unexplained." He gestured right, to the tapestries on the northern Wall of Ignorance, "We must investigate the betrayal leading to the Wars of the Foul Crawlers and the Fall of Laird Lordag of the Hoop. This will prepare us..." he turned and pointed south to the tapestries hanging upon the Wall of The Rising Hope, where, in the center of the wall, hung a pristine, untouched canvas.

***Why's that one blank?***

*How-*

"For our examination of..."

She shuddered as his soothing crystal-blues swiftly shifted and shattered her ego of defense.

"...your place in the story of our Chronicles."

***Our? What the Hell is he talking about?!***

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<sup>8</sup> *Fancy word for the entirety of innate knowledge possessed by the collective whole. Only a Polyhistor can handle it. You can try, it'll blow yer mind! Here we go.*

*I have no idea.*

***What do you mean-***

She twinged as, unrelenting, the seer's sharp gaze forced her to look to the east, to a massive tapestry on the Wall of Ascension.

It was a weaving of a double portcullis. Atop the battlements of the lattice-grilled gates was embroidered a lithe-bodied, wheatish skin toned, warrior queen, adorned in bronze and gold leather armor.

A curved talwar sword in either hand, astride a rearing, white stallion, Costa immediately recognized the legendary figure.

"That's Manukarnika, Queen of Omos."<sup>9</sup>

"Well observed. If it were not for her, Polyhistor, you and I would not be sitting before her portrait."

"Paradoxically true, Hlafweard."

He smiled. "Indubitably, Polyhistor. Hence, it is with the Battle of the Portcullis that I wish to begin our saga."

***Oh my God! For real?***

"I have longed to learn of her since I was a young girl." Then, with a cranial agility possessed only by a polyhistor of her standing, Costa ignited her orbitofrontal and dorsolateral to make way for the rush of learning about to rain down on her.<sup>10</sup> Nothing thrilled her more. For Costa, epistemology was tantamount to breathing. She did not compare it to sex for that had only happened once in her life, a brutally traumatizing, horrific event even Cascadia knew not to regurgitate. "All systems are go, Laefward."

"Thank you, Houston."

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<sup>9</sup> *Her portrait is in the gallery.*

<sup>10</sup> *I feel your pain. Gambatte minasan! [BA11] the orbito- is the bottom, and [BA9] the dorso-is the top of the front of your frontal lobe. It's where you plan, reason, and problem solve; your 'executive suite,' as t'were. She loves neuro. [codicil]*



"Ha!" Again, Costa burst forth with the guttural chortle demonstrating Cascadia was amused.

***The old guy's funny.***

"Laefward, I'm so sorry."

"It was intended as a jest, Polyhistor."

"Right."

***Yeh, chill, Polyhistor.***

Costa brought palm to palm.

***No! I have to be here for this.***

*One more snide remark-*

***As quiet as a church mouse, I promise.***

"Shall we?" he asked.

Taking a Cascadia calming breath, "We shall," she replied.

"As you see depicted here, the Portcullis, the southern gateway to the heart of our realm, has been entrusted to a squadron of elite Impavido bowmen, the descendants of the mythological Clear Silver, God of Archers.<sup>11</sup> These valiant men and women are led by the magnificent, Manukarnika, who has been ordered to protect the gate at all costs. The reason? Petrified panic has swept down the highways of Necrandy upon the electrifying news that the realm is being overrun by the hideously grotesque, malformed Nagle. Finding the outer gate of the keep open, in what he assumes is the rush of panicked retreat, the grizzled commander of the Nagle, the cunning General Pam, charges his vanguard of rabid marauders, 'Direct frontal assault.' All Pam needs is for his Foul Crawlers - as we now call them - to break down the shuttered inner gate and Diencia is his.

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<sup>11</sup> *He's a deity of the Rigvedi of Omos, from the subcontinent of Bharat. All myths are outlined in the codicil. Pozhaluysta. [codicil]*

"With the fall of our beloved capital will come the fall of Necrandy, our beloved realm. If Necrandy falls, our beloved life source, the Nine Realms descends into extinction with it. The only defense now protecting Botah from an obliterating Armageddon is Queen Manukarnika and her armful of archers."

Like children at a magic show, Costa and Cascadia were bewitched by the Kampion's account.

"Riding Badaal, her steadfast steed, Manu - as her archers fondly call her - looks down from the portcullis ramparts at the swarming battalions of ferocious, Orc-like Nagle stormtroopers spread out before her. First, they come on at a slow walk. Then at a steady trot. Nearing the gates, their fanatical lieutenants urge their rushing monsters to let rip their horrific, blood-curdling, battle-cry. As if dragged from the bowels of infernal Hell, the retching horde vomit forth the 'corkscrew up the spine,' nerve-shattering 'Shriek of the Nagle.'

"'Hold, my brave warriors,' the unflinching Manu orders her anxious archers, the strings of their bows taut between the two fingers of their right hand, their arrows poised to bullet through the air. 'Hold.' The tension too much, a frightened archer lets loose his shaft. Reflexively, his fellow bowmen arc their weapons skyward, urgent to hurl forth their avalanche of death. 'Do not fire!' Manu ferociously commands. With veteran discipline, her ever-trusting Impavido hold back the torrent of their bows.

"The Nagle horde, screeching in expectant celebration of the rout they are about to exact, plunge through the outer gate. Victory is but moments away. Still the queen holds them. Still her aching archers bide her command. And then, with Crawlers swarming the inner space, Manu lets loose. 'Now!' Torrential sheets of pointed agony pierce through the heart of the Nagle vanguard as, in the same instant, the jaws of the Portcullis' outer gate come crashing to the ground. It's a trap."

***What the-!***

Thrilled, Costa gasped.

Now, also fully engrossed, the Kampion charged on. "Instantly realizing his mistake, the cursing General Pam counters, 'Scale the battlements!'

"Siege towers are swiftly swung into place. Parallel squadrons of Foul Crawlers sprint up the rungs of the ladders now scaling the walls, racing to annihilate the thin blue line of Impavido archers spread along the parapets. Outnumbered ten to one, the Impavido fight with Herculean courage. Pure adrenaline and passion hurls the first wave of gnashing Nagle back down the ladders. Undaunted, Pam thrusts his accusing finger at the walled archers. 'Crush them!' he barks. Instantly, the second echelon of Foul Crawlers scramble over their slaughtered comrades and up the ladders. The third and fourth waves urgently step forward, eager for their command to attack. Inside the walled square, the ensnared Crawler vanguard fights viciously to force open the inner barrier.

"'Cauldrons,' Manu calls out to her archers, for in the ceiling above the square are Murder Holes. Murder, because at the side of each hole, stands a cauldron filled with red-glowing rocks, heated from beneath by red-burning fires. 'Pour!' the queen yells. Straining on leather straps, Manu's archers tip the roaring cauldrons on their side. A hail of lava rains down on the warring Crawlers below, searing those struck in a fiery death. Instantly, the hail of burning rocks is followed by volley upon volley of puncturing arrows, skewering the thwarted attackers. Ambushed in this inferno of raining thorns, the Nagle vanguard is obliterated."

***Fuck me, that's brilliant!***

"But the hurlyburly's not done. Seeing her archers straining to hold back the surging Crawlers on the walls, Manu directs her murder-hole troops, 'To the battlements!' Marshalling her warriors, the sure-footed Badaal bearing her along the ledges of the parapets, Manu braces herself for the pounding weight of wave upon wave of Foul Crawlers ascending the ladders. Still the queen and her bowmen refuse to yield. 'Fight on, my courageous warriors. Fight for the honor of our ancestor Clear Silver. Fight for all that is true to your heart,' their queen cries out to them. Rallying around their sword-yielding general, the tattered Impavido form a square.

"In brutal hand-to-hand combat, their katana push daggers crashing against the bone-crushing, Nagle taiaha clubs, ferociously Manu's archers fight to deny the Foul Crawlers their land. 'Die hard, my Champions of Destiny, die hard,' Manu implores her troops. And die hard they do, until only one of them remains, Queen Manukarnika of Omos.

"In a savage rush of blood-curling revenge, Manu and her fearless Badaal are hideously clubbed to death by the incensed, blood-drenched, curse-yelling Crawlers. Until the end she holds her head high. Until, in the end, with Badaal's bone-crushed legs buckling under the incessant blows, the pounding taiaha clubs crush Manu's skull, and the passion of the courageous queen's soul sublimates into the ether."

***She's incredible.***

"With the fall of the queen, the gates to Diencia, and with them Necrandy and the Nine Realms, are moments from Pam's despotic design. But in the very instant the Nagle general raises his sword to cry 'Havoc!' from the Woods of the Four Hills - guided by the Log Jumpers, who have run as fiercely as their legs will carry them to give warning - come the galloping regiments of the soul-crushing Horsemen of Ammon. Savagely swinging their gruesome bearded-axes, the galloping Ammon warriors engulf the battle-exhausted Crawlers. In a maelstrom of throat-smashing blows, the Nagle battalions are engorged in death. Blindsided by the flanking attack, Pam orders a full retreat. But as the panicked Nagle monstrosities break and run, the brutally swift Horsemen hack them down. Necrandy is saved. Thanks to Manukarnika and the Impavido archers, the Nine Realms have been preserved."

***Wow. Just... Wow.***

"Epic, Hlafweard."

"Truly. But not the end of the Foul Crawlers, Polyhistor."

"They could invade again? How is that possible?"

"In a brilliant rear-guard action, the ice-veined Pam brought order to his terrorized Nagle horde, extracting the remnants of his battalions back through the crack in the Lina that had given him access to the upper realm in the first place.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *The Lina Wall is a gigantic, tres chic, fortification surrounding the entire upper realm. Without it, Necrandy would be pummeled into a bloody waste land by invading heathen from the lower realms. [codicil]*

"Now, back in their homeland of Engel, licking their wounds, General Pam and his horde linger, thirsting for revenge. And with the Nagle commander lingers the unclaimed token, marker of the unknown promise made by the general to the unknown Necrandian fifth columnist who, by revealing the crack in the Wall to Pam, fomented the Nagle invasion. Leaving us, Polyhistor, with our puzzling, riddle-wrapped enigma..."

"Hlafweard?"

"Who caused the breach in the Lina that ignited the Nagle catastrophe? Who is the Traitor of the Wall?"

"Surely, the Dred Laird."

"Never designate your answer to desire."

"Right. Reason must not be made mistress to Passion; Want must not master Truth."

The Kampion's warm smile evinced how fond he was growing of his brilliantly able, perhaps a touch too sincere, pupil.

***You know he's playing Antiochus with the questions, right?***

*What?*

***He's toying with you. The answer's at his feet.***

*You don't know that.*

***Ask him.***

Costa glanced down at the Kampion's neatly arranged scrolls.

***Do it.***

*When he's ready.*

***God, you're-!***

*Don't!*- Costa swiftly raised her palms.

***Yeh, yeh.***

*Try it if you don't believe me.*

Cascadia knew this was not the time to *'try it.'* Casually, rolling herself up, she retreated back into her rostralateral folds. ***You'll miss me.***

"Ha!"

"Polyhistor?"

"Hlafweard, I'm so sorry, I--"

A big grin crossed his wise lips. "That's quite alright, we all have a right to our private thoughts."

She loved him even more.

"Are we ready for the next chapter, Polyhistor?"

***Does the Pope fart?***

Laughing, Costa gazed into the seer's brilliant, crystal blue eyes. "Does the Pope fart, Hlafweard?"