

Altar of Reason™ v1.0

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ISBN 0-943891-56-6

BTRC#6113

Published by: BTRC
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Wish I'd died instead of lived

A zombie hides my face

Shell forgotten

with its memories

Diaries left

with cryptic entries

And you don't need to bother

I don't need to be

I'll keep slipping farther

But once I hold on

I won't let go 'til it bleeds...

- from **Bother**, by Stone Sour

▼ **THE PAST** - Sometime a very long time ago, before the dreamtime, before men had learned to speak and draw and think about what existed beyond their limited senses, before they consciously understood the difference between "today" and "tomorrow", before they started piling rocks on top of each other and sacrificing animals to the gods, there was a war in the ether.

Not the sedate, civilized war-by-proxy that the Causes engage in now, but full-blown, bloody, nasty war. Violence, betrayal, atrocity, the works. When the fires of hatred and greed and every other deadly sin had burned themselves out, the Causes were fewer in number, and the survivors were exhausted, battered, bloodied and afraid. Afraid of each other, afraid of what they had become, or worse, had always been capable of. While the wounds on their bodies and psyches were fresh, they resolved to never let such a thing happen again.

They buried their losses.

Not an exact term for the non-material world of the ether, but even a dead Cause has ethereal remains, and you have to do *something* with the bodies. And with their dead, they also buried part of themselves. They voluntarily stripped from themselves those parts of what they were that most frightened them.

They left unto themselves only what they considered an "acceptable" level of such traits as ambition, aggression and so on. Everything they wished to forget about the past and themselves, they buried with the dead Causes.

Not everyone agreed that this was the best course of action. The Causes never unanimously agreed on *anything*. But, those who could not be swayed by reason to follow this course of action faced the still-bright wrath and violence of the remainder. Those uncooperative Causes that survived this difference of opinion were stripped of most of their power and banished to the dark and cold spaces far from the Sun and life. They became the Unspoken. The rest of the Causes buried their dead and part of themselves, and sealed it away, not only out of sight, but out of mind. The place of burial is something that they chose to forget, a magical weaving in the ether the Causes are blind to, and the horrible events of their past are now only remembered vaguely and with distaste.

▼ **INTRODUCTION** - This adventure has its origins in the ancient past, and its appearance in the mundane world in the first minutes after the Warp, but the details of what is going on will not become apparent for a number of years, and the final resolution of the situation (one way or the other) is likely to take place in the year 30 adventure segment of a **WarpWorld** campaign. Serious elements of the plot and sub-adventures are possible anywhere from the year 1 point forward, but most things before then are going to be hints of a larger whole that will resist being revealed too soon. The basic plot of the thirty-year story arc will only take a few pages of space. The details, the complications, permutations and potential adventures will take up the rest of the book. This is *not* a "gamemaster by numbers" adventure, with pins to be set up and knocked down in a particular order to get a desired result. It will require some work on the part of the gamemaster to incorporate it into their own particular **WarpWorld** campaign, but it does tie into plot threads and adventure ideas presented in the main book. Successfully solving the puzzles and defeating the antagonists is desirable, but failing to do so is not necessarily fatal nor world-ending. However, failure *will* have some consequences that last a century or more, *seriously* affecting the year 300 campaign.

If you're a player in a **WarpWorld** campaign, put this down now and step away from it. We're going into "gamemaster eyes only" material right from the start.

They do remember that there was a war in heaven, and that it was terrible. But who tore whose throat out, or who raped or betrayed whom, those details are lost. They remembered enough to not make the same mistakes again, and these memories consciously or unconsciously affect all their later works. When they lifted humanity to true sentience, they gave us some of these attitudes, near-universal "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" commandments and stories that resonate down through the ages.

Thou shalt not eat thy dead

Thou shalt honor thy progenitors

Invoke not a holy name without good reason

And so on. And so things went for some tens or hundreds of thousands of years. Men rose, the age of wizardry and Atlantis began, and no mortal ever knew that the Causes had ever been anything other than they appeared to be. Even after the Warp that removed the Causes from our reality and caused the fall of Atlantis, men still remembered these commandments, for they were part of what we are, how we were shaped, how we differ from the animals we once were. Legends long forgotten are remembered again in new religions. Cain is doomed to wander the earth in eternal loneliness for killing his brother. Those who reject the will of the divine are cast into the outermost darkness, and so on. And so things went for another ten thousand years.

Until the Warp cycled in in 2010CE.

The wave of change that blasted through the ether blasted apart the sepulcher of the gods. What was buried there remained buried and still forgotten, but the lid of the sepulcher was blasted from the ether into this world. It was not *truly* a sepulcher, nor a lid, but that is the closest possible translation to mortal terms. The manifested concept of the lid crashed to earth, clipping the top of a hydro-electric dam and sending waves a hundred meters high up and down the length of the reservoir.

Millions of tons of water sloshed over the top of the dam and killed hundreds, if not thousands, in the towns or cities immediately downstream of the dam, killing most of the possible direct witnesses to the event.

As the slab of something not-quite-stone and the size of a soccer field settled into the muck at the bottom of the reservoir, rockslides poured in on top of it, ruining the reservoir (though the dam held), burying the slab under a much shallower lake and millions of tons of dirt and rock. But one piece, one tiny chip of this immense slab went *somewhere else*. When it clipped the top of the dam, a splinter the size of a melon flaked off a corner of the slab and ricocheted several kilometers in another direction. It was a tiny piece of that immense lid, but like the slab itself, what was more important was what it *represented*. It was a flaw in the lid of the sepulcher, a crack in its integrity.

The lid of the sepulcher is not truly a lid, but a physical representation of a far larger concept. It is both gateway and barrier, a separation between what was and what is, between the dead and the living, between what we fear and what we know. It holds in and *holds back* what the Causes fear in themselves. It is not alive, nor sentient, but for something as powerful as the Causes, that does not mean it is without personality. It has no thought, but it *does* have emotion, and even the remains of a dead Cause are a thing of terrible power.

*And this sepulcher holds **all** the dead Causes.*

▼ **THE PRESENT** - The time: Warp plus 1 minute. The place: Somewhere mountainous. It doesn't have to be large mountains, but it has to be enough to support at least a medium-sized recreational or hydroelectric dam. The home of Jeremy Steele, carpenter, divorced, twenty-eight years old. He comes out of his post-Warp daze, gets up off the floor and sees two things: A hole in his living room ceiling, and a lump of worked stone, the broken-off corner of a larger, unseen piece. Its surface is dead and black, but is covered with patterns that look like writing, yet squirm and cannot be focused on long enough to read.

He picks up the melon-size stone and dies.

He touched the Stone, and it consumed him utterly. *Jeremy still lived*. He continued to think, to retain his identity and sense of self, but everything in him that was *not* thought was replaced with *something else*. Something from what was on the other side of an impossibly large slab that he somehow knew with absolute certainty was only a few kilometers away.