

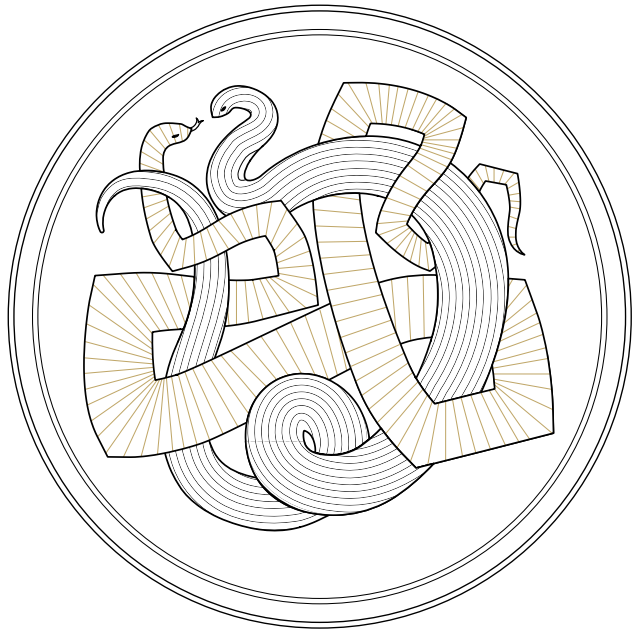




ABYSSAL ARCHIVE

By Lokey

TUNE & FAIRWEATHER
DUBLIN, IRELAND



Tune & Fairweather, 2022

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Print ISBN: 978-1-9162799-5-7
Digital ISBN: 978-1-9162799-6-4

First printing, 2022

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Typeset at Tune & Fairweather in Garamond with Priory as display. Printed on Munken Pure paper at L.E.G.O. S.p.A. in Vicenza, Italy, and bound at their facilities with original cover designs by Andrew P Hind.

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Volume 1

He believes his poor fate to be providence, that his cheating death wasn't random but deliberate, a second chance at becoming what he failed to be (page 420) — *frontis*

The Age of Ancients existed in perpetuity, until it was interrupted by fire (page 5) — 10

The original purpose for these structures and the fortress itself was to be a training ground for Silver Knights (page 61) — 59

He was alone in the unfair chaos of life, but now they are all part of the equalizing, harmonious family of death (page 104) — 106

She wanted to experiment on beings that predate even fire and life, and Gwyn provided an opportunity to procure such specimens in abundance (page 123) — 119

The irony is that, for all the panic and chaos over its sudden appearance, the gods brought the curse upon themselves (page 175) — 166

By marrying Seath to his own daughter, Gwyn's justification for giving the archdragon his titles and honors was unassailable (page 181) — 179

But Velka proves to be a rather generous goddess, forgiving sins in exchange for an indulgence of souls rather than blood, and offering a refuge guaranteeing the inhabitants' lives if not their freedom (page 201) — 201



Foreword

By Michael "VaatiVidya" Samuels

Before you venture into *Abyssal Archive*, it's important to accept that we don't yet know all there is to know about *Dark Souls*' story. Perhaps we never will. The true story seems locked away in the mind of its creator, and to this day, we are constantly reaching for new discoveries and new truths. However, to reference Gideon Ofnir, the "all-knowing" character in FromSoftware's 2022 smash hit *Elden Ring*: "Knowledge begins with the recognition of one's ignorance."

We've come such a long way since the release of *Dark Souls* in 2011. Back then, players were only just defeating Gwyn for the first time, savoring that bittersweet feeling of finishing a great game, and asking themselves "so … what now?" Naturally, many wondered *why* they had just killed all those bosses, and turned towards the Internet, innocently venturing down a rabbit hole that would offer them a seemingly endless wellspring of discovery and entertainment.

In those early days I found myself arguing about *Dark Souls* lore for hours on Internet message boards. It was a great place to test your ideas against others', and hone your perspective in a crucible of debate. This was long before I had taken up the name "VaatiVidya" and there was nothing to be gained except knowledge itself. But before long, I felt confident enough to attach a name to my theories. So I started to make YouTube videos.

Unlike a theory, a YouTube video is a static, unchanging thing. Short of removing the video, you can't just go back and edit out mistakes. You can't splice in your updated thoughts at a later date. Thus when creating anything about *Dark Souls* lore, you have to accept that it's okay to have your ideas challenged. And it's perfectly okay to be wrong.

So years after the release of *Dark Souls,* when I read some of Lokey's work for the first time; I realized where I was wrong. I changed a lot of my own theories. This was a painful realization, but it was also a welcome revelation: that my truth about the game could evolve, even so many years after its release. It's a testament to FromSoftware's writing team, and to the investigative skills of Lokey himself.

To be fair, I don't agree with Lokey on everything. His *Dark Souls* truth is unique from my own, and may be unique from yours as well. However, his truth is also *extremely* comprehensive, and our understanding of the game's lore will be deeply enriched by hearing the perspective he shares in the pages that follow.



Preface

By Lokey

Did you know that Snuggly the Crow isn't actually a crow? Her Japanese name is simply "hawk girl" (鷹娘) much like how her *Demon's Souls* inspiration Sparkly the Crow was just "double-winged hawk girl" (双翼鷹の娘). Not that you could tell, since you can only hear her caw from her nest in the Northern Undead Asylum, instructing you to provide her with a "warm" and "soft" offering. By dropping certain items in that nest, the hawk will take the gift and leave a new one in its place when you return – her trades always involving items that happen to relate to one another; for example, two divine blessings for a Ring of the Sun Princess, both items related to Gwynevere. Based on the size of her nest, "Snuggly" is far too small to have carried the weightier items, such as the Demon's Great Hammer, all the way from wherever it is she found them back to her roost. But you are clearly not supposed to find any hidden meaning in this implausibility. She is simply a curious hawk who brings fascinating trinkets she spied back home – a trait common to birds – and then exchanges those curios for others. The concept is sound, even if some of her specific gifts beggar belief.

In this way, understanding Snuggly serves as a microcosm for understanding the lore of *Dark Souls*. We must look past the English text, consider the surrounding context and behavior, and then determine how literally to interpret what we see.

When I first visited the *Dark Souls* subreddit on a whim, excited to see what the English-speaking community thought of *Dark Souls III*'s then-upcoming downloadable content (DLC), *The Ringed City*, I never thought that I would end up publishing a book about the original game. But at the time, I was stunned by the dissonance between my and English-speaking fans' understanding of the story and characters, and a little digging led me to discover the source for many of these splits: the localization. *Dark Souls* was never a series to which I paid much attention, but this experience possessed me to dive deep into the lore, clarifying my own misconceptions in the process. Now, I present my analysis of the first game in its entirety, with the goal of cleaning up the localization's mess. While there will likely never be a definitive lore book, I can say with confidence that my work is the most complete, consistent and comprehensible account of the original game you will read. If nothing else, it will serve as an excellent resource for your own theorizing on the subject.



At the core, there is the question of the relevance of such analysis. In the end, isn't this just a game? That it is. One can play through the entirety of the original *Dark Souls* (henceforth abbreviated to *DS1*) without any engagement in the setting. Its merits as pure mechanical entertainment should not be understated. However, *Dark Souls* is more than just a game. It tells a story, with characters in a setting which has inspired countless players to try and understand them – and the thematic messages they convey along with it. There is no question that the lore of this game merits examining.

More than perhaps any other franchise, *Dark Souls* leans on the golden rule of "show, don't tell". Exposition is minimalistic, strictly limited to what makes sense for the characters to say in the moment, or otherwise conveyed in often oblique item descriptions. Everything else is left to implication, expressed in the behavior and appearance of the world itself – something which, admittedly, requires a little imagination to pick up on. It is this peculiar method of storytelling, possible only within the gaming medium, that makes *Dark Souls* equal parts fascinating and difficult to decipher for many, resulting in wildly different theories on the same topic.

But some theories are more valid than others.

Dark Souls's director, Hidetaka Miyazaki, has spoken repeatedly about the game's story and characters with remarkable consistency, providing much insight into his intentions regarding each element of the lore. The man leaves no doubt that there is a definitive story being told in *Dark Souls*; the game simply asks the audience to invest more in order to follow it than most. So, to filter all of the information, I split my analysis into three distinct pillars:

- Philological
- Archaeological
- Psychological

Some might find it strange that I employ terms typically used in strictly historical contexts, but I find that framing *Dark Souls* as an actual mythology with a real history behind it, no different from the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, does wonders to analysis. These are stories that have and will be told and retold for as long as there are minds willing to engage with the material. We can only hope that with each retelling, we will be one step closer to the truth.

Philological

Localization

The game script covers everything from item descriptions to dialogue. It serves as a bible from which we learn the deeper truths and becomes the basis from which we frame all other elements in the game. And much like how understanding of the original Latin, Greek, and Hebrew maximizes understanding of the biblical narrative, an understanding of the original Japanese is critical to understanding the *Dark Souls* narrative.

Some might believe that *DS1* wasn't written for a Japanese audience first or foremost since it is an international game dubbed only in English. However, this was a stylistic choice for a fantasy game that based its setting on medieval Europe, intended to serve its Japanese audience with an authentic "foreign" world. Aside from the obvious fact that *Dark Souls* was developed by Japanese developers working for a Japanese company based in Japan, *DS1* has several instances of cut dialogue written in Japanese but ultimately not localized in English, something which simply wouldn't occur if English was in fact the script's original language.

Then there is the quality of the localization itself.

Simply put, the localization for *DS1* is littered with deviations from the Japanese script ranging from debatable word choices to erroneous mistranslations of the text. Many of these deviations have a major effect on interpreting the information contained therein, and collectively have a cascading effect on understanding the overall lore. Some might claim that these deviations are somehow intentional on FromSoftware's part, designed to present different information to different audiences for a game which can often seem deliberately ambiguous. If that were true, then the developers have presented the Japanese audience with a fairly straightforward and coherent script while leaving English audiences to writhe within an inconsistent, contradictory and obfuscating one.

In an *Edge* interview and separate Q&A on the localization company's Japanese website, Miyazaki and members of the localization team from Frognation attest that the game director is the original writer, and that the team translates his Japanese text into English before handing that English script off to be localized in other languages. In other words, the English localization is simply a filter, one which for one reason or another contains serious flaws.

Some might argue that the English localization is useful in situations where the Japanese script is vague, since the translators may have received insider information to provide deeper insight. While

this is entirely possible, it is a Rorschach test. There are instances when evidence supports the localization's assumptions, and instances where said evidence belies them. Moreover, the aforementioned interview and Q&A give mixed impressions on Miyazaki's involvement. Frognation claims that the localization receives little to no input from FromSoftware, and Miyazaki himself acknowledges that he defers heavily to the localizers. At the same time, they have both claimed to closely collaborate from early on in the writing process, even sharing some internal documents when needed. Overall, it appears that Miyazaki has acted as a rubber stamp for these localizations, only pushing back when it comes to certain key terms he wants translated a specific way. And with so many objective errors riddling the text, we cannot trust the English script to ever give insight over the original.

For that reason, I will be supplying quotations from my own translation for reference in this analysis. My rendition shouldn't be considered a replacement for the official English script, per se, but it will provide a closer approximation of the original wording and flow that the Japanese text actually provides. In rendering this translation, I focused on plainly conveying the necessary information in as consistent a manner as possible over flowery verbiage or phrasing and other, more artistic, concerns that an official localization needs to take into account. If this is to be interpreted in any way a criticism of Frognation's work, it is in so far that their rendition could have done more to incorporate accuracy into their poetry.

Typos

However, this doesn't mean that FromSoftware never introduced errors of its own. Take, for instance, the sorcery Resist Curse, which references sacrificing Humanity to remove curses in its item description, but in fact only reduces the build-up for the curse status effect, an ability accurately reflected in the Japanese description. The deviation is too radical to attribute simply to a localization error, and the supposed effect is similar to the actual curse-removing mechanic performed by the spell's owner, Ingward. Therefore, it seems very likely that the sorcery did at one point reflect the English description, but the design – along with the Japanese text – was changed sometime during development. Somehow or another, this change was never passed on to the localization team, leaving a huge disparity between the two versions in the final product. Indeed, the same issue seemed to befall the Japanese marketing team, who initially referred to Gwyn as the female "Gwen" (グウェン).

We are all human, so there is no point pretending that this product is free from human error. Other typos and mistakes, however, are far more difficult to discern. Some lines may well be objective errors in the Japanese script, but it is just as possible that the perceived blunder is simply due to faulty analysis.

Thus, in a vacuum, it is better to bet against the fallibility of the writer than the fallibility of the reader. Potential errors can and should be acknowledged, but our judgment shouldn't substitute for the original Japanese text, the closest medium we have to the writer's original intention, and one which requires our inherent trust. Because of this, I have only identified a small handful of potential typos, comparing them to their surrounding text and other evidence when no other explanation proves sufficient.

Hyperbole

All that being said, there is a difference between trusting the text inherently and taking it literally. Ignoring the reality that people use exaggeration to convey meaning is a common pitfall for textual criticism. The goal is to analyze the writer's intention, not our own. You cannot simply assume that every word or phrase is exactly how you might first interpret it, nor how it would be generally assumed by the speaker.

For instance, there is the case of records for Gwyn's firstborn being expunged along with him. While its descriptions claim it to be "all" records, this is pure hyperbole, since the deposed war god's image and seemingly deeds have continued to be passed down in one form or another until the present era. In fact, it is impossible to completely exterminate every account of him when some would undoubtedly be hidden or secluded in parts of the world where his detractors' hands couldn't reach. And even the idea that his name isn't known is preposterous, since many of the characters who would have undoubtedly known him before the purge are still alive.

If you applied this standard to every area of the script, then you would have little to verify as accurate. But that isn't the message being imparted. The point is not that every single scrap of paper mentioning the firstborn was destroyed, but that it was so thoroughly exterminated that the current generation no longer remembers his name by and large. You don't assume that the villain cursing the hero for having "ruined everything" refers to every molecule in existence, just his evil plans. The same standard applies to *Dark Souls*. Whether the speaker in item descriptions is an omniscient narrator reciting historical facts or an everyman inferring from observation, the context for what is being said and why is just as important as the words themselves.

Archaeological

Environmental Storytelling

You run the gauntlet of Sen's Fortress, dodging shadowy traps – only to get knocked down into the tar pits below, by a scythe. Seeing that all-too-familiar white light flaring in the distance, you slowly wade your way over. Loot the corpse, and, lo and behold, you found the scythe.

DS1 is filled with these cheeky little ironies, and it speaks volumes of FromSoftware's environmental design – not to mention sense of humor. Items are deliberately placed based on their relevance to a given area, and these areas are arranged so as to tell a broader, interconnected story about the world. Spot a curious landmark clearly visible on the horizon, and chances are that you will be making the trek to it later on. Look back at where you came from, and you can trace your journey all the way home. Kick down a nearby ladder, and you discover a logical shortcut back along a path you previously took. This internal consistency and attention to detail with world design rightly earns *Souls* games praise. But, it is not immaculate.

Look up to the distant Duke's Archives atop its mountain peak, then enter the tunnel before you. Count your paces to the lift up to the Archives, and you will realize that you have nowhere near covered the distance to be directly under them. Game developers are illusionists, and FromSoftware constantly manipulates your perception, mainly through line-of-sight, to make us feel like we have journeyed farther than we have. Although the developers have situated the low-detail recreations seen in the distance around the same place as the locations they represent, some areas would cut into each other if the geography were actually authentic to the game world. The Gaping Dragon's boss room would plow straight through Blighttown, both Izalith and Nito's domains would marr the scenic view of Ash Lake, and the path bridging Darkroot Garden to Darkroot Basin would be just an open ravine for the Valley of Drakes. Compromises in realism are made for the developers' image of the given area, and they mostly go unnoticed – though you occasionally can see the seams when looking from angles that the developers clearly never intended you to.

The same can be said for inconsistencies within individual areas themselves. Each area can often be identified by a particular style and iconography, thereby associating it with a specific culture. We can therefore extrapolate the origin and history of certain buildings based on these unique markers. However, these inferences must be

counterbalanced with some measure of skepticism; buildings in two completely different areas might share similar architectural design because the developers reused assets to save on time and money. Likewise, one has to be careful about looking too deep into the more generic iconography. Sometimes an icon isn't depicting anyone or anything specific, sometimes a floral pattern is simply an artistic decoration, and sometimes an arrangement of random shapes is just that: random shapes. Even in more specific cases like legible text written in a foreign language, it is almost always a stock image of something entirely unrelated to the game.



Trying to force meaning onto something that might easily have been designed only to impress a certain ambience can derail serious analysis, thus my focus is always on the bigger picture, only considering specific elements when their form and significance is obvious from casual observation.

Indeed, when it comes to detail, many of the most pertinent elements aren't found in minuscule symbols in a large ruin, but in the way more time-sensitive elements of a location have been arranged. Because *Souls* games lack a proper day/night cycle, the time of day, brightness, saturation, and hue of every location have been tailored for atmosphere – as have certain objects within said area, like large bonfires or piles of rotting meat. The same holds true for the local non-player characters (NPCs) and items.

Like actors on a stage, NPCs usually just stand in position, waiting for their cue to react to the player. And while they are often set up with the clear intent of generating interesting gameplay, their positioning can also inform us about the relationships between NPCs and their environment as well as each other. The items we find on corpses or stored in chests likewise exist in context – their placement usually having lore implications. Corpses in particular can be considered their own characters, and while the cadavers' personal stories are typically short and unremarkable, they can often speak volumes about

the greater whole. Chests convey ownership, with their location and contents saying much about their owners' identities and intentions.

Alive or dead, characters possess a given item due to one of the following reasons:

- It is personal property
- It was stolen from someone
- It was collected from the vicinity
- It was ingested as or with food
- It is a bodily byproduct

Mimics then, functioning as both enemy and chest, perfectly amalgamate these ideas. Putting aside the mimic encountered in Sen's Fortress, which functions as one of the gauntlet's designers' many deliberately placed snares, someone will have only secured their possessions in a trapped chest for one or some combination of the following reasons:

- To protect something particularly valuable to them
- To seal away something particularly dangerous to them
- To hide the fact that they owned it

So, if an ordinary chest has been juxtaposed with a mimic, we can be sure that the owner wanted to secure one item over the other.

Not all items will speak strictly to the narrative, of course. We can find a sickle off a corpse in the Catacombs, for instance. There is no particular narrative reason for a simple farming tool to be in a graveyard, but the sickle has long been associated with the Grim Reaper, and so placing it in a place of death serves as a humorous meta-reference. But even when an item may not seem especially relevant to its backdrop, its associations can still shape our interpretation.

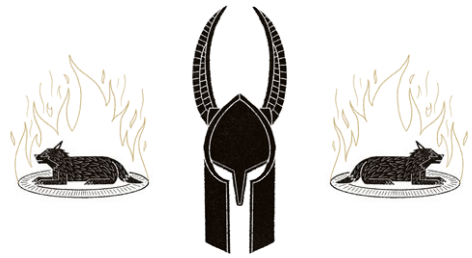
Gameplay vs Lore

Safe from their perch, the channelers harass you with soul arrows cast from their tridents, but take that sorcery catalyst for yourself and you will find you are only lugging around an ordinary polearm – such is the divide between gameplay and lore.

While developers try their best to make us forget during the experience, we are ultimately playing a game, which tries to codify and thereby simulate a reality similar but distinct from our own. In doing so, there is an inevitable disconnect between the possibilities presented in the narrative and the options afforded to us. Some of these compromises are idiosyncratic stylistic choices, others are unquestioned traditions in gaming, and yet more are necessary concessions for the game to be enjoyable; this doesn't make them any less arbitrary.

To start with a compromise shared by almost all games of this type: does anyone look at identical generic enemies and think they are all twins or clones? Of course not – by necessity, the world of *Dark Souls* has been populated with a more limited set of character models than there are individuals in Lordran.

Another obvious example is health and stamina points (HP and SP), one reflecting the body's hold on life; the other, the temporary reprieves needed between exerting great effort. It is absurd to think a giant dragon actually dies from having its toe poked, but that is what an HP system enables. Similarly, while it makes sense for certain weapons or spells to require relatively more strength, dexterity, or another statistic (stat) to wield than others, no one would quantify this difference with exact numbers.



In fact, this problem extends to actually wielding weapons. You can backstab a Black Knight to death before it can even swing its sword, loot that blade, and somehow instantly know its unique technique. Requiring certain stats to properly master a weapon is reasonable, but instantly, intuitively mastering the wielding of those arms the moment the stat requirement is fulfilled goes beyond being a savant.

Other contrivances and compromises abound – you can typically only summon signs or be invaded while in human form, yet messages written with the Orange Guidance Soapstone appear regardless of form; the same for Dusk's summon sign and the inexplicable tutorial messages. (Later games don't hesitate to tweak the mechanic further.) Equally arbitrarily, NPCs will often carry particular weapons and armor, but you can't simply kill them and loot their equipment. Instead, you have to wait until a certain point in their personal quests or loot the gear from an unrelated corpse or chest. And, during those quests, you will frequently unlock a singular pathway to an area just to discover an NPC somehow got ahead of you, apparently via an alternate route unavailable to yourself.

You can also carry an infinite number of items in your inventory, far more than is realistically possible, but suddenly be encumbered by those you equip. If you want to sort this inventory, you must buy a Bottomless Box to store them separately. Yet in order to store them, the mouth of the box would need to be large enough to fit even the largest weapons, at least the size of the in-game chests. But you won't ever see yourself dragging around a box large enough to be your coffin. It simply disappears into the same "hammerspace" as the rest of your inventory, defeating the purpose of even owning a container.

In short, certain mechanics are rooted in the logic of reality – at least for the setting – only to be rendered nonsensical in conjunction with other, less reasonable gameplay elements. And then there are contrivances that don't so much simplify as defy, or outright ignore, narrative logic.

For instance, on the topic of chests, the same prop – a nondescript wooden strongbox –is used as stand-in for formal storage even in places where it isn't necessarily sensible to be placing such items in a chest specifically. Are the lavish mountaintop gods of Anor Londo really using a plain wooden chest identical to the fiery subterranean witches of Izalith? Even for their dress clothes or *still-burning embers*?



In the same vein, the Moonlight Butterfly has seemingly killed the divine blacksmith in making the ruins he resided in its nest. This "corpse" bizarrely appears petrified, but Miyazaki downplays it and others like it as just a "vessel for embers" in the *Design Works* interview. This suggests that FromSoftware simply reused Andre's model to represent the dead body of other blacksmiths, the statue being an asset leftover from a scrapped concept.

Even basic mechanics fall victim to this. Why does the player character (PC) constantly emit a faint light? Because it was more convenient for navigating dark areas than equipping an item for it like in *Demon's Souls*. Why can we die falling from certain heights in some areas but not others? Because the developers decided those parts were unexplorable. It is all arbitrary.



NPC size is probably the worst offender: encounter a Berenike Knight and he is about the stature of the PC, but somehow his Hollow is twice that. Either way, loot the armor and it will always perfectly fit you. This doesn't even consider how some NPCs can ever enter or leave the rooms they are found in; take Gwynevere, for example – learning that she is an illusion doesn't change the fact that the illusion is supposed to be believable. Why so big? Because Miyazaki had thought women much larger than oneself would convey a motherly aura.

But this last example shows that some compromises are made more for creative reasons than strictly mechanical or budgetary ones. Just as the painter might be so inclined to make the portrait of his patron more palatable, he may just well want to make it more stylized. The same is true for the developer with the player experience.

Take the seeming silence of our protagonist. NPC dialogue would suggest that the PC is in fact calling out to them, asking questions, making the occasional interjection. But players never hear a word. The Chosen Undead's muteness is an artistic decision, one commonly made in roleplaying games to encourage the player to identify with the character – to immerse yourself into being the PC. This is the same reasoning behind choosing the PC's background, though most players' primary motivator is stats, not the character's experiences before you took control. The PC's personal knowledge is essentially irrelevant, their actions subject to our blind decisions in first exploring this new world. (For this reason, I will be taking my own liberty to refer to *you*, the pseudo-PC, as simply *us*, the community of players, going forward.)

All of this is to say that there is a tension between interfacing with the player and maintaining the integrity of the setting. The resulting oddities and inconsistencies are a product of artistic license – decisions FromSoftware made to suit its vision for the stylistic, dramatic, or gameplay experience. Just as a painter tries to hide his patron's gross imperfections, so too do game developers take creative liberties for their audience. Some mechanics may well be entirely faithful to the reality they represent, but many have been clearly designed without that consideration in mind. Players have become so accustomed to the artificial and arbitrary rules pervading gaming that most no longer question many of the basic absurdities when confronted with them in a fictional world. Nonetheless, to attempt a serious analysis, we must first separate the wheat from the chaff; the canonical from the merely representational.

Psychological

The last pillar of analysis is the simplest and perhaps most neglected by fans. Some become so concerned with determining what characters do that they don't dive into *why* they did it. If we simply list, to the best of our ability, a chronological list of events involving each character, then it is as worthless as it is hollow. For even ignoring the impossibility of making a coherent history without some level of subjective interpretation, such an account only provides insight when we then extrapolate what it reveals about the character.

Like any good story, *Dark Souls* presents characters with specific wants and needs. And much like real people, these characters don't act in a vacuum. They have personalities and life experiences which inform their decisions or impulses; put simply, their thoughts become actions. So, by looking at those actions, we can reverse-engineer their intentions and construct a psychological profile with which to judge their other behaviors, assuming we aren't just told what they are feeling during a particular moment.

For example, say you walked into a house and found a pendant with a man's face on it within a chest in some obscure corner. You read the item description to learn that it belongs to a housewife who always kept it with her until the day of her "terrible betrayal". You then walk into another room of the home and see a peculiar sight. An older male NPC with a knife stands over the bloodied corpse of a younger male, an older female NPC sobbing in the corner. A reasonable conclusion would be that the housewife had an affair, stuffing away the treasured pendant featuring her husband out of guilt; said husband walked in on them during one of these trysts and then killed the homewrecker in a rage.

A basic understanding of human behavior allows us to connect the dots on things otherwise impossible to analyze, because characterization most often occurs through demonstration rather than information. That isn't to say that there isn't a degree of subjectivity to psychological analysis, but unlike people, characters tend to be simple. In most cases, a character can be reduced to one essential element, with every bit of nuance and complexity building around that cornerstone. Once we know what their core motivation is, we can infer how they think and act even in situations where such information is absent.



1 "Certainly, I possess the key for the seal. But might I ask one thing before I hand it over? There's a great dining hall before our eyes, yes? Atop the roof, there lives one of the servants of the Four Small Kings, a Darkwraith... You are to exterminate that guy, understood? If one said to challenge the Four Small Kings cannot defeat their servants, I cannot trust you, as the guard of the seal. Even if you are one chosen by Frampt... Even if you are one who possesses the King's Vessel." - Ingward

Other Resources

Outside of these three pillars, there are a few other disparate elements which can also factor into my analysis:

Cut Content

I don't blame anyone for knee-jerk skepticism with regards to cut content. It is by its very nature unused, never to be seen by design, and the reasons are commonly because it is a relic of the development process. As Miyazaki relates in the *Dark Souls: Design Works* interview, Andre was originally planned to be related to Gwyn by blood, and this revelation would have coincided with him revealing a secret passage to the Firelink Chamber behind the goddess statue in Firelink Shrine. However, the character eventually became just an ordinary blacksmith, and what vestiges of this plot thread remain in the files have no bearing on the evidence present in-game. Any theory about Andre being the god's descendant would be working with outdated data for an entirely different vision for the narrative, complete with an earlier iteration of the game's script. I myself would doubt the validity of such an argument.



However, this cannot be applied to every instance of cut content. For example, Ingward was originally planned to test us prior to handing over his key to New Londo's seal.[1] Directing us to the roof of the large building across from where we first find him, the sealer would task us with proving our mettle defeating a Darkwraith. Even if we had met Frampt's standards, the sorcerer would have still felt obligated to ensure that the person breaking the seal to challenge the Four Kings can at least defeat their servants, for the sake of everyone that had been sacrificed to lock them away. Everything about Ingward's dialogue and behavior here is consistent with what we see in-game, explicitly and implicitly. Likewise, it makes sense for a Darkwraith to have climbed up to the roof of a building at the highest elevation to avoid the seal as it flooded the lower levels. The only wrinkle with this plot thread is the trial's premise – what is a Darkwraith still doing on the roof?

The seal has been at the same water level for a long time now, and if we would have had a means to get up there, then our quarry would have had a means to get back down. Did this Darkwraith not once consider trying to free his lieges and fellows in captivity, take revenge on the perpetrators, or at least try and escape his ruined homeland? There is simply no logic behind staying up there except to wait for someone to come and fulfill Ingward's trial. This unnecessary detour, which just screams "video game", was probably cut for that reason, not because it conflicted with the final narrative. Therefore, we cannot disregard cut content wholesale and must instead evaluate *why* it was cut on a case-by-case basis. Such content can outright confirm elements of the narrative that were otherwise left only to implication, and likewise exclude inferences which don't line up with the development history of a given item or character.

Internal Naming

While we are almost always introduced to the name of each area we enter, the official names for allies and enemies alike are commonly only listed in external sources like official guides or artbooks. However, characters and areas both typically have their own labels within the actual game files, and these internal names can be radically different from what official sources provide. This is because developers need to call the models something as the story and map layout go through the iterative process prior to the game's release, preferably something memorable so that it doesn't just become another bland string of letters or numbers in the code.



Sometimes an internal name is a simple descriptor of the subject matter. Other times it is a joke. The Mass of Souls from New Londo is internally named "Big Jelly" (ビッグゼリー) in obvious reference to its vaguely gelatinous form. Occasionally, it references the game role. In some cases, it is a reference to the underlying inspiration from history or media. The knight encountered at the start of the game has

the internal name "Knight Ostra" (騎士オストラ) to reference Ostrava, who wears similarly iconic knight armor in *Demon's Souls*. And often enough, an internal name will describe the original concept behind an enemy design, which can differ markedly from their final incarnation.



When discussing the designs for Ornstein and Smough in the *Design Works* interview, Miyazaki recounts that Smough was among the earliest concept arts for the game. Both his and another design were internally called "Four Knights C" and "D" respectively because, as he jokingly explains, the hope would be that this would eventually lead to the design of A and B. But while the Four Knights themselves made it into the final game, their members ended up filled with later characters like Ornstein and Artorias. The design for "Four Knights D" instead became the generic channeler enemy while C became Smough. In Smough's case specifically, he became a maverick grinding against the overall image of Anor Londo, an unknightly executioner – apparently only because Miyazaki was partial to the design and wanted to make the character inside the already alien armor more unique.

Clearly, there is a lot we can learn about the design process by how things were dubbed internally, with Smough's troubled history with the Four Knights in the narrative now seeming like a lighthearted meta reference to his development history. In many cases, of course, the internal name is simply what ends up becoming the characters' official name, such as in the case of Darkwraiths. That said, an official English name that appears to have been taken directly from the game files can radically differ from its official Japanese counterpart. For example, the exploding head enemy is officially called a "grudge" in Japanese and a "wisp" in English – the latter clearly derived from the enemy's internal name "wips" (ウィプス), an obvious misspelling "wisp" (ウィスプ). For that reason, it is important for us to know the official Japanese names and how they are labelled internally.

External Sourcing

Several times in this very prologue, I have mentioned interviews or other sources which cannot be found within the code of the actual game. If the game script itself is our Bible, then these external sources can be considered our Apocrypha. While they can never trump what is provided in the actual game, such outside resources can inject additional insight into analysis, sometimes even creating a shortcut

for more oblique inferences. Characters don't exist in a vacuum, and neither does the game as a whole, for the people developing it have their own history contributing to their every creative decision. Fans have often pointed out similarities or even direct references to other creative works, even those not developed by FromSoftware. These include properties like *Demon's Souls*, *King's Field*, *Berserk*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Saint Seiya*, *Fighting Fantasy*, and various mythological tales.

But while knowing the developers' influences can be useful for framing certain elements, those influences should not be substituted for actual narrative data. The nods to other creative works are just that: nods – many reflecting the developers' love for self-aware meta-references. By following the above three pillars of analysis, *Dark Souls* proves to be a story that stands on its own, like any tale of good quality. Researching these confirmed or proposed inspirations has shown me nothing to say otherwise. In fact, zooming in on these inspirations is more likely to distract than edify, sending fans on wild goose chases trying to see patterns where none might exist. Even when confirmed to exist, the references tend to only be skin-deep, aligning simply in aesthetic or the broadest of circumstances. To then apply additional information beyond the reference from the influence to what it influenced is simply backwards.

The fact of the matter is, if *Dark Souls* were not so esoteric in its presentation, such fans would not even consider looking so hard at outside resources. Theirs is a standard which would never be applied for a more conventional series, and so shouldn't be used as a crutch for failing to properly engage with the internal evidence. Even the most derivative of authors are ultimately trying to weave their own tale, so we should respect their work on its own merit first and foremost. To avoid bloating this analysis with references, I will mainly mention these kinds of external sources as secondary evidence for particularly relevant comparison or analogy, as well as explanations for relevant character and place names. I will also apply general historical, societal, or religious knowledge – namely concerning medieval Europe – to the setting when appropriate.

By contrast, formal interviews with FromSoftware staff, especially Miyazaki, are infinitely more valuable. The most relevant of these interview sources include the *Dark Souls: Design Works*, the PlayStation.Blog, the Game no Shokutaku podcast, and *Edge* magazine. While the more casual context makes them vulnerable to speaking imprecisely, the actual testimonies tend to provide reliable information; in many cases, the direct statements even

serve as ample shortcuts for conclusions otherwise based on circumstantial evidence. The additional insight likewise remains closer to the source of the core ideas behind. I will thus be employing them more frequently, and as primary evidence.

Official comics, on the other hand, are little more than glorified fanfiction, with the writers themselves disclaiming the content as mere interpretations of the original work. They cannot be considered part of the canon, and so I will simply ignore them.

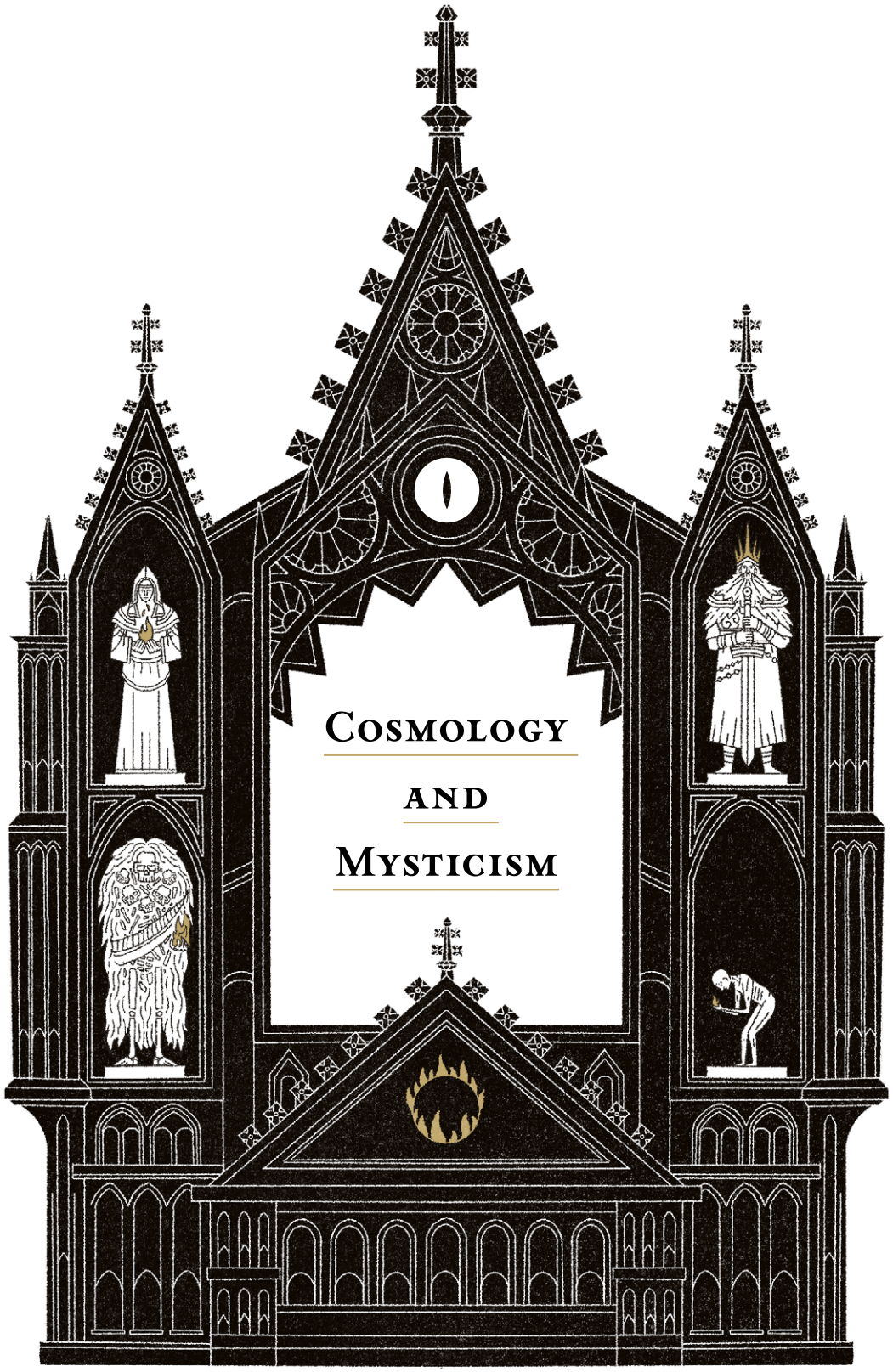


In a similar vein, this book will be primarily analyzing *DS1* as if its sequels did not exist. While later games can potentially change or contextualize details presented in past titles, each title should be viewed through the lens of its creators' intentions at the time. If *DS1* was initially conceptualized to be a gimcrack story lacking rhyme or reason, then any possible course corrections in later games shouldn't be a factor. And so, I will only add mention of *Dark Souls II* (*DS2*) and *Dark Souls III* (*DS3*) when they make explicit what I derive as implicit in their predecessor. The analysis itself won't factor in those games' revelations or events.

In Summary

If you are like me, then you probably find this methodological hullabaloo rather dull. But I nonetheless consider it crucial to understand the framework with which I approach this game. Many things I will say from the next page onward might surprise you, or go against basic information you took as given fact. I only ask that your mind suspend all knee-jerk "buts" and "what abouts" until you have first finished reading this corpus of research in full. If for just the moment, wipe your mind clean of everything you knew or thought you knew and reexamine the story with me with a blank slate. Who knows? Perhaps you will find what you didn't know.

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Cosmology and Mysticism

What Once Was

In the beginning, there was a uniform grey; a universe comprised of rock crags, rock trees, and rock dragons. The world wasn't "unformed" as the English narration for the opening cinematic purports. Rather, the world wasn't yet "distinguished"[1] – everything was composed of a sole mineral element. There was flora and fauna, but it didn't live or die. It simply existed, and would continue to exist in perpetuity if left unimpeded. This can be difficult to grasp, since the notion of having *being* without the state of life or death is completely foreign to us, but it is a fundamental truth of this universe.

We are also told that this world was covered in fog, which seems to contradict the idea of mineral sameness. Weather phenomena often exist in a unique context in *Dark Souls*, and what we learn about the nature of fog in-game resolves this contradiction. The Ring of Fog clarifies that its power actually lessens one's "presence", their sense of existence,[2] thereby making detection more difficult. We see this same effect with Hidden Body, which explicitly states that total invisibility will cause us to "disappear",[3] negating our existence. In short, fog embodies the power of nonexistence, and manipulating it affects the state of physical being. We can see this dominion over space reflected in the way that fog is visually expressed in game mechanics.

Walls of fog initially divide areas of Lordran, obscuring what lies ahead until we pass through them or defeat the area's boss. We cannot confirm what is on the other side, just as enemies and bosses beyond the wall cannot notice or attack us. No one acknowledges the fog walls' existence or explains their largely arbitrary placement, so we can assume that they are simply a game mechanic. But even so, their gameplay function mirrors the concept behind fog: what cannot be seen effectively doesn't exist, and it isn't until we disperse the veil that both sides come to be. Similarly, the summon sign for the Path of the Dragon covenant features a dragon eye bordered by fog, implying that the haze plays a key role in bridging the spaces dividing so-called "other worlds" for members of the covenant.

Fog erases the barriers of existence and everything it confines. Yet it has no dominion over the abstract, conceptual, or imaginary – all things that derive from a conscious mind. In essence, abstraction falls under the category of nonexistence and would theoretically persist independent of whether the physical also does so, at least before the introduction of the soul. (Fog blurring the lines between fiction, reality, and even causality carries over from *Demon's Souls*.) This is likely why the ancient dragons were able to exist as beings and not mere objects all through the Age of Ancients; their minds – their sense of self – weren't palpably real, and so couldn't be erased.

1 "In the Old Age, the world was still undistinguished, shrouded in fog, and there were only ash-colored rocks, great trees, and unperishing archdragons." - Narrator

2 "Mystifying ring given to comrades whom the white cat Alvina trusts. The thick, pure white fog looks like a pearl.
Lessens the equipper's presence, so has an effect that makes it difficult to be found by enemies." - Ring of Fog

3 "Old sorcery of the destroyed country of Oolacile. Makes the whole body almost transparent.
You appear faint to avoid disappearing, but you will blend into your surroundings as soon as you stand still and won't be so easy to find." - Hidden Body

Of course, the fact that fog has power and can be manipulated demonstrates a primordial origin for magic. Magic is rooted in the realities of the *Dark Souls* universe, deriving from the elements that make up the cosmos and then impressing their power upon the environment. The methods utilized may vary, but all reflect the basic laws of nature. A will can manipulate these laws, thus we have various schools of magical expression, but magic itself has existed ever since rock and fog. It is all the powers governing reality itself.



And what of rock – the primal element, the original existence? Its power is likely seen in many dragon weapons, which display a "mysterious" power that otherwise goes unclassified. Typically, this manifests as waves of raw might, colorless and unassuming; humans who have transformed into dragons can unleash a similar power as an attack. The strength of this power varies across weapons, generally scaling down with those deriving from more recent dragon species.[4] And, if the power is weaker in these distant descendants, then it likely derived from the progenitor species. The world's primal state was rock, so it was the only element with which dragons predating Disparity could have been imbued with. Those dragons are characterized as tangible, solid, strong, resilient, and eternal. We can thereby infer that these qualities are the same for rock as a whole.

The state of the world was originally one uniform element, drawing upon the image of unmoving, enduring stone. Rock anchors existence into reality, and maintains space regardless of time. Because of this, fog couldn't simply consume the world out of being, forcing it instead to coexist with the stone universe by filling the gaps between it. The power of existence was, in other words, a literal bedrock to the cosmos that made reality possible. It was a stagnant reality – it had neither beginning nor end, as it would simply exist and continue to do so, and all that existed was rock while fog filled up a vacuum for what didn't exist. However, this dichotomy shouldn't be mistaken for Disparity, which specifically refers to *variations* in existence. But the important difference between this stasis and nonexistence is that there *was* a bedrock, and it allowed all that came after it to occur.

4 "Weapon born from the tail of the wyvern Hellkite. One of the rare dragon weapons. Wyverns are referred to as failures of dragons, but they are still distant descendants of the unperishing archdragons, aren't they?

It is tinged with mysterious power, and that power is unleashed with both hands." - Drake Sword

Then Flame Came

The Age of Ancients existed in perpetuity, until it was interrupted by fire. The cinematic portrays this interruption as occurring in a cavern deep within the earth, below the roots of a "great tree" (大樹). We never get to visit this cave – though the Kiln of the First Flame is built upon the base of a tree that fits the description – and as such, we must simply accept the reality of this incredible event at this unassuming location, just as we accept the beginning state of the universe itself. Fire undeniably did occur, and the implications of its existence are far-reaching.

The name "First Flame" (最初の火) denotes it as the beginning fire; it is at once the first fire in existence, a fire which begets more fire and all things resulting from fire, and a fire which irreversibly changes the universe. "Change" is the operative word, for we are told that fire also brought about Disparity.[5] Flame is by nature boundless, unbiased, and unapologetic, affecting everything without discrimination. Yet differences create disorder and disunity, so by merely existing, fire added new states of being to the universe, always in pairs. The flame itself brings light and heat, but this requires by necessity that there be dark and cold in its absence. Disparity isn't simply a duality of polar opposites like existence and nonexistence. There is sequence, and consequence. There is light and *thus* there is Dark. And for there to be consequence means that space now exists in progression, which we call time. The universe was stagnant no longer. It began to flow and change.

Blacksmiths' use of embers, or "source flames" (種火), to forge, enhance, and evolve equipment is the best example of this phenomenon.[6] The blacksmith shapes the form of metal by heating it with fire derived from source flames like the Large and Very Large Embers;[7] these embers can shape its properties too. The ember imbues the mineral with its essence,[8] resulting in weapons and armor carrying the power of that fire, even flame itself. In this sense, blacksmiths have formalized the natural process of fire interacting with rock. Just as the heat of the forge helps transfer the ember's power, the power of fire spread throughout a cold universe lacking it, causing change.

And one of those changes was the emergence of the soul.

The soul is the source of life and came to exist with fire. This is emphasized by the most powerful souls – the Lord Souls – being found "near" the First Flame according to the original Japanese website.[9] The power of souls, however, is not just life. Souls can be split and combined, decreasing or increasing their power. We "exchange" souls for stat increases at bonfires, implying a connection between one's abilities and the strength

5 "But at some point, the first fire occurred, and Disparity was brought about with the fire. Heat and cold, life and death, and light and Dark." - Narrator

6 "There are two major ways to forge weapons. Simple enhancements, and evolution. Simple enhancements are easy. Makes the weapon strong without changing its properties. It is a matter of course for a blacksmith like me, but if you have a smithbox, you can do it yourself." - Andre

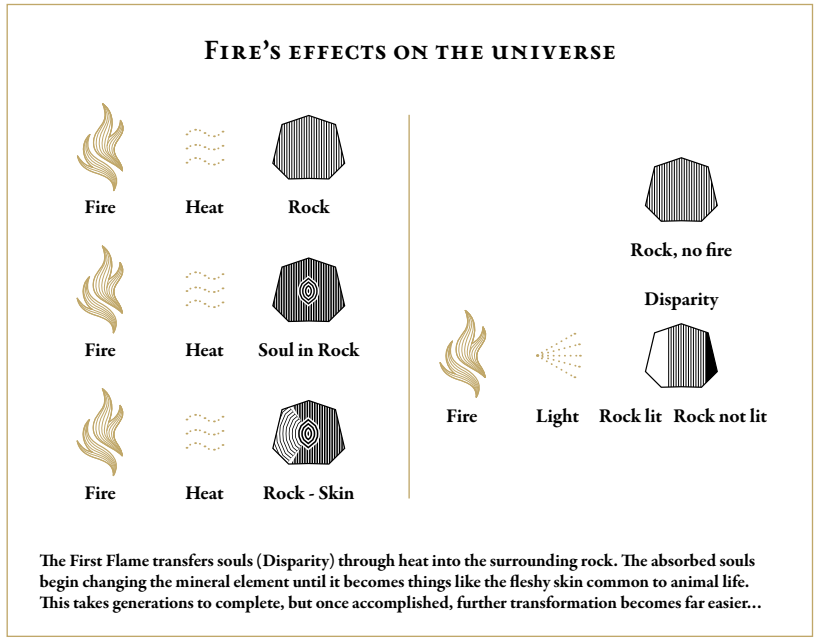
7 "Source flame required for evolving weapons. The Large Source Flame is a fine quality thing among them and handled by the blacksmith of Astora.

Makes it so that you can evolve +5 standard weapons and enhance them up to +10.

Also, evolves +5 standard weapons to crude weapons. (crude weapons can be enhanced up to +5)." - Large Ember

8 "But, evolution's different. It's high-level smithing that changes a weapon's properties. That's why evolution's the monopoly of smiths like me. You can't do it with a smithbox. Well, simple enhancement eventually hits its limit. At that point, you should consider evolution." - Andre

9 "And then, some animals, those which were born from the Dark, were captivated by fire and found the Souls of Kings near the fire." - Website Prologue



The First Flame transfers souls (Disparity) through heat into the surrounding rock. The absorbed souls begin changing the mineral element until it becomes things like the fleshy skin common to animal life. This takes generations to complete, but once accomplished, further transformation becomes far easier...

of one's soul. Boss souls exemplify such logic, explicitly tying "special" beings to equally "special" souls, which can then be used to forge special weapons that somehow relate to the soul's owner. In short, being affects the soul, and vice versa, as seen when either Ornstein or Smough absorb the other's unfiltered soul and immediately gain their fallen companion's characteristics.

We already know of one other power strong enough to give life and to shape any aspect of being: Disparity. In other words, the soul *is* the power of Disparity, hence why it is the driving force behind life in all of its forms and why the strongest concentrations of it were ultimately found in areas closest to the First Flame. (*DS3*'s Fire Keeper later states this outright.)

We spark fire with fuel and keep it alive with that same fuel. What could possibly fuel the first fire in existence except the very power it spontaneously unleashed upon its advent? The witch Quelana mentions pyromancy requiring "provisions" (糧) as part of the learning process,[10] and this fuel is likely the souls we "pay" for spells. The witch is a self-styled hermit with no need for these souls as currency, yet she requires them in order to teach us her spells and grow our pyromancy flames. Therefore, we must be using souls to fuel these flames and cast these spells. (*DS2* later reflects this in specific instances.) Even the entire firelinking ritual is based around this concept.

And so, the First Flame's initial inception must have similarly created an outburst of Disparity that fueled the flame, making the First Flame both the creator and creation of Disparity – a paradox that likely couldn't

have happened had the universe not already existed in a state best, albeit inaccurately, described as simultaneity. The effects of this irregular relationship are also seen in the form and nature of the soul. Common souls are basically white wisps with tails of energy akin to flames. As these souls grow to "heroic" sizes, they begin taking on a slightly yellow aura, which appears even richer in boss souls. The Lord Souls were the residue left behind from the world-shattering emergence of fire, so they manifest an additional red aura. In other words, the most powerful souls resemble the fire that both spawned Disparity and simultaneously feeds off it to survive.

Despite this, souls don't necessarily resemble fire. Miyazaki confirms on the Game no Shokutaku podcast that Humanity are fragments of the Dark Soul, and these vaguely human-looking spirits are portrayed as a black core with white aura, unlike common souls. From this, we can deduce that a soul's appearance is affected not only by its power, but also by its affinity. A soul strongly aligned with a certain aspect of Disparity will possess qualities unique to that element of nature. (Later entries in the series reinforce this notion, portraying souls with a wider variety of colors and shapes in correlation with their owner's nature.) However, humanity proves to be a viable fuel for fire, and so these physical characteristics don't actually affect the souls' interaction with flame; every soul fundamentally shares the same source flame for its power.

Curse of Life

Souls demonstrate a certain attraction to one another, hence their ability to be combined – even doing so with a degree of autonomy. This is demonstrated best by the souls we automatically collect from slain enemies. Upon killing a living being, the newly dispossessed soul becomes attracted to the nearest soul still living. This explains why souls of nameless nobodies are so small [11] while souls of heroes are so large,[12] because the latter presumably kill many during their heroics.

Only the souls most disconnected from the whole seem to be drawn in, however, as certain magic items can increase the amount absorbed while sizable souls can still be found on corpses. The absorbed souls likewise aren't immediately incorporated into our own – we have to instead force them to through leveling up – so the natural process likely takes more time to consolidate the energy within our bodies, a natural process akin to digestion. Indeed, digestion might serve as a more efficient means to absorb souls, thereby further rationalizing eating within the world of *Dark Souls*.

10 "Hmph. I see. You would do so. If that's the case, then I shall make you my apprentice. But my pyromancy demands a certain amount of provisions. Can you meet that?" - Quelana

11 "Soul of an Undead who, unaware of even his circumstances, became a Hollow and ultimately stopped moving.
Use to acquire souls.
Souls are the source of all life, so even if they become Undead and become Hollows, everyone instinctively keeps on seeking them."
- Soul of a Lost Undead

12 "Soul of a hero in legend who became a Hollow and ultimately stopped moving.
Use to acquire a vast amount of souls.
Souls are the source of all life, so even if they become Undead and become Hollows, everyone instinctively keeps on seeking them."
- Soul of a Hero

Naturally, life shares in the soul's instinctive attraction to itself, drawn to the source of other life. The Alluring Skull, filled with some leftover souls, demonstrates this best when thrown to temporarily distract various living creatures.[13] Fire likewise captivates life, holding a fascination that dates back to the Lords discovering the Lord Souls. In essence, while the soul is certainly the source of life, it is but a byproduct of fire, and life's yearning for both is nostalgia for its primal origin. The soul inherent in a living being recognizes the link, and reacts accordingly. Of course, this longing can be tempered by an individual's will.

Like fire, life is diverse with many proclivities and variations in form in accordance with the chaotic nature of Disparity. But it is also influenced by consciousness, which can be both rational and irrational at its own whimsy, as evidenced by the various personalities we come across. We may know the general parameters for how an individual will act, but not the specific expression and their rationale for doing so – a disorderly order. Nonetheless, the soul retains certain traits and affinities, and these qualities intrinsically impose limitations, or at least roadblocks, on life's expression. And they aren't alone.

Curses also impose limits on the soul, which then change the nature of the being acting as that soul's vessel. In the case of petrification, the only curse we can be afflicted with in-game, we accumulate the curse over time until we reach a "death by curse" (呪死) state. However, this curse doesn't end with our death. Instead, it eats away at existence from the source[14] and lingers on our being indefinitely, permanently halving our max HP. This also makes it extremely difficult to undo – Resist Curse makes clear that the best means to counter curses is to just avoid being cursed in the first place.

That said, it isn't impossible to remove a curse, though the Purging Stone we use to do so clarifies the curse to be more accurately diverted than undone – the stones were originally humans, so we transfer the curse to another "person" as a sacrifice.[15] The only other item that negates curses is a Rare Ring of Sacrifice, explicitly created in sacrificial rituals.[16] Even a curse-lifter like Ingward requires humanity to fix our cursed state. In short, redirecting curses always requires life. All of this suggests that the source of existence that curses feed on is the soul. In this respect, curses can be loosely defined as any magic strong enough to afflict the soul. Once the soul is cursed, the body which acts as the soul's vessel is cursed by association, as is anything in direct contact with said body.

The ghosts of New Londo, for instance, appear as immaterial spirits that can slip through physical matter freely because they are "cursed beings" – their physical form has been cursed to function this way. Such "ghosts" ignore weapons and armor when attacking as well as attacks against them, yet the physical weapons they wield in themselves cannot

13 "Skull that had a few souls left over. Throw to disperse the souls and lure over certain kinds of enemies.
The soul is the symbol of life, so it can lure Hollows starved for it, but it isn't effective against all enemies." - Alluring Skull

14 "Sorcery of the red-clothed Ingward, a sealer of New Londo who is also called a healer. Reduces curse accumulation.
Horrifying deaths by curse continually eat away at existence from the source. This magic is one of the few means to resist curses and keep away deaths by curse." - Resist Curse

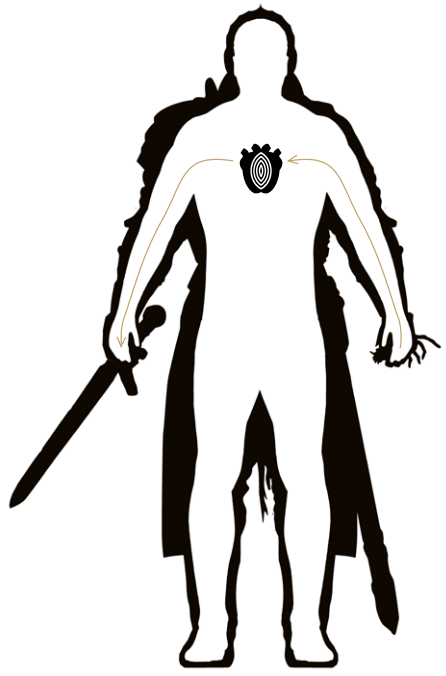
15 "Ash-colored stone with a skull etched in the middle. One of the secret treasures of the earl of Carim, Alster. Reduces curse accumulation and lifts the death by curse status.
Man is powerless against curses and can only divert them.
The curse-lifting stone also only diverts a curse. It is probably a person, or something that was a person." - Purging Stone

pass through matter – at least while in our hands. These daggers *are* cursed, however, so the specific cursed properties of the ghosts' bodies must pass onto the weapons only in their hands and by their will.

Similarly, the ghosts' blades cannot pass through our equipment while *we* are cursed, meaning that the effects of a curse must pass onto anything in direct contact or in extremely close proximity to the cursed body. We can sever the arm of someone who died cursed and repurpose it as a "temporary curse" (一時の呪い) extending its death by curse state to us through this same principle. This curse is likely only temporary because the remnants of the soul in a small piece of the body are quickly consumed by the curse, without it latching onto the user's own soul. This is what makes the Transient Curse the safest curse.[17]

This ability to spread the effect of a curse typically ends once an affected item separates from the cursed body. However, there are cases where an object itself becomes cursed, such as the Greatsword of Artorias or the ghosts' blades. These daggers are cursed presumably from long-term exposure, and so can be used to harm ghosts as well as block their attacks. In other words, curses seem to cancel each other out to some extent. The ghosts are physical beings at their core, as the transient curses they provide demonstrates, and their incorporeality

CURSE'S EFFECTS ON THE BODY



Curses spread via close proximity, so an armored body holding a weapon will spread its curse to each of those items in a chain. Prolonged exposure can permanently curse them, though this curse tends to be too weak to spread back. By contrast, a cursed body part can spread from armor to body back to armor to weapon. In short, the closer to the soul which is at root of the curse, the more potent the curse's spread. Such relentless spread seems to be why a "collision" cancels out two curses' effects, like two bulls locking horns. Curiously, the Undead curse is excluded from this behavior. Is it just too weak to affect other items or curses with such limited contact, or is another curse already blocking the spread?

16 "Mysterious ring of the Goddess of Sin Velka made through a sacrificial ritual. Even among them, the one with a reddish-purple color is considered special.
The equipper doesn't lose anything even if they die, and it nullifies the horrifying death by curse, but this ring will break." - Rare Ring of Sacrifice

17 "Arm of one who was cursed and died. Temporarily puts you in the death by curse status and allows you to fight ghosts.
A ghost is a cursed being, so there is no way to fight it except by cursing yourself. And if it is the safest way to be cursed, cutting off an arm of the dead probably can't be helped." - Transient Curse

is a willful effect of their curse. Yet regardless of the source or kind of curse we acquire, another curse *will* interact with the ghosts' cursed bodies. One can't undo a curse with another curse, but the magic is strong enough to potentially interfere with its effects, and we take advantage of this to slay the ghosts.

Ultimately, curses represent limitations on the soul, proof that Disparity can be affected as much as it affects. Indeed, petrification implies that curses have existed since the moment fire arose and made it possible to transform matter *back* to rock. But, just as curses emerged alongside fire, so did life itself. From that perspective, one could argue that the phenomenon of life is a curse and that other curses are simply interfering with it. (A concept later explored in *DS2*.)

But when does the soul go from being a general source of power to the source of life specifically? The most obvious indicator would be the emergence of consciousness within the soul, and every known entity possessing life that we encounter *does* demonstrate some degree of intelligent autonomy. But intelligence doesn't necessarily mean consciousness, and we have no other way to confirm that every one of these beings is self-aware. Therefore, some other, more fundamental factor must constitute the soul's "life".

The Pursuers sorcery "gives a fleeting will to the Dark of humanity",[18] causing the missiles to chase after the target in accordance with that will. This is the complete opposite of the principle behind Homing Soulmass, a spell where life's natural, intrinsic attraction to itself draws the conjured souls to the target,[19] even though both spells look similar when cast. The difference is highlighted by the humanity missiles manifesting beady white "eyes" identical to the living humanity souls encountered in the Chasm of the Abyss. In other words, the moment the soul gains a will, it becomes its own individual, able to govern its own behavior, and thus a life. That will can be as simple as a singular emotion like the love or envy directing the Pursuers' humanity to "relentlessly pursue" its target to its own destruction, or as complex as intelligent consciousness. That exact will may also contradict and thereby resist the soul's inherent nature, creating a divide between instinct and free will.

In this way, will can affect nature and vice versa, as the two struggle to govern the soul. Without will, there is no spark of life, only innate qualities. With will, there is constant conflict as the soul potentially grows and develops in ways contrary to its innate affinity – chaos. That is life. For if there can be chaos between the natures of souls, why not *within* the nature of one? And so, what was once just *being* now had life, followed by death, just as the cosmos now had heat followed by cold, and light followed by dark. The conflict between these opposing dualities shaped the universe as it followed its natural course.

18 **"Sorcery of the Master of the Abyss Manus. It gives a fleeting will to the Dark of humanity and fires it. The will given has envy for man, or possibly love, and even if its final moment can only be a small tragedy, it continues to relentlessly pursue the target." - Pursuers**

19 **"Personal sorcery of "Big Hat" Logan. Fires soul masses of a high pursuing nature.**

If the soul is the source of life, then being captivated by life would, if anything, be natural. A sorcery where part of Logan as a seeker is seen." - Homing Soulmass



A Light on Time

Because there is Disparity, there is consequence, causality. Events occur in a linear sequence, creating a flow of time. Space progresses along that flow of time, for time is how differences in space can be measured. A glass of water cannot be full after you drink from it. One cannot bend time without in some way affecting space and vice versa. In this manner, the very state of the First Flame affects time. This is most evident in the existence of "other worlds". According to Solaire's Japanese dialogue[20] and the Japanese description for the White and Orange Sign Soapstones,[21] the flow of time has stagnated in Lordran, resulting in space becoming unstable and randomly slipping out of alignment. This causes individuals to be separated into different worlds.

Many assume these so-called other worlds to be parallel universes, but the evidence is lacking. Solaire states that time's function in Lordran makes it "strange", which suggests that time flows normally in the world outside. In short, Lordran is in a time bubble, hence why Miyazaki calls it a "different dimension" in an *Edge* interview.

Within this bubble, events that couldn't occur otherwise are possible, leading to Solaire's second point: we can meet people who should be long dead, heroes from over a century ago. Both parties may have entered the bubble years apart, yet they can share the same space in either time simultaneously, regardless of the gap. However, causality is still in effect, and events occur in sequence, thereby excluding true parallel worlds as an explanation. Furthermore, time followed a stable flow before the bubble, so all possibilities within it are limited by what has already transpired. There is no reality where Quelana didn't abandon Izalith, or Gwyn didn't link the fire. Solaire's wording indicates that the bubble has only existed for the last hundred years.

Some interpretations of Solaire's comments suppose that reality within the bubble has split into every possible variation and will reconverge into a singular reality again come the bubble's end. However, this idea assumes that each reality remains independent during the course of the break and generally cannot be realized or escaped from until it is concluded. This way, each reality can remain truly parallel to the other while remaining internally consistent. Yet we freely cross over into other worlds in body or as phantoms, and we can leave or re-enter Lordran at any point. If the version of us in another timeline did so at any other point, there would be no way to determine which of us is the valid vessel to shoulder every reality, creating a paradox upon exiting the bubble.



20 "This is a truly strange place. The flow of time is stagnant, if you consider there are legends of over 100 years ago. Since it is terribly unstable, various things will soon slip out of alignment. I don't know how long the worlds of you and I will remain overlapped." - Solaire

21 "Item for playing online. Writes a summon sign.
If you are able to be summoned to another world as a spirit from the sign and defeat the area boss where summoned, you can acquire humanity. (Summon can't proceed with Hollows.)
It is a means for Undead to help each other at the land of Lordran where the flow of time has stagnated."
- White Sign Soapstone

In conclusion, neither parallel universes nor parallel realities are likely definitions for these so-called "other worlds". Thus, the most accurate description of a "world" seems to simply be "timespace" – a space existing at a certain point in time. For instance, say we arrive at the Undead Burg on Day 1 and Solaire arrives on Day 10 but both parties first encounter one another on Day 1. Normally, this would be impossible, but Lordran's time bubble causes our different timespaces to overlap. We shared the same space at two different times but now these periods blend together. It is now possible for that glass of water to still be full *after* drinking from it. Since it is unstable, the overlay eventually breaks and both parties return to their proper time. The worlds aren't defined by planets or dimensions, but the actual flow of time.

The NPCs we encounter confirm this interpretation. Many characters acknowledge the existence and utility of these other worlds. Yet not a single one considers the existential questions the idea of parallel realities brings. Do our individual actions matter when there are infinite other worlds undergoing the same situation? Who are we if there are countless other versions just like us? Not even the most inquisitive characters mention this fascinating topic. In fact, they act under the tacit assumption that they are the only *them* in existence. Solaire confidently asserts that we will summon *him* from another world, not a parallel variant of him.[22] The Lautrec we invade another world to kill recognizes *us* as the same person the Lautrec of our world encountered. And in any case, when an NPC is killed, all related encounters promptly end. We simply never encounter another version of a character despite multiple opportunities to do so.

Likewise, characters act in accordance with belief in a single timeline. Dusk automatically returns to her own era soon after she is freed from a Crystal Golem.[23] But the princess then writes down a summon sign in the past, confident that we can use it in the future to anchor her back to our era. Meanwhile, the Japanese website describes the areas we explore in the DLC as the "world of the past" (過去世界) but Elizabeth makes a point to not learn about the future and keep our actions in the past anonymous.[24] If a "world" was truly a separate reality, then these attempts to avoid causing a paradox would be pointless. Interestingly, Elizabeth's concern seems misplaced: the future already factors in the effects of our actions in the past, as evidenced by Alvina hinting at public perception of history being mistaken even before we have made that secret history. But the point remains unchanged: our actions take place across a single coherent timeline, in a single coherent universe.

22 **"But, if you use this… we can cross the world slips and cooperate. By summoning me as a spirit, we cross the 'slip'. Of course, we aren't the only ones doing that… but that is why I am a Warrior of the Sun, and my summon sign is brilliant, specially-made. I think it stands out quiiiiite a bit. Uwaha ha ha haha!" - Solaire**

23 **"I am Dusk of Oolacile. I am a human of a different age than yours, a very old age… I cannot stay here for long." - Dusk**

24 **"I shall keep you only in my memories. You are a human of the far future. So it is probably for the best. But… even though none will sing of you as a result, you are a great hero. Knowing that and continuing to know it shall be my mission." - Elizabeth**

25 **"… Oh, you… How dare you… are you stupid, or impudent…?… Well, fine. You need me for something, yes?" - Chester**

All of this goes against the localization's use of "convoluted", a term implying that time continues to flow, but in a manner so complex that it is pointless to try comprehending it. Many theories handwave chronology issues by citing this concept. In truth, time isn't *flowing* whatsoever. It has stagnated, layering upon itself instead of continuing along a straightforward path, and only in Lordran. The "worlds" are timespaces of individuals from as early as a century ago randomly intersecting because of this pileup. And even when time is functioning regularly, we can bridge the gaps between periods via summon signs. To call this "convoluted" both overcomplicates and oversimplifies the principles at play. The events of *Dark Souls* can be consolidated to a single timeline, simple as that.

This, of course, makes summoning a simple form of time travel, performed using a soapstone. Soapstone is a rock and thus has the power to anchor existence in reality, and every soapstone we can acquire seems to combine this principle with some additional element of magic to initiate the summoning process. In reality, soapstones were historically used to write with, and the ones in-game naturally allow us to write script to communicate. Presumably, the power of rock makes this magic script far more resilient than typical graffiti, hence why summon signs can be found and used potentially centuries after they were first inscribed. For that same reason, the summoner can use the sign's power to draw and anchor the summoned into their timespace, as we do when we summon Dusk after she has already returned to her own time.

While we summon Dusk in the flesh, other summons consistently enter other timespaces in a spirit form and explore that timespace with its owner. The spirit, sometimes called a phantom, can freely interact with the world the same as its non-spirit counterpart, whether that be through touching and attacking others or dropping and trading items. This precludes the spirit from being a mere astral projection, and instead suggests that they are an actual physical presence. This is reinforced by the fact that items spirits drop or trade neither retain a spirit form nor return to the original timespace with their owner.

When injured, phantoms neither bleed nor suffer any consequences for dying. For example, Chester invades as a dark spirit and remembers the encounter if we defeat him.[25] He acts annoyed by the loss, but hasn't suffered any apparent injuries. This explains why Kirk can invade our world multiple times. His dark spirit is in no actual danger in our timespace, and so he invades to his heart's content, aware he can always try again. Likewise, Lautrec acknowledges our repeated attempts to invade his timespace should we fail to kill him on our

first try, and the death of a friendly summon doesn't ever prevent us from seeing that character again in the future. In short, the spirit form is only a partial manifestation of the summoned being in reality – the phantom's existence has been "lessened" in a manner similar to how the power of fog operates, affecting corporeality in that timespace.

Essentially, phantoms exist outside of space and time until the persona returns to physical being in their original timespace. (*DS2* further explores this concept with the Forlorn.) We see this idea expressed in various aspects of the time bubble in Lordran, too. Throughout our journey we see brief, faint glimpses of player "spirits" from other worlds, and potentially interact with them in real time. Similar to our interactions with Solaire, these manifestations seem to be the byproduct of time's stagnancy, a sort of proto-overlap of the different timespaces that hasn't quite reached the same level of synchronization as with the Sunlight Knight. We are technically interacting from different periods in time, but it appears simultaneous from our perspective. This is clearly true in the case of bloodstains, which allow us to witness the moments leading up to someone's death.

We can't physically interact with these spirits acting from beyond our timespace, so of course a summon manifesting as a spirit between the two can't be truly harmed either. The summon manifests enough to have an effect on the world, but that is all. Because of this, we never ever actually kill invaders. While a corpse with the invader's equipment spawns after their failed invasion, the rules governing this seem inconsistent. Kirk's spirit has to be defeated three times for his corpse to spawn despite others spawning after only one bad invasion. Moreover, the corpses spawn nowhere near their place of death, even for non-summons. We can kill Lautrec in the chamber preceding Ornstein and Smough's boss room but then find his corpse past them one floor above. And killing Dusk isn't even required to spawn her corpse in the spot where we had found her imprisoned. These corpses are merely in-game rewards, and don't necessarily reflect the actual fates of the characters.

While summoning and invading are definitely the most intuitive forms of the art, they are not the only means for crossing time and space. Manus, for instance, physically drags us via a portal from the present to the past. We then travel between the two eras by "warping" between bonfires in the different ages. This isn't surprising, since we already use this art to bend time and space when teleporting between bonfires in the same era. This is reinforced by the use of special bonfires to enter



the Battle of Stoicism, which we can then exit by using a crystal – similar to using the Black Separation Crystal to send back summons.[26] Time manipulation is commonplace in Lordran, whatever form it takes.

Now that the function and effects of time have been explained, it is possible to understand how fire affects it. Fire is the progenitor of time and the reason it exists in conjunction with space. If it is why time flows, then it is likely to be why it stagnates as well. The fact that Lordran is the only area affected by these quirks in time suggests that the cause is something local, and the Kiln of the First Flame is the only place of relevance in the vicinity. Similarly, the stagnation only extends back to about a century before the game's main events, meaning that the cause is recent. The only explanation is that fire's continued fading has caused the stagnating flow of time. As the First Flame disappears, so does the progression of space it created, until both disappear together.

That said, it isn't fire specifically that governs time, but light.

Oolacilian sorceries manipulate light,[27] and their gold-and-black color scheme indicates that they differ from other light-based magics. Hidden Body manipulates light for camouflage, but it is no mere trick of said light, as it warns that total invisibility could cause us to "disappear". In other words, the spell is affecting our physicality – altering our existence in space. Fog can provide similar camouflage by manipulating existence, but that is because fog, along with rock, is one of the core elements of existence. Light magic must be achieving the same result from a different angle, namely by manipulating time. Time and space are intrinsically linked as the co-equals of spacetime. In that case, the light of Hidden Body affects our space in the universe not directly, as fog would, but through time – lessening our presence in the present. The spell as employed makes us less obvious to inattentive eyes, but its full potential could negate our very existence by denying a time for our space to exist in.

Repair is another Oolacilian spell derived from light magic.[28] Functioning as a "healing" spell for non-biological targets, we must consider the principles behind such similar light-based spells[29] in the first place. Either they reverse the damage done to organic matter by reversing its time, or they boost the body's innate regenerative abilities to accelerate its natural recovery. Wood, metal, and leather have no such abilities. Therefore, Repair doesn't regrow a weapon to reconstitute its form, it *restores* its previous form. Time is again being used to directly affect the target's space. (And *DS3*'s iteration of the spell later confirms this time relation outright.) In short, Fire's light is time, the reason that space progresses and changes in the universe.

26 "The black crystal given to exiles who became Undead has been a mark of farewells since long ago, so it can return spirits you summoned to their original world and return you to your original world from the other world you were summoned to.
But, if you consider meetings important, you shouldn't use it lightly."
- Black Separation Crystal

27 "Old sorcery of the destroyed country of Oolacile. Makes the right-hand weapon almost transparent.
It is no simple enhancement and depends on the user. Oolacile's sorceries excel in arts that deal with light. This sorcery is another aspect of that." - Hidden Weapon

28 "Old sorcery of the destroyed country of Oolacile. Repairs the weapons and armor being used.
A sorcery that was deeply rooted in the life of Oolacile. Many parts resemble "Repair Light Powder". Their culture has probably been handed down a little." - Repair

29 "Special miracle imparted to the holy women who serve the Princess of the Sun's Light Gwynevere. Gradually recovers HP, including the surroundings.
Miracles of Gwynevere, who is loved by all, widely distribute their blessings to warriors but cannot be used if you aren't a covenantor."
- Bountiful Sunlight

Deceptive Coequal

Understanding the beginning of time through light raises the question of how it will end, and we understand *that* through light's relationship with the Dark. This particular pair of Disparity has the most visible relevance to the world and *Dark Souls*' overarching narrative, highlighting the idea of difference as consequence. This is true for all dualities of Disparity, but fire eventually fading and only *dark* remaining is the central maxim. All other dualities intersect or overlap with this core idea to varying degrees, to the point that we can vaguely map their polarities in terms of fire's presence versus its absence. Light and dark sit at either end of this scale, and the universe heads in the direction from light to Dark.

Dark is the natural opposite and consequence of light. Before fire, there was only rock, with fog filling the gaps. After fire, there will instead be Dark. The universe can no longer return to its original state, for fire added dimensions to existence which cannot be subtracted. Fire itself may disappear, but the effects of fire remain, a literal shadow over the cosmos. That said, both the primal universe and the eventual one will exist in the absence of fire, making Dark arguably the aspect of Disparity closest in nature to the universe's primal state. In fact, the Dark shares several qualities with the power of rock or fog, at least conceptually. For instance, without light, we cannot distinguish our surroundings both in relation to one another and to existence as a whole, effectively returning the world to a state of homogeneity. That isn't to say that the Dark is a facsimile of rock or fog, but it is undoubtedly an evolution of the universe's foundation.

Yet Dark also possesses traits similar to those of fire. Physically, the Dark is "heavy" with a tangible force behind it, resulting in most Dark magic dealing physical damage.[30] Similarly, Artorias' greatsword was cursed due to his pact with a beast tied to the Dark,[31] causing the sword to lose its magic and divine damage and deal solely enhanced physical damage. This curse also highlights the Dark's antagonistic relationship with the power of light. Grant, another weapon blessed with the divine element, carries the power to "slaughter persons of Dark in particular".[32] These "holy" weapons are forged with a unique white fire ember, meaning that their power *isn't* simply that of fire itself. If holy weapons are strong against the Dark, then they are its antithesis, and the opposite of dark is light.

This truth becomes obvious when we juxtapose the divine with the occult element. Despite the English name's association with

the supernatural, *jakyou* (邪教) is "heresy" or more literally "wicked faith", with connotations of falsity and paganism. This suggests that the power is used by heathens unaligned with the gods, which is why the in-game menu graphic for the divine element is a white aureole, while a black aureole represents the occult. Occult weapons are likewise forged with Dark Embers, and the Effigy Shield imbued with this element protects against holy weapons. In other words, the divine and the occult are no more than manifestations of the power of light and Dark respectively. The two powers are simultaneously each other's counter and Achilles' heel.



The Dark also bears a strong connection with the soul. The description for humanity pointedly inquires about the true identity of these black souls,[33] and Miyazaki confirmed the answer on a Game no Shokutaku episode. Each black spirit is a fragment of the Dark Soul, and using them provides great insight into the nature of its power. To begin with, using a humanity fully restores one's HP and increases all defenses. This not only indicates the Dark is capable of defending against all kinds of magic, including the power of fire, but also suggests it has healing properties. The only other healing magics we experience are the gods' light-related miracles and Estus, the latter of which derives from the heat of Undead bonfires. If healing properties are byproducts of fire's light and intrinsic to fire's presence, where does the consequential power of fire's absence acquire this same regenerative ability?

The art of Lifedrain traces its power to the Dark Soul. It is described as the power of "life-eating" (生命喰い), and Ingward claims that the Darkwraiths who used it are the enemies of everything with a soul. This is why its Japanese name is "spiritsucker" (吸精), which naturally brings the phrase "bloodsucker" (吸血) to mind. A vampiric soul-draining quality is thus a core ability of the Dark – though, in-game, the attack only deals damage while absorbing the target's humanity and doesn't restore our HP. Server explores the same idea.[34] The weapon is "Sacrificial Blade" (生贄刀) in reference to its primary use in ceremonies which were evidently sanguinary in nature, and its design resembles a ram-dao used to behead animals in Hindu sacrificial rituals. The purpose of such rituals can be seen in the blade's ability to drain its victims of HP and transfer it to the wielder. And despite allegedly being imbued with heathen power, Server isn't *mechanically* an occult weapon. This suggests that the Dark's root power is indeed the ability to drain life from others. (*DS3*'s iteration of Lifedrain finally does absorb the target's HP.)

30 **"Abyssal sorcery that a sorcerer of Oolacile discovered in the midst of madness. Fires a giant dark orb.**
Unlike normal soul sorcery, dark sorcery is heavy and is accompanied by physical damage. The soul of man is closer to its true state as humanity, isn't it?" - Dark Orb

31 **"Greatsword born from the soul of the ash-colored great wolf Sif, gravekeeper of 'Abysswalker' knight Artorias.**
It was cursed due to a contract Artorias once exchanged with a fiend of the Abyss and can deal damage to ghosts."
- Greatsword of Artorias

32 **"One of the Way of White's legendary treasures said to have long ago been entrusted to a holy knight who became Undead.**
It is an iron mass that can't be lifted by ordinary men, blessed beforehand and possessing the power to slaughter persons of Dark in particular." - Grant

33 **"Small black spirit found on corpses on rare occasions. Use to gain 1 humanity and recover HP.**
This black spirit is also called humanity, but the details are unknown. If the soul is the source of all life, then what is humanity that is only within man?" - Humanity

34 **"Giant curved sword primarily used in ceremonies.**
It is imbued with sinister heathen power, so you recover HP every time you attack an enemy." - Server

The Dark Soul takes the power of life from any soul and incorporates it as part of its essence, feeding on it, and souls aligned with light seem especially susceptible. Most souls have a light affinity, and are white at their core. The graphic for Soul of Artorias portrays the Dark enwreathing his white-colored soul, a corruption which related dialogue equates to consumption. This appetite for light potentially explains why the Dark counters it so effectively, but the Dark's hunger doesn't discriminate. Dark Fog makes a point of its Dark being a "terrible poison" to man,[35] implying it eats away at the target's humanity.

Given this propensity for soul-eating, humanity's healing ability upon use isn't a surprise – a single humanity sprite would no doubt be rich in the life it has consumed – but its connection to life doesn't end there. Humanity, unretrieved after death, spawns a crab-like monster in other worlds. These Vagrants, or "wandering spirits" (さまよう精霊), demonstrate that disembodied humanity will spontaneously develop independent forms of life over a long period of time. The only other way to spawn Vagrants is dropping items and leaving them for a similar period. This variant's more developed egg shell may indicate that traces of our Dark remained with those items, eventually possessing them – though these spirits potentially drop different, unrelated items as they mature, so the item-method may be a pure gameplay mechanic. Regardless, no other soul demonstrates such autonomy, and even the First Flame permeated the existing universe in order to create life. To birth entire new creatures both by itself and with itself is simply remarkable.

Likewise, the Dark appears to have dominion over space. Dark Hand manifests a fire-like black soul energy on the back of one's hand – as seen in its menu graphic – and can create a dark spatial distortion for a shield. This black vortex manipulates the space around the hand to block all attacks equally, including fire and lightning. In effect, the weapon negates an attack's travel path, perhaps even its causality. (A principle later confirmed by the Repel and Twisted Barricade hexes of *DS2*.) Based on this, it seems that the Dark can not only manipulate existing space, but even potentially generate new space, which would explain why humanity can sprout biological appendages as vagrants. Whereas light relates to spacetime from the angle of time and thus space, the Dark is apparently the reverse.



35 "Abyssal sorcery that a sorcerer of Oolacile discovered in the midst of madness. Generates a Dark fog.

The Dark fog that should be close to humanity is instead a terrible poison for man. As if much of man often eats away at man." - Dark Fog



The power of Dark isn't restricted to the physical either, as humanity also increases our item discovery rate. Realistically, most items like weapons or armor should be easy to acquire from enemies, who clearly possess them, upon their deaths. Instead, we rely on chance to decide whether we can retrieve anything. In other words, humanity increases our luck. This suggests that luck is an actual force affecting the outcome of events in spacetime, which ties directly into the concepts of karma or destiny. The universe undoubtedly moves in a specific direction, and those affected positively by that direction are naturally fortunate. Bearing all that in mind, fortune clearly favors the Dark. It is the end result of light, for logic dictates that fire go out and leave only darkness in its wake; of course it is intrinsically lucky. Fate has

determined that the Dark ultimately wins out at the end of fire's being. (*DS3* later adds luck as a separate stat explicitly unique to humans.)

Finally, humanity increases resistance to curses, meaning that the Dark Soul is less susceptible to magic that negatively affects it. This may reflect its resilience to magic in general, but it can also be interpreted as having curse-like properties. The Dark already feeds off manifestations of Disparity to provide its healing abilities, and such magic demonstrates the capability of inflicting curses, as seen with Greatsword of Artorias. In that respect, the Dark Soul very much resembles the definition of curse magic.

Ultimately, the Dark's properties can be compared to various powers, making it wholly unique. It is only through breaking down these qualities that we can understand the Dark in all its forms, including the Abyss.

Ingward refers to the Abyss as a "dark void" in English dialogue,[36] but he describes it as simply "dark" in the Japanese script, suggesting that the two are synonymous. Taking the consistent presence of humanity into consideration, the best definition for the Abyss is a physical manifestation of dark souls' power, its exact form primarily one of two states. The first appears as a viscous substance that either clumps up in high concentrations or spreads out as bodies of fluid, ranging in color from a dark blue or purple to pure black. Artorias' equipment is soaked in this Dark mucus[37] and secretes it constantly during his boss fight. Likewise, Oolacile's entire cityscape slowly sinks into a swamp made of the fluid. Alternatively, the Abyss manifests as a uniform black void composed of what appears to be a fire-like substance – the fact that we can find the Black Flame pyromancy in such a void reinforces this interpretation. This may be the ultimate form of the Abyss, the Dark completely enveloping a given area.

The Abyss actively spreads and consumes, in keeping with the nature of the Dark. In the case of Oolacile, we see veiny strings of abyssal sludge stretch from its void across the urban landscape. As expected, this causes a variety of dangers for nearby life. Those afflicted by the Abyss have their souls consumed and, in the case of humans, the humanity slumbering within them driven wild like caged beasts. The end result is madness, but the corruption results in physical transformations as well. These transformations typically include the growth of horn or antler-like structures resembling tree branches from skin or bone – unsurprising, given the Dark's power over space. Meanwhile, the Dark's ability to generate life can be seen in the humanity with independent wills found within an Abyss, and the Covenant of Artorias affirms that the Abyss can even produce intelligent beasts. (*DS3* later introduces sentient locust-men who arise from the Abyss.)

36 "... Ah, and one piece of advice. They live in dark, called an Abyss." - Ingward

37 "Helmet of 'Abysswalker' Artorias, one of the Four Knights of King Gwyn.
As if showing its owner's final moments, it is corrupted by the Dark of the Abyss, and the proud, eminent ultramarine tassel is soaking wet without drying." - Helm of Artorias

Having said all that, these threats may be conditional. Ingward warns us that the Abyss is a place no ordinary person can traverse. Yet, we can trek to the heart of the Abyss in Oolacile without being afflicted. In contrast, the Abyss in New Londo immediately engulfs us without proper protection. The generation of abyssal monsters and threat of its spread, meanwhile, is limited to Oolacile's Abyss. The differences between the two Abysses can perhaps be ascribed to their creators. We know the spread of an Abyss can be stopped by killing its creator, thereby implying that its threat derives from its master's will. And while the sources of the New Londo Abyss are only ever described as wicked, the Oolacile Abyss was born from humanity going out of control and driving its owner mad. If the master has no control over themselves, then what happens to the creation?



The answer is that it too loses control. A madman controls the Oolacile Abyss and so it acts on its own, running wild the same as its owner. The New Londo Abyss, however, is controlled by perfectly sane individuals and so it serves their will. Once we defeat the Four Kings, we will no longer be subsumed without protection. The Abyss is a tool, one which is dangerous in the same way a power saw is dangerous in unskilled hands. It isn't intrinsically destructive, and its ill effects can be mitigated if not negated entirely. It is in no inherent way a threat.

Nonetheless, the Dark is undoubtedly a constant threat to the light. Like a cancer, it metastasizes, taking in anything and everything. It bears qualities reminiscent of both the world before and during fire. The only thing keeping this force at bay is the light, but light can only exist with fire and fire inevitably wanes over time. When the universe began, fire and light dominated the universe and with them came heat and life. Conversely, there had to exist the creeping consequence of Dark, and with it came cold and death. As time progresses due to the light of fire, the Dark silently waits for the eventual moment fire ails, light falling behind it. It is only then that the Dark will swallow the light and engulf the space in shadow.

Astrology

Lordran is stratified, and can be reasonably split into a Lower and Upper World, with the layer of earth held up by the great trees as the dividing line. While technically still "underground", this Lower World is distinct from the cramped caverns in the rock situated both above and below it. It isn't an "underworld", however, as both planes are very much part of the terrestrial earth. The world of *Dark Souls* doesn't appear to have a molten core, and the ground the denizens of the Upper World walk upon is simply the Lower World's ceiling. And while we get to thoroughly explore the Lower and Upper Worlds, the heavens above don't afford us the same luxury. The armillary spheres in the Duke's Archives imply that the heavenly bodies revolve around a spherical earth, but beyond that is a mystery. Is there deep space past the clouds, or does the universe simply revolve around the earthly plane? What looks like our sky may well be following an entirely foreign ruleset, similar to fog. Nowhere is this more obvious than with the sun and moon.

The sun is undoubtedly a great ball of fire, which dates its existence only as far back as the beginning of fire. This implies the world once existed without a sun and that the sun would disappear should fire go out, though we cannot confirm this during the Age of Dark ending. (*DS3* later supports this implication with a solar eclipse as fire imminently fades.) Because of the sun, there is a kind of disparity – day and night. The sun lights the world during day and leaves it in dark during night, a difference that traditionally marks the passage of time. In essence, the sun is a microcosm of the First Flame, demonstrating the same effects on the world that have been intrinsically linked to fire. This also makes references to the sun synonymous with the First Flame, as evident by their shared association with light, heat, life, and magic as well.

Lightning is repeatedly defined as the power of sunlight and portrayed with a unique golden aura – the opening cinematic confirms lightning to be a product of storms, but it is nonetheless the sun's light made manifest. This power is popularly associated with Anor Londo royalty, many of whom bear a title referencing the sun or sunlight. Their power traces back to Gwyn and his Lord Soul, directly connecting the gods' power to the light of fire. The Dragon Eye describes the gods themselves as "persons of fire", strengthening the association. And if the sun is effectively the First Flame, at least in representation, then the gods would be seen to wield the power of fire in their hands.

Our moon is a ball of rock that reflects the light of the sun, and that may be key to its identity in this context. Rock is the basis of all that existed before fire, so the moon possibly always existed, representing primordial existence in its simplicity. In other words, if the power of the gods is the power of the

sun, then the mysterious power of the dragons is, in effect, the power of the moon. With the advent of fire, however, the moon was subject to the same fate as other minerals, now existing in phases where fire is either present to some degree or wholly absent. Moonlight occurs when sunlight interacts with the rocky surface of the moon, reflecting back at us. In other words, moonlight is the indirect manipulation of the power of the sun. If the sun represents the First Flame, then the moon represents the rocks affected by it.

Perhaps this is why magic commonly has a blue hue, particularly sorcery. Most magic energy manifests on a blue gradient – including aqua or even silver[38] – despite the power of light and the soul usually manifesting as white or yellow, and this is especially true for soul sorcery. The color association is so strong that the Spell Stoneplate Ring represents the soul as blue rather than the traditional white.[39] This suggests that some component other than the soul is involved in realizing these sorceries, a component other than the standard light or fire. This component may be derived from moonlight.

This would help explain why certain sorceries are reproduced by multiple independent parties. Moonlight is the power of fire after it has already interacted with the natural world and thus may be easier to draw from surrounding nature than sunlight. This doesn't necessarily mean that moonlight is weaker; it is basically an altered state of sunlight. Still, accessibility directly impacts understanding, as the sheer number of independent sorcerers employing blue-colored spells would seem to imply.

The only exception to this explanation is Darkmoon light, but what is a Darkmoon? The Blades of the Darkmoon emblem portrays a crescent moon, suggesting that a Darkmoon almost entirely lacks the sun's rays compared to, say, a full moon. Yet rather than reducing its potency, this instead merely changes the nature of the moonlight, which now manifests as "vengeance"[40] in stark contrast to pure sunlight manifesting as lightning. Darkmoon light also has a strong association with the Dark. When the light wanes, the moon goes dark until it is only a crescent, and eventually not even that. The combined moonlight and Dark affinities result in a unique form of magic intrinsically tied to the concept of vengeance. If the moon itself is alpha rock, and moonlight is beta fire affecting rock, then is Darkmoon light the gamma?

"Vengeance" is simply retribution for wrongs committed, a straightforward form of consequence that brings to mind the principle of karmic justice. Consequence, of course, began with Disparity, so Darkmoon light is the effect, and the cause was the emergence of fire. Fire began and so must eventually end, leaving behind only darkness. Dark is the consequence of light, and Darkmoon light is the consequence of fire first affecting the world of rock. That standard moonlight can become the power of

38 **"Magic arrow given to covenantors of Gwyndolin, Sun of the Shadows and youngest child of King Gwyn. That arrow is tinged with silver light and deals magic damage."**
- Moonlight Arrow

39 **"The square stone widely known as the mark of a knight grants the power to face various difficulties.**
The blue square stone derives from the soul and boosts the equipper's defense power against the magic attribute."
- Spell Stoneplate Ring

40 **"Mysterious orbs granted to knights of the Blades of the Darkmoon, who serve Sun of the Shadows Gwyndolin. They are, in other words, blades of the gods' vengeance."**
- Blue Eye Orb

"vengeance" demonstrates the importance these astrological symbols have in understanding the supernatural. Even the slightest change in state can have huge implications in the metaphysical processes at work in the cosmos.

With that in mind, we should also note the lack of stars in the night sky in-game. Despite the game script's repeated references to the two aforementioned heavenly bodies, stars are not once mentioned and are notably absent in nighttime settings. It is difficult to even confirm their existence. While this may be an artistic choice, it may also indicate that stars aren't particularly relevant in the world. (Indeed, *DS2*'s Astrologer set is the only direct reference to stars in the entire series, and its design otherwise focuses on the moon.) Based on purely their astronomical associations, it is possible that stars govern some aspect of reality in connection to the sun and thereby relate to fire, but if so, their role cannot be particularly noteworthy.

Schools of Magic

While supernatural by our standard, magic in *Dark Souls* is an extension of the laws of nature, and so follows a ruleset. Magic is the art using one's will to manipulate these rules to produce a desired effect. Unlike powers predating the First Flame, magic born after its advent consistently ties into Disparity, with various arcane arts formalizing the broad powers of fire.

Magic power is drawn from a concentrated source of energy similar to a battery. That energy is then channeled through a medium to serve as a catalyst for the power.[41] Magic items show that both the energy source and the catalyst can be one and the same, usually expressing a specific power imbued in the catalyst itself. More flexible catalysts such as staves must be imbued with some power to direct magic effectively, the output of the medium directly correlating to the time spent channeling said power, as seen with Logan's staff.[42] As a result, most magic users rely on such tools to perform their craft.

Some crafters use themselves as the catalyst, with their own beings typically serving as the source of their power. Because the essence of one's being, the soul, proves intractable so far as independently altering its nature, acquiring power that correlates to a specific element helps facilitate this shift. The more aligned you are with a specific power, the easier it is to manipulate.

These rules form the basis for every school of magic, but for the purposes of understanding Disparity we will focus on the main three: sorcery, pyromancy, and miracles. While these three popularly focus on one aspect of Disparity, they each showcase a distinct approach to magic

41 **"Staff possessed by Dragon Academy Vinheim sorcerers. Becomes a catalyst to use sorceries.**
In order to use sorceries, it is required to equip a staff and memorize sorceries from spell texts at a bonfire. Also, most sorceries have a limited number of uses."
- Sorcerer's Catalyst

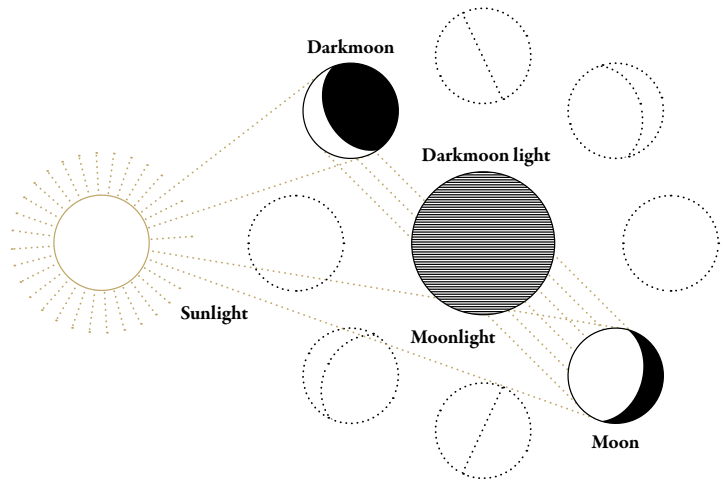
42 **"Staff of 'Big Hat' Logan, who is the great seeker of sorceries.**
The lumber quality is the same as the sorcery staves of Vinheim, but it has been tempered due to its long-term use by Logan and draws out high might if used by someone with excellent intelligence."
- Logan's Catalyst

comparable and relating to the mind, body, and spirit respectively. Each methodology reflects an aspect of the human condition, and applies a different philosophical approach to understanding reality.

Sorcery is the mental methodology, best defined as the study of magic as a rational science. Since magic is a law of nature, sorcerers can observe it and replicate their observations with a consistent, tangible process. For this reason, these "magic arts" (魔術) require a degree of intelligence, or "logic power" (理力). One's ability to reason determines whether we can cast spells and how powerful their output will be. By that same token, sorcery can cover theoretically any field of magical inquiry, as almost any element of nature holds power. So long as we are able to attune, or "memorize", the spells, our rationale will carry us through the rest of the process. However, sorcerers generally practice soul sorcery, even practitioners completely foreign to the Vinheim Dragon School, where such magic is chiefly taught. The overabundant study of this magic in particular is likely because of the soul's nature.

Soul sorcery is in essence the manipulation of the power of Disparity through rational means. The soul, of course, is an extremely basic and easy to observe element of nature, meaning that various independent scholars can study it, and reproduce its effects. Despite all our sorcery instructors mentoring us to repay a life debt, our lessons still require we hand over souls,

Darkmoon Light's Creation



Normally, any sunlight reflecting off the moon is considered "moonlight" without distinction. But the crescent moon just short of becoming a new moon is considered a "Darkmoon" with the dark-to-light ratio determining Darkmoon light's qualities rather than strength. Despite this terminology, magic users draw these sun and moon powers from sources other than the actual heavenly bodies, such as souls.

which Griggs describes as "raw materials" for the learning process.[43] The soul functions as a blank canvas upon which sorcerers can explore various elements of Disparity and understanding it is a fundamental expectation for a sorcerer. From there, sorcerors can move onto more advanced variants of their art – such as the Oolacilian spells, which have no obvious connection to souls.

By contrast, pyromancy is the physical methodology, primarily relying on the strength of its actual catalyst – the pyromancy flame.[44] When not in use, we hold this flame within our body, and growing it directly affects our growth in power,[45] leading to stronger fire and thus stronger pyromancies. Unlike other schools of magic, pyromancy draws upon the raw power of fire directly, though the output need not be limited to fire. Despite what the English name suggests, pyromancy is in fact *jujutsu* (呪術), or "spell arts"

43 "By the way, would you like to learn sorcery? You seem to have talent, and I want to return the help I received. Of course, some kind of raw materials are necessary, but if it is something simple, I can teach it. Are you interested?" - Griggs



– "conjury". In other words, this school of magic reflects the role of First Flame as creator, generating elements of Disparity as well as manipulating them. Pyromancy can conjure not only fire, but other elements of nature such as poisons, as the pyromancer Eingyi demonstrates. However, the school still requires us to memorize and practice written spells, suggesting there are degrees of complexity to the art similar to sorcery, and teachers approach it as both a discipline and religion. (*DS3* finally reflects this by having pyromancies additionally scale with both intelligence and faith.)

Faith is otherwise the main prerequisite for miracles, the spiritual methodology. Miracles are generally defined as the gods' power, and commonly taught through stories of their deeds.[46] By memorizing these stories, we can reproduce the effects of a divine power,[47] and the story's level of detail directly affects the resulting power. The most powerful miracles have the longest stories,[48] and abridging these stories lowers both the required faith to perform them and the power that ultimately manifests.[49] Faith is ultimately belief, and belief is our ability to accept validity regardless of evidence. Theoretically, less detail should necessitate more faith. In practice, faith correlates to the belief in the actual power that the story holds. The greater the power, the greater the faith required to make it possible.

Instead, the length of a miracle's story ties into a slightly different concept: imagination. If a picture says a thousand words, then do two thousand words paint a better picture? The ability to form thought and image from even the conceptually abstract is the driving principle behind stories as mediums for miracles' power, and longer stories provide greater detail in recounting events and thereby allow us to more fully conceptualize them. This increases a miracle's potential power at the cost of us easily grasping and retaining the image, in addition to requiring greater faith in the events mentally reconstructed. While this scaling with length is also true for sorcery with intelligence, miracles don't require the subject matter to actually explain the inner workings of the power to increase its potential. The story need only convey the experience itself so that the reader can sufficiently recreate and internalize it – the what versus the how.

That key difference reveals the underlying principle: feelings have power. We engage with stories on an emotional level, and reflect on them through feelings as much as intellect. And it is because these stories resonate on a personal level that faith in their revelation is possible. This spiritual approach to magic differs from the mental and physical approaches seen in sorcery and pyromancy, and yet remains an undeniable aspect of Disparity. Simply put, the relation between soul and reality also involves psychology, and Disparity governs the abstract as well as the actual. Homeward Bone illustrates this, as strong feelings imbue the object with power long after its owner's death.

44 "Flame catalyst that pyromancers of the Great Swamp use. Pyromancers fight with this fire and wield various flame arts.
In order to use pyromancies, it is required to equip a pyromancy flame and memorize pyromancies from spell writings at a bonfire. Also, most pyromancies have a limited number of uses." - Pyromancy Flame

45 "The pyromancy flame is a part of a pyromancer's body. Everyone carefully raises this and raise their own arts. That's why the fire that was given to you is also a part of me. Please take the upmost care of it." - Laurentius

46 "Basic miracle of clergymen. Recovers HP.
A miracle is an art where one learns a story of the gods and prays to receive its blessing. 'Recovery' is the shortest story." - Heal

47 "Catalyst to perform miracles of the gods. It is commonly distributed to the average believer.
In order to use miracles, it is required equip a talisman and memorize miracles from writings from a bonfire. Also, most miracles have a limited number of uses." - Talisman

48 "One of the great miracles used by high-ranking clergymen. Greatly recovers HP.
'Great Recovery' is an enormous story and therefore can be studied by few, but the amount it recovers is more than sufficient for the body of man." - Great Heal

49 "Thing which generalized a great miracle used by high-ranking clergymen for the common people. Greatly recovers HP.
Because it has cut out parts of the story of 'Great Recovery', its number of uses are considerably fewer." - Great Heal Excerpt

In conclusion, Disparity affected the universe in two ways. On the one hand, the world gained difference in being; there is light, thus there is dark. On the other hand, the cosmos gained difference in awareness; there is happiness, thus there is sadness. The powers driving these metaphysical effects are called magic and manipulated to varying degrees by the different schools of arcane thought. No branch is intrinsically superior to the other. Sorcery, pyromancy, and miracles can theoretically recreate the effects of the others' spells with their own methodologies, and sometimes have done so. In the end, ignoring rock and fog, all elements of the universe can be classified as derivatives of the First Flame's power. No matter the subject matter or the approach, they all share the same root. Magic is universal, and with that comes another undeniable reality: there is no divine power.

The Problem of God

In spite of its polytheistic pantheon, *Dark Souls*' most popular religions largely draw upon Christian theology in their view of the divine. To adherents, the gods' power is unknowable providence and miracles are an expression of their grace. To praise miracles is to praise God. But despite these western philosophical sensibilities, divine power's nature is in fact antithetical to them. Miracles aren't wholly different from magic, they are an aspect of it. To worship a god is to worship a branch of magic no more special than any other.

If we were to posit that power as divine, then one could argue that all magic tracing its roots to the First Flame is equally holy. This is close to the actual views of the setting's religions, though the specifics vary due to the individual political and social contexts in which each school of magic is practiced. But is there actually a divine aspect to fire?

While the First Flame undoubtedly changed the universe, it didn't create it, or replace what came before. The rock doesn't disappear, it simply exists in a new context. The universe moves in a specific direction, constituted by difference. There is no longer just rock, but rock either illuminated by fire or hidden in its absence. Naturally, this disqualifies fire as the Creator while potentially qualifying it as the "unmoved mover" of the universe. Though, of course, there was no will to this movement, for the Flame demonstrates no sentience, and cannot even be definitively classified as alive despite unleashing the potential to generate life. The flame may have established causality, but its aseity is debatable. And of course, it is certainly not eternal. Fire simply lacks the qualities to be considered a deity, at least in the Judeo-Christian sense, and can only be conclusively classified as a phenomenon.

But is there a divine will behind the phenomenon? If we define God as a sentient entity existing outside the bounds of reality with omnipotence, then no such being exists in this universe. The so-called gods we are presented with are very much confined by reality both physically and magically. And if there is a God beyond this, there is no evidence to His existence either in the fields of observation or revelation – He remains silent and has allowed His creation to act of its own accord without obvious sign of continued involvement.

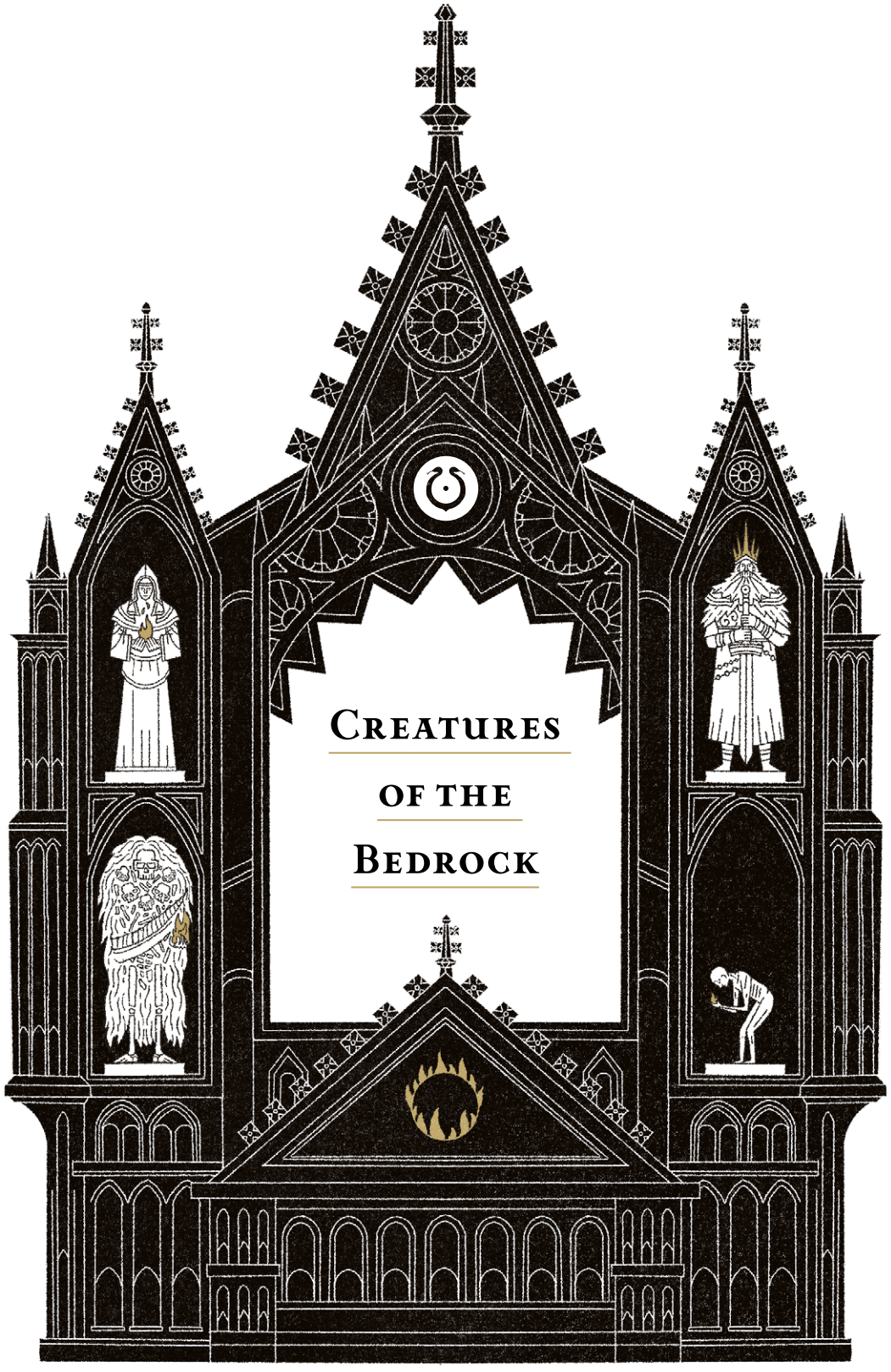
The same lack of evidence applies to any theoretical afterlife. While the terms "heaven" and "hell" pop up multiple times in dialogue, they are almost always a product of the localization. The one actual reference to hell in the Japanese script comes from the Undead merchant describing his homeland for its treatment of him.[50] It may even be literal. *Jigoku* (地獄) refers specifically to an "earth prison", which could hold entirely different connotations for a purely physical world absent an afterlife to those suffering in it. Beyond this isolated mention, there is no evidence that these realms exist as dimensions outside the bounds of reality or as concepts in religious belief. Souls remain with their host bodies even after death until someone takes them, as we witness repeatedly, though it *is* theoretically possible for the soul to be reused in a manner akin to reincarnation. (Another idea explored in later games.)

Even without a Creator or afterlife, the First Flame still came to be and the universe irreversibly changed because of it. We have to accept that such an event occurred and can only speculate as to the reason. Did fire really arise spontaneously, an inexplicable quirk in the universe's infinite existence? Or did something occur deep within the earth that was never observed during that continuous sameness? Whatever the truth, the effect on the Age of Ancients is obvious. And if we cannot go farther back than the beginning, then it is best to plow ahead.

On Reflection

A common theme of the creation account in mythology is bringing order to chaos. In *Dark Souls*, we find quite the opposite, chaos springs forth from order. If nothing else, I think this diametrically-opposed view of creation lends itself to why the game's setting is considered so novel even as it lifts so many more familiar elements from other properties. This is a story where order exists in spite of disorder, not because of it, and everything flows from that principle. The only true constant is the inevitability of change.

50 **"... Actually, this place's quite nice. The Hollows don't care for a withered thing like me. Moreover, I got this girl... and no one's throwing stones. As an Undead, you get me, right? Wasn't your homeland hell...?" - Itinerant Merchant**



Creatures of the Bedrock

Beasts of Stone

The Age of Ancients was largely a period without life, and so the original everlasting dragons were not alive but simply *were*. Miyazaki alludes to this idea in a Game no Shokutaku episode, explaining that the dragons aren't truly alive and thus don't feel pain as we can understand it. He further expands on *Dark Souls*' conception of dragons as "somewhat special" in the *Design Works* interview.

These primordial creatures are in fact denoted by a unique name, though this isn't reflected in the localization. Much like how wyverns are more literally "flying dragons" (飛竜), this race of dragons predating the emergence of life is referred to as "ancient dragons" (古竜), obviously denoting their races' old roots compared to later dragonkin. Subsequent games localize this term as "archdragons" – similar to how the "ancient trees" (古木) were localized as "archtrees" – so I shall use that term.

In the podcast, Miyazaki defines archdragons as "half-living, half-element" which the interview clarifies to be "half-mineral" specifically. This means that they do possess life, but not in the same way as other, actual living things. Thus far, we have discussed "life" in terms of the phenomenon centered around the soul, but there are instances where the game's script or Miyazaki use "life" as shorthand for *biological* creatures – beings who not only have a soul that manifested a will, but also a living body. What makes the body "alive" is that it is comprised of flesh and blood versus non-organic matter. Archdragons, however, are from an era when everything was rock, and are thus inherently different from true life. Miyazaki elaborates by comparing them to Akuma Shogun from the *Kinnikuman* series – a living head fused with an empty suit of armor. As he words it in the *Design Works* interview, this unique bodily composition makes them by nature "transcendental beings"; conscious rock, distinct from biological life.

Fans have argued over what constitutes a member of this primordial species, but the verbiage is clear: there were multiple generations of archdragons, and descending from archdragons doesn't necessarily exclude one from the classification. Kalameet is described as both the "progeny" of the old dragons[1] and their last survivor,[2] and Miyazaki reiterates that the other archdragons we encounter are the survivors of their age's end as well. Indeed, Domhnall refers to the Ancient Stone Dragon, or "stone archdragon" (石の古竜), of Ash Lake as another such survivor[3] even though item descriptions also state it to be a descendant of that very race.[4] The Gaping Dragon too is simply called a descendant,

1 "Oh, you again. What of Kalameet? He is also progeny of the old dragons. Felling him probably won't be easy." - Gough

2 Weapon born from the tail of the one-eyed black dragon Kalameet, last survivor of the unperishing archdragons. One of the rare dragon weapons.
Its obsidian blade is tinged with strong mysterious power, and that power is unleashed with both hands.
- Obsidian Greatsword

3 "Hmm... Well, since you're a good business partner... I don't even know if the rumor's true, but apparently there's a survivor of the old dragons somewhere in this land." - Domhnall

4 Weapon born from the tail of the Stone Archdragon, descendant of the unperishing archdragons of before that sits in Ash Lake. One of the rare dragon weapons.
It is tinged with strong mysterious power, and that power is unleashed with both hands.
- Dragon Greatsword

not "distant" descendant as the localization asserts,[5] yet Miyazaki still uses it as an example of the archdragons as a whole in both the *Design Works* interview and a Playstation.Blog post – the same blogpost where he calls the undead dragon a dead archdragon descendant.

In fact, when discussing both of their designs, the director states that the Gaping Dragon and undead dragon were created to reflect the notion that most archdragons are dead, and what few survive are eaten away by madness – which was certainly true for the bosses at that time of release. And although the Ancient Stone Dragon is clearly sane, that survivor is a "secret" character in an easily-missed optional area and so can be considered an exception to the rule. The same can be said for Kalameet, who was added later on with DLC. This is likely also why the black dragon is called the last everlasting survivor when he can be killed chronologically before the others. The Gaping Dragon and Ancient Stone Dragon were probably not born, or at least discovered by people, during the era when we meet Kalameet, so the scriptwriter played loose with the wording. (Later games reaffirm that there are even more surviving members of the species.)

Despite his anomalous appearance, Seath is also an archdragon according to the Moonlight Greatsword;[6] Miyazaki reiterates this in the *Design Works* interview. There are thus four archdragons featured in-game. And by comparing their traits, we are able to attempt a taxonomy of the species.

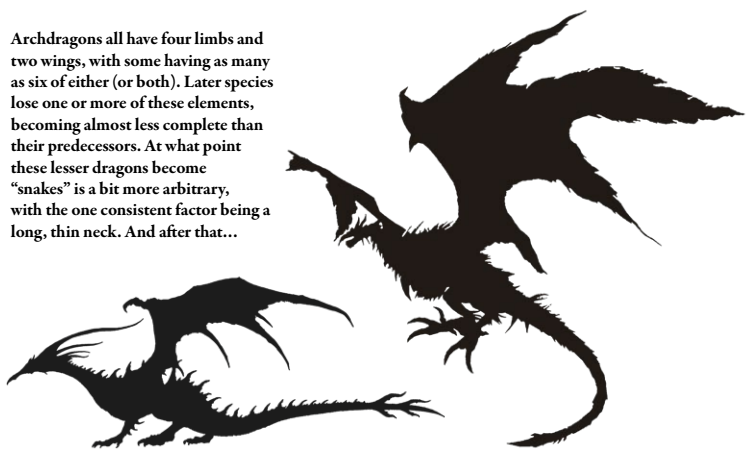
At minimum, all archdragons have a pair of arms accompanied by at least one set of wings, but this far from their most defining feature.

5 Weapon born from the tail of the Voracious Dragon, descendant of the unperishing archdragons that became grotesque. One of the rare dragon weapons.
It is tinged with strong mysterious power, and that power is unleashed with both hands.
- Dragon King Greataxe

6 Weapon born from the tail of the white dragon Seath, the scaleless archdragon who once betrayed his brethren. One of the rare dragon weapons.
It is the magically-powered crystals of Seath, who is the founder of sorcery, and that power is unleashed as a wave of moonlight.
- Moonlight Greatsword

ARCHDRAGON PHYSIOLOGY

Archdragons all have four limbs and two wings, with some having as many as six of either (or both). Later species lose one or more of these elements, becoming almost less complete than their predecessors. At what point these lesser dragons become "snakes" is a bit more arbitrary, with the one consistent factor being a long, thin neck. And after that…



Archdragon Wyvern

Excluding Seath, who is an explicit exception, these dragons also all possess stone scales of "non-death" (不死) which can refer to either undeath or immortality. In essence, their stone bodies make them half-mineral, granting them their permanence, which is why Seath the "Scaleless" is not described as "everlasting" – or to be precise, "unperishing" (朽ちぬ) – in reference to not aging or fading with time. Left alone, members of the species can apparently live forever, but they are still capable of dying in some sense, as the gods' dragon hunts proved.

Yet the archdragons are only "half-living", and didn't even originally possess life. They simply existed as stone beings until, as Miyazaki explains, they were attacked by the "poison of life". With the advent of fire, there was no longer simple *being,* but a state of being alive or dead, and while these stone dragons could never truly be alive with bodies of stone, it is at this juncture that they gained souls to make them half-living. This is irrefutable: all life has a soul, and so dragons too must have souls. The fact that we cannot acquire unique boss souls from dragon bosses is simply a game design choice made in favor of the tail-cutting mechanic, which draws clear inspiration from the sword the god Susanoo-no-Mikoto found within the tail of the dragon Yamata-no-Orochi in Japanese mythology. (Later games drop the tail weapon mechanic entirely in favor of traditional boss souls.) Dragons still provide regular souls when slain, and Priscilla is given both a tail weapon and a boss soul only to complement her unique half-dragon nature.

Archdragons became quasi-living creatures with the emergence of fire and the soul, and can thereby suffer death. But because they are only half-living instead of full-living things like humans, "death" may be a misnomer.

This distinction between "life" and "half-life" is highlighted by followers of the Path of the Dragon, "transcenders" who seek the "perpetuity"[7] of the archdragons' "perfect" form.[8] *Eien* (永遠) refers to permanence, eternity, or immortality, and this perpetuity is explicitly different from life, as even the gods have the "weakness" of being alive and thus are vulnerable to death.[9] However, we can still slay archdragons and their transformed worshippers in a post-fire era, leaving us with two possibilities: either they seek the permanence that archdragons possessed before fire, when they simply existed, or they seek their nonliving stone bodies that will make them immortal while still possessing a soul necessary for life. In either scenario, one cannot reach the true eternal existence from before fire, but painless immortality alone can be considered "transcending" mortal life, and Miyazaki's statements in the aforesaid interviews show that he considers them transcendental beings, even in

7 Scale used to enhance dragon weapons, said to be born from the body of a dragon.
Dragon scales are part of an archdragon's body, and it is said that the transcenders who seek the eternity of the archdragons are searching beyond the ends of the world. - Dragon Scale

8 Stone imbued with the power of the unperishing archdragons. Secret rite of the transcenders who pray to the archdragon and try to approach it. Makes human head into that of a dragon and breathes a dragon's breath.
What the transcenders aim for is the transcendence of life, and for that reason they try to acquire the perfect form of the archdragon. This secret rite is only the gateway to that, but its metamorphosis effect cannot be undone until death. - Dragon Head Stone

9 Art of the transcenders who pray to the archdragon and try to approach it. Life is a weakness, and even the gods who are persons of fire are no exception. The goal of the transcenders is apparently to be different from life. - Dragon Eye

the present era. This distinguishes their "death" from traditional death as experienced by other races, but it is nonetheless still death – Nito makes the undecayed decay with his power over death in the cinematic.

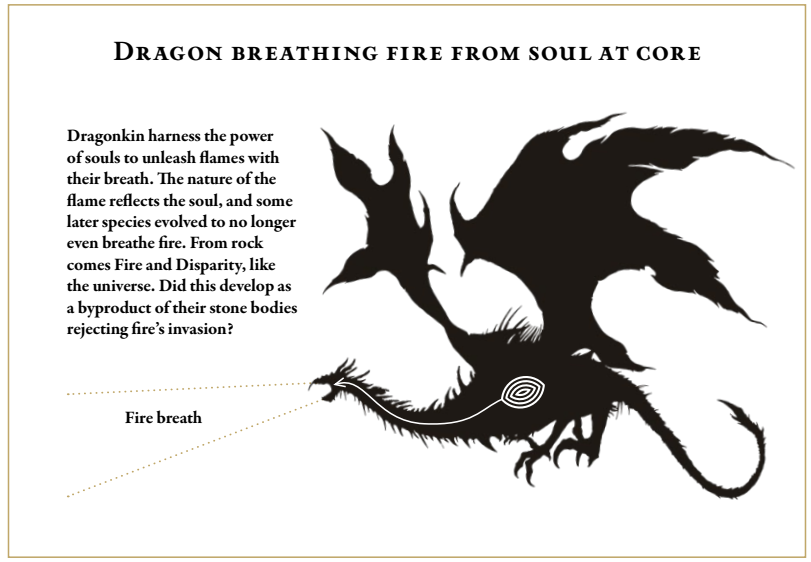
The notion that the archdragons cannot " die" with as much finality as other races finds further support in the undead dragons, more accurately "dragon zombies" (ドラゴンゾンビ). The Undead curse is unique to humans, and popular culture traditionally imagines "zombies" as corpses revived by disease or necromancy. Add to that the dragon zombie's significant weakness to fire, and they have more in common with dead than Undead enemies. There are no obvious signs of necromancy, however, so the archdragons' innate immortality is the most likely cause for their resurrection. The one encountered at the Valley of Drakes was seemingly slain by a party of Astoran knights it killed in turn, losing its lower half to the ravine as the body rotted. However, its residual soul allowed the corpse to eventually revive as a quasi-dead being. Miyazaki said he wanted the zombie's design to convey the sadness of a dying dragon, and it shows.

The archdragons are slow to truly end, but fire guaranteed that they no longer belong in this world. They are beings of rock, represented by a moon that now reflects fire's light. Even so, they still possess that primal power.

The transcender covenant allows us to become a dragon. To begin this process, we obtain stones imbued with the archdragons' power. By then drawing upon this power, our head and body undergo the early stages of metamorphosis; our hands and feet become claws, our tailbone starts sprouting an actual tail, our spine begins growing wings, our face grows horns and a snout, and our skin gains scales. This is merely the "gateway" but nonetheless proves that non-dragons can join the ranks of the ancient creatures, and these dragon powers grow stronger as we collect dragon scales and offer them to the Ancient Stone Dragon the covenant worships.

This dragon sits cross-legged, as if meditating, and throws up its head, arms, and wings when we ascend the ranks, as if performing some shamanistic ritual. This *stone* dragon certainly doesn't need the scales personally, so these gestures imply it to be imbuing their power into the stones in order to strengthen our draconification. Dragonstones are even referred to as a "secret rite", and the covenant is evidently cult worship.

These practices mirror Zen Buddhism in its emphasis on meditation, direct experience over informed doctrine, and living out the insights of enlightenment for the benefit of others to observe. To this end, its dragon leader has gained profound insight that encourages it to ignore violence, such as if we decide to cut off its tail, and share its power with human worshippers. The beast doesn't feel pain as we imagine it, so



non-lethal harm is inconsequential, yet this is still a stark contrast from the violent behavior most dragons exhibit, suggesting that this particular dragon has realized its race is nigh-extinct and desires to repopulate through its human worshippers' transformations. This would also explain why our draconification makes us resemble this dragon specifically, as the root of the dragon stones' power comes from it, only to later be built upon with the power of other dragons' scales. Regardless of its motives, the covenant shows that the dragons are capable of using the magic power of rock in more than just a physical sense.

In fact, dragons were most likely the first magic users by virtue of being the only beings in existence before fire created life as we know it. Not only do they naturally possess the power of their mineral bodies, but also seem to be in-tune with their original environment. We can receive Dragon Eye from the Ancient Stone Dragon, which is described as an art rather than the literal "eye of an archdragon" (古竜の瞳). This art allows those possessing dragon scales to manifest a unique summon sign featuring a grey eye immersed in a fog, indicating that the dragon who teaches this technique knows how to use the power of fog to cross through time and space. The art's name further suggests that the power originates from the dragon's actual eyes, perhaps developed as a result of the species being immersed in fog for the entirety of the Age of Ancients. The archdragons must have learned to see through the fog and thereby time and space. (*DS2* reinforces this innate knowledge of fog magic, when a giant transformed into an archdragon provides a mass of fog used to cross space-time.)

Experience in Difference

The perpetuity of the dragons' mineral-based bodies is a trait shared with the stone archtrees and crags that also predate fire. As a result, they all share a natural resistance to fire and most magic. But, of course, not even the archdragons were immune to fire's Disparity, which affected the beasts beyond just giving them life. For one, it prompted their ability to breathe fire. The First Flame is the first occurrence of fire, so this ability cannot predate it, and was likely a byproduct of the dragons acquiring souls. The power of fire directly permeated their preexisting stone bodies and is expressed in the race releasing flame itself as easily as breathing. The fire unleashed by the Obsidian Greatsword (and later the Dragonhead Shield of *DS3*) reinforces this notion.

Disparity also caused the dragons to evolve, albeit in a manner distinct from our conventional understanding of the term. Miyazaki explains that the "poison of life" that led to the archdragons' decline refers to things like action and emotion. The Gaping Dragon, for example, was warped by "appetite" in particular, resulting in its head rapidly degenerating so that it could ingest food directly into its body at the cost of all its other faculties – even its fire breath has been replaced with a deadly belch of gastric acid. Emotions have power in *Dark Souls*, so it is not surprising that they can warp the physical form.

Given time, natural evolution is not an unimaginable development either. While we cannot confirm the existence of cells or genetics in *Dark Souls*, it is clear that the same general concept applies: the trees of Lordran, for instance, are distant descendants of the archtrees, hence their hardier nature compared to flora beyond the land.[10] When archdragons gained life, they gained the possibility to procreate and be moved to do so by carnal desires they had previously never experienced. In fact, they must reproduce sexually since the race remains nigh extinct into the present era when scattered, an issue easily resolved if they didn't require a partner. (Later games introduce dragon eggs, typically produced when reptiles mate.)

Indeed, we must consider the underlying function of sexual reproduction in this world. All life in *Dark Souls* must ultimately be anchored in a soul. Hence, insemination is probably a method for transferring souls, alongside or in place of genetic information. This is demonstrated by the Fair Lady, who needs the humanity offered to her in order to lay her eggs. As with DNA, both parents will have unique souls, parts of which combine to create an entirely new soul which will

10 Round wooden shield made in the land of Lordran. An old symbol, twin blue snakes, is depicted on it.
The trees of this land are distant descendants of the great trees of rock, and because they inherit their properties slightly, they tend to have a high cut rate against magic.
- Caduceus Round Shield

11 For a failure of a dragon, the snake, which is a symbol of the Undead, is conversely also known as an extremely greedy creature which swallows prey even larger than its body whole.
The silver ring made in the shape of such a snake likewise has an effect that increases the souls absorbed when the equipper defeats an enemy. - Covetous Silver Serpent Ring

then go on to influence the development of the offspring. The child will thus have similarities to the parents while still being unique, and these differences will only compound with the generations. Add to that the random nature of Disparity – providing the unpredictability and the occasional wild variation – and as such, evolution is inevitable.

In the case of the archdragons, early generations continued to possess many of the same traits as the first, but as they continued to procreate, the species became increasingly diverse. Wyverns, which the localization sometimes erroneously calls drakes, are among their distant descendants. The arms of these "flying dragons" have merely fused with their wings, yet they are considered "failures" as dragons. The wyverns seen at the Valley of Drakes possess dragon scales, so this failure is not for *lack* of their ancestors' stone power. Rather, these wyverns' moon affinity must be weakening, meaning their bodies have come to possess more similarities to flesh and blood creatures than their stone-bodied ancestors. As dragons have slowly evolved, Disparity has gradually shed them of their pre-fire heritage, diminishing their rock affinity until it has become a mere shadow of the power held by their ancestors. This is why the wyvern-derived Drake Sword manifests only a small fraction of the power unleashed by the Dragonking Greataxe or Dragon Greatsword.



They aren't alone, however, as the snake has also become a symbol for failing to be a dragon.[11] This is rooted in more than just metaphor, as exemplified by the hydras. These multi-headed aquatic "lake beasts" (湖獣) are only found in Darkroot Garden and Ash Lake, the latter of which must be their natural habitat given that the former's lake doesn't exist during the fall of Oolacile. Therefore, hydras are most likely descended from dragons but adapted to suit the watery environment. As a result of this unique evolution, the giant creature breathes water instead of flame. Nonetheless, these snakes possess dragon scales, so they are still fairly closely related to the archdragons and their distant descendants.

Despite also possessing scaly skin, the snake-men encountered in Sen's Fortress and the Duke's Archives never provide the stone scales, and

thus must be more distant relatives. (*DS3* later confirms their relation.) Although portrayed as a forgetful and generally unintelligent species, they are the only dragonkin dressed in ragged clothes and ornate jewelry and thus do have their own culture, albeit a primitive one. The race consists of two distinct subspecies. The typical snake-man functions as a warrior,[12] while the leaner, four-armed cobra variant is labeled as higher-ranking. This is probably due to that second set of arms. Recall that the wyverns have had their front limbs and wings fused together, distinguishing their race from the ancients. If snakes are even more distantly related, then this second set of arms likely derive from wings, making the cobra subspecies closer to true dragons than their two-armed counterparts, which is precisely why they hold a higher position in snake-men society. These venerable snake-men additionally cast magic, making their role similar to that of shamans or priests in other tribal cultures.



Even the basilisk, though never classified as a snake, is a lizard with the peculiar power to convert biological matter to stone. We only encounter the beast in sewers or the hollowed-out archtrees in Ash Lake, so it is likely another distant relative of the archdragons originating from the humid Lower World. Though not stone-bodied themselves, the basilisks have evolved to use that ancestral power. This isn't their only defense mechanism either. Their giant eyeballs – seemingly the bulbous Eyes of Death we harvest from their corpse – are blank and unblinking while a second, smaller pair are clearly visible beneath them. Taken together, and the larger set are clearly vestigial eyes used to intimidate predators, making the basilisk the outcome of a curious evolution induced by the effects of fire, life, and death. Their petrifying breath is simply the vestige of moon power.

Disparity has created a broad family tree with a variety of traits for dragonkin, but since none of these descendants are described as "everlasting", it seems that even those among them that still retain their ancestor's scales only have them in small quantities. But are reptiles the only animals to trace their lineage to the archdragons?

12 **Bloodstained, single-edged greatsword. Weapon of choice of the snake-men that slither around Sen's Old Castle.**

It is considerably heavy, and sufficiently swinging it with the body of man will probably be difficult. - Man-serpent Greatsword

It is easy to overlook the peculiar beginning of life in *Dark Souls*. The opening cinematic rushes us through the world's origins, so it is easy to accept events in their spontaneity. Fire emerged, thereby life, thereby animals. But that is not entirely true. The universe already possessed the entities that would become the basis for life. There were giant trees for flora, everlasting dragons for fauna, and grey crags for both to flourish in. Just add fire, and this setup was perfect for creating an ecosystem.

While the Tomb of the Giants is ostensibly a "giant graveyard" (巨人墓場), skeletons of the giants we are familiar with aren't its only residents. As we head deeper into the caverns, we face skeleton beasts that resemble giants, but with broader shoulders, thicker limbs, more pronounced jaws, razor-sharp teeth, and small tails. These are not the "civilized" giants; they are true beasts and behave as such. Given the nature of the tomb and its residents, the only explanation is that this is an ancestral burial ground for the giants' ancient precursors.

And littered across the tomb is a third type of skeleton unlike the other two. While still retaining a humanoid element, the skull's pronounced jaw has become a snout, the teeth have become a set

The circulatory system and the soul



The soul centers in the heart, producing blood which circulates the life energy throughout the body. When the blood flow halts, the vitalizing souls within gradually dissipate, causing the dead body to decay. The soul is very much the lifeblood to beings in a post-fire world, and the same principle can be applied to other key bodily functions involving fluid. For example, souls can operate just the head, so brains may use brain fluid to create another large soul concentration for higher-cognitive functions. Souls must also be transferred through some medium during sexual reproduction in order to be producing unique souls in the offspring. Life revolving around the soul truly puts new perspective on our existence...

of sharp fangs, and the cranial area has become slightly elongated. The body has four limbs ending in claws instead of fingers and toes, and its stance wildly differs from both bipedal giants and their beast ancestors. These creatures even lack a distinct pelvic region, instead having a continuous ribcage akin to that of a snake.

Taken together, there is a clear evolutionary history to these remains. The beast skeleton is the ancestral link between the modern giants and these serpentine humanoids, which seem to have gone extinct as the giant lineage evolved into its present, bipedal form. The giants as we know them seem to have evolved from a serpentine ancestor, likely tracing their lineage to actual serpents and thereby dragons.

If dragonkin can be born without scales like Seath and have bipedal forms like the snake-men, why can't these traits aggregate in another branch of the tree? In fact, if giants descend from dragons, why can't the same be true for the other humanoid races and, more broadly, all life in the animal kingdom? The cinematic mentions a "They" that were born from the Dark. This "They" is specifically "several animals"[13] (幾匹か), implying that the now "civilized" races which acquired the Lord Souls were originally primitive creatures akin to the lions, hawks, hornets, and dragons. This language also implies that both humans and gods were born from the Dark despite the former being explicitly labeled and demeaned by the latter for this very point.[14] This must mean that "darkness" in this instance, is distinct from the Dark to which mankind traces its heritage.

Rock that isn't in the presence of fire is, logically speaking, in the dark. Whereas the cinematic portrays the archdragons among the crags and archtrees of the Lower World, it shows the First Flame emerging deeper underground, far below them. However, "They" approached fire, meaning that they came from where fire was absent, thus the dark. In other words, the dragons' lineage probably branched out into all modern animals and these myriad races were "born from the dark" in that they traced their origins to the crags and caverns where fire's light didn't reach. And in the course of migrating to survive, they happened upon the First Flame, and eventually the Lord Souls.

This evolution of animals parallels the evolution of plants from archtrees – culminating in animated forms of arboreal life like "moving" trees and tree-men. This may be the same evolutionary track that fungi like the mushroom-men emerged from. They are found flourishing at the bottom of the Great Hollow, suggesting their race is of similar age to other native life there. The cinematic doesn't mention

13 And then, some animals which were born from the Dark were captivated by fire and found the Souls of Kings. - Narrator

14 "Impious one born in Dark… an eternal curse upon you cur…" - Gwyndolin

15 Standard pyromancy of pyromancers of the Great Swamp. Throws a fireball.

Because the fireball possesses attack power of the fire attribute, it is especially effective against living things that fear fire like flesh and blood Undead or beasts. - Fireball

a potential fungal progenitor, and their presence in Darkroot Garden may indicate relation to its other animated flora. This lack of their own biological kingdom is reinforced by them possessing resin, indicating that their bodies secrete substances typically exclusive to plants.

This transition from the half-soul, half-rock archdragons to true life makes sense given fire's effect upon the universe at large. Stone scales gradually evolved into flesh and skin, meaning that the soul must permeate living bodies to a greater degree compared to the nonliving bodies of archdragons. Both can be affected by Disparity and grow and change, but one far more than the other as demonstrated by true life's propensity to age. In fact, we can infer that it is because meat, or wood for trees, is so conducive to change that it is so easily burned by flames, radical change which earns the fear of the fleshy creatures attracted to it.[15] But how did the power of Disparity cause this gradual softening in eternal rock?



If semen functions as a physical medium for transferring the soul in sexual intercourse, perhaps the same can be said for other biological fluids. Blood is mainly seen in animals, but it is also possessed by the mushroom-men as well as entities with nonliving bodies like archdragons. There is only one other commonality between them: they all bear souls. Blood has often been considered the currency of the soul, and losing it draws us closer to death, thereby tying it intimately to life. This suggests that blood is yet another physical medium of the soul, produced directly by it even in nonliving things to affect its vessel. In the case of animals, blood circulates throughout the entire body constantly, allowing the soul to constantly permeate the body. The dragons' stone bodies evolved to specialize in this function much like how the Gaping Dragon specialized in eating. This also implies that the heart, which produces and pumps blood, is where the soul is largely concentrated in this biological system; the proverbial seat of the soul.

The final notable consequence of Disparity is community. The archdragons seen in the opening moments of the cinematic are scattered

and solitary. We learn of no dragon nation or even tribe with which they share kinship. This holds true even up to the present era, where most dragons we encounter survive just fine by themselves, though this behavior may be more by necessity than by choice. However, the Lords challenged the dragons collectively, and they fight as one force in the cinematic.[16] This is emphasized by Seath, who betrays his fellow dragons during the same sequence, an act of treachery that can only occur if they are in fact a united side in the conflict and have fostered some sense of community. Therefore, Disparity meant that the archdragons became at



least loosely aligned and cognizant of each other as kin. This solidarity can be traced to the intrinsic codependence of sexual reproduction for the continuation of their species, as well as emotional sociability.

Animals group up to better their chances of survival, but dragons aren't mere animals. Seath demonstrates that archdragons are fairly intelligent, capable of communication, and even have names. Whether their intellect predates fire or resulted from it, the race had the potential to live as a far more organized society. And yet, there are no signs of them ever having a developed civilization.

The only explanation for the archdragons' unambitious development as a people is that they simply didn't feel threatened. Their race was immortal and remained the apex predator even after fire's advent. The power of primordial rock plus their new ability to breathe flame left them unmatched for eons. If they required sustenance, it wouldn't be too difficult to acquire. If they required companionship, their race had plenty to mingle with. They had always existed one way, and there was no need to change more than they were compelled to. Competition begets innovation, and without it the ancients lacked the urgency to radically develop. It is perhaps for that reason that it wasn't the powerful ancients who founded civilization but their powerless, distant descendants.

Contrast with the present era, where dragons are perceived as a menace – a source of awe and fear for the populace. Knight King

16 The first dead, Nito. The Witch of Izalith and the Daughters of Chaos. King of the Sun's Light Gwyn and his knights. And the pygmy none know about. They acquired the power of Kings and challenged the archdragons to battle. - Narrator

17 Shield of a knight of unknown name. Likely that of a high-ranking knight of Astora.

Since it is one of the fine quality blue shields tinged with magic power, the shield with the dragon crest has a high fire cut rate in particular.
- Dragon Crest Shield

Rendal is well regarded in human society, otherwise known as the world of man (人の世界 or 人の世), in part, for his encounter with a giant wyvern. Humans also incorporate dragons into their noble crests and equipment designed specifically to counter the beasts.[17] The aggression mirrors European folklore, but may well be the result of the dragon hunts and not representative of their typical behavior during the preceding peacetime. In other words, had the war between the Lords and archdragons not occurred, there may never have been the scarcity or enmity needed to result in conflict on the Upper World. But some might argue that such a clash between beings of different eras was simply a matter of course.



Sages of the New Order

The so-called primordial serpents are actually "world serpents" (世界の蛇), harkening to Jormungandr. Norse mythology dictates that this singular "world serpent" (世界蛇) will herald Ragnarök by releasing its tail from its bite, tying back to the ouroboros as a symbol of nature's infinite cycle of creation, destruction, and rebirth. This fits well with Kaathe's declaration that a world serpent seeks the "correct" age for the universe. They act as wise men who attempt to lead the world along its natural path forward.[18] Kaathe makes mention of the world's "logic"[19] (理), which refers to an underlying principle to the universe in Confucianism and Buddhism. Frampt insists on continuing fire, but Kaathe reveals the logical fate of the universe to be Dark, for what is more common sense than fire eventually fading and leaving behind only darkness?[20] It is the apocalyptic death and rebirth of the world, from fire to dark, that the world serpents desire.

While their Japanese name negates any connotation that they existed from the beginning of time, we can still infer the world serpents to be fairly old since they possess profound knowledge about the underlying mechanics of the universe. Although they are called serpents, they have humanoid heads, scaleless skin, and possibly limbs given the widening at the base of their necks, though this part of their model isn't visible in-game (though statues in *DS3* do depict them as humanoid or saurian). Given all this, they may be a branch of the bipedal races' family tree, perhaps even a common ancestor. Whatever their exact relation to dragons, the snakes are still close enough to be considered "failures", and show clear respect for their ancient forebears.

We can feed Frampt various items in exchange for souls, with their soul value seemingly reflecting his personal feelings – things he despises most receiving a value of 1. Among them, he shows a particular bias for items derived from dragons. The only exceptions are the Moonlight Greatsword derived from Seath and the Lifehunt Scythe, a weapon that harms the wielder and likely any serpent trying to swallow it – though the anomalous value of 14 suggests his struggle with the decision, as well as digestion. This, as well as the fact that he devalues the Iron Golem installed with a dragon bone, implies that these serpents have a great deal of love and respect for their powerful ancestors. Kaathe also refers to Seath as the "traitor", an overtly negative spin on the paledrake's defection to Lords' side during the dragon hunts.[21] Some have suggested that the serpents act to avenge the archdragons' defeat, but this personal attachment to their heritage doesn't seem to affect their professional pursuit for the world's progress above anything else, based on their dealings with other races.

18 "... Greetings, Undead brave. I am a world serpent, Darkstroking Kaathe. The one who guides you humans and teaches you the truth." - Kaathe

19 "... But, the king, Gwyn, feared the dark. He feared the end of fire, feared man that were persons of Dark, feared the King of Dark who would be born amongst man, feared the logic of the world. That's why he linked the fire and bound leading man to his own sons. So that you humans forget everything, go senile, and don't birth the King of Dark." - Kaathe

20 "So, I will tell you the truth openly. Once, at the beginning of fire, the ancestor of you humans found a fourth soul after the old Kings. The Dark Soul. The ancestor of you humans acquired the Dark Soul and waited for after fire. Eventually fire goes out and only dark remains. In that case, it would be an age of you humans, of Dark." - Kaathe

21 "Very well. Next, just fill that vessel and open the gate to Gwyn. Grave King Nito, the Witch of Izalith, and also that traitor, the white dragon Seath. Gather their souls and offer them up to that vessel. Then, the gate will open... and after that, kill Gwyn." - Kaathe

There is an association between snakes and greed, but it may be a false stereotype. Neither world serpent we meet bears obvious signs of avarice, and the symbol chiefly signifies the Undead, and thereby humans, who are often characterized as greedy. In turn, the association of humans with snakes may be a result of the primordial serpents' support for man and the Dark, support which directly correlates to the serpents' adherence to the logic of the universe. If another race had found the Dark Soul, or the Dark was not the consequence of fire's light, the serpents would have most likely never associated with mankind. Their support for the Dark isn't simply some personal vendetta against the light. Indeed, they were likely aligned with the gods before they shifted their support to man.



Both Frampt and Kaathe are extremely familiar with Gwyn. Frampt, of course, is regarded as the Lord of Sunlight's friend and ally,[22] but Kaathe is intimately aware of the Great Lord's mindset and actions preceding the firelinking, details too specific to be written off as secondhand knowledge. Kaathe knew Gwyn, and what transpired in the years leading up to his "death". Likewise, Frampt's sincere devotion would have required extensive contact to build up. It seems unlikely then that the world serpents have always been the gods' enemies. They were, at the very least, neutral arbiters observing gods and humans and providing their input as necessary. Frampt invokes his species as a moral authority to sanction murder,[23] and he is respected by god-fearing men as a sage, or "elder", in cut dialogue,[24] implying that the world serpents were an established and valued part of civilization.

The primordial serpents simply seek the world's natural evolution, which ultimately means fire going out and leaving behind darkness in its wake. Naturally, this requires that fire flare up and light all around it in the first place. For the serpents to support the logical outcome of dark, they must have also supported fire's logical domination over the cosmos following its inception. For it is only with fire that dark casts its shadow. Kaathe is critical of Gwyn for delaying the Age of Dark, but he never once suggests that fire itself should have never dominated the world.

22 "Oh, you. Are you the one who rang the Bells of Awakening? I am a world serpent, Kingseeker Frampt. A close friend of Great King Gwyn." - Frampt

23 "Killing them and stealing their souls, the world serpent approves as the correct course of action. Pay it no mind. Don't go astray." - Frampt

24 "You rang the Bells of Awakening and received Elder Frampt's mission, right? How wonderful. I have expectations of you." - Oscar



Therefore, the world serpents must have at one point supported the gods as harbingers of the Age of Fire in the same way that they currently support humans bringing about the Age of Dark. It was only *natural* for the gods to overtake the race of a bygone era, even if that race were the serpents' own revered ancestors; the serpents may have even incited the gods to war.

If we kickstart the Age of Dark, the world serpents continue to bow to us as their king,[25] ruling out the notion that their actions are part of some devious ploy to manipulate us. Indeed, their weakness to Artorias' holy sword proves them to have already embraced the Dark, showing that they turned their attention toward mankind and the inevitable path to come well before Frampt decided to betray them. There is no reason to continue the façade at this point if simply ending fire was our only use to them. Rather, they desire the world be led by a singular ruler who rightfully commands the dominant power. They advise and provide, not use and discard.

With these motives in mind, it is no surprise that friction arose when fire began to fade and Gwyn desperately attempted to delay the inevitable. The serpents aren't against fire itself, but are certainly against Gwyn "illogically" trying to delay the natural course of the world when it didn't suit him.[26] And so, they realigned themselves with the full expectation that mankind would succeed the gods as rulers of the world. This led to the irreparable divide between serpents like Kaathe, and Gwyn, much like Jormungandr being the archenemy of the Nordic thunder god Thor. But Frampt "forgot logic" and decided to support Gwyn's attempts to perpetuate fire.[27] Whether he actually came to believe that the current age was ultimately worth preserving or had simply become devoted enough to Gwyn to respect his "dying wish", the snake betrayed his kin and supported fire's continuation.

This defection is most obvious by Frampt giving minimum value to the Dark Hand, which Kaathe provides to humans aligned with the Dark and against Gwyn's Age of Fire. Frampt has a surprisingly positive disposition toward numerous items connected to the Dark, even overvaluing other items used by Darkwraiths like Cracked Red Eye Orbs, suggesting that he retains his fellow serpents' overall support for the Dark in principle. Besides the Dark Hand, Frampt slightly devalues items related to Manus, whose revival and subsequent destruction is directly attributed to Kaathe tempting Oolacile toward the Dark. Therefore, his disfavor for these items directly correlates to personal

25 "It is wonderful you have returned, my King. Both I, Kaathe, and Frampt shall serve you. We come together to serve you. Well then, a true Dark to the world… my King…" - Kaathe

26 "Listen, Undead brave. I, Kaathe, shall tell you the correct mission. Kill the currently-going-out king Gwyn, who links the fire contrary to logic, and then become the fourth King and bring about the Age of Dark." - Kaathe

27 "… I am a world serpent. One who seeks the correct age, and its king. But, another serpent, Frampt, forgot logic and fell to befriending the king Gwyn." - Kaathe

28 "Fool… the likes of you can't be an Undead hero. Enough… I shall now sleep and await awakening once more…" - Frampt

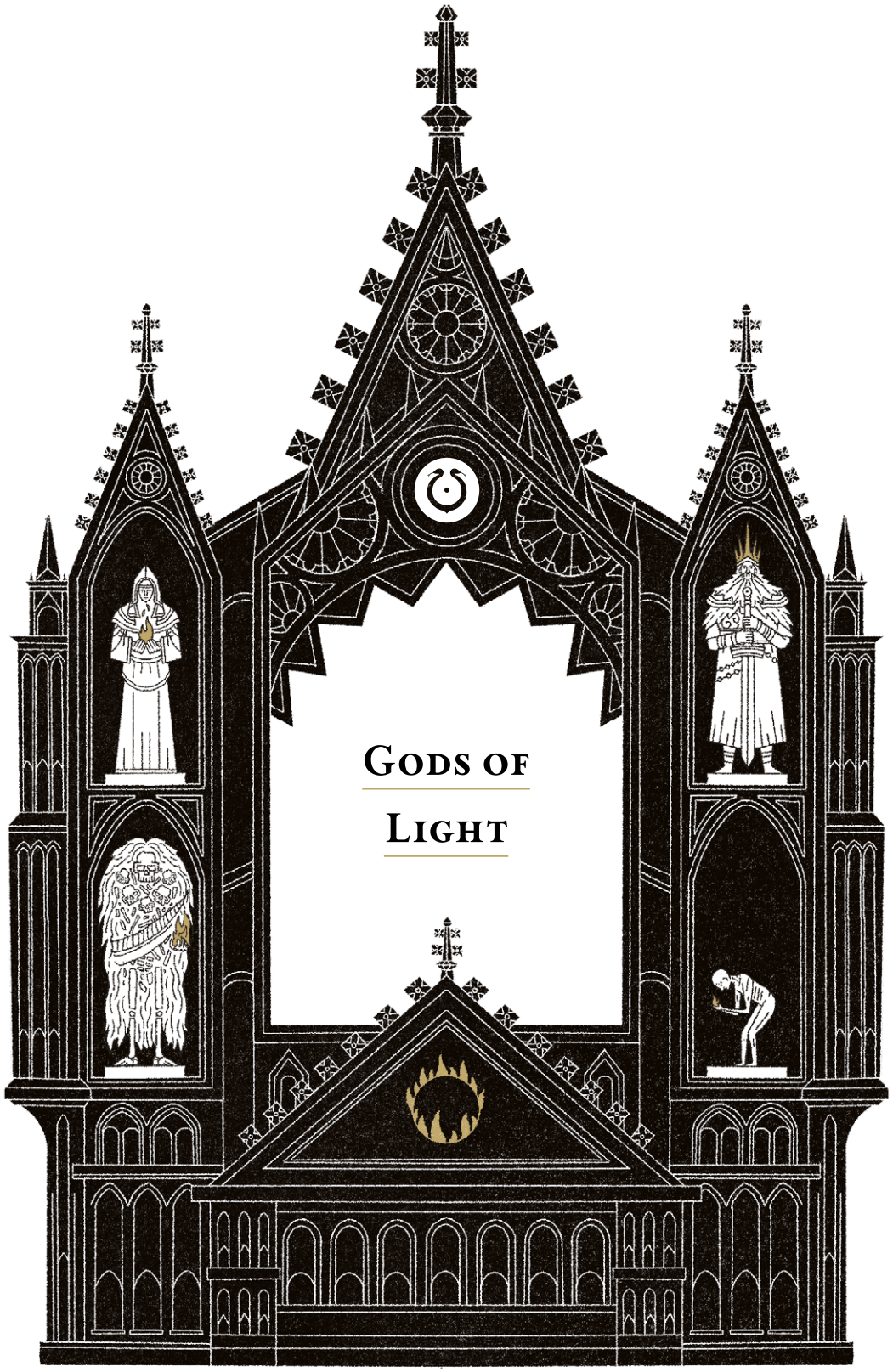
animosity toward Kaathe, who actively resists the gods and their new direction for the world. Simply put, Frampt has a personal slant for Gwyn and thereby against Kaathe, no matter how illogical the position.

He isn't the only one Frampt views in a negative light. All items obviously connected to Seath and Smough are also given a minimum value, which ties into their negative relationship with Gwyn. Evidently, somehow betraying Gwyn or just earning his disfavor is an easy way to evoke Frampt's ire, which he expresses should we go off-script ourselves.[28] This contrasts his overall positive disposition toward items connected to the gods – especially Gwyn, whose soul he offers double the value the item itself provides when consumed. The only real exception appears to be Lloyd, who he feels indifferent about. The serpent also demonstrates a generally negative disposition toward Artorias and Ornstein, which should come as no surprise; the former failed his mission and became corrupted by the Abyss while the latter willingly associates with Smough (and is later revealed in *DS3* to have abandoned his post).

These subtle yet overt biases again discount the notion that Frampt is somehow feigning his allegiance to Gwyn as part of an aforementioned ploy by the world serpents, and yet he does return to the fold should we kickstart the Age of Dark. This reflects more on Frampt's personal integrity than anything else. At worst, he refuses to go down with the ship when he sees that fire's survival is beyond hope. At best, his rebellion from the others was a matter of personal loyalty to Gwyn and the age's actual survival is irrelevant to him. In either case, he is a hypocrite and doesn't represent the world serpents as a whole, though it must have been useful for the gods to have one of the primordial serpents in their corner as a moral authority. An internal dispute amongst the self-styled sages over such basic ideological principles was no doubt eagerly seized upon by Gwyn. Indeed, divide and conquer seems to be a recurrent tactic in the Lord of Sunlight's long history.

On Reflection

Miyazaki describes the dragons as a quasi-fourth pillar to the game's setting, leveraging their unique conception in *Dark Souls* to depict mighty beasts at their lowest point. Even the most powerful can fall. And because of this, the dragons serve not only as a symbol for what has already happened but also as a foreshadowing of what is to come.



Gods of Light

Into the Light

The "gods" of *Dark Souls* aren't truly deities as traditionally imagined in monotheistic theology, but one of many races born as a result of the world's evolution, looking and acting much like the humans who revere them. Yet unlike the Nordic Aesir or Greek Olympians, these gods are no more divine than their worshipers. They are bound by the same laws of the universe as mortal kind, and their dominion over elements of nature or society – such as McLoyf serving as a god of both alcohol and medicine[1] – reflect career choices, interests and behavior rather than innate roles in the cosmos. They are feared and respected as deities solely for their immense magical power and willingness to share it. And even that power is borrowed from the First Flame, true creator of the universe.

Instead of a state of being, godhood in *Dark Souls* is a state of prestige. In Anor Londo – whose pantheon is almost always the reference for "the gods" – one can marry into godhood and lose it just as easily. "God" is essentially a title conceived to elevate this one race and individuals within it above others, similar to how peerage separates upper and lower castes in aristocracies. Yet some gods continue to be worshipped by human followers even after their official expulsion from the pantheon. And, when beyond Anor Londo's influence, humans end up creating imagined gods. (Later games retroactively deify even humans.) Simply put, a god can only be a god if people consider them so, and the "gods" of Anor Londo have worked hard to ensure that *that* is how they are perceived. Big Hat Logan is a pariah in part because he denies their godhood and views their magic as "mysteries" in his pursuit of rational knowledge.

There are multiple characters who are evidently not human but never expressly stated to be gods either – evidently part of the same race as the gods, perhaps even descending from divine lineage, but not necessarily gods themselves. This precludes us from using "gods" to refer to the race as a whole, meaning a more universal term is required. The actual gods encountered in-game vary in size seemingly arbitrarily, perhaps as an artistic choice. However, most are player-sized or slightly larger; and the "pygmies" and "giants" were apparently named relative to this apex race. And so, I refer to their species as "medials" and the specific subset which controls their societies and governments as "gods" to differentiate the two. Most gods are medials, but not all medials are gods.

The medials didn't just spontaneously appear after fire manifested and immediately find the Lord Souls, despite what the opening cinematic

1 "Coin made with copper. The center has the profile of the God of Alcohol and Medicine, Old Man McLoyf.
Even though a copper coin is moderately valuable in the world of man, it has little meaning in Lordran, where souls are the currency.
Still, not throwing it away is because of the hope to return to the world of man someday, right?" - Copper Coin

may convey. Gwyn has an uncle, and therefore parents, meaning at least one generation of medials precedes him. And their race is most likely an offshoot or subspecies of giant – Nito is located "where the gods rest" deep within the Tomb of the Giants,[2] yet Lordran is explicitly Gwyn's birthplace.[3] Why would the oldest graveyard for gods be found among the graves for their slaves?

If giants have an evolutionary history linked to serpents, then they can also have an evolutionary future. One of the peculiar skeletons, found in Ash Lake, is a massive skull resembling a giant, but with horns and fangs more resembling a dragon. Clearly, there are other branches to the giants' evolutionary tree, the medials among them. (*DS3* confirms that such horned giants actually still exist.)

By the time that Gwyn's generation does emerge, however, civilization is tribal at best. The Daughters of Chaos have worn their gold-hemmed black cloak since before the Age of Fire,[4] meaning that the attire predates the discovery of the Lord Souls that mark the age's beginning. This tattered, patchwork, and shoeless robe helps resist poisons and similar hazards, suggesting that the medials originally lived simple lives dealing with commonplace, natural threats – much like beasts.

That is, until the Lord Souls were found.

A Lord Soul is literally a "soul of kings" (王のソウル), and Quelana indicates that the four Lords became the first kings in history as a result of finding that power near the First Flame.[5] In other words, the medials lacked the capability to actually establish dominion over anything up until that point. Their major accomplishments as a society occur only *after* finding the Lord Souls. Prior to this, the medials were still "animals", closer to their distant dragon ancestors than people.

The cinematic introduces Nito, the Witch of Izalith, Gwyn, and the furtive pygmy in that order, but we can only confirm that the latter's placement corresponds to the order in which they found their respective Lord Soul. Since Gwyn ultimately ruled over his tribe uncontested, Nito and Izalith were likely from separate tribes, or had left the larger community of medials well before finding their Lord Souls. Regardless of when, each in turn discovered fire and became "captivated" by it, according to the cinematic's Japanese subtitles. Having only known the darkness that they were born into, the unique sensory experience drew them closer to the flame, and this fascination eventually led them to discover the Lord Souls nearby. Shriveled humanoids mindlessly loiter around the flame in the cinematic, so it is likely that these "animals" resided around the area for some time before finally discovering the power of kings.

2 "Miracle known only to servants of Grave King Nito, the first dead. Thrusts up Grave King swords anywhere in the surroundings.
Nito is in the innermost depths of the Giant Graveyard where the gods rest, quietly governs all death, and awaits the 'Eyes of Death' his servants bring." - Gravelord Sword Dance

3 "Oh, you! Seems you're not Hollow, somehow. I am Solaire of Astora. As you can see, I am an adherent of the God of the Sun. I became Undead and came to this land where Great King Gwyn was born to search for my own sun!" - Solaire

4 Garments of Craana of Izalith, one of the Daughters of Chaos and a founder of pyromancy.
This gold-hemmed black hood has been her garment since before the Age of Fire, and it protects against fire as well as has strong resistance to poisons and the like. - Gold-Hemmed Black Hood

5 "... Say, you. I have a request, but... My mother, Izalith, was once one of the first Kings. She found a soul by the First Flame and became a King with its power." - Quelana



Each Lord Soul had a different affinity, determining its bearer's power. After acquiring his Lord Soul, Gwyn became known as the Lord of Sunlight or "king of the sun's light" (太陽の光の王); thus, he acquired the Light Soul. Gwyn's own soul is described as giant, the "most powerful soul",[6] so the Light Soul is likely synonymous with Gwyn's actual spirit. Souls can be amalgamated, and Gwyn conjures sunlight magic without a visible catalyst. If the Light Soul's power is already part of him, then he can naturally use himself as that catalyst.[7]

At the same time, Gwyn and his Light Soul are repeatedly depicted as separate entities, suggesting that at least fragments were regularly kept separate from his physical being. Regardless, we require both Nito and the Witch of Izalith's Lord Souls and two fragments of the Light Soul to prove that we can measure up to Gwyn's soul, making him the strongest of the four Lords.

While Gwyn mostly hoards this power, he does share it amongst his tribe. Item descriptions establish Gwyn as having given his power to both the "gods"[8] and his "clan", implying the two to be one and the same. The Dark Ember likewise asserts that the tribe of the gods are weak to the occult element. Still, this doesn't include Nito, Quelana, or any medial outside Anor Londo. The only commonality among Anor Londo's gods is that they are Gwyn's subjects. Therefore, these medials' unique weakness to the Dark must be tied to the power of Gwyn's light, which commonly gives them a resistance to lightning and an affinity for sunlight-related magic.

While life before the Lord Souls is prehistory, we can be certain that it was infinitely inferior to life after. Anor Londo means "Haven of the Sun" in J. R. R. Tolkien's Sindarin, a name which places the First Flame front and center in their civilization. Gwyn's title, of course, makes him synonymous with this "sun", correctly framing him as the effective root for all their power. The other medials needed Gwyn in order to receive this power, and obeyed Gwyn for fear of being subjected to it. In this hierarchy, we see the first example of the monarch – an individual dominating the masses through a mixture of power, patronage, and fear – in the world of *Dark Souls*. Since fire is revered as divine, Gwyn may have even justified his position as mandated by heaven – as have real-life monarchies. Under Gwyn, the medials established a more stable, stratified social order than that of a communal tribe. From here, the gods developed as a civilization.

6 "Greatsword born from the soul of King of Kindling Gwyn.
It is said that King Gwyn of the most powerful soul made lightning, which is the sun's light, his weapon but handed out his power to the clan before the firelinking and began a journey with only this greatsword in hand." - Great Lord Greatsword

7 "Miracle born from the soul of King of Kindling Gwyn. Throws a sunlight spear.
In the battle of the beginning of the Age of Fire, this is the lightning that was used by Gwyn. That power is still overwhelming as it goes out." - Sunlight Spear

8 "Soul of King of Kindling Gwyn, who linked the First Flame as the Great King of the Sun's Light.
Much of his power was given to the gods as well as became ash as kindling for the First Flame. But even so, the soul of the Great King possesses extraordinary power." - Soul of Gwyn, Lord of Cinder

Building an Empire

Both the discovery of the Lord Souls and the later dragon hunts mark the beginning of the Age of Fire, implying relative simultaneity. However, the timescales being marked here are eras, long enough that "the beginning" could reasonably cover any amount of time. The medials were beasts when they found the Lord Souls, and the cinematic further implies that at least some lacked even a concept of clothing. They were a primitive people, yet Gwyn is already an aged man with an army of fully-armored knights capable of conjuring spears of lightning like him by the time they hunt dragons. This requires the time for medial culture and technology to develop; time to master language, writing, spellcrafting, weaving, dying, smelting, smithing, and the art of war. Even assuming that Gwyn's Light Soul led to a massive boom in societal development, Anor Londo as we know it must have existed by the time of the dragon hunts.

First would have come the creation and development of "holy" magic. The most obvious example of this is Gwyn's lightning miracles, which require the King to have studied the Light Soul's power to invent. By that same token, the power behind holy weapons most likely derives from the Light Soul as well, though it is *not* the same as lightning. With the exception of the Dragonslayer Spear, lightning weapons can be wielded without any prerequisite faith, unlike holy weapons with their generic magic damage. Many advanced miracles also have a yellow color scheme matching Sunlight Spear and contrasting the white color scheme of weaker spells, including variants of the same miracle. Taken together, virtually all holy arts somehow derive their power from the sunlight Gwyn largely kept for himself, some closer to the source of raw lightning than others. After all, if the medials' affinity for light and weakness to Dark is due to the Light Soul, then the magic and weapons they develop should rely heavily on its power.

Because this magic is ultimately rooted in the power of a soul, the medials became intimately familiar with the power of souls more generally. Ingward asserts that lifting curses was originally the art of the gods,[9] and, indeed, the vast majority of armors and shields with curse resistance we find belong to medials or humans with close ties to them, including those of the Silver Knights seen fighting alongside Gwyn in the cinematic. Curses afflict the soul, so studying the power of fire's Disparity via a Lord Soul would have naturally led to understanding that process and how to counteract it, leading to a strong grasp of magic as a whole.

9 **"Lifting your curse I can do. But, curse-lifting is originally the art of the gods. Prepare a suitable sacrifice..." - Ingward**

This study of, experimentation with, and exchange of knowledge about the power of souls created the basis for their economy. Anor Londo uses souls as its currency, which can be traced back to Gwyn first sharing pieces of his soul with his clan. The Light Soul substantiated Gwyn's authority as King, implying that his kin recognized its inherent value. Thus, Gwyn giving pieces of that power in return for loyal service or desired goods was an exchange of value. Since souls are homogenous concentrations of magic, the medials could assign a value to any soul, using the Lord Souls as a barometer. Souls are plentiful, but limited; one can't simply generate more souls to completely destabilize their value. This makes for an ideal currency, and the medials' adoption of it shows just how profoundly the power of souls and, by extension, fire permeated their culture.

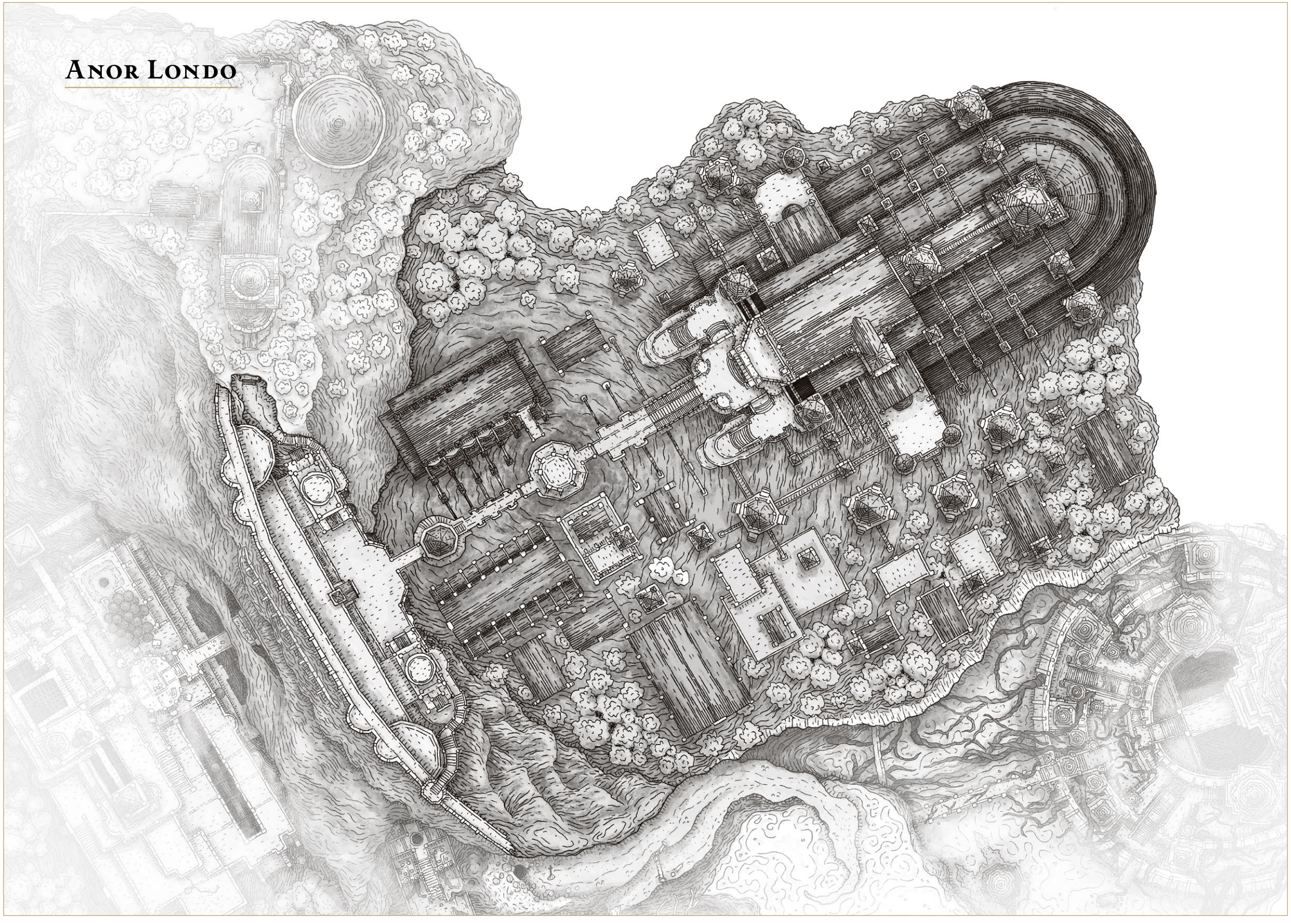
As another example, fire is central to the craft of smithing, allowing blacksmiths to mold materials and even imbue them with a flame's element. With their knowledge of holy magic, the medials formulated a white fire which can create holy equipment, which they likewise reinforced with a special white titanite. Anor Londo commonly imbues even lightning itself into the weapons and armor it forges, and the process requires special wooden tools and knowledge limited to the royal capital.

The lightning-infused armor and spear Dragonslayer Ornstein uses necessitates that these technological developments occur before or during the dragon hunts. Gwyn and the medials first needed to learn how to harness their power before they could use it against their enemies. And once they learned it, they must have tested it, and perhaps they did during their subjugation of the giants.

The giants we encounter range from slaves to knights and royal guards, (*DS3* adds "judge" to this list) but no giant is referred to as a god or noble. Gwyn is the only one of the four Lords to have living giants serve his kingdom, so their enslavement must be solely his responsibility. Slaves in antiquity were commonly criminals or prisoners of war, therefore the medials most likely used their newfound power to conquer and exploit their forebears.

The coffins found in the Tomb of the Giants house both giants and gods, suggesting that the former were brought under the latter's banner by the time the gods started interring their dead in this manner. These sarcophagi are stone and engraved with hieroglyphs, meaning that civilization had developed pictograph writing by this juncture – yet clearly hadn't originated the classical and medieval architectural styles found in their later constructions. Relatedly, concept art shows that the Kiln of the First Flame was designed with giants in mind, and it is easily the oldest ruin we visit in-game.

Anor Londo



The Kiln of the First Flame is also the earliest example of the medials enshrining fire. Although called a furnace, the layout and architecture more resemble a sanctum, and the walls encircling the area reveal the importance placed on protecting it. A common feature in Anor Londo architecture is the image of a blossoming flower. The shield Sanctus uses this image to represent the power of "white" fire,[10] so the icon probably represents the First Flame. (*DS3*'s Sacred Bloom Shield uses the same imagery explicitly to embody holy fire.) The medials recognized where their power originated from and that preserving it was in their best interest. Being the light of the sun, the sun itself would potentially disappear if fire went out. In other words, they revered the First Flame more as a resource critical to their way of life than a higher power.

Of course, whatever divinity the gods *did* project onto the First Flame reflected back on them. And nothing better demonstrates this appropriation of holiness for themselves than the Cloranthy Ring. This ancient ring's origin is unknown,[11] likely lost to time, and we find it on a corpse in the Great Hollow, associating it with the Lower World. It is modeled on a green flower in full bloom, reminding us of the medials' symbol for fire, and despite this blossoming flower's twelve inner petals and twenty outer petals being called a unique design, it also features inside the coffins of the giants. In other words, this was likely an early design of the symbol employed in later architecture, dating back to the time the medials first enslaved the giants in the Lower World.

The symbol was likely a sort of blessing. While sunlight's power is more often expressed as healing magic, the ring's boost to stamina regeneration can still be tied to the sun's invigorating rays, and a similar relation between divine power and physical energy is seen with Fina's blessed ring increasing both stamina and HP. The gods' devotees also say "by the guidance of fire" to show deference to the First Flame[12] – though the localization mostly changes this to the Latin *vereor nox*, which is likely intended to mean "fear the night" despite grammatical errors. The underlying implication is the same: we are helpless without fire, and those who wield fire are as necessary as fire itself. Nonetheless, the image of the First Flame, the symbol of the gods' divinity, hanging over the slaves even in death exemplifies the power the medials lorded over others, and indicates that the concept of their "godhood" was likely firmly established by that point.



The gods we learn about have been drawn from royalty, nobility, or other major positions in society. The lowest caste of a confirmed god is

10 "One of the Way of White's legendary treasures said to have long ago been entrusted to a holy knight who became Undead.
It was blessed beforehand and has the divine protection of white fire but has already lost most of that power, and only a slight HP recovery effect remains." - Sanctus

11 "Old ring that was modeled on a large-blooming green flower. Its design is unique and its origin is unknown.
Has an effect that boosts stamina recovery speed." - Cloranthy Ring

12 "Oh, you. Apparently, we'll be leaving soon. The Catacombs and such, it isn't really a pleasant story... but, well, no helping it. Let's meet each other again if possible. By the guidance of fire..." - Vince

that of the blacksmith deity, who forges Anor Londo's arms and armor and is thus above most smiths in terms of prestige. Meanwhile, the various types of knight are undoubtedly medials, but never collectively labeled as deities. Angelic wings ornament Silver Knight helmets, contrasting the devil horns ornamenting the helms of their Black Knight counterparts; this makes them more analogous to servants of the gods – holy, but not on the same level as deities. They are instead revered as representing the gods' will in their secular role within medial society.

Silver Knight weapon descriptions imply them to be royal guards,[13] and we only see them guarding the royal family's manor and adjoining church. Knights typically represent the moral ideals of feudal society, reflected in their code of chivalry, and their glamorization in medieval romances. Naturally, Anor Londo society developed a set of moral ideals based around hierarchy, where loyal service to your lord and reverence for your god earns you accolades and blessings from those standing above you. This standard is expected even of the giants they enslaved, since we encounter both "guards" (衛兵) and "royal guards" (近衛兵) among them – giving slaves a path to status as the city's sentinels or the royalty's personal bodyguards, just like the Silver Knights. And this culture of hierarchy all stemmed from Gwyn and the power of his Light Soul, making the life of the Lord and those closest to him paramount. In return for their loyalty, the Silver Knights became angels of god.

With the establishment of their society as a pantheon, the medials created a religion centered around them synonymous with allegiance. One cannot claim to be the medials' ally without acknowledging their divinity, giving them dominance over other races by default – and leverage in social and diplomatic contexts. Combine this with their awe-inspiring power, and the result is worship sealed by covenants. A covenant is a magic ritual where one pledges service in exchange for some boon. Being a magical contract, we can only maintain one covenant at any given time, and the other party will immediately know if we break the terms. Most of these ceremonies involve joining the cult of a god,[14] and Oswald only deems us to be religious if we have performed one.[15]

And yet, the pardoner admits that the gods are magnanimous,[16] tolerating our refusal to accept their divinity and follow them. This generosity shows that the medials aren't attempting to forcibly convert nonbelievers, opting instead for more subtle coercion. Those who submit to the gods' covenants and distinguish themselves through service are elevated to more prestigious positions within the hierarchy, thus rewarding obedience whilst of course denying such servants

13 "Straight sword of the Silver Knights who protect Anor Londo. Slender, elegant royal guard weapon.
Its chain attacks that put in one's own body weight and greatly close in have the might to deal great damage with even a single blow."
- Silv. Knight Str. Sword

14 "Very well. Then, first, the gods' covenant..." - Petrus

15 "Hey, how do you do? I am Oswald of Carim. A chaplain. A comrade of ours, are you? I welcome you." - Oswald

16 "You don't appear to be a religious person... but, well, the gods are generous." - Oswald

the ability to achieve the status of the most prestigious medial. In some ways, the covenants function as another form of bondage.

Even so, the practice isn't exclusive to the medials and their adherents. While most covenants connected to the gods of Anor Londo or Izalith generate bright yellow lights, those performed with Nito and the archdragon of Ash Lake instead manifest black and white light. This means that the art of binding someone into a magical contract isn't exclusive to sunlight magic, though clearly sunlight magic's practitioners are the ones who employed it first and use it the most often.

Because of the importance of this worship-based hierarchy, Gwyn was likely the original Allfather, not Lloyd, the current bearer of the title. *Shushin* (主神) means "chief god", so not the literal "father of all" but leader of the gods. How could a religion based around the medials not have had their king, the source of all their divine power, serve as head of the pantheon? Even if the title didn't exist prior to Lloyd assuming it, Gwyn must have been the effective chief god before that point. This holds true even for the church Lloyd now leads, the Way of White – more literally the "white faith" (白教). The name "Gwyn" means "white" in Celtic, with connotations of holiness, purity, and beauty. This in effect makes the Way of White the "Gwyn faith", implying that the king had already been head of the pantheon when the church was established. In this way, Gwyn's authority over church and state is undeniable.

The invention of holy magic, smithing, the concepts of knighthood and godhood – it was all part of the beginning to proper civilization, the equivalent to our Stone Age. It is also the same period that Anor Londo is established, though the city as we see it likely didn't exist until much later. The Firelink Chamber, as Frampt dubs it, is actually a *shiniki* (神域) or grounds for a sacred area like a shrine.[17] Though we encounter it as a part of our quest to succeed Gwyn and link the fire, the architecture and erosion of the stonework in the chamber indicates it to be far older than the Undead mission – of similar age to the Kiln. Conveniently, the chamber has a dimensional staircase connecting directly to the Kiln, meaning that the gods created a shortcut between the Upper World in Lordran to their shrine for the First Flame. That this shortcut exists a little outside the borders of Anor Londo, which Frampt calls the gods' country in Japanese dialogue,[18] implies that the early days of Gwyn's kingdom is linked with the beginnings of this very city.

Similarly, the so-called Regal Archives are in actuality the "Gods' Archives", (神の書庫) and Gwyn granted Seath access to them following the dragon hunts. If the archives existed by then, then the country of the gods most likely did too. This is reinforced by the classical style and imagery on display in both areas' architecture.

17 "This place is a god precinct that receives the successor of Great King Gwyn. Now, put the King's Vessel on the pedestal." - Frampt

18 "Sen's Old Castle is a trial for man to reach the country of the gods, a path of traps." - Frampt

19 "Armor of the giant guards who protect Anor Londo.
It is manufactured with old brass, so it is effective against non-physical attacks, but because it is made to match a giant's physical strength, it is very heavy for the body of man and inhibits stamina recovery." - Giant Armor

20 "Large halberd made with old brass. Equipment of the giant guards who protect Anor Londo.
The brass is slightly tinged with the power of lightning, but because it is made to match a giant's physical strength, it is probably too heavy for the body of man." - Giant's Halberd



Of course, this also means that the library's vast collection of knowledge was already compiled by this point in history, and the use of books and ink to collect and store information demonstrates great advancements in language and writing from the time they first conquered the giants. The statues of a woman holding fire leading up to the archives may depict an actual goddess, perhaps the librarian, but it likely symbolizes the gods' wisdom thanks to fire – wisdom they extensively recorded and collected over the course of their development as a civilization.

Why did the gods choose to reside in the Upper World? The presence of the sun and opportunity to situate their capital atop a mountain likely contributed to the appeal. Besides the aesthetic and symbolic value of literally being on a higher plane than those beneath them, the decision also segregated them from the archdragons living down below, allowing them to develop their civilization in peace. It also seems that the First Flame exists within this region, though somewhere still so far and deep underground that a wormhole shortcut was preferable.

Since this was the land of their birth, the other two medial Lords also remained close by, and the region became known as Lordran (ロードラン), which can alternatively be read as "Lordlan" in obvious reference to a "lord-land" (ロードランド). As the cinematic narrator describes, this is the land of the Lords, the old kings, and so had become the site for them to build up their respective kingdoms.



Anor Londo's subsequent development into the massive metropolis we visit resulted in a number of technical marvels, most notably the machinery underpinning the city's various mechanisms; some of these are automated – products of an era that can largely be considered a Bronze Age equivalent. Both the Kiln and giants' stone sarcophagi use hieroglyphs of a Bronze Age civilization, the giant sentinels wear old brass armor,[19] and we see this and other copper-derived metals used in many other holy arms and armor of Anor Londo make.[20] These materials were also crucial parts of the gods' other metalwork, from their cathedral doors to their chandeliers

and candlesticks. Meanwhile, the emphasis on flora and bread-baking in the city's reliefs suggests that this was a flourishing nation – and pays respects to the First Flame's profound effect on society's development.

By the time the gateways to the royal manor and smithy came to be constructed, Anor Lando had clearly reached an Iron Age. Much of that new metal went into building up the kingdom of light's war machine. Dragonslayer arrows are essentially iron spears.[21] Grant is considered a legendary weapon of the Way of White, but close inspection reveals it to just be a misshapen mass of iron welded to an ornate pummel. The iron mass' brighter sheen and ability to unleash a Wrath of the Gods effect indicates that it was an attempt to infuse iron with holy magic. The failed product was then converted into a holy hammer once they forged a proper iron handle. The end result of these experiments was the white iron used in the giant sentinels' shields,[22] which have an extremely high resistance to both fire and lightning. Despite these advancements, the gods still employed regular iron as shown with the massive vessel for the Iron Golem's core, though their metalworks overall prefer gold, silver, and copper; elements most conductive to lightning.[23]

Andre confirms that "Sen's Old Castle" (センの古城) was created by the old gods, perhaps during this period.[24] However, it is unlikely to have always been a trial ground for the Undead to undertake. The citadel has three distinct styles of architecture in varying conditions, suggesting multiple expansions and renovations to the fort over an extended period of time. This includes the introduction of housing and prison facilities. Likewise, we find a painting of the already aged fortress in a bedroom at the royal manor. The manor is abandoned in the present era, so this painting and thus the current fortress exterior were made well before the royals left. The various pots found throughout the fortress, the largest concentration of which are found in the entrance chamber, as well as the wooden tables and chairs set up in the fortress towers both indicate that interaction with the outside world was frequent enough to have guards stationed there. This was a military facility only later converted into a trial ground – a notion made obvious by the abundance of Silver Knight statues seemingly stuffed aside, piled upon one another at random, or crowding its hallways and rooms.

The castle's oldest-looking architecture connects directly to Anor Londo, and served an even earlier function. Six pillars surround a circular platform, three on each side. Each pillar has a gargoyle mounted to face us as we pass through, posed as if bracing upon the pillar and stretching its jaws at us. Upon closer inspection, there is a tube within the jaws, suggesting a system to eject something from the open maw. This system is

21 "Giant, iron spear-like arrow for dragon-hunter greatbows exclusively. It is a thing of the dragon-hunter unit that was led by 'Hawkeye' Gough, so it will easily pierce through something like man.

This great arrow can only be used with a dragon-hunter greatbow. Also, dragon-hunter greatbows can only use this great arrow." - Dragonslayer Arrow

22 "Large shield made with old brass and white iron. Equipment of the giant guards who protect Anor Londo.

It is effective against non-physical attacks due to the white iron, but because it is made to match a giant's physical strength, it is probably too heavy for the body of man." - Giant Shield

23 "Head of the Iron Golem that slaughtered heroes aiming for Anor Londo as guardian of Sen's Old Castle.

It is now just an iron mass that lost its core and can be equipped as solid armor, but it is very heavy and inhibits stamina recovery." - Golem Helm



never used during the Iron Golem's boss battle, but the rubble on the platform implies the original function. There were eight columns lining the platform in-between each pillar, windowed sections for the gargoyles. And at the center of the circle were two parallel walls blocking the gargoyles on either side. One could pass through the middle without worrying about the gargoyles, but anyone taking the sides would be shot by this system. A setup like this is too inefficient for one of the fort's traps, which leaves one option.

The original purpose for these structures and the fortress itself was to be a training ground for Silver Knights. The gargoyles' long snouts, four limbs, and wings resemble the physiology of archdragons and the only reason to mimic them at a military facility is to simulate a real-life scenario the army would face. Up to six trainees stood in front of the walls to face a gargoyle and be assaulted by, most likely, streams of fire. This was likely intended to train their ability to block and endure intense heat in extended combat, and concept art proves the devices were indeed designed to shoot fire upon the platform. In a similar vein, the knight statues were likely used as training dummies – a way to practice one's weapon technique against both similar humanoid opponents and an approximation of a dragon's stone hide – and decorations, as seen with the two "welcoming" us in the foyer. Naturally, this implies that the fortress, and knighthood in general, was established to prepare for combat with dragons.

The final proof is the mimic found in the fortress. It is the first of its kind we encounter, making it an excellent trap for inattentive treasure hunters. But the chest does contain treasure, a spear imbued with the lightning element. Its description illuminates how such spears are widely used by soldiers and effective against hard exteriors; one's presence here implies that it was used at the fortress and later repurposed as a trap reward. The medials used lightning spears primarily to hunt dragons,[25] as exemplified by the Sunlight Spear and Dragonslayer Spear's speciality in piercing stone scales. However, Gwyn's knights wield their own spears in the rocky caverns of the cinematic, so this low-grade wood and steel-tipped spear was probably solely for trainees or predates the Silver Knight Spear's invention. Although the silver spear is classified as a "holy" weapon without actually dealing any magic damage, it may still be infused with lightning. (Silver Knight weapons in DS3 later prove this feasible.)

The name Sen may be a reference to the Japanese *sen* (戦) meaning war or battle. But whoever or whatever the name actually refers to, the fort

24 "Sen's Old Castle is a path of trials created by the old gods. It is said that their castle, the great Anor Londo, is beyond it." - Andre

25 "Miracle imparted to those who have entered into the covenant 'Warriors of the Sun'. Throws a lightning spear.

Lightning spears are effective against targets resistant to magic and fire since they possess the unusual offensive power of the lightning attribute. It will manifest great power, especially against dragonkin."
- Lightning Spear

itself was evidently the medials' primary training ground. Eventually it was converted into an outpost and saw regular traffic from the outside world, likely humans. This explains its connection to the old church linked to the Oolacilian ruins that Andre alludes to.[26] Later on, the fortress was needed to detain certain individuals within its walls, again, likely humans based on the size of the hanging cages. And sometime after that, iron pendulum scythes were installed along with other complex mechanisms to test Undead hoping to reach Anor Londo. As a result, elements of the fortress relating to its original purpose have fallen into disrepair or have been hurriedly shoved aside, which might be a sign of sudden developments necessitating such haphazard "disposal" – of the statues in particular. But regardless of what it became, Sen's Fortress was once crucial to the gods' battle against dragons.

26 "This place is an old church. The Undead Church that you passed through was built and this place was abandoned. That's why, not that I've reason to say this, this place is connected to two forbidden regions: Sen's Old Castle and the Garden of the Black Forest." - Andre



Triumvirate Plus One

Sometime during all this, Anor Londo formed alliances with the other Lords. There is no evidence of war between the Lords during this period, so the three likely recognized each other's power enough to deter such conflict, though Gwyn had the strongest influence over the others thanks to his Lord Soul. While never actually called "gods" in-game, we can assume godhood was extended to the other two Lords due to their own human followings. Gwyn seems to have respected their power enough to include fellow medials in god society while keeping them subordinate to him. Although the furtive pygmy's contributions to the dragon hunts aren't stated, the fact that "they" acquired the power and challenged the dragons implies all fours' involvement.

However, the relationship between the pygmy and other Lords was unique. According to Kaathe, Gwyn feared the Dark and the humans who inherited it from the Dark Soul. Man had the power that was the antithesis and consequence of Gwyn's light. And yet man was not exterminated or enslaved outright. Instead, the Lords welcomed the pygmy among their number with the implicit understanding that the fourth's power was worthy of them. This suggests that the gods lacked the means or will to oppose the pygmy.

Nonetheless, Gwyn remains the dominant figure in the alliance while the pygmy has been forgotten to history. Kaathe submits that this is due to Gwyn orchestrating the suppression of humans' heritage from their collective memory in an effort to weaken mankind. This great deception must have required subtlety and time over many generations. And were mankind to uncover this brainwashing, this falsification of its own history, the medials could have faced retaliation. It also suggests that the gods were in a dominant position over the pygmy to even initiate this sabotage in the first place. In that case, why the subtlety? Just wipe out the weaker Lord and absorb their resources for yourself!

However, the underlying reason for this peculiar strategy was probably the forthcoming war with the dragons. Seath proves the archdragons were sentient creatures, though the dehumanizing vocabulary of "hunts" says much about the gods' view of them. There is no evidence that the dragons had first invaded the Upper World, and the cinematic only portrays fighting in the Lower World, eliminating a viable justification for Anor Londo to initiate the struggle. If the dragons weren't a threat, why hunt them? The only reason is to subjugate them like the giants. The world serpents may well have incited the gods, but there would have

certainly been an impetus for war regardless. Archdragons are the primordial animal predating fire. Once they were defeated, the beings of fire had proven their superiority over all other races and truly ushered in their Age of Fire – an adequate revenge for once powerless beings forced to live in fear of these mighty beasts.

Gwyn had the most to gain from this conflict, but he evidently needed the power of the other Lords to cross the finish line. And the other Lords evidently served to gain from it as well, even if their "gain" was simply avoiding a needless conflict with Gwyn in retaliation for ignoring his request for help. This was as much an alliance of convenience as one of fear. Gwyn welcomed the pygmy as another Lord simply because the Dark Soul was a useful weapon. And under the guise of comradery, the gods slowly emasculated mankind, severing its connection to the Dark once it outlived its usefulness – a process which likely began early in their relationship, before humans became a threat or could realize the deception.

Once the gods established dominance in the alliance, they could ease humans into perpetual subordination. The most obvious example of this is the numerous human countries spread throughout the world. By letting humans spread out, the gods thinned their numbers across an extremely wide area. This naturally results in a divergence of disconnected cultures, making it easier to brainwash the whole over the generations. (*DS3* confirms that the pygmy had a kingdom and was manipulated by Gwyn from the start.) Without a single national identity, the only thing still uniting man as a species was its ties to the Dark. But the gods had created religion as a tool for control, and they exercised it upon humans just as they had the giants. Attracted to their blessings and lacking a singular ethos, human values gradually shifted from pride in their heritage to considering even dabbling with the Dark unnecessary and eventually dangerous.

This philosophical shift is seen in the widespread worship of fire among present-day humans. For humans to remain ostensibly free while completely dependent on the gods, they had to have willingly embraced the religion. This could have started as benign alliances and welcome assistance. For instance, Gwynevere is a goddess of good harvest and grace, something a classical and medieval society would want to guarantee basic necessities and even simple luxuries.[27] The gods' miracles also heal the injured and return travelers home, ensuring survival. With



fire at its strongest, the power of the Dark went from essential, to optional, to completely irrelevant. All they need do was worship.

That isn't to say that medial-human relations were purely religious. The presence of humans serving Anor Londo implies that the two races intermingled. Indeed, the royal cathedral lifts leading to the inner sanctum on the upper level come in two sizes. The left-side elevator is only fit for humans like us, while the right-side elevator is large enough for medials and giants – naturally, we see Ornstein jump down from the latter side. Evidently, the gods made sure to accommodate, and segregate, humans with the implicit understanding that they would be regularly coming through to greet their royalty, whether they be local servants running errands or visitors on diplomatic missions.

The royal capital certainly once welcomed humans for trade. The giant blacksmith sells crossbow bolts imbued with the power of lightning despite not knowing what a crossbow is, forging them at the request of some ancient man.[28] The Japanese description of these lightning bolts doesn't even necessarily imply that he had heard this request personally. He has inherited the knowledge about the ammunition but not the weapon it is used for, indicating that he is simply continuing the tradition of making the bolts from a predecessor who actually learned about them and the weapon they came from. Regardless, this implies that crossbows are a human invention and that humans *have* set foot within Anor Londo and engaged in trade talks with its royal smithy. This can only occur if Anor Londo was at one point open to humans.

The gods felt safe cooperating with humans and seemingly respected their independence so long as humans recognized their inferiority. However, this respect was likely a sham, since Kaathe mentions "shackles of the gods" (神の枷) being placed upon man.[29] It is easy to assume this to simply be a metaphor for the gods scrubbing out mankind's Dark lineage; Kaathe even calls us their slave if we ultimately follow their will.[30] But the serpent teaches us Lifedrain with the intention of removing our shackles by unleashing the Dark Soul's power, so there must be *something* restraining the Dark within us. (*DS3*'s Moundmakers covenant later confirms the implication.) If there was ever a time to shackle the Dark within man, it would have been early on in history, when the race was still relatively small. That way, all humans would inherit the tethers as they multiplied across the world and long forgot all about them by the time that their brainwashing was complete. It is no accident that the gods' curse-lifting arts only accepted humanity as sacrifices when any soul should suffice. They hoped to rid man of the Dark which made them man.

27 **"Holy water with the blessing of the goddess Gwynevere. Completely recovers HP and cures abnormalities.**
Gwynevere, known as the Goddess of the Sun's Light, is the daughter of the great King of the Sun's Light Gwyn and is universally loved by mankind as a symbol of good harvest and grace." - Divine Blessing

28 **"Special bolt tinged with the power of lightning that is made by the giant blacksmith of Anor Londo.**
He, who doesn't know a crossbow, makes its bolts because he has remembered the old request of some human all this time." - Lightning Bolt

29 **"You... If you wish it, I will give you my power. The power of the King of Dark, the power of life-eating. With that power, you may continue to be human as an Undead and remove the shackles of the gods that were placed on you humans." - Kaathe**

30 **"You're already a slave to the gods! To think you didn't understand the value of the truth! Honestly! I can't! I can't believe it!..... Well, fine. Farewell, forgetful, senile fool. I shall dive into the Abyss once more and await the King of Man..." - Kaathe**

Hunted Down

The four Lords then finally challenged the dragons to battle. Gwyn's army served as the backbone of the coalition. Hawkeye Gough led an entire dragonslayer corps of greatbowmen[31] and allegedly shot down archdragons in distant skies.[32] The Lord of Sunlight himself accomplished similar feats with bolts of lightning, and he wasn't alone. His knights wielded the standard straight swords and spears commonly seen in Anor Londo but also conjured lightning spears to pierce the archdragons' stone scales from a distance.

However, ranged tactics fall apart once the enemy closes the distance, so the gods needed a vanguard force to hold the line. This led to the development of the cross spear, named for its unique haft allowing the wielder to put their entire body behind thrusts.[33] The gods took full advantage of any opportunity to penetrate their rock-hard skin as deep as possible, developing the most efficient means to hunt their prey. (*DS3* introduces a Dragonslayer Swordspear to show that there was a learning curve to perfecting this art.)

Morale was high. Participation in the dragon hunts was a path to glory for Gwyn's army – an experience they long prepared to undertake, part of their culture. According to Gough, challenging dragons is a knight's honor,[34] and Gwyn conferred knightly decorations to warriors who felled archdragons.[35] Gough himself proudly wears his medal and victims' bones as mementos long after the conflict.[36] Havel repurposed the stone tooth of an archdragon as a great hammer to bash their hides.[37] There was even a tradition of beheading slain archdragons as trophies, prizes the royal family dedicated an entire room for mounting back at Anor Londo; while their in-game models are identical to wyverns, the Fang Boar Helm implies that these trophies are intended to be the same archdragons fought in the cinematic.[38] Gough readily gives up his greatbow after the archdragons seemingly go extinct, indicative of both the threat they posed and the irreplaceable sport they provided.

This is not to say that the war was heavily one-sided. While Gough recounts the hunts with an air of nostalgia, he admits that many knights fell and fueled the survivors' enmity for their scaled foes. There was equal feelings of exaltation and resentment experienced in battle,[39] and naturally this meant honoring the fallen. Ornstein's title and equipment implicate his participation in the hunts, and he will respectfully absorb Smough's soul should the executioner fall first in their boss battle, suggesting that it was common practice for warriors

31 "Greatbow of the dragon-hunter unit that was led by 'Hawkeye' Gough, one of the Four Knights of King Gwyn.
Since it is too large for a bow, it pierces the ground with the anchor at the bottom end when shooting and can use exclusively great arrows." - Dragonslayer Greatbow

32 "Special ring that was given to the Four Knights of King Gwyn. The Hawk Ring is a thing of 'Hawkeye' Gough who led a greatbow unit.
Has an effect that extends the range of bows, and it is said that Gough's greatbow shot down archdragons in the distant skies." - Hawk Ring

33 "Cross spear born from the soul of Ornstein, the 'Dragon-hunter' knight who protects the church in Anor Londo.
It is tinged with strong power of lightning effective against dragonkin, and the two-handed thrusts with cross support and the full power of the body behind it thrust the spear deeply into a dragon's body, and greatly blow away the likes of man." - Dragonslayer Spear

34 "Aha, did you see it, a beautiful hit. Even he won't be able to fly for a while. Hereon depends on your valor. I'll be waiting for good news. Challenging dragons is a knight's honor..." - Gough

35 "You... hunted Kalameet, did you? Splendid. It is a feat that would see Great King Gwyn confer decorations, if only he were in this world." - Gough

36 "Armor of 'Hawkeye' Gough, one of the Four Knights of King Gwyn. It has always been with him since he was in the field.
But the medal of royal award and shoulder pad of archdragon bone proudly exemplify great glory." - Gough's Armor

to empower themselves with the fallen. (A fact later confirmed in *DS3*.) Such a ritual offers both an efficient use of resources and a subtle means of closure for the survivors. The fighting spirit of the fallen lives on within them, literally. This philosophy drives a warrior to press onward, and Gough certainly implies that there was a fervent tenacity to Gwyn's army.

In the end, the dragons were defeated, not totally destroyed as the localization implies.[40] Still, the mountain of corpses in the cinematic shows that the archdragons *were* massacred. Recall again that the dragons are intelligent beasts treated like lowly game. This slaughter would have been labeled barbaric if committed against fellow medials or even giants, yet Gwyn's knights consider dragon-hunting honorable. They initiated the conflict but neglected to paint it as an actual war. They had recognized the intelligence of the race in Seath, and still committed to their annihilation. There is no honor here, this was genocide. Factor in the enslavement of the giants and manipulation of the pygmies, and the gods' concept of honor seems at the very least extremely skewed toward their own interests.

They certainly reaped the spoils of war.

Divine Opulence

Aside from hanging as trophies, the slain and defeated dragons had a number of uses. The wyverns of the Valley of Drakes are unique in that they breathe lightning instead of fire and largely congregate around the gates to New Londo, as if to prevent anyone from approaching the quarantined country. This is odd, since there are no apparent nesting grounds in the area, and a valley is hardly a good hunting ground compared to the lush forests above. Therefore, these dragons likely serve the gods and were tasked with keeping the city's Dark sealed away. Cut content reaffirms the implication – the same enemies would have also been flying around Anor Londo.

The gods most likely claimed dragon pups or eggs during the hunts, breeding them to ultimately produce wyverns with a sunlight affinity. (*DS3* introduces Midir, an archdragon descendent also raised by the gods and tasked with combating the Dark.) The gods enslaved the giants they subjugated, so why not dragons?

Though they possibly predate the dragon hunts, the Iron Golem is the earliest known example of the gods creating one of its kind, possessing a core[41] that combines the magic power of a soul with the bone of an

37 "Legendary great hammer of 'Rock-like' Havel said to be the tooth of an unperishing archdragon made into a weapon as it was.
This tooth is harder than a rock and never breaks, and also gives the user the power to endure magic and fire." - Dragon Tooth

38 "Thing where someone who battled the fully-armored tusk boar and won cut off the head as proof of victory, like how the gods once did with the heads of archdragons.
Can be worn on the head and becomes surprisingly solid armor." - Fang Boar Helm

39 "... Ah, dragons. We knights challenged them, slaughtered many, and still many of my friends fell to them. Exaltation, honor, resentment, hatred, it was all with them. You too will understand eventually. At twilight, you instead dearly miss self-serving sentiments uncontrollably." - Gough

40 "Gwyn's lightning pierced rock scales, the witch's flames became tempests, and a miasma of death was unleashed by Nito. And then, due to the treachery of the scaleless white dragon Seath, the archdragons were finally defeated. It was the beginning of the Age of Fire." - Narrator

41 "Soul serving as the core of the Iron Golem that slaughtered heroes aiming for Anor Londo as guardian of Sen's Old Castle.
It is said that it was originally the bone of an archdragon, and is used to acquire a vast amount of souls or create a unique weapon." - Core of an Iron Golem

archdragon.[42] Without this core, the golem is simply an oversized suit of armor, making it essentially a living puppet for the soul inside. The soul is the source of life, so why craft the core with a dragon bone as well? The Iron Golem set and axe make a point of its "extreme weight" making it difficult to move effectively. Combined with its size, and the iron mass *should* be overwhelming. And yet the boss moves with the power, speed, and mobility to create gusts of wind with each swing.[43] The dragon bone infused with the power of rock most likely enhances the qualities of the soul, allowing the golem to move its large and weighty form with the ease of an archdragon moving its heavy stone body. Since the stone golems of Oolacile lack any apparent connection to dragons along with the chest hole used to presumably install the core, it seems that the Iron Golem's unique power supply was a necessity due to its massive size.

Using solid stone or iron shells as vessels for souls is something the gods toyed with extensively. Gargoyle enemies are magical creatures, literally "living things" (生物) animated by souls.[44] This is supported by the fact that they can breathe fire, an ability shared with dragons. This would make them an advanced offshoot of golems, and both do bleed despite their bodies lacking any apparent biological elements, curiously enough. Although first seen installed as guardians of the Undead Parish, the creatures wear decorative bronze armor and also patrol the streets of Anor Londo; this gold-looking variant attacks with lightning instead of flame, making it decidedly more advanced. All of this implies that they are creations of the gods, and the enemies are indeed supposed to convey the ambience of Anor Londo according to Miyazaki's comments for a PlayStation.Blog blogpost. What better evokes the image of medieval knights and kings than church gargoyles?

The gargoyles' similar physiology and abilities to archdragons suggests that they were created with the intention of artificially reproducing the primordial beasts, which were already being bred as slaves or pets and imbued with the power of sunlight. These many experiments with dragons demonstrate incredible interest in the beasts' power. Whether fascinated with their unique capabilities or hoping to assume the same qualities that they simultaneously admired and feared, dragons remained an integral part of the gods' history and heritage well after the era of dragonslaying.

After all the bloodshed to create this golden age, the gods seem to have lived in peace and prosperity, with humans serving and worshipping them all around the Upper World. We lack any references to wars or other major conflicts during this



42 "Weapon born from the soul of the Iron Golem that slaughtered heroes aiming for Anor Londo as guardian of Sen's Old Castle.
The gods probably formed the mighty golem's core by combining the magic power of a soul with the bone of an archdragon." - Dragon Bone Fist

43 "Axe born from the soul of the Iron Golem that scrapped heroes aiming for Anor Londo as guardian of Sen's Old Castle.
Unleashes the golem's blade of wind with its one-handed great attack, but the blade of iron is heavy and difficult to handle." - Golem Axe

44 "Helmet of gargoyles, magic living things that protected the Bell of Awakening at the Undead Church's bell tower.
A gargoyle's skin is hard to begin with, so this helmet of bronze was no more than decoration. Probably can't expect high defense power." - Gargoyle Helm

period, and the state of the present era shows that the gods have largely succeeded in pulling man away from the Dark. The knights no longer had dragons to hunt, but their code of honor kept them as the royal family's bodyguards, and everyone else was still dependent on the gods' bounties for their faithful service. The King even distinguished some such giants and medials as the renowned "Four Knights" during this time.

The gods detested greed, especially from humans, and this seeped throughout their culture. Man and Dark are repeatedly associated with avarice, in contrast to the gods, who are associated with restoring, providing and gifting. A hostile Ciaran chastises our race for always "taking".[45] Greed is blatantly "a point the gods strictly admonish" according to Petrus' cut Japanese dialogue,[46] and the fact that this attitude is rooted in religious dogma indicates it to be another way that the gods suppressed humans' Dark lineage. However, Anor Londo didn't tolerate this behavior among its own.

The mimics are described as monsters, but are in fact members of the clan of gods, punished for their apparent greed by being branded with a Bottomless Box and turned into security chests.[47] The Undead merchant sells one such box, which we use to store an infinite number of items therein. But the Japanese description mentions another name: "Brand of the Greedy" (貪欲者の烙印). This is also the Japanese name for the Symbol of Avarice – the "head" of a mimic – confirming that they are one and the same. The fact that the mimics' official name is the "greedy" (貪欲者) only emphasizes that point. While the description claims that these gods were exiled,[48] we find mimics only in Anor Londo or places directly connected to it. Thus, the use of "exile", or *tsuihou* (追放), in this context is probably not to expel from a country but to remove from an occupation or social status – in these greedy clansmen's case, their godhood.

Despite their many possible applications, the gods only used the bottomless boxes to apply these punishment-curses, even though we find several armor sets divided between multiple adjacent chests in Anor Londo, a clear acknowledgement that large armor pieces can't all fit into a limited space. The gods did use spatial manipulation for the staircase leading to the Kiln of the First Flame, however, and we employ a similar power to "warp" between bonfires after acquiring the Lordvessel, so this physics-defying box probably is another product of the medials' light magic. Lloyd's Talismans reinforce this idea. The tool effectively shuts down the mimics' security function on top of its primary role in sealing Undeads' ability to drink Estus,[49] implying that both share the same source. It is curious that the gods didn't use the boxes more extensively, but it is nonetheless noteworthy that they avoided executing their own.

45 "Hmph, human after all, huh? Very well, in your kind's fashion, I shall take." - Ciaran

46 "Please don't be impatient. Your reward will come after I return to the ritual place. Greed is a point the gods strictly admonish." - Petrus

47 "Strange wooden box missing a bottom. It is apparently also called the Brand of the Greedy, but its origin isn't known.
You can put as many items as you want in it and freely take them in and out when resting at a bonfire." - Bottomless Box

48 "Head of a monster that mimics a treasure chest. It is said to be a brand long ago imposed on certain clansmen who were ousted for the sin of greed despite being gods.
When worn on the head, you slightly raise soul absorption amount and item discovery power but also receive the effects of the brand's curse." - Symbol of Avarice

49 "Tool for when knights of the chief god Lloyd hunt Undead. Makes it impossible to recover via Est within the effective range.
In the world of man, Undead are cursed monsters and the knights of Lloyd that hunt Undead are even heroes.
For those heroes seal only Undead recovery via this blessed talisman and fight fair and square." - Lloyd's Talisman

Beyond the occasional crime or noble scandal, life in Anor Londo was pleasant. Alliances with the other Lords remained strong, and all knew who was responsible for the good fortune. The city is dominated by a cathedral directly connected to the royal manor, almost like an additional wing. Front and center in its main chamber stand three pedestals for statues of Gwyn, Gwynevere, and presumably the firstborn. Gwyn's statue is larger than his children, and the Silver Knight statues raise their swords specifically in his presence there and at his tomb, honoring their King.

Through the power of his Light Soul, the gods' civilization had reached its zenith. An empire of light built on the backs of giant slaves, the manipulation of useful allies, and the massacre of ancient forebears. Without their divine air, the medials' path would appear little different from our own history. But to the victor goes the spoils, and so they instead live like gods.

Sight of a God

The medials' history reflects much on their leader. The gods' arrogant flouting of fire's power is Gwyn's vanity; their bellicose intimidation of other races into subordination, his mercilessness. Their kingdom is a monument to his own ego. The Lord of Sunlight is certainly justified in his pride. We learn of no other being more accomplished than Gwyn, who rose from seemingly nothing. Narcissism and a god complex were unavoidable. Yet there is very little to infer about him beyond that.

Many sing the praises of the Great Lord but none actually tell us about him. Gwyn is glorified because he is worthy of glory and so is glorified. The cycle feeds into the image of vainglory but not an ounce of character. Few know who Gwyn actually was, and those who do aren't willing to share the details. The only exception is Kaathe, and he doesn't paint a very flattering picture. The only positive trait to really derive from Gwyn is that he shares the Light Soul's power with his clan, but this is counterbalanced by the fact that he still hoards the power to lord over them and other races.

Some may point to Smough as proof of Gwyn's character, but this evidence is oversimplified. The executioner was indeed disqualified from joining the rank of Gwyn's knights due to his excessive cruelty,[50] a trait unbefitting the gallantry associated with knighthood. But this ignores the fact that he remains on the King's payroll and is free to commit his dishonor upon the gods' enemies as he very much pleases. Gwyn's commitment to the code of chivalry is at its best conveniently selective

50 **"Great hammer born from the soul of 'Executioner' Smough who protects the church in the abandoned Anor Londo.**
Smough took joy in executions and is said to have invigorated himself by pulverizing his victims' flesh and bones; because of that cruelty, he ultimately wasn't introduced to the ranks of the Four Knights."
- Smough's Hammer

and at its worst completely arbitrary. Knighthood requires loyalty to your lord and liege in contexts beyond killing, so a bloodthirsty murderer would not make ideal material. And those knights who actually live their moral code are unlikely to be enthusiastic about such a deplorable personality joining their ranks. Smough is an example of Gwyn playing politics at its finest, one of many examples of his deftness at the game; he *did* likely invent it. Even if we were to assume that the event reflects on Gwyn's integrity, rejecting a psychopath isn't exactly a tall baseline.

Gwyn is portrayed as merciless to his enemies as he is generous to his allies, but his actions are always deliberate. He never wantonly kills, and shrewdly builds alliances when they are to his benefit. He is a master manipulator and uses a combination of military force, political tact, and charismatic leadership to get whatever he wants. In short, the self-proclaimed god can be best described as power-hungry, ambitious, cunning, calculating, dogmatic, domineering, oppressive, cruel, conceited, and fearful of losing it all. (Later games echo this portrayal.)

Gwyn's parents were most likely dead before he even became king, or died very early in his reign. The gods' resting place is largely devoid of coffins, disqualifying the chamber from being an ancestral burial ground for the medials like the adjacent giant graveyard. Instead it houses only medials who actually acquired godhood during life. If Gwyn's parents had been alive long enough to become gods, then they would be buried there along with others of their generation, assuming they died of natural causes. But if so, we have no way of identifying them. And if they are still alive, then Gwyn's uncle Lloyd wouldn't be presently leading the pantheon, since the Lord of Sunlight's parents would have a far stronger claim to leadership than their brother or brother-in-law. Thus, the only family he had left was Lloyd and whatever kin he thereafter gained as King.

We encounter statues of a crowned woman carrying a child, presumably her own, standing atop Anor Londo architecture in the Undead Burg. All of this implies that she is Gwyn's wife and mother of at least some of his children. The *Design Works* confirms that she is a goddess, but she is never named or referenced anywhere in-game. Considering that Gwyn founded his kingdom on the basis of his soul's power, he has no reason to marry for political gains. And so, the fact that this specific woman is his Queen can only be because she actually earned his affections. Still, she lacks a statue in Anor Londo, unlike her husband and children. The Queen was apparently not a very prominent figure in politics, and her notable absence from major events within at least the past few millennia carries broader implications about her current status.

At the very least, she lived long enough to sire him heirs. A statue of Gwyn's eldest daughter stands alongside his in the Anor Londo cathedral. The empty pedestal opposite hers is twice the height and so most likely originally seated an idol of Gwyn's now disgraced firstborn. Their place alongside their father is indicative of both their importance to the pantheon and value to the patriarch; naturally, their statues are still much smaller than his. They were worthy of the titles of Sun and Sunlight, like Gwyn, and contributed greatly in ways that honored their family's place in divine society. This contrasts Gwyndolin, Gwyn's youngest child who appears neglected or at the very least treated differently from his siblings. Gwyndolin's circumstances do set him apart, but it is hard to view the Lord of Sunlight in a sympathetic light when he shows such overt bias regarding his own children.

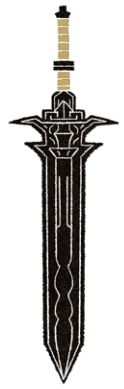
There are no doubt positive aspects to Gwyn's rule and personal relationships. From the perspective of medials, he is the most significant persona in their history. From the perspective of humans, he is the most helpful god in their history. From the perspective of the giants, he is the most rewarding master in their history. But that last part already begins to show the cracks beneath the sunny exterior. Did these institutional systems, designed to control the world, truly provide a better fate for those living under the gods? Machiavelli's ideal prince rules with both charity and fear to cement his regime, making calculated actions divorced from morality. Gwyn isn't interested in truly living alongside others; he wishes to rule above them.

Dark Omen

But eventually fire fades and only dark remains. The First Flame inevitably waned in power, and this coincided with a "dark ring" (ダークリング) appearing on humans.[51] Thus began the curse of undeath, and the gods' reaction to it is telling. Undead were branded as unholy monsters, to be despised by all god-fearing humans for their intrinsic impiety. This persecution is "hell" according to the Undead merchant's Japanese dialogue, and this reaction implies that the gods were rattled by the sudden emergence of this curse. Why wouldn't they be? The occult Dark was already an effective tool for hunting them, and now there was a sign of it growing stronger as the light of fire dims. The gods got too close to the sun, but they weren't burned by its rays; rather, cast adrift by the night it left behind.[52]

51 "But, eventually fire goes out and only darkness remains. Now, fire is just about to go out and doesn't reach the world of man; only night continues on, and a cursed Dark Ring began to appear among man…" - Narrator

52 "Nevertheless, we already know the brightness of fire, know its heat, know its workings of life. If the fire of the world is now lost, naught but cold darkness and fear shall remain." - Gwynevere



It is likely at this point that Anor Londo was sealed off from mankind and Sen's Fortress was converted to a prison. The conventional entrance to Anor Londo is bricked up, so we rely on an escort to fly us over the wall. The only reason to set up this system is to prevent any humans from breaching the walls without the gods' invitation. Humans who did attempt to enter were detained and probably executed after a thorough cross-examination. Dialogue suggests that no human has even confirmed the route to Anor Londo via Sen's Fortress for centuries, leaving the divine capital as legend and hearsay in the world of man.

These extreme actions aren't without merit. The Effigy Shield proves that gangs of heretics gave their all to exterminating the gods. It was impossible for Anor Londo to discern which humans were the faithful and which were not. The only humans they could almost certainly trust were those loyal, pious followers who had traditionally served them for generations. This was a dark time for the medials, and their way of life was threatened perhaps for the first time in their history. Kaathe notes that in Gwyn's fear, he defied the logic of the world and tried to delay the coming Age of Dark.

As part of such efforts, Anor Londo established the Way of White. Up until this point, the extent of organized religion had consisted of cults dedicated to specific gods akin to the polytheistic faiths of classical antiquity. These cults are separate covenants from the Way of White, with miracles foreign to the church. For instance, both Force[53] and Emit Force derive from Wrath of the Gods,[54] but the latter is only handed down in a frontier or "remote region" (辺境) where there is no apparent Way of White presence.[55] If the church had existed from the start, then it should be the definitive representative of the faithful and have a presence in every god-fearing nation. Instead, the Way of White seems to have been founded long after religious worship became widespread in the world of man, leading to rifts in various cultures' spiritual developments.

The standard weapon of a Way of White clergyman is the mace, but their armory includes more bloody armaments like the morning star and a holy crescent axe given to warriors chosen by the church. The latter is old, well-used, and made of copper[56] – likely forged in Anor Londo.This literal "third-day moon axe" (三日月斧) likewise refers to waxing crescents early in the lunar calendar. In other words, the weapon invokes the image of a new moon gaining light, which

53 "One of the miracles widely spread among clergy knights. Generates a shock wave.
There is no damage, but it is invoked quickly for a miracle. Repels surrounding opponents and sends them flying, and defends against arrows that come flying at you. For clergy knights charge into enemies alone depending on this." - Force

54 "Old prototype of 'Force'. Generates a strong shock wave.
'Wrath of Gods' was one of the extraordinarily long stories, so shortened gradually and became the current 'Force'. The prototype accompanies great damage with the shock wave." - Wrath of the Gods

55 "One of the miracles of the frontier, not known to the Way of White. Fires a shock wave as is.
It is considered to be 'Force' handed down in another form, and fires ahead so as to force out a shock ball." - Emit Force

56 "Long-used, old copper battle axe that has a long handle and a crescent-shaped blade.
One of the blessed weapons handed down in the Way of White, and given to recognized clergy warriors in particular." - Crescent Axe

fits the gods' desire to give "light" to the "night" of undeath plaguing the world of man. The Way of White also had "legendary" treasures such as Grant and Sanctus in their possession, both of which were given to their first Undead cleric. Clearly, the gods were behind the church from the start.

The Roman Catholic Church considers itself God's kingdom on earth versus His kingdom in heaven, thereby functioning as an authoritative body for its members' beliefs and practices. This gives structure to the faith and provides universal order to worshipers. The Way of White essentially serves the same function: an institution in the world of man that Gwyn oversees from the gods' kingdom of Anor Londo and provides a consistent platform for his divine will. This is the complete opposite of the more casual worship characterized by mythical epics and dedicated cults. It implies that the gods, fearing the sudden rise of the Dark and proliferation of undeath, felt the urgent need to consolidate their religion into a universal message while establishing a firmer foothold in the world of man.

By allowing religion to vary between cultures, the gods risked any one of these offshoots falling into heresy and then revolt. Undeath was shaking the image of light's superiority. What were humans to learn from this calamity? That the Age of Fire was over, that their ancestors had forgotten the Dark was the true inheritor of the earth? The occult already existed as a heathen element, and its spread would make the gods' enemies that much more dangerous. The gods couldn't remain on the defensive, holed up in their city. The Way of White gave Anor Londo a mouthpiece to directly spread propaganda and a body to enforce it. This is reinforced by the cleric class starting with the East-West shield, named for the "old symbol" of a double-headed eagle it bears[57] – a crest commonly representing empire. The church didn't grow into the mainstream religious institution on charity alone.

While the gods hadn't outright prohibited the Dark before undeath emerged, this all changed with the Way of White. Proselytization coincided with further scrubbing out the Dark from human history and society. The Dark Ember is a "taboo" that the church has long hid, to the point that no blacksmith alive in the present era knows it exists.[58] What agents of the occult remained were branded heretical fringe groups and summarily wiped out. (A concept later expanded upon with the Church of Filianore in *DS3*.) The gods used their church as a tool to convert, control, and cover-up when they needed it most. Once Anor Londo controlled the message, it was able to effectively curtail conversion back to man's roots.

The Way of White portrayed an image of strength for a pantheon more vulnerable than it had ever been, providing a solid cornerstone for humans to rest upon during a chaotic era. The church's cleric warriors,

57 "Wooden shield. An old symbol, a two-headed yellow bird, is depicted on it.
Lighter than metal shields, and has low physical cut rate and defensive ability." - East-West Shield

58 "Source flame required for evolving weapons. The Dark Source Flame is a taboo that has long been hidden by the church, and there is no blacksmith alive who knows about it.
Evolves +5 holy weapons to heathen weapons. (Heathen weapons can be enhanced up to +5.)
Heathen weapons are weapons for god-hunting and are effective against the clan of the gods and its adherents." - Dark Ember

59 "Source flame required for evolving weapons. The Clergy Source Flame is property of the church and primarily handled by the clergy blacksmith, but…
Evolves +5 standard weapons to holy weapons. (Holy weapons can be enhanced up to +5)
Holy weapons are weapons for Undead-hunting, so are effective against the Undead and servants of necromancers." - Divine Ember

60 "Helmet worn by clergy warriors of the Way of White, famous for tenaciously not falling. It is fairly heavy equipment and makes the equipper's body look big." - Cleric Helm

wielding holy weapons forged by the church's own blacksmiths with the god's white fire embers,[59] hunted Undead. They are famous for their tenacity and subsequent survival-rate,[60] which is explicitly tied to their use of the Replenishment miracle.[61] Since Undead are viewed as monsters, this resilient army is seen as heroes. Given that many Undead are just imprisoned and persecuted, it seems that Way of White focused its efforts on exterminating Hollows or criminals. But regardless, these hunts allow the church to maintain a positive reputation with pious humans while also keeping the surging Undead population in-check.

The gods also tried to prevent future Hollows from arising, resulting in the creation of Undead bonfires. These allow Undead to reverse the effects of hollowing, retaining their sanity and keeping them loyal to the preservation of fire. They are sometimes presided over by Fire Keepers, who serve as avatars of the bonfire[62] – their life is directly tied to the flames' survival. All three Fire Keepers we encounter have ties to the gods, indicating that the bonfire's origin ultimately lies with Anor Londo, and the gods clearly used the Way of White as a source for Fire Keepers. Anastacia, for instance, wears the dirtied garb of one of the church's saints, or "holy women"[63] (聖女). Most Undead emerge in the world of man, hence the church's chief role in regulating them. It is only natural that they would handle this practice too. (*DS3* reinforces this implication with Irina, another saintess.)

All the same, the Way of White relies on human members, so the gods took care in entrusting their power to this institution. The more advanced Large Divine Ember was kept a strict secret from the laity,[64] existing as only rumor according to Andre.[65] These embers were used as part of secret rites for select blacksmiths serving within the church, mirroring the selection process involved in handing out the crescent axe. This heavy regulation betrays the gods' reservations about humans wielding their power. Holy weapons are allegedly on par with the gods' weaponry at their maximum potential. For that reason alone, they are best kept strictly as church property. Of course, even this system could be exploited and corrupted without the gods' direct supervision. Following that logic, a god should indeed directly oversee the Way of White. And that god was Lloyd.

We can confirm that Gwyn's uncle made key contributions to the church's practices and popularity. The cleric warriors are specifically Lloyd's knights, and hunt Undead at his discretion, wielding a talisman Lloyd developed to seal an Undead's ability to drink Estus – preventing Undead from using the bonfires' power against the gods. He is associated with a white halo,[66] the image of which appears as the symbol for in-game achievements/trophies relating to the covenant. This white aureole

61 "One of the miracles widely spread to clergy knights. Gradually recovers HP.
Clergy knights who have received the blessing of 'Life Surge' are extremely tenacious and don't fall halfheartedly." - Replenishment

62 "Soul of a Fire Keeper who existed sometime, somewhere.
Fire Keepers are incarnations of bonfires and vessels for the humanity offered to them. It is said that their souls are devoured by countless humanity and boost the power of Est Bottles, an Undead treasure." - Soul of a Fire Keeper

63 "Clothes of the Fire Keeper of Firelink Shrine.
It was probably the white hood of a holy woman originally, but it is lightly dirtied in the ashes of the bonfire and now beyond unrecognition." - Dingy Hood

64 "Source flame required for evolving weapons.
Makes it so that you can evolve +5 holy weapons and enhance them up to +10.
The Large Clergy Source Flame is a secret rite of the church and primarily handled by a chosen clergy blacksmith. It is already a weapon of the gods itself." - Large Divine Ember

65 "Oh, you have an amazing ember, don't you… Even I only know it from rumors but… that ember must be the secret rite of the clergy…" - Andre

66 "Coin made with gold. The center has the chief god Lloyd and his white halo.
Even though a gold coin is extremely valuable in the world of man, it has little meaning in Lordran, where souls are the currency.
Still, not throwing it away is because of the hope to return to the world of man someday, right?" - Gold Coin

doubles as the relay for miracle resonance, a game mechanic that boosts the power of miracles sold by the church or derived from them like Emit Force. The only Way of White miracles that create these rings are Great Heal and Wrath of the Gods, the strongest spells in its arsenal. And the aureoles spawn in "other worlds", suggesting that they are residual magic left over from using these miracles in the area. That requires someone to have created this function, and Lloyd is the most likely culprit. (*DS3* ties the aureoles' disappearance in subsequent games to his cult dying out.) Even his name, Celtic for "grey", holds similar connotations of holiness as "Gwyn".

For Lloyd to have such an impact on the church, he must have been directly involved in its development, which strongly indicates that he is present in the world of man. His vested presence within the church was likely under Gwyn's orders. Anor Londo reacted cautiously to its situation, and not permitting the humans it feared to run its cultural counterattack was to be expected. As the King's trusted relative, Lloyd effectively acts as a regional governor representing the interests of Anor Londo, and who else would appoint him to this position besides Gwyn himself?

The world of man wasn't Anor Londo's only focus though. New Londo (ノヽロンド) is a country located quite near the divine kingdom and translates to a "small" or "lesser haven". But a haven for whom? The Crestfallen Warrior claims it to be an "old Undead ruin" in the Japanese script.[67] The Undead formed their own country in Lordran, and Gwyn personally appointed four among them to rule the new state,[68] hence why their Japanese name is the four "official kings" (公王) as in public officials. These king officials received a fragment of the Light Soul alongside their appointment, a political gesture to secure the four's power over their fellow Undead – and likely a show of good faith toward the humans entrusted to run the city as another kingdom loyal to the gods. It is also implicit subordination, hence why Kaathe and Ingward refer to them as the four "small" or "lesser kings" (小王) like their country.[69] They are ultimately vassals to Anor Londo.

The menu graphic for the Four King's soul is noticeably smaller and thinner than the otherwise identical graphic for the other three Lord Souls or fragments we acquire, implying that Gwyn provided the humans he ostensibly trusted with a significantly smaller piece of his power. He also divided authority between an even number of individuals, obstructing absolute monarchy and promoting deadlocks. Such underhanded subtlety is consistent for Gwyn, but nonetheless shows a vested interest in New Londo's development.

What reason do the gods have for supporting an Undead nation at their doorstep when they were obviously still wary of humans? The answer

67 "Have you tried going to the New Londo ruins below here? Head down those stairs and take the lift and you'll arrive there shortly. You should go once if you haven't yet. It is an old Undead ruin. There may be a hint of the mission or something." - Crestfallen Warrior

68 "Soul of the Four Official Kings who fell to the Dark. Fragment of a Soul of Kings found at the beginning of the Age of Fire.

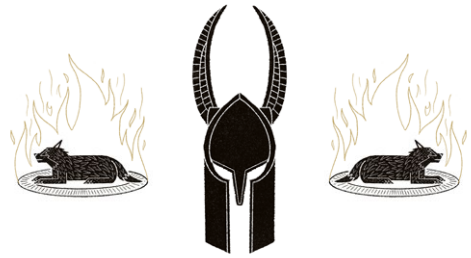
The four were once great leaders of New Londo, having been spotted by King Gwyn in particular, awarded their position of official kings, and given a share of that great soul.

Even though it is a fragment, it is sufficient to occupy the King's Vessel." - Bequeathed Lord Soul Shard

69 "Undead brave who destroyed the Four Small Kings. You want to know, don't you? The truth about you humans and the Undead." - Kaathe

is the firelinking ritual. The gods had devised a plan to prevent the Age of Dark from occurring, using Undead as fuel for perpetuating the First Flame.

Frampt reveals that our mission as Undead[70] is to link the First Flame, and thereby exorcise the encroaching Dark.[71] The kanji *tsu* (継) is used to mean both literally tying together as well as to succeed or inherit, to become part of a line of succession. In other words, to link ourselves to the fire is to take on the flame which came before, to have us carry on its legacy. We undertake many trials to that end,[72] such as the Iron Golem blocking our path to Anor Londo from Sen's Fortress – a trial that can be easily reset by nature of its guardian. We prove both our mettle and piety until Anor Londo finally permits us the means to enter the Kiln and do so. The firelinking ritual emulates the creation of bonfires, which use the bones of Undead to fuel their flames[73] – we even utilize an ash-covered bonfire situated at the very center of the Kiln to link the fire. But it also relies on the linker's soul.



Gwyn's soul notes that much of its power turned to ash as kindling for the First Flame, explaining why we must undergo such arduous trials. We require a sufficiently powerful soul in order to inherit the fire, and defeat increasingly powerful enemies to level up the strength of said soul. We are taking part in a system designed to find and train an Undead hero worthy of becoming a Lord of Cinder, or "King of Kindling" (薪の王), like Gwyn. Just as the Lord of Sunlight inherited the flame and became the king of fueling it, so too must we inherit that flame and title from him. It is for that reason that Frampt goes by the alias "Kingseeker" as the judge for this system, which revolves around the entrance to the Kiln located below Firelink Shrine.

Firelink Shrine is more literally the "firelink ritual place" (火継ぎの祭祀場), so not just a place to worship the ceremony but where it is supposed to take place. And despite the area name, it is actually an extension of New Londo. The stonework and architectural style are identical to the ruins below, and unique to these two areas. The lift to the Undead Parish, which incorporates artistic reliefs from both Anor Londo architecture and New Londo lifts, served as a point of contact between both countries via Sen's Fortress. This architecture extends into the graveyard behind the shrine, ending at the steps leading to the Catacombs.

70 "Undead brave who rang the Bells of Awakening. I want to teach you about the Undead mission. It's the reason for the world in which you Undead have appeared. Is that all right?" - Frampt

71 "Good. In that case, I shall impart it. Undead brave. Your mission… is to succeed Great King Gwyn. You shall succeed that King, rekindle the fire, exorcise the Dark, and exorcise the sign of Undead. For that, you must first acquire the King's Vessel at the royal capital Anor Londo." - Frampt

72 "Now, the path of trials has been opened. Head for it, the fate of you Undead." - Frampt

73 "Bone fragment that became white ash. Returns you to the bonfire you last rested at.

The bonfire's fuel are the bones of the Undead, and these bones on rare occasion take on the magic power of return. For even as bones, they are captivated by the bonfire." - Homeward Bone

New Londo was nothing more than a client state founded to gather Undead and use them for the firelinking ritual. Gwyn set up the Way of White to control the human and Undead populations whilst shepherding the sane and pious immortals through a system to select the proper fuel for the First Flame, operated from a city where they could all gather. This was the gods' counterattack against the growing threat of the Dark. Anor Londo had hoped that mankind forgetting its Dark past meant that it could suppress the Dark itself. The medials may have been caught unaware, but they wouldn't just let humans supplant them.



Relations weren't harmonious between the gods during this period either. The Black Knight equipment was designed for facing chaos demons, putting one's entire weight behind slow, heavy strikes to combat the demons' often massive size.[74] This implies that Anor Londo warred with Izalith, the chaos demons' homeland. We can confirm this conflict happened as fire first waned due Quelana referencing her mother's atonement for the past "thousand years",[75] the same amount of time that Frampt claims to have awaited retrieval of the Lordvessel,[76] Gwyn's "relic" he left behind after linking the fire according to Kaathe.[77] Further supporting the notion that the conflict took place shortly before the firelinking specifically is the fact that the Black Knights still wear their demonic-looking equipment even after becoming ash.

Many assume that the knights were charred black during war with the chaos demons, largely due to the description for Black Knight Shield.[78] Yet, when talking about the Black Knights' design in the *Design Works* interview, Miyazaki and Mai Hatsuyama, the artist behind their design, consistently relates their burned image to Gwyn linking the fire. Hatsuyama in particular recalls that one fan "got it" upon realizing that they used to be Silver Knights but were burned upon the firelinking. The Black Knight shield's English description is grossly misworded to imply that it turned black facing demons when it in actuality only claims that they had *once* faced the demons while the shield is *presently* darkened. The knights' armor was still silver at the end of the war. But by then, time had run out and drastic measures needed to be taken.

74 "Greatsword of the Black Knights that wander Lordran. Weapon for confronting chaos demons.
The attacks that put one's body weight into large movements come from the mightiness of their enemies of before."
- Black Knight Sword

75 "Mother's ambition was arrogant, but it has been 1000 years. They have probably already finished atoning..." - Quelana

76 "Oh! You did it! Unbelievable, to think you brought back the King's Vessel! The person that I have been searching for all this time for over a thousand years has appeared at last!" - Frampt

77 "A good answer, Undead brave. But, you must first prove yourself worthy of my, Kaathe's, truth. Head to Anor Londo. And then, acquire a relic of Gwyn, the King's Vessel." - Kaathe

78 "Shield of the Black Knights that wander Lordran. Flowing grooves are deeply engraved on its face. The shield of they who once confronted chaos demons is wholly blackened and has high defense efficacy against fire."
- Black Knight Shield

Firelinking

Shortly after the war with Izalith ended, Gwyn handed out his power to the gods before setting out to link the fire.[79] This included pieces of his Light Soul, much of which was given to the gods or turned to ash as fire's kindling. This handout didn't include Seath or the Four Kings, as Seath was given his piece "when" he became Duke and the Four Kings are Undead humans, not deities. Neither did it include the Four Knights. While the English description for the Soul of Ornstein claims that Gwyn granted the soul to the group, the Japanese text only asserts that the soul belonged to one "counted among" their number, namely Ornstein.[80] It also lacks the strong yellow hue seen with the soul of the Sanctuary Guardian, a lightning-breathing "holy beast" (聖獣) implicitly imbued with Gwyn's sunlight. It can also only be used to forge Ornstein's spear, associating it strictly with the dragonslayer. However, pieces of his Lord Soul weren't the only "power" relinquished.

Descriptions for Gwyn's items affirm that he left Anor Londo with only the clothes on his back and his weapon of war, having divided everything else amongst his "many" clansmen. One item stands out among the articles he kept – his crown. It was merely a symbol of *Gwyn*, not monarchy in general as the English description often misrepresents. Furthermore, it was "bereft of any power" when he departed.[81] In other words, Gwyn left with a crown which signified only *his* rule with nothing behind it. In essence, he lacked the authority to govern; he had abdicated the throne. And the king he left in his place? His firstborn.

It is commonly assumed that Gwyn was responsible for his eldest son's expulsion from the pantheon due to supposed foolishness on the heir's part,[82] but this is simply impossible. Kaathe mentions that Gwyn bound his "sons" to guide mankind before leaving to link the fire, not his children in general as the localization claims. Similarly, the presumed heir by birthright, who inherited his father's power over sunlight, leaves the Sunlight Blade text on his father's empty casket after his expulsion from the pantheon, which is only possible *after* Gwyn's "death". The firstborn wasn't disowned by his patriarch. Instead, Gwyn entrusted him with the kingdom's future. (*DS3* introduces the Nameless King, a former dragonslaying war god nigh identical to the firstborn's statues and wearing an Anor Londo-styled crown.)

This transfer of power is likely the underlying cause for Gwyn's "Great Lord" title. The god is commonly addressed as "King Gwyn" in item descriptions, and yet he is also the "Great King of the Sun's Light" or simply the "Great King" in other items and dialogue. His soul's Japanese

79 "Robe of King of Kindling Gwyn who linked the First Flame.
Gwyn of the most powerful soul handed out his power to the clan before linking the fire. The clan was many, and it is said that what was saved for him upon departing was merely his best greatsword, his crown bereft of power, and his apparel."
- Robe of the Great Lord

80 "Soul of 'Dragon-hunter' Ornstein who protects the church in the abandoned Anor Londo.
Use the soul of one who was counted among the Four Knights of King Gwyn to acquire a vast amount of souls or create a unique weapon." - Soul of Ornstein

81 "Crown of King of Kindling Gwyn who linked the First Flame.
Gwyn of the most powerful soul handed out his power to the clan before linking the fire. The clan was many, and yet this crown he saved was bereft of any power and merely a symbol of Gwyn."
- Crown of the Great Lord

82 "Old, dirtied ring that the eldest child of King Gwyn, who inherited the sun's light, is considered to have once worn.
Has effect that boosts the might of miracles.
The eldest child of the sun was once a war god, but due to his foolishness, his godhood was expelled along with all records of him, and now not even his name has been handed down."
- Ring of the Sun's Firstborn

description confirms that he linked the fire as this Great Lord, and Frampt calls us the new Great Lord after satiating the Lordvessel,[83] confirming that it originated when Gwyn embarked to link the fire – glorifying his sacrifice. Kaathe refers to the Firelink Chamber as Gwyn's "coffin",[84] and it is internally named "great grave" (大墓). This explains why an empty tomb dedicated to Gwyn was built beneath the Anor Londo cathedral. Gwyn's act constituted martyrdom, and the mausoleum is a testament to the king who discarded his earthly crown and went on to become the Great Lord of Sunlight, a Lord of Cinder.

The tomb's entrance chamber is lined with graves marked by statues of Silver Knights, suggesting that its construction coincided with many of their deaths. These either memorialize the knights who died in the preceding war with Izalith, or the survivors who then left to become Black Knights. When Gwyn left to link the fire, the surviving knights split from those left stationed at the capital. They "pursued" Gwyn, chasing after their King.[85] There was no reason for Gwyn to needlessly sacrifice his knights, and many ultimately escape the Kiln and aimlessly wander Lordran. They chose to follow their lord, who had presumably led them in battle against chaos demons not long ago, wherever fate took him. This loyalty explains why only the demonic-helmed knights turned black while the angelic-helmed knights remain silver. They felt the greatest connection to their sovereign and didn't even have time to reintegrate with their brethren back home before embarking on one final expedition.

As a result, they arrived at the Kiln right when Gwyn linked the fire, which the surroundings suggest created a massive outburst of flame. The knights were burned to ash, leaving their equipment black but otherwise unharmed thanks to its fire resistance. We see spirits of these knights cross the steps in the space between the Firelink Chamber and the Kiln, but this is likely the afterimage of their actual trek, a footprint in the fabric of time similar to the ones we can see of players in other timespace during our journey. Miyazaki implies that the armor of the Black Knights wandering Lordran is physically empty in the *Design Works* interview, yet they still contain souls as disembodied spirits, and bleed black mist as if all that is left are burned remains.

Many assume that the gods acted out of desperation to preserve fire, and that is probably true. That said, much of our present-day mission was part of Gwyn's methodical calculations. The god-king intended to be replaced as the Lord of Cinder, and created a means to determine how. The Great Lord left



83 "Ooh... Ooh... Finally, the King's Vessel has been filled... Splendid... You are Gwyn's rightful successor, the new Great King..." - Frampt

84 "... This is Gwyn's coffin." - Kaathe

85 "Helmet of the Black Knights that wander Lordran.

When King Gwyn set out for his firelinking, the knights pursued the King and were burned by the rekindled fire. Henceforth, they became ash and continue wandering the world." - Black Knight Helm

behind the Lordvessel, a glorified measuring cup to weigh our soul against that of his own.[86] Once the vessel reaches a power level comparable to his, the doors leading to the Kiln will open and allow a worthy successor to replace him as king – "King's Vessel" (王の器) doubling to mean one's capacity or caliber to be king. This relic served the secondary function of deterring entities like Kaathe from easily invading the Kiln and bringing an end to fire. And to prevent abuse, the Lordvessel was gated so that only the gods of Anor Londo could decide who would use it in good faith.

However, this doesn't necessitate us killing the four bearers of Lord Souls or pieces of them, and it is unlikely that Gwyn intended us to. The vessel simply requires souls to fuel its flame, and larger souls naturally create a larger flame. Technically, the power of the Lord Souls aren't essential to this process – they are simply the largest souls immediately available, the easiest means to prove our mettle against Gwyn. Even if we were to assume that their souls were necessary, Gwyn couldn't have set this requirement, or else the doors would already be shut and the Black Knights unable to reach him in time to become ash. Someone else had to have set the vessel's lock after the fact. The setup for this sacred ritual is suspicious.

It is often assumed that Gwyn erected the magic barriers blocking our access to Seath, Nito, and the Bed of Chaos, yet all we are told is that the areas are sealed with the "power" of the Great Lord. Anyone in Anor Londo could have done this since the god gave both his soul and sunlight to them before leaving. And if Gwyn is truly responsible, then why? The Lord of Sunlight warred with demons far below him but merely quarantined a mad paledrake hording the gods' library of knowledge at his doorstep? Rather shortsighted for Gwyn, who carefully thought through how to decide his replacement without compromising the First Flame. Not to mention all three seals ultimately prove ineffective at containing the forces within, which is counterproductive to their supposed purpose of containing them until a proper replacement was chosen. How sloppy.

No, this wasn't Gwyn's design. Someone else tied these barriers to placing the Lordvessel on the altar, after the Great Lord became Lord of Cinder, once it was clear that the three soul bearers wouldn't suddenly vacate their locations. The barriers only exist to prevent outsiders from reaching the eventual targets before the intended time.

So why *did* Gwyn ultimately choose to link the fire himself and not continue to rule the gods as he had? In truth, his fear of the Dark probably simply surpassed his fear of death. If the Age of Dark came about, he and the gods would be forgotten and nothing would remain

86 "Very well. Then, I, Frampt, shall tell you, who has the King's Vessel, the next mission as the Seeker. You must fill that vessel with great souls to succeed Great King Gwyn. But, that king's soul is quite a giant thing... Thus, there aren't many who possess the souls to fill the King's Vessel." - Frampt

of his great history. The plans he had set in motion weren't producing results fast enough, and the only way to buy time was to have someone already fulfilling the requirements to be fire's new kindling. Gwyn's Light Soul, the most powerful soul in existence, was apparently the only one qualified. Gwyn made a noble sacrifice for his people, but his intentions were hardly pure. He was an egotistical man and would rather die in a literal blaze of glory than see the monuments to his greatness, arguably his last bastion at immortality, collapse before his very eyes.

Many believe that Gwyn's haggard state during his boss battle implies that he has Hollowed. But undeath is a uniquely human phenomenon. Instead, Gwyn has spent a millennium as fire's kindling, something that surely takes a toll on the body even if the soul has plenty left to burn. As often surmised from the somberness of his boss music, we fight the pathetic shell of a self-proclaimed deity who may not even recall who he once was; a king of ruins and ash piles, simply standing in wait as the First Flame's final line of defenses. The Great Lord heralded in legend died long ago. Died believing he preserved his memory forevermore. Died believing he rewrote the logic of the universe. Died believing he was truly the greatest to ever walk the earth. We just sweep away the cinder.

Vanity's Decline

Contrary to popular belief, the gods didn't abandon the capital around Gwyn's departure. According to her covenant ring, Gwynevere left the country with many of her fellow deities,[87] leaving it deserted in the present era save for dutiful guards and slaves. The English descriptions for the Silver Knight equipment further implies that the knights chose to remain at the "abandoned" metropolis in service to an "illusion" of Gwynevere when the chivalric order first split. However, the Japanese text has subtle differences. The knights are "the *ones* remaining"[88] and "they who have *continued* to remain"[89] in the royal capital performing these duties. This wording doesn't necessarily suggest that the city was deserted when they first split from their demonic counterparts.

There was no reason for the gods to up and abandon their way of life when their country had safely adapted to the crisis. Gwyn's regime had gone to great lengths to preserve the status quo, setting up a system to find a successor to his throne in the First Flame whilst also installing his heir to the throne in Anor Londo, entrusting him

87 "Ring given to covenantors of Gwynevere, Princess of the Sun and eldest daughter of King Gwyn. It is slightly warm and has power that boosts miracle resonance effect.
Gwynevere, Princess of the Sun's Light, left Anor Londo along with many gods and later became the wife of the God of Fire, Flann." - Ring of the Sun Princess

88 "Armor of the Silver Knights who protect Anor Londo.
When King Gwyn departed to link the fire, his knights split into two groups. The Silver Knights are the ones who have remained in the abandoned royal capital serving an illusionary goddess."
- Silver Knight Armor

89 "Shield of the Silver Knights who protect Anor Londo. Flowing grooves are deeply engraved on its face.
For the shield of they who have continued to remain in the royal capital protecting an illusionary goddess is still protected by the goddess' divine protection."
- Silver Knight Shield

with guiding the humans that they had successfully swayed to their cause. With Gwyn memorialized as a hero, and the capital under new leadership, Anor Londo remains a populated kingdom at least until the firstborn is stripped of his godhood and stricken from history. Who else could depose the King other than all of his subjects?

The new king's rule lasted at least up through the fall of Oolacile. Ciaran is a member of the Lord's Blades, a group of female assassins whose duty is to erase the king's enemies[90] as the name "King's Blades" (王の刃) would suggest. She is still an active member of the group when we encounter her in Oolacile's past, implying that they still have a king to serve. Furthermore, she can wish us the "guidance of the King" in the same way other characters wish us the guidance of fire.[91] All characters address Gwyn as the Great Lord in Japanese dialogue except for Kaathe, who hardly considers the implications behind the title to be great. Meanwhile, item descriptions refer to him as "King Gwyn" when describing events from before he linked the fire. When even Gough invokes his name as Great King during the same era, Ciaran's use of just "King" indicates that she is referring to another king – her current king: Gwyn's firstborn.

Meanwhile, Gough explains that he is in retirement. Since the knight's ring is in the possession of the giant blacksmith in the present era while he can be killed in the past, it was likely given to the giant, presumably his friend, as a parting gift upon retiring. This further narrows down the timeframe when the gods left Anor Londo. The smith relates that his poor communication skills are because he had no one to practice with.[92] However, Gough speaks eloquently while also being extremely familiar with the blacksmith's talent. This implies that the gods taught the giant metalworking at a very young age, where he demonstrated enormous potential. They then left while he was still a child, and so he grew up honing his craft but with barely any customers to speak to.[93] Gough calls his friend a "youngster"[94] (小僧), implying he is still small at the time we meet the knight. Combine this with Ciaran's earlier prayer, and we can narrow down the departure of the gods from Anor Londo to a relatively short time after the fall of Oolacile.

Gough notes that Kalameet was ignored "even by the Anor Londo of before",[95] a line often misinterpreted as proof that the city is already abandoned at this time. In truth, the rest of his dialogue reminisces about the era of Gwyn's reign while the comment itself concerns military strength, not total population. With that in mind, his meaning is clear: if Anor Londo at the height of its powers wouldn't confront Kalameet, then a country which has lost half its knights after Gwyn abdicated and

90 "Special ring given to the Four Knights of King Gwyn. The Hornet Ring is a thing of 'King's Blade' Ciaran.
Has effect that boosts fatal attack power. Her daggers are said to have erased the king's enemies." - Hornet Ring

91 "Thank you. I'm grateful to you, as his friend. Take these at least… I won't be needing them anymore. May you have the guidance of the King." - Ciaran

92 "Talk, I weak at. There, no one. They gone."
- Giant Blacksmith

93 "Talk, I weak at. Forging, I strong at. Always perfect."
- Giant Blacksmith

94 "Now, don't you mistake me. I like this. Wood-carving is also a profound and fun thing. At present, I can say I'd have a lot to discuss with that smith youngster. Which reminds me, I wonder how he is doing? Should still be hammering away." - Gough

95 "Yes, it is as I thought. His name's Kalameet. A frightening dragon who was overlooked even by the Anor Londo of before." - Gough

left certainly wouldn't. The distinction between the two Anor Londos is the presence of Gwyn, not his people.



In that case, then the only question left is when Oolacile falls. Dusk states that it occurred "hundreds of years ago",[96] though not "many" centuries ago as the localization asserts. Producer Daisuke Uchiyama also claims that the DLC takes place 200-300 years ago in a *Digital Spy* interview and 300 years ago in a *Eurogamer* interview. Although Miyazaki states that this "additional content is set about a hundred years before Oolacile was ruined" in an *IGN* interview, this can potentially be disregarded as a misquote. Dusk states that Oolacile is already destroyed in the DLC's era and has by all indications been in ruins for several centuries at least. At the same time, *Gaming Trend* makes a similar claim in its interview with Uchiyama, so this may be an inconsistency in marketing the DLC. But with even an in-game source citing a vague *multitude* of centuries, we can assume that the events do in fact take place somewhere between 200-300 years ago.

In conclusion, the gods remained in Anor Londo for at least seven hundred years since Gwyn linked the fire. The country lost some of its military strength during the transition of power, but his firstborn led a stable regime attempting to enact the Great Lord's plan, at least until he was stripped of his divinity and left the capital. The gods soon followed. In the royal manor, there are two mimics hiding silver and gold coins – an odd thing for a member of the royal family to hide since souls are the local currency. These coins have no in-game use other than feeding to Frampt for souls and thus only serve a lore purpose – they show us a god keeping human money and hiding it in security chests, a member of the royalty no less. The gold coin depicts Lloyd, implying that he has already established himself as a prominent figure in human society when these were acquired. Meanwhile, the silver coins depict Knight King Rendal,[97] narrowing the date even further.

We see Rendal's knights of Balder throughout Undead Parish and Sen's Fortress, and the Crestfallen Merchant reveals that Rendal and others' attempts to pass the trials of Sen's Fortress have gone on for a century.[98] From this and other references to century-old legends who came to Lordran, we can derive that the current form of the Undead mission is only that old, dating Rendal's lifetime to during the preceding century. The fact that the Undead Burg is missing during Oolacile's past from the same areas where we can see it in the present supports this further. Therefore, the town was founded after Oolacile's destruction sometime within the

96 "So, perchance, was that also you back th..... No, it couldn't be so, could it? That was in Oolacile hundreds of years ago. Please forget I asked such a thing." - Dusk

97 "Coin made with silver. The center has the portrait of the legendary Knight King Lendl.

Even though a silver coin is highly valuable in the world of man, it has little meaning in Lordran, where souls are the currency.

Still, not throwing it away is because of the hope to return to the world of man someday, right?" - Silver Coin

98 "... That's right, let me give you one piece of advice. You absolutely can't go. To that Anor Londo. I would know. It is already been 100 years. Knight King Lendl, Tarkus of Black Iron, even that Logan. Like you, they couldn't do it. Like hell you can bear it. That's why, if you struggle to the upmost, fine. You'll make it still deeper. Your despair." - Crestfallen Merchant

past two centuries. The mimic in Anor Londo is the only instance where we can acquire silver coins, so we can't confirm that they are even still in circulation. Nonetheless, they can't have been minted before Rendal's lifetime and so must have been collected during the same hundred-year period between Oolacile's destruction and the Undead Burg's foundation.

The expulsion of the firstborn, the exodus of the gods, the construction of the Burg, and the hiding of human coin; they are all connected. After the firstborn was deposed, the gods left for the world of man. Copper coins portray McLoyf, indicating that he too entered human society and grew to prominence like Lloyd. The fact that he is casually addressed as "old man" (親父) implies that humans perceive the god as a friendly old drinking buddy you go to for a checkup. The goddess Fina courted Lautrec, as evidenced by him wearing articles representing her affection, so she must have visited his country at one point. The stashed coins most likely belong to Gwynevere, the only royal known to join them in their exodus. After all, if you *are* planning to integrate into a foreign society, you will need to deal in their accepted currency. After centuries of self-isolation from the mortal realm, the gods chose to mingle with their followers. Why?

The gods were so aghast by the firstborn's scandal that they purged their king from society, removed his statue from their cathedral, and destroyed any record that so much as bore his name. Such an extreme response had consequences. Despite English dialogue calling her a Queen, Gwynevere is still just a princess.[99] Anor Londo had deposed its former king's firstborn, passed over his lastborn, and ignored the eldest daughter. Under this patrilineal succession, the gods had no clear leader, which likely caused untold havoc throughout the realm. Even now, the throne sits empty: Gwyndolin remains in the shadows, and Lloyd has become chief god while remaining in the world of man. Much like how the governor of Gaul can't be micromanaged by distant Rome, Gwyn's uncle's place in the world of man was well beyond Anor Londo's reach. Thus, Lloyd could easily assume the title of Allfather on the basis of being the closest male relative to the Great Lord. He likely even used his duty as an excuse to avoid returning home, where his claim could be disputed. As a result, the Way of White developed into a faith primarily worshipping Lloyd.

Despite being a church dedicated to the Anor Londo pantheon, its present-day clergymen never once invoke Gwyn's name. Vince prays to "God", but he doesn't specify which god and may even be calling upon the divine collectively.[100] This is the opposite of individuals from places beyond the church's reach or influence, all of whom openly speak

99 "Undead hero. My name is Gwynevere. I am daughter of the Great King Gwyn and Princess of the Sun's Light." - Gwynevere

100 "I am Vince of Thorolund. Let's pray for each other's safety. To our great God. By the guidance of fire." - Vince

Gwyn's name with reverence.[101] Miyazaki reaffirms the religious divide in the *Design Works* interview, where he compares the cult worship of Gwyndolin and the moon to the whole of faiths close to Gwyn and the sun. This acknowledges the church's relation to the Lord, but the director then specifies the Way of White to be the "faith of King Gwyn's close relatives," not Gwyn himself. In other words, Lloyd is in control and downplaying worship of his nephew while propping up his own cult.



The Allfather is of the oldest living generation of medial we know about, yet he has only a tertiary tie to the royalty. He was given a prestigious role in preserving the Age of Fire but was ultimately expected to obey the will of his grandnephew. So close and yet so far from the reins of power, all because of fate, or maybe even chance. Perhaps an inferiority complex lay behind Lloyd's opportunistic power play. Said power revolves entirely around relation to Gwyn and the continued survival of the First Flame, so he perpetuates the worship of fire and existence of the Great Lord. But the old man has no further interest in taking orders from the main family. Because he largely cut ties with Anor Londo, the holy axes with which the church provides its recognized warriors are *old* copper axes, weapons Anor Londo forged and sent over before the current schism in the faith.

Why remain in a world burning down around them? Escaping to someplace calmer would offer far more comfort. Lloyd already had deep roots in the world of man and proved that the gods could coexist with humans. Whether they supported his claim to being the chief god or not, no other potential heir publicly contested it. And with the firstborn gone along with the sunlight that he inherited, how else could they pass on the torch? Perhaps Lloyd even foresaw this very dilemma when virtually erasing the firstborn from human history, an act which certainly required his enthusiastic cooperation. Regardless, the gods ultimately decided to leave the chaos behind and join the new leader in the world of man. The only exception was Gwyndolin, who remained behind[102] with the country's various servants. Thus ended the Age of Gods.

101 "That said, I have a curious connection with you. Maybe it is the liking of Great King Gwyn. Gahahaha!" - Siegmeyer

102 "Soul of the Sun of the Shadows Gwyndolin who protects the abandoned Anor Londo.

Special beings possess special souls. Use the soul of he who is the youngest child of King Gwyn to acquire a vast amount of souls or create a unique weapon." - Soul of Gwyndolin

A Final Rally

While it may have been in development even before the political chaos, the Undead Burg was definitely built in the aftermath of the exodus. Its name "Undead Town Below the Castle" (城下不死街) is a reference to Anor Londo, the *kyojou* (居城) or castle for the feudal lord per Andre. The town itself is the largest city we visit aside from Anor Londo, which is the only local power with the resources required for such a massive undertaking. While the gravestones behind Firelink Shrine reflect a wide variety of cultures, giant skeletons rise from two enormous graves at the far back of the cemetery – Anor Londo slaves who died during construction and were thus first to be buried. As far as we explore, the Burg lacks any sort of government headquarters, but its highest district is the parish built specifically to replace an existing church already connected to Sen's Fortress. And this parish has the gods' gargoyles installed to protect the church bell tower. Much like New Londo, Anor Londo built another gathering place for Undead; the motive behind it was the same.

Though it is often called the Fate of the Undead in English dialogue, the firelinking ritual is an "Undead mission" (不死の使命) predicated on a supposedly old legend.[103] The knight who sets us on our mission introduces himself as Oscar in cut dialogue[104] and entrusts his mission to us after being mortally wounded. As he relates it, those with the Darksign are to travel to Lordran from the Northern Undead Asylum and ring the Bells of Awakening in order to learn what the mission actually entails.[105] But one of the bells is installed in the Undead Parish church, so this "prophecy" can only have existed for about as long as the Undead Burg itself – around a hundred years. This suggests that the church and thus the entire township was founded with these trials in mind. Indeed, even Sen's Fortress only opens when a giant slave hears *both* bells ring and pulls up the gates.

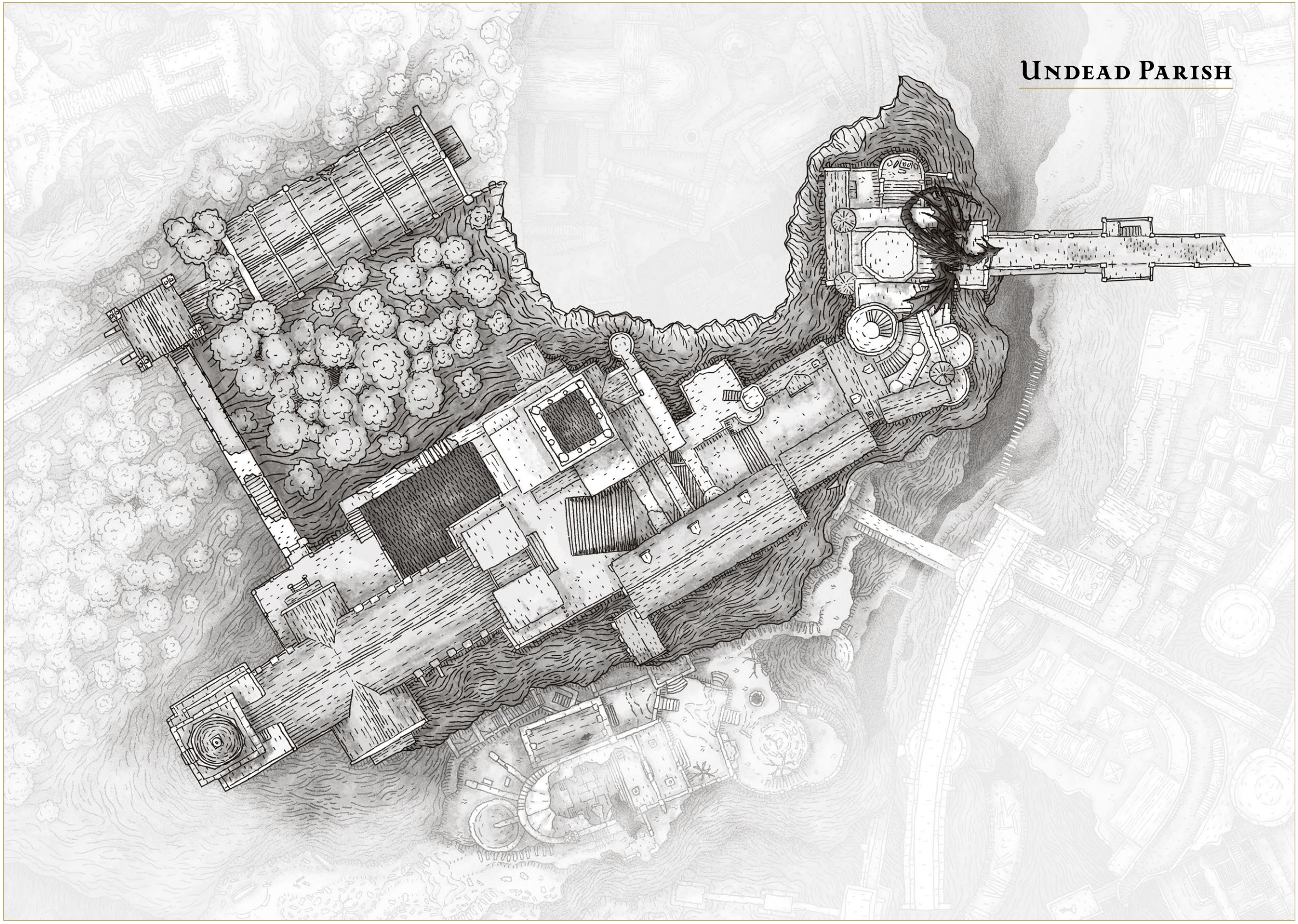
Even ignoring this, the legend is suspect. Oscar says that it is handed down in *his* family, but the Crestfallen Warrior implies that there have been many Undead pursuing the same mission, and not just from the asylum. Numerous parties have taken on Sen's Fortress, and the Crestfallen Merchant collects his wares from the corpses of those who failed – including knights of Balder, Berenike, and Catarina. We can acquire a shotel originating from Carim off another corpse there. That is too many parties of varying backgrounds who have successfully rung the bells and entered the fortress for it to be solely a legend passed down in Oscar's family. Rather, variations of the same story have directed all these different Undead to pursue the trial. Their versions of the tale may not even involve escaping from the Undead asylum.

103 "Yet according to an old legend, only a very rarely chosen Undead will leave the Undead Institute and be allowed pilgrimage to that land. It is the land of the old Kings. Lordran." - Narrator

104 "How do you do? I heard about you from Elder Frampt. I am Oscar of Astora." - Oscar

105 "... It is handed down in my family..... Undead have the sign of a mission... Those this sign appeared on... go to the land of the old Kings... from the Undead Institute..... ring the Bells of Awakening, and learn the Undead mission..." - Oscar

Undead Parish



Who would be imprisoning entire companies of knights, especially in an already ruined facility overcrowded with Hollows? And even if the legend is only shared amongst the aristocracy, none of the Undead Burg's residents appear to have peerage or the skill set to all be Northern Undead Asylum escapees.

All in all, we are told a century-old legend with dubious origins that leads Undead to a town built by the same divine kingdom administering the trials to determine its Undead hero. It is obvious that Anor Londo proliferated the legend to all these countries, hoping to attract scores of potential candidates for linking the fire. The church at the town's peak directly links to Firelink Shrine, Sen's Fortress, and one of the two bell trials, indicating that the parish handled the general management of the mission, as the divine capital's proxy. This duty also explains why its main doors prominently feature a laurel wreath, a symbol of honor and victory, and why the church halls are lined with statues of a woman holding up a firelit staff and wearing what appears to be a helmet.

The same is true for the statue of Gwyn's wife and child enshrined there as the main idol. The statue is featured both there and on the fountain at the entrance to the parish, emphasizing its importance to the church. The infant in particular carries a longsword, so it can't be the cross spear-wielding firstborn or the bow and staff-wielding Gwyndolin. It must also portray a universally beloved and uncontroversial figure since the Way of White cleric Reah prays to the statue, disqualifying the disgraced firstborn. The church statue is surrounded by reliefs of a lion, goats, and a man offering wheat and an egg along with candle ornaments made in the shape of birds and vines. This imagery doesn't complement gods of war or vengeance but does complement a goddess of good harvest and grace, whose birth would be seen as a boon to all nature. In other words, mankind's beloved Gwynevere. This church primarily worships Gwyn's eldest daughter, and for good reason. The entire point of the mission's early trials is for us to reach Anor Londo and receive a revelation about it from the goddess.[106]

In short, the Undead Burg is the new New Londo. Anor Londo created a refuge for Undead to live and attracted them with a fabricated prophecy. The town's governing body was wholly complicit in this system, hence why we see some of its regular army stationed in the facility as guards. But who does "Anor Londo" refer to now? The illusion of Gwynevere that provides the Lordvessel[107] is the creation of Gwyndolin, who rules the country from behind the scenes. Frampt follows the legend's guidelines before revealing himself and the Undead mission to participants, completely aware that there have been no attempts to challenge the fortress in a while. Thus, this current iteration of Gwyn's plan is most likely the product of these two's collaboration.

Lloyd seems to be at least cooperating with this plan, as Anastacia wears the dirtied robes of the Way of White's holy women and serves as Fire Keeper

106 **"Oh... a pilgrim after all this time, huh? Welcome to the abandoned Anor Londo, Undead brave. If you so desire, head out there and go straight ahead. It is the former castle manor of the Great King Gwyn. If you are the true brave, your wish will come true and you'll receive a divine revelation there... What comes next depends on you..."**
- Darkmoon Knightess

107 **"Ever since Father disappeared, I have been awaiting you. I bestow upon you the King's Vessel. Please. Do inherit the fire of the world as the Great King Gwyn's successor. If you do so, the world of man's night will end and the Undead shall appear no longer." - Gwynevere**

of Firelink Shrine. It is still in the gods' best interest to keep the Age of Fire alive, and providing Fire Keepers is the least he could do to help along the process. The church may also be partly responsible for the legend spreading to various countries and the continued imprisonment of Undead at places like the asylum. Otherwise, Lloyd seems to have left the ritual to Frampt and Gwyndolin. Petrus tells us that the church prioritizes its own Undead mission to acquire the Rite of Kindling.[108] This "secret rite for a fueled fire" (注ぎ火の秘儀) pours humanity into Undead bonfires to grow their flames and in turn increase the power of Estus,[109] healing the same amount for smaller swigs of our flask. This too, however, is done in service of the firelinking. More potent Estus improves survivability which gives Undead more opportunities to win and get stronger. As Petrus says, the ceremony gives Undead the power of a hero, which is exactly what the Undead mission is meant to ferret out.

The gods failed to enact Gwyn's plan for nearly a millennium, losing two kings in the process. The Undead Burg is their last hope, masterminded by the only two who still believe that the plan can be brought to fruition. After a century of yet more failure, we arrive to find even the town in chaos. Meanwhile, the gods' servants guard the vacant halls and barren streets of a ghost town, as if expecting its residents to one day return, the very residents living out new lives among the humans they fear under a dubious heir hungry for control. This is the glorious empire that Gwyn left in his desperation to preserve the Age of Fire.

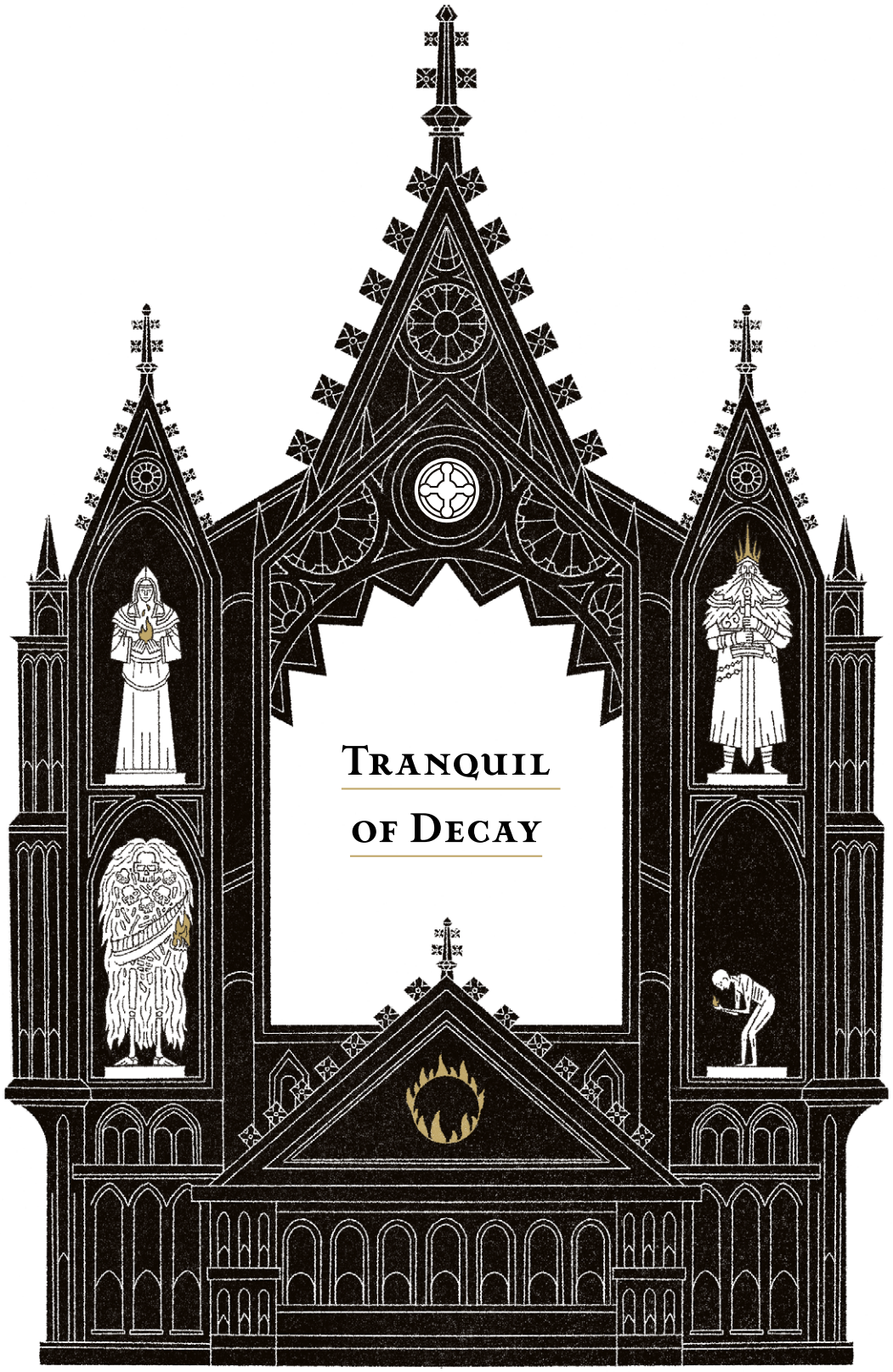
On Reflection

For the setting's first pillar, Miyazaki and Uchiyama have individually confirmed that Anor Londo represents medieval high fantasy Kings, knights, and gods. And much like the gallant Kingdom of Boletaria from *Demon's Souls* before it, this theme is deconstructed to highlight the hypocrisy of such romanticized concepts. For all of their posturing, the gods are no better than the "greedy" humans they despise, and are in many ways worse for it.

At any point in this narrative, the gods could have abandoned their steadfast allegiance to fire and embrace the Dark. It may have been difficult and required a process, but no more than first adopting the power of the Light Soul had been. In internalizing their fear, the medials might have still enjoyed supremacy even during an Age of Dark. But this was never an option in their minds. We can only attribute such obstinacy to the gods' own arrogance, born out of their longtime comfort in familiarity. They refuse to change with the times, still trying to cling to their antiquating hierarchies even as its foundation fades away.

108 **"The Undead mission in the clergy is, first, the search for 'Fueled Fire'. 'Fueled Fire' is an art that raises the bonfires of Undead via humanity. Through that, we will gain the power of a hero." - Petrus**

109 **"Secret rite for raising a bigger flame at the bonfire with fueled fire and acquiring much more Est.**
It is handed down as a secret in clergy legends, but the ceremony itself can be performed by all Undead.
However, is it really not until man becomes Undead that he acquires a 'use' for humanity?"
- Rite of Kindling



King of Death

Nito, the first of the dead. Fans often debate the meaning of "first", but this is the wrong question to ask. "First" (最初) quite explicitly refers to sequence, not position – he is the start of the dead in the same way that the First Flame is the beginning of fire. Rather, the question to ask is – what is meant by "dead"? There are two kinds of dead in *Dark Souls*: those who have died and become the corpses we find throughout our adventure, and those who have died and then had their corpses reanimated in some fashion. So, is Nito the first being to die, or the first being to be resurrected after death?

Either way, in order to understand the dead, we must first understand what death is.

Death is distinct from life and undeath. It emerged as a direct consequence of Disparity, contrasting the phenomenon of life that resulted from souls. If life is spontaneous, chaotic, generative, and ever-expanding, then death is by necessity predictable, serene, degenerative, and ever-contracting. For life cannot go on growing forever. By its very nature, it must eventually wane in power, much like the flames it is derived from. All living things age until death finally claims them, at which point their living bodies – disconnected from even their souls – further atrophy. Even immortal dragons aren't immune to this phenomenon; the power of rock simply prevents it from occurring naturally while the beasts' souls are still tied to the nonliving bodies. Ultimately, death affects everything touched by the soul.

The Gravelord Sword is shrouded in a miasma of death that is a "deadly poison" (猛毒) to every life[1] – hence why both the blade and Nito's own miasma of death inflicts the toxic, or deadly poison, status effect. Poison, or *doku* (毒), refers to any substance harmful to living bodies, so death made manifest is naturally the most poisonous substance. This miasma surrounds even the summon signs of Gravelord Servants, who sow disaster in another player's world by spawning even stronger enemies through Eyes of Death.[2]

In essence, the power of death imbued in these rotting eyes even affects causality, making enemies deadlier and thereby more likely to kill the person affected. Said person can try killing the Gravelord Servant to stop this but may instead be killed and deprived of their eyes so that they can be used to spread even more disaster. The power of death is thus in some ways analogous to a plague, though only in the way it can spread – it is not disease itself as the localization implies.

1 "Sword made with the bones of the dead possessed only by servants of Grave King Nito, the first dead. The thick miasma of death that the sword is clad in becomes a deadly poison to every life." - Gravelord Sword

2 "The sinister 'Eyes of Death' are a means for sowing disaster in other worlds and luring spirit bodies who become the victims. For the victims produce 'Eyes of Death' and the disaster spreads further." - Eye of Death

In short, death can best be defined as "decay", the inevitable entropy of the universe when the power of fire runs its course to its natural conclusion. And yet, the reanimated dead are, in a sense, alive. Nito's miasma of death still affects the skeletons fighting alongside him, and slaying them provides souls just like living beings. Miyazaki distinguished the archdragons from life due to their being half living and half element. We can apply this same framing to the dead, who possess living souls but expired bodies. We see this most often in the form of animate skeletons. The presence of wisps – floating heads which explode – in the Catacombs confirms that the dead can be something akin to zombies, walking dead covered in decayed flesh. In both cases, the souls powering their unlife are signified by spectral light in their eyes, which disappears upon their demise. In essence, what makes the dead distinct from life is that, even if they still possess a soul, their bodies aren't actually alive. Much like how the archdragons are "living" rock, they are the living dead.

However, like with the dragon zombie, it takes more to reanimate the dead than the power of a soul. Yes, we can resurrect Anastacia simply by returning her stolen soul to her body without affecting her status as an Undead, even restoring a lost body part. However, this case is likely due to her exceptional nature as a Fire Keeper. After all, we come across many Undead corpses that haven't spontaneously resurrected despite still being in possession of their souls. And, of course, many characters who die at no point revive. If full-body resurrection was so simple, it would be commonplace; death wouldn't have the implicit finality it does for all biological life in *Dark Souls*. In other words, the resurrection process involved in creating the living dead seems to only occur under specific circumstances.

How else can living dead arise? New Londo's mass of souls enemy, more accurately a "mountain of corpses" (死体の山), is an amalgamation of human bodies, which it twists into spears or releases as the same wisps found in the Catacombs. These wisps' internal name of "grudge" (怨念) implies that they persist due to resentment, hence their willingness to self-destruct to our detriment. They are found alongside the cursed ghosts, whose designs evoke *yuurei* (幽霊) – Japanese spirits that remain bound to the earthly world due to grudges of their own. We know that feelings have the power to warp living forms, so why wouldn't this power persist beyond death? The mountain of corpses is a product of resentment, much like the ghosts, but morphed into a grotesque mass of flesh instead of incorporeal matter. But what could cause enough resentment to revive the dead flesh into its current, monstrous form?



The slimes lurking down in the Depths are actually "crawling carrion" (うごめく腐肉) and share a similar shape, movement, and attack style as the mass of souls. These smaller blobs of rotten flesh lurk solely in the sewers where the Depths' residents reside; adjacent to it is the dining hall, where cooks prepare meat for their fellow Hollows. The sacks that the Hollow cooks wear affirms them to be cannibals, and we can drop down the kitchen chute into a sizable bone pile – making the wriggling rotten meat's identity apparent. The Depths' denizens have been culling their own in order to survive, betraying their neighbors so that they can eat. The victims' indignation embedded in what vestiges of the soul remain later reanimates the leftover meat and bone. Their flesh is by definition decaying, but not inanimate. Thanks to strong lingering emotions, the dead are cursed to "live" again, a common motif in Japanese folklore.

Necromancy formalizes the reanimation process. The most common products of these "corpse arts" (屍術) are skeletons, whose bare bones are kept in alignment by some unseen force and thus can be reanimated indefinitely. Nito and Vamos prove that they can retain the same sentience they had in life, but we have no reason to believe this holds true for all skeletons. Petrus' cut dialogue implies that necromancy can involve sacrificing the living,[3] which may be why the skeletal servants of necromancers demonstrate such limited sentience. They are closer to golems, installed with a soul from another source and heavily controlled by their masters. They are among the living dead but arguably lesser in being. At the same time, we find skeletons seemingly unrelated to necromancers in the graveyard behind Firelink Shrine, likely the result of natural curses.

In that case, where do these necromancers learn their art? It isn't described as a branch of sorcery, and the miracles of the Gravelord Servants don't draw upon faith either. The necromancers of the Catacombs serve the current ruler of the area, Pinwheel. More pinwheel enemies stand outside Nito's boss room among countless skeletons prostrating themselves in the direction of their Gravelord – toward a ramshackle wooden "shrine" draped in tattered cloth, with a faded red carpet leading up to his burial chamber – suggesting that Pinwheel was once one of many necromancers serving the king of the dead. The gods commonly have priests learning their magic and serving their will. If these pinwheels are Nito's priests, then necromancy is just the art passed on by the Gravelord himself.

Skeletons support Nito during his boss battle, endlessly reviving until the Gravelord has fallen; a scrapped mechanic saw the skeletons

3 **"Ah, you... please save me... As you can see, I am captured, immobilized. As things stand, I will be an offering for necromancy. Please... please help..." - Petrus**

decorating the god's body breaking off when attacked and immediately reanimating. Furthermore, his "grave king" (墓王) title confirms that the kingdom he founded upon acquiring a Lord Soul is built upon death, and he was even designed with this ruler of death image in mind according to Miyazaki in a Playstation.Blog post. Nito dedicates his Lord Soul's power to spreading death to the living,[4] thus he found the Death Soul. And so, just like how the discovery and development of holy magic stemmed from study of Gwyn's Light Soul, necromancy must be an art stemming from Nito studying the power of his Death Soul.



We likely even get a peek at this period. The opening cinematic portrays Nito during a peculiar moment. His "aura of death" as Miyazaki calls it in the *Design Works* interview is spread across the rocky floor before coalescing back to his original form. He then reaches out and grabs the soul shining before him, presumably the Death Soul, and gazes upon it as his fingers twitch. The fact that his deathly aura starts so dispersed implies his bones are spread across the floor beneath it, similar to those of a slain skeleton. The aura then begins bubbling up, as if drawing these bones back to their proper place – again, similar to how skeletons recollect themselves when reanimating. This cannot merely be Nito waking from an inactive state, since he isn't in shambles when we see him resting in his coffin, and he doesn't manifest his aura of death until after he stands up to confront us. The only additional hint to what we are seeing is the narration accompanying the scene, suggesting that it has *something* to do with him being first of the dead. In short, we are seeing Nito use the power of death to reassemble his skeletal body.

More than likely, Nito was originally alive and became the first of the dead after acquiring the power of the Death Soul. In order to formalize such power into the corpse arts, a corpse needs to be resurrected. And so, Nito became his own test subject. Close inspection of the medial's body shows that he is in actuality a singular, hulking skeleton with countless bones of at least two different races grafted onto his form, indicating that he has experimented on himself in the past. The Gravelord Sword is similarly constructed from bones of the dead and upgraded with Demon Titanite. The only weapons

4 **"Soul of Grave King Nito, the first dead. One of the Souls of Kings that was found at the beginning of the Age of Fire.**

Grave King Nito, who governs the death of every life, dedicates most of that power to death. But even so, that soul is large. It is sufficient to occupy the King's Vessel." - Lord Soul

reinforced with this titanite are forged with souls, and the blade is permeated by a miasma of death like Nito, so we can be sure that it was created with the Death Soul. If Nito has improved himself as a member of the living dead through use of his Lord Soul, the same can be true for how he became one.

Consider the benefits of becoming a living dead. Like the stone-scaled dragons, the living dead are immortal and have bodies resilient to injury and immune to disease. They don't need to eat or sleep or perform other bodily functions to survive. And finally, Nito and Vamos prove that they can still maintain their intelligence and personality. Compared to life, which is vulnerable to natural death, or undeath, which is vulnerable to hollowing, it is easy to see why someone might prefer the grotesque form of the living dead. It is nothing to fear or mourn for those willing to join its ranks. In experimenting with his new power, Nito used the Death Soul on his living self to artificially become the first being to persist after death, the first of the dead.

Yet this raises a question. The evolution of life left many corpses in its wake, but we don't find a single clear-cut example of any of these corpses reanimating through strong emotion before Nito's experiment. Why would this be? Perhaps resenting your death requires you to realize the potential future you lost in life – that is, it requires a degree of consciousness and luxury limited to a select few races, all of whom suffer little to no deaths of such nature before discovery of the Lord Souls.

Regardless, Nito shrouds himself in an aura of death that can be spread as a miasma, meaning that the power of death is in fact a part of him. The cutscene predating his boss battle portrays his skeletal form lighting up, accompanied by a heartbeat, as he awakens. This heartbeat persists until the aura manifests around him, as if to imply his very life is tied to this power of death. Concept art too portrays a heart or similar coalescence of energy at his core, reinforcing this connection. The Death Soul killed him and at the same time gave him eternity.

While the opening cinematic shows the Gravelord reconstructing his body into a new form, this isn't the ritual that actually turned him into the first dead. His arms are already swathed in tattered wraps, his body already comprised of others' bones. Rather, the cinematic shows a later experiment when Nito is grafting bones to improve his physical body. His twitching fingers show he is still getting a feel for controlling this new form.

And yet he still holds a soul, the source of life, in the palm of his hand. For Nito, death was not the end, but a new beginning. He experimented, improved his physical body beyond anything it could be in life, developed rituals that could resurrect other corpses to serve him, and even created

miracles for his followers, like other gods. Except his miracles don't require faith, instead basing their strength wholly upon the amount of death generated as an offering to the Gravelord.[5] The more death there is, the more powerful Nito becomes, a true king of graves. He used his power over death on himself and then formalized the art for his followers to mimic and propagate. And those who use his power as covenantors either spread death or become death itself, strengthening his power in turn. (This is why *DS2* later references him as the "one who once brought death to this world".)

And it is this power that caught the Lord of Sunlight's eye.

Rest in Peace

Nito ultimately allied with Gwyn against the archdragons, spreading his miasma of death upon them. While the English narration suggests that this includes disease, the original text never includes this detail. Regardless, it is evident that he brought decay to the everlasting, their immortal stone bodies crumbling to dust before his power of death. Yet this king of death had built his kingdom in the giants' ancestral graveyard, high above dragon territory. While his domain lies deep within the earth, it is nonetheless part of the ceiling of the Lower World, overlooking both Izalith and Ash Lake from openings in the crags. Why would Nito even bother cooperating with Gwyn in toppling the dragons beyond the threat of war to his own domain? The answer can be traced to his resulting behavior.

The Effigy Shield reveals that a band of heathens tried to steal Nito's power to bring death to the gods.[6] This implies that Nito has largely avoided spreading death to the medials in spite of clearly targeting humans and giants. Indeed, there are only three coffins visible in the cavern where Nito resides – a cavern dedicated to entombing Anor Londo's gods – one of which is occupied by Nito. The two others are almost half the size but still three times our height as one would expect of a medial's casket. The one right next to Nito has been opened and is now empty while the third is in an alcove behind the others, to their left, obscured by darkness and stalagmites. This may imply that there are more coffins in these cave pockets that we just can't see, and this is supported by the bones of at least a dozen medial-sized skeletons at the foot of Nito's sarcophagus.

Nito seems to gather the bones of his fellow deities from their sarcophagi after burial, likely adding them to his Frankenstein body as he does the bones of other races. And yet, all of these bones are still not

5 "Miracle known only to servants of Grave King Nito, the first dead. Thrusts up giant Grave King swords anywhere in the surroundings.
Very few know the 'Greatsword Dance' even among the servants. Its power is based on many deaths as its foundation. How many dead have had their eyes stolen?"
- Gravelord Greatsword Dance

6 "Sinister heathen shield. It protects against the gods' weapons and lightning.
A band of heathens opposed to the gods seem to have tried stealing the power of Grave King Nito, the first dead, in order to possibly kill gods, using up all of their strength before achieving their goal." - Effigy Shield

nearly enough to match the countless humans and giants buried in the Catacombs and Tomb of the Giants. Why hasn't the god of death been bringing death to medials like he does for humans? And who is facilitating these burials? There is no evidence of the dead carving these exquisite sarcophagi, and the farthest we can see them carry in the bodies is from the Catacombs. Who has brought Nito all these corpses and coffins, giant and god alike? The only powers in the vicinity at the time were Izalith and Anor Londo. And with that, we have our answer.

Gwyn most likely struck a deal with Nito, granting the Gravelord absolute authority over the dead and permission to spread death to any of the living he chose except for medials. Living is a weakness even for the gods. By striking this deal, the gods of Anor Londo and witches of Izalith could coexist with the Gravelord without fear of him bringing them under his purview. Meanwhile, Nito had free reign to expand his kingdom of death without consequence and avoided unnecessary conflict by simply ignoring the one race that managed to gain power equal to his own, all the while staying out of their politics. The deal perhaps obligates the gods to turn over their dead to the Gravelord, resulting in him gaining the bodies and souls of what few gods did happen to die, along with their servants and slaves. Of *course* Nito would abide by these terms and assist in the dragon hunts. It was a more than fair treaty.

We can see evidence of this in the layout of Nito's domain. He settles in the giant graveyard, but the Catacombs are built practically on top of it. This underground graveyard is much more organized and clearly designed for human burials. The only human civilizations in its immediate vicinity are the Undead Burg and New Londo. But both are populated by Undead, and there is already a traditional graveyard behind Firelink Shrine. So, who was this middle layer of interment history for? We can confirm the identity of one person entombed there by the Darkmoon Séance Ring on his person. It is actually a "Darkmoon priest ring" (暗月の司祭の指輪) and implies that a priest to Gwyndolin was laid to rest there, not general adherents. This ties the use of the Catacombs to the gods of Anor Londo. We know that various humans served those deities, and the practice predates undeath since the Undead painting guardians come from a lineage that has passed down their duty for generations.[7] For entire families to live and serve at Anor Londo, they would inevitably die and require burial.



These servants were unlikely to be permitted burial among their living, divine masters. Outside the city walls was a much more suitable location.

7 "Robe of the painting protectors of Anor Londo. Dimly white, smooth apparel. Strong to magic.
They have protected the Great Painting of Eremias since long ago and have inherited that mission for posterity. But, the reason for the mission is already long lost." - Painting Guardian Robe

The Catacombs



But this gravesite wasn't just built anywhere, it is directly adjacent to Nito's domain. In other words, this tomb complex was originally built to bury human followers of Anor Londo near the Gravelord, another show of good faith toward the gods' treaty. This is made apparent by the giant skeleton protecting the aforementioned priest's tomb. Said skeleton drops down from the floor above, right after the statues of Pinwheel stop. Between them, a hole in the wall reroutes us to an adjacent chamber ultimately leading to another Pinwheel statue. In short, it seems that Pinwheel's servants stopped just short of disturbing the priest's casket and instead burrowed into other chambers, hence the giant skeleton – whose kind all act in service to Nito – guarding this particular priest remained undisturbed and didn't interfere. The grave and its defender thus serve as a time capsule from before Pinwheel's takeover.

In short, the Catacombs were an extension of Nito's domain, where the gods' deceased servants were offered to him as new denizens to his kingdom of death. This would explain why he has human skeletons among his servants, and why a giant skeleton comes to retrieve us from the Catacombs should we rest in a coffin with offerings to the Gravelord: Humans were interred there specifically for Nito. Moreover, the main door to the Catacombs has elements of iconography also seen on the bottom of giant coffins in the Tomb, implying that these symbols were created by the same parties. The gods set up a system where Nito could easily build up his empire of corpses, and all he had to do was avoid bringing death to one of their own. What more could a god of death ask for?

Eventually, humans interested in Nito's powers forged a covenant to help spread death on his behalf. To prove one's accomplishments, the deceased's eyes are removed and offered to Nito directly. However, this system proves exploitable since we can extract Eyes of Death from basilisks and offer them up as a substitute. Other followers became necromancers, learning how to raise the dead like Nito. The pinwheels' odd form and concept art implies that they are an amalgamation of three individuals underneath the cloak, befitting their Japanese name "Three-Man Coat" (三人羽織) in reference to the "two-man coat" (二人羽織) comedy act. Because of this, they are probably among the dead and went through the same process Nito did, joining their bodies together in new forms to become his disciples.

Each mask of the pinwheels' three personalities represents a familial aspect, reflected in the boon it provides when worn. The one wearing the Mask of the Father is seemingly the dominant personality – concept art portrays the "manly" father as the legs carrying the other two aspects around, with the mask increasing the burden of weight we can

carry.[8] In comparison, the mask for the "kind" mother increases max HP,[9] consistent with a caregiver, while the mask for the "innocent" child boosts stamina regeneration[10] – apt for an energetic youth. All three personalities cooperate in-tandem while maintaining their individuality, as seen when they look at each other before responding to our intrusion. And together the masks represent a stereotypical family, though this is unlikely to be literally the case. Every pinwheel wears the same masks despite not necessarily sharing the same background, and none of them need to have been family in life to be joined together in death. Still, the fact that the Gravelord's "priests" have been shaped into the image of a harmonious family suggests that this is an ideal for the necromancers, or more broadly for the dead as a whole.

This may reflect on their master, as Nito is the only medial Lord with no known intimate partner or surviving relatives. If the god was celibate in life, then his embrace of death and focus on spreading it to

Pinwheel, beneath the robe



The father (white) carries the mother (grey) who carries the child (dark grey). Each cares for the other, working in perfect harmony. This is Gravelord Nito's ideal family, and his closest acolytes exist to project that image whilst overseeing the dead's slumber. Each part in the composite still demonstrates individuality, but whether a single Pinwheel should be considered a simple group acting in sync is debatable. With their Lord's penchant for grafting together multiple bodies, the three may be closer to a singular, and inseparable, hive mind entity. A rather grotesque peace to hide beneath that unassuming robe...

8 "One of the masks of Three-Man Coat, master of the Catacombs, the necromancer who stole power of the Great King.
This mask is that of the manly father, so it slightly increases equipment weight." - Mask of the Father

9 "One of the masks of Three-Man Coat, master of the Catacombs, the necromancer who stole power of the Great King.
This mask is that of the kind mother, so it slightly increases HP." - Mask of the Mother

10 "One of the masks of Three-Man Coat, master of the Catacombs, the necromancer who stole power of the Great King.
This mask is that of the innocent child, so it slightly raises stamina recovery speed." - Mask of the Child



others may double as a means for him to cope with solitude. He was alone in the unfair chaos of life, but now they are *all* part of the equalizing, harmonious family of death. The Gravelord "servants" are *kenzoku* (眷属), which also refers to one's kin or household and is commonly employed for the familiars and turned servants of vampires among others. This contrasts the Chaos Servants, who are *juusha* (従者) or "attendants". In other words, the pinwheels may reflect a twisted house play on the god's part, and the same can be said for surrounding himself with the bones of his kindred. This might even explain the countless baby skeletons found solely in the cave preceding Nito's boss room. Their attacks uniquely inflict the toxic status like the Gravelord Sword, so the pinwheels may regularly offer their god surrogate children to reanimate with the Death Soul.

The pinwheels teach us much about how the Gravelord governed his realm. They all carry lanterns that double as catalysts for fire magic, with unique yellow rune trails. This may be a kind of flame sorcery, as their strongest resistance is to magic followed by fire. The boss version additionally casts illusory clones and teleports with a dark aura emanating from a core of white light; these illusions in particular can attack but lack lantern light until doing so, further indicating the use of unique light-based magic. These magic lamps are likely derived from the same process used to create the catacomb necromancers' Skull Lanterns, the description of which explains that the god's domain devours "ordinary light".[11] This lantern not only illuminates the shadowy area, but also reveals a direct path to Nito's lair via blue lights appearing at regular intervals along the rockface – useful for servants who regularly traverse the extraordinary darkness.

For there to be a special darkness shrouding Nito's lair, there has to be magic. And this magic only extends to exposed parts of the graveyard itself, preventing the light that shines into the cavern from adjacent areas from illuminating the cemetery grounds. This isn't widely known to outsiders, given the lanterns and campfires of the abandoned campsite at the very start of the area. Why would Nito keep the light of the outside world from shining upon the territory of the dead? Perhaps because the dead prefer the darkness. Despite the makeshift shrine obstructing entrance to Nito's lair including four standing torches, none of them are actually lit. In other words, his servants built a monument to their Gravelord where the absence of fire is a show of respect.

The living dead are vulnerable to fire, so this may have been a safety precaution more than anything, but the magical darkness encourages them to detest the light associated with their antithesis. The dead eternally rest in peace far from the light of the living, ignoring them and hoping to be ignored in turn. Nito's intent to mask the dead's presence is further supported by Snuggly the Crow, who provides a Ring of Fog in exchange for the Skull Lantern. Nito is only concerned with advancing death and has no interest in dealing much with gods, humans, or anyone else. This may tie into his name. In the *Design Works* interview, Miyazaki reveals that he changed the character's name in response to feedback that it was "sad" from Nito's designer, Masanori Waragai, and ultimately liked the ambiance the new name impressed. This may be because Nito (ニト) is similar to *niito* (ニート), or NEET. If nothing else, the image of a shut-in sequestering himself away from the rest of the world in a dark room fits the god quite well.

11 **"Skull lantern possessed by necromancers of the Catacombs. Hangs strung up by its long hair.**
It is both a torch that can illuminate the Giant Graveyard, Grave King Nito's domain of death that devours ordinary light, and a strike weapon possessing the fire attribute."
- Skull Lantern

Oblivion of Death

Nito holds a strange position in the pantheon. The Gravelord Servants' interference with and killing of others for prizes is reminiscent of the Darkwraiths' invasions of other worlds to rob men of their humanity. Nito shrouds his domain in darkness, and his aura of death has a black core and white outline in-game, similar to humanity. Anor Londo's holy magic counters both agents of the Dark *and* the dead, negating necromancy; this is true even for Lloyd's talismans. Nito's power and the Dark have a similar, perhaps complementary nature as powers of consequence. If Disparity is mapped out on a spectrum, then light and life are closer to a state where fire is present whereas dark and death are closer to the state where fire is absent. (*DS2* adds dark weapons and sorceries derived from Nito's soul.) Where life seeks refuge in light, the dead find solace in darkness. And so, the holy power derived from sunlight is strong against both of their resurrecting effects.

This highlights the oddity of Nito's association with the gods of light as well as the friction between him and agents of the Dark. There is a peculiar ring left on a corpse in the Tomb of the Giants, the Covetous Silver Serpent Ring. Attempts to take it are immediately met with Nito's bone towers, suggesting a great deal of antagonism between the Gravelord and the human possessing it. Its description mentions the Undead, greed, and serpents – all terms associated with humans close to the Dark – while the ring itself has the power to siphon souls. Did Nito feel threatened by humans hoping to take souls? Another corpse there carries the Effigy Shield bearing the image of a "wicked god" (邪神), a false deity. It was used by an occult gang in their failed attempt to steal Nito's "power" – clearly the Death Soul, the source of Nito's command over death. Despite their aim being to kill gods, this band of Dark-worshipping heathens invaded with equipment ill-fit for battling the dead, which may explain the heist's ultimate failure. What's more, they used up "all their strength" to do so. They were dedicated, desperate even.

These heathens wanted to exploit a critical weakness of the gods, something Nito had thus far failed to do, and their timing is peculiar. Heathen elements like the Dark Ember had been scrubbed from history in the wake of rampant undeath and resurging Dark. This band has no obvious connection to known agents of the Dark such as the Darkwraiths, meaning that they are perhaps one of many groups that cropped up in retaliation to the gods' efforts to stamp them out. They were certainly no large army, and the realm of the gods is a fortified fortress in itself. In order to slay the medials and herald a new age, they would need a decisive advantage, which Nito's Death Soul would have provided.



Yet despite the close relationship between death and the Dark, the heathens did not approach Nito as a potential ally. Why? Because it seems that the Gravelord has continued to provide assistance to Gwyn during this period.

We acquire instructions to perform the "secret" Rite of Kindling from Pinwheel, who "stole power" from the Gravelord. The item's menu graphic portrays a single humanity curled over in apparent pain as it is burned by a bonfire's flame. By offering up humanity in this way, the flame grows – along with its healing properties when its heat is extracted into Estus. Basically, this ceremony sacrifices a fragment of the Dark Soul to further fuel bonfires. If the soul is the origin of life, then its destruction would fall under the Gravelord's domain – Nito created a means to destroy the Dark within man by drowning it in flame, having experience with creating *and* negating darkness with light. We already know the basic ritual, and the Way of White is aware that the secret rite exists, so Nito must have already shared knowledge of this power with the outside world, having worked out development of the original rite and a better iteration of it with the church beforehand. Of course, this power couldn't have been the heathens' objective since Lloyd's Talismans would render it useless.



It is no coincidence that during the period that fire wanes whilst undeath flourishes, the gods collaborate to create bonfires from the bones of Undead – strengthened through sacrificial ceremonies of Dark souls – while heretics attempt to forcibly usurp Nito's power. The god of death, who has remained largely uninvolved in the Upper World's affairs since the end of the dragon hunts, had suddenly reaffirmed his alliance with Gwyn by helping regulate Undead and thereby propagate fire. The Dark worshippers had no reason to consider him anything but an enemy. And while Nito successfully dispatched these agents, why did he take sides in the first place? Perhaps he disliked undeath's infringement on his domain and worked out a new charter with Gwyn for additional service. The king of death was certainly content with the status quo.

But, more recently, he seems to have since changed his stance. Human corpses are no longer interred at the Catacombs, instead a mountain

of casually-dumped bodies piles up at the entrance. Caretaking the facility looks to be so negligent that a waterfall, seemingly stemming from a stream flowing between Sen's Fortress and the Undead Parish, is now beginning to flood the Catacombs' lower levels unobstructed. Meanwhile, the Way of White's attempts to retrieve the secret rite are met with resistance. We find the Large Divine Ember on the corpse of a blacksmith in a giant's coffin lined with candles and skulls, accompanied by another corpse with the soul of a brave warrior. This is indicative of a waypoint outpost – the church's military foothold in the graveyard. By the time we arrive, it has been lost to Nito's skeleton horde. There is no reason for such antagonism if the two parties are still allies.

Was Nito spooked into severing ties with the outside world, quietly removing himself from the conflict between light and Dark? The heathens' attack may be to blame, but this seems unlikely. Surely he realized that choosing sides meant making enemies. Rather, the cause is more likely to have been friction within the alliance. The Gravelord surely witnessed the conflict between Gwyn's knights and chaos demons from his shadowy lair overlooking Izalith. If that alliance of convenience was broken after all these years, who was to say that Nito wouldn't suffer the same fate? If so, his fears would end up being vindicated since he is ultimately made a sacrifice for the firelinking. But the straw that broke the skeleton's back was probably Gwyn personally linking the fire.

The Lord of Sunlight's firelinking broke the arrangement between the kingdoms of light and death. The king of the gods made his body and soul fuel for flame rather than part of Nito's legion of the dead like the other deities laid to rest alongside their Gravelord. Whether or not Gwyn ever intended to hand over his own remains in the event of his death, Nito's cooperation up until that point had been based on continued good faith. The actual state of the First Flame is of little concern to him. If the gods would renege on their end of the bargain in order to preserve fire, then he may as well no longer assist them in perpetuating it. Whether it be light or Dark that ultimately succeeded, Nito would still be bringing death, steadily increasing in power. And so, there will be no more negotiations, no more collaborations. The dead want nothing to do with the living.

Cutting ties with all parties wasn't the wisest decision, however. True, the Way of White doesn't care enough to mobilize armies over the Rite of Kindling, but it *is* willing to harass his domain with smaller efforts. In other words, the church isn't desperate enough to



avoid killing Nito in its pursuit; if the ritual is lost with his demise, perhaps at the hand of a Chosen Undead, so be it – it isn't required. And in the end, Frampt justifies murdering Nito because he has either erred from the path of good or already fulfilled his necessary role. In a world where the gods now live among their worshippers, a god of death regulating the populations of lesser races is unnecessary. His sphere ultimately derives from the First Flame, and so death will go on even without him.

Put simply, he has no leverage. The *only* thing keeping Nito alive is the gods' mutual respect for each other's power. The god of death may have even felt secure in his strength being a universal weakness to any living thing, but he is not almighty, as we prove. There is a difference between neutrality and indolence, and Nito seems guilty of mistaking the former for the latter.

The Church's Mission

Nito's sudden isolationism explains why the Way of the White sent its very first Undead to retrieve the secret rite. Leeroy was a church paladin, or "holy knight" (聖騎士), in likely reference to *World of Warcraft* paladin and gaming icon Leeroy Jenkins. The fact that he is the church's first Undead places his lifetime to around its founding.[12] This is reinforced by his knowledge of old miracles like Wrath of the Gods – otherwise only performed by Anor Londo's giant royal guards – and Great Heal, which has since had its story abridged for the wider masses. Paladins are presumably the equivalent to senior knights in terms of rank, and quite pious on top of being skilled if Leeroy's strength and faith-heavy weapons and miracles are any indication. His faded, tattered armor fits the time he became Undead and highlights his separation from his contemporary society. Plus, he wields Grant and Sanctus, two treasures given to him before being sent on the journey to Lordran. Suiting his task, he also possesses a canvas talisman used by travelling clergy,[13] though not necessarily for a pilgrimage as the English description claims.

The church equipped Leeroy with some of the best blessed arms to defend himself against the dead. Indeed, we can summon the paladin to help us defeat Pinwheel, who possesses the rite. This wasn't a friendly visit but a warrior's mission, showing that the church had already realized that Nito wasn't allowing peaceful delegations into his kingdom. The original plan was likely for the god to hand off the latest iteration of the Rite of Kindling to the church so they could increase any given Undead's potential to become the next

12 **"Helmet of Leeroy, holy knight of the Catacombs.**
It is said that the Undead who was the first born in the Way of White long ago was a holy knight wearing golden armor.
The holy knight departed to search the land of the gods Lordran carrying two treasures, Grant and Sanctus. It is the beginning of the Way of White's Undead mission." - Paladin Helm

13 **"Catalyst to perform miracles of the gods. That of coarse cloth is a simple thing which traveling clergymen possess.**
In order to use miracles, one needs to equip a talisman and memorize miracles from texts at a bonfire. Also, most miracles have a limited number of uses." - Canvas Talisman

Lord of Cinder. However, envoys sent to retrieve the rite were likely slain by Nito's servants instead, requiring a more aggressive solution. Ultimately, Leeroy ended up only being the "beginning" of the mission, failing to retrieve the rite and forcing the church to send more cursed clerics after it.

Their continual failure is evident by the large number of souls of famed knights and white titanite found throughout the Catacombs and Tomb of the Giants, not to mention their ruined outpost; we even find the soul of a hero outside Nito's chamber. And by the present era, the Way of White's mission has become no more than a suicide run, though recent missions have mostly been derailed by Patches. The thief has taken the opportunity to lead either graveyard's visitors to their deaths and strip their resulting corpses of valuables, the string of knight souls ending at the same dead-infested pit that he can kick us into at the Tomb. To be fair, the Way of White has enabled this. Based on Reah's meager entourage, the church has been investing less and less effort into the mission over time, making for easy prey.



But why did Leeroy fail the mission when he was the best equipped for it? We meet the paladin twice: Once as an ally to defeat Pinwheel and later on as an invader on our way to face Nito. Invasion is odd for a holy man, and even odder that it takes place just outside the sole path to Nito's chamber. He is also in possession of five humanity total, three we absorb with the Dark Hand, indicating that he has stopped a number of would-be attempts to reach the Gravelord. Both Leeroys we encounter share the same ragged appearance, so we can exclude them as being from different points in time. The same Leeroy that helps us defeat Pinwheel also attempts to kill us and steal our humanity. This behavior is beyond eccentric.

Leeroy's shield has lost most of the blessing that it had received from white fire, but shows no signs of damage. The most likely explanation for this is prolonged exposure to the darkness permeating Nito's domain slowly eroding its power over the millennium. (*DS2* indicates that such exposure to darkness even afflicts the soul.) This means that Leeroy has remained in Nito's kingdom since he first entered the Tomb of the Giants. He isn't a mad Hollow, since he can still write summon signs and invade. Rather,

Leeroy seems to be acting on Nito's behalf. Stopping us from reaching the Gravelord, helping us kill his thieving servant; the paladin didn't simply fail his mission, he defected. The fact that a corpse with his armor spawns in Nito's boss room once his invading phantom is defeated reaffirms this.

Perhaps Leeroy sympathized with Nito's vision of the dead resting quietly away from the living, something Undead are denied. The Way of White makes no effort to stop Undead discrimination – it even hunts them down. Reah claims that we Undead are *just* "cursed" if we don't abide by the missions the gods bestow upon us,[14] revealing a certain distaste for undeath embedded in the church's teachings. Japanese dialogue again alludes to this when Reah mourns Vince and Nico hollowing as "going against the gods".[15] The Way of White associates undeath and hollowing with sin and sacrilege, which fits the gods' motive for even establishing the church. Humans are supposed to die, and undeath is a denial of that natural course. Cut content makes this explicitly clear. Escape Death is another miracle foreign to the church, in this case because it was "lost" by a faith that recognized death but not undeath.[16] Anything that defies our mortality is a sin.

And yet the church practices an obvious double standard, sending Undead clerics on a mission to retrieve something as penance for their sin, which implies that they were expected to return. Indeed, Miyazaki alludes to at least some characters having a goal to find their way back to the world of man in the *Edge* interview, and the churchmen are the only party who act as if they can. Whether the Way of White actually plans to welcome them back into the fold is another story. With the minimum effort put into recent missions, it is questionable if the church's upper echelons really cares about the secret rite versus the convenience that sending all their Undead after it brings, excising the church's problematic elements under the guise of legitimacy knowing full well that they won't come back. But the fact that they even promise it betrays their hypocrisy. Are Undead irrevocable sinners, or not? Before the mission became routine, at least some must have noticed the farce – the seeds of doubt taking root in their minds.

It all began with Leeroy, a most pious servant of the faith who was branded as just another unholy monster and burdened with a dangerous duty to repent for his unwilling transgression. He was sent to battle the living dead, who also deny the finality of death in conflict with the church's teachings. But the Way of White tolerated them so long as the alliance held; it was only when Nito and his kin decided they wanted to be left alone that the church remembered that they were unholy monsters. Faced with this hypocrisy, and his own rejection, is it any wonder why the holy knight might feel an affinity for the Gravelord and defect?

14 "... You are an Undead too, correct? In that case, there is no need to fraternize. Let us each fulfill our own missions... Otherwise, we are just cursed people." - Reah

15 "... You are no Hollow, are you?... Thank goodness. But, please be careful. Beyond here are two terrifying Hollows. They are both excellent knights... and were my companions. That they would become Hollows, go against the gods and all, is a terrible thing... but I... can't do anything... no matter what..." - Reah

16 "One of the lost miracles, not known to the Way of White. If within its effective time, lose nothing upon death.

The Way of White affirms death itself, and that it is undeath rather which should be avoided. It is for that reason that this miracle was lost." - Escape Death

Inquisitive Trio

Pinwheel wasn't part of the heathen band's failed heist. They sought different powers, and Pinwheel succeeded where the cultists failed. Nor do the necromancers use any obvious Dark magic during their boss battle. Nonetheless, they betrayed their god and fled to the Catacombs with the secret rite. Since the area is technically part of Nito's territory, Pinwheel becoming its new "master" was a rebellion. After settling there, they gathered a cadre of necromancer servants, disposing of most of Nito's guards and replacing them with their own army of the dead. These necromancers' are internally named "Undead (gravekeeper)" (不死人(墓守)) and appear Hollow, so they were most likely recruited from the only human civilization existing nearby in recent history – the Undead Burg; this thereby narrows Pinwheel's takeover to within the last century.

Pinwheel's reign has lasted long enough for their servants to build two types of statues. Standard effigies portray the entity as just the father while others portray the mother holding the mask of the child around the womb area. Befitting the unbalanced look of the "kind" mother's more pronounced tilt of the head, the "innocent" child's eyes and mouth shoot out deadly skewers as a trap. Likewise, many skeletons lying around the Catacombs are contorted as if clawing away or begging for mercy, a few clinging to these statues. These visitors were slaughtered upon entry, and the fact that some had managed to reach the lower levels beforehand implies that they could fight. The holy set and souls of famed knights are also found on various corpses there, so these skeletons are most likely clerics passing through the Catacombs to reach the Tomb of the Giants.

The fact that Pinwheel sets up shop in one of the giant coffins at the very edge of Nito's domain demonstrates both their confidence and the god of death's lack of effort to punish them. Indeed, Nito continues sending giant skeletons to retrieve prospective Gravelord Servants from what is ostensibly now Pinwheel's domain. His apparent indifference is justifiable. Whatever physical medium the instructions for the secret rite were recorded in can be replicated by the Gravelord, and his primary concern is the dead, not the Undead. There is little lost in Pinwheel's treachery, and his servants can still navigate the Catacombs as needed just fine. Of course, Nito may simply be leaving the matter to Leeroy, who has placed a summon sign near Pinwheel's chamber. In that case, the rogue necromancer's reign over the Catacombs has probably only been a matter of months at most.

Why did Pinwheel even steal the secret rite and settle in the Catacombs so close to their former master to begin with? Their chamber is littered with books that could only have been acquired from the outside world. Odd that three who served the Gravelord would be collecting outside knowledge of the corpse arts. In fact, there is no evidence that such research is even in service of advancing necromancy. Meanwhile, Pinwheel has made no actual attempt to deprive Nito of his Lord Soul or overthrow the death god himself. A cut first encounter with Petrus in the Catacombs involves his capture in preparation for a necromantic ritual, but this encounter may have simply been the work of Pinwheel's servants. Pinwheel themselves don't perform any necromancy in our battle against them despite the wealth of skeletons surrounding them for their apparent research. Taken as a whole, their actions seem too peculiar to simply be an overzealous pursuit of necromancy.



Does their research even directly relate to necromancy? When we first encounter the boss, they are working with a skeleton with missing hands and feet, like the rest in the room, and the serrated blade and giant bloodstains on the work table imply that the three had started with a regular corpse. Why would a necromancer dissect bodies down to the bone? And then continue to work on them? This only cripples future servants, and bones have little to reveal compared to fully flesh cadavers. Yet Pinwheel has been doing just that before repurposing the tools to string them up like prisoners, one can almost say "shackling" them. What's more, they are specifically examining *human* skeletons, which aren't buried in the giant graveyard where the other pinwheels reside. Pinwheel's theft of the secret rite reveals their interest in the function of Undead bonfires, particularly in relation to humanity. In total, their research seems far more invested in undeath than necromancy. They may well be trying to discover and study the "shackles of the gods" that Kaathe describes.

We offer humanity not only for the Rite of Kindling, but also as part of a similar ceremony performed to reverse hollowing. Aside

from their healing function, this is the only reason for Undead to be dependent upon the bonfires. Yet Lifedrain preserves our sanity as Undead by absorbing souls – especially humanity – from others, effectively negating the limitations of the curse. Kaathe describes this as removing the shackles that the gods placed on man, so these shackles must somehow be related to hollowing. If these shackles are physical, then they can be observed. And if they can be observed, then they can be studied. Pinwheel may therefore be aiming to study them. (*DS3* confirms that the shackles exist in human vertebrae, validating skeletal dissection.) Trying to understand the Undead curse would also explain the sheer volume of reading material that they have collected, which could potentially range from history to biology to Dark arts.

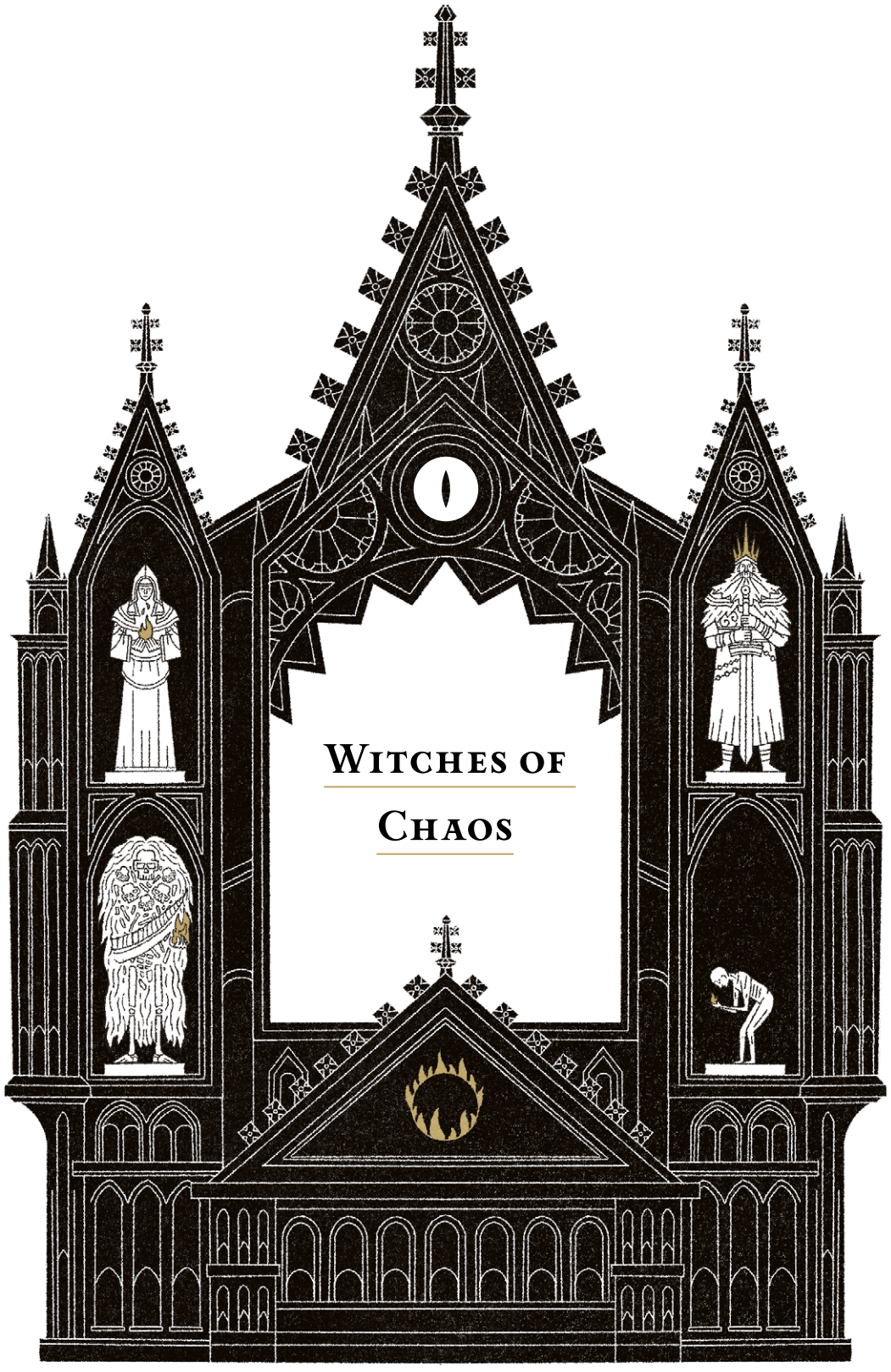


So, what inspired this investigation? Was Pinwheel suspicious of Nito's involvement with the other deities' response to undeath via the bonfires? Did the assault from a cult devoted to the idea that Dark was man's true origin and fate spark their curiosity? Whatever the trigger, stealing the secret rite would be critical to fully understand the Undead curse and the gods' manipulation of it. And it may have still tied into mastery of necromancy. The common motive for studying necromancy is a vested interest in life after death, either by resurrecting the dead or by obtaining a form of immortality. If the only downside to undeath can be perpetually negated, then one can preserve the mind and living body without further need of the bonfires. In that case, what is the point of being living dead? It is possible that Pinwheel was possessed by this question and couldn't help but explore the full extent of the curse, maybe even touched by their human nature. The result was independence from their Lord and teacher; the three were *not* part of the family any longer.

On Reflection

As the setting's second pillar, Miyazaki and Uchiyama affirm that Nito and his domain represent death and darkness. If there is anything to say of death itself, it is that it doesn't matter if there is an afterlife. Whether moving onto some higher plane or retaining awareness in a corporeal vessel, life will still reflexively reject its natural conclusion. For in the end, death is simply too different from life. Even the Undead, for all their similarities, cannot find common cause with the living dead who have shed themselves of all carnal pleasures. To embrace death is to reject almost everything relished as part of the human experience, to see no point in the struggle to hold onto that. And to what end?

The living dead choose the dark not to rule but to hide, remaining out of sight and out of mind for an eternal rest in peace, effectively unplugging themselves from reality. One might wonder if they have not chosen outright oblivion simply out of fear of losing self. In that case, death is truly useless. There is nothing to be gained from cutting short the road of life. What good is immortality without experience? Blindness without risk? To find kinship with the dead is to persist without meaning. Therefore, it is apathy that is the true death.



Witches of Chaos

Covenous Clan

Izalith's status as a medial can be assumed from her notable size – akin to Gwyn and other medials – when compared to her human-sized children. I refer to her as "Izalith" and not the "Witch of Izalith" for several reasons. In Japanese dialogue, Quelana refers to her mother as just "Izalith", and Miyazaki uses terms like "Izalith's daughters" when talking about the Witch. In the same vein, the opening cinematic refers to both the "Witch of Izalith" and her "Daughters of Chaos" – the latter label only usable after they create the Flame of Chaos, implying that both are being applied retroactively. Therefore, "Izalith" is the witch's true name while her better-known moniker was popularized later on.

Izalith found her Lord Soul near the First Flame. The witch's Lord Soul sparks a flame that creates an entire new species of life, thus she found the Life Soul. All the Lords were captivated by fire, but Izalith had a particularly profound fascination, enough to learn how to conjure and control fire itself. She freely weaves flame sorceries with the wave of a hand and no obvious catalyst in the cinematic. This magic isn't pyromancy, as her daughters' staves makes clear.[1] It was the product of rational inquiries into the properties of fire and how to manipulate it. Nevertheless, Izalith *is* called the godmother of pyromancy, and her later creation of such an art betrays the underlying motivations in her earlier experimentation.

Laurentius calls pyromancy the art of the "original" or "primal life"[2] (原初の命), and fire is indeed the origin of life. Disparity exists because of fire, and it brought life to replace what was originally mere existence. Thus, the Witch's interests lay in understanding and controlling the creation of life, as opposed to Nito who lords over the dead. However, fire is evidently not so easily controlled. Disparity is by nature disruptive, and the emergence of life was an upheaval of the status quo; in other words, chaos. At her core, Izalith was driven by an insatiable fascination with power, and thus sought to govern arguably the most powerful and erratic aspect of that power. This can even be seen outside of her studies.

Izalith inducted her daughters into the life of a witch regardless of their initial willingness to study magic. The gold-hemmed black set that each daughter wears indicates that Izalith began siring children even before discovering the Life Soul – the fact that their tree-branch staves appear to be of similarly primitive make further suggests that they were already sorcerers. Indeed, Izalith's obsessive study of fire betrays a curiosity about nature which may well have preceded her discovery. She and her

1 **"Staff of the time before the Witch of Izalith was consumed by Chaos and when the daughters were still flame witches.**

Pyromancy was yet to be born, so their staves were catalysts for sorceries, but these flame sorceries have been completely lost." - Izalith Catalyst

2 **"What we call pyromancy is, in other words, the art of fire. The art of the primal life, which kindles and uses fire." - Laurentius**

daughters had likely already been trying to comprehend the dark world around them when the light in a cavern changed everything. (*DS3* later adds to this notion by making their catalyst compatible with dark sorcery.) By the time of the First Flame and Life Soul's discovery, the Witch had turned her daughters into apprentices for mastering fire specifically.



The Witch gave birth to seven daughters in total, the eldest being Quelana – she addresses her siblings collectively as "younger sisters" (妹たち). Also, Chaos Fire Whip states that fire whips are arts of the eldest *sisters*, plural,[3] and Quelana wields such a pyromancy.[4] While the Daughter of Chaos found just outside the Bed of Chaos boss room is commonly cited as the eldest, this is because the English description for Chaos Fire Whip erroneously translates "fire whips" as "this spell". This daughter is most likely among the eldest, but she is not *the* eldest. She is named "Witch Daughter Gurana" (魔女の娘グラナ) in Japanese guidebooks, and so I will refer to her as "Guelana" in keeping with the localization for the names of Quelana, originally Craana or Kuraana (クラーナ), and Quelaag, originally Craag or Kuraagu (クラーグ).

As one of the first kings, Izalith founded a kingdom to rule over as its Lord. This, along with the presence of her family, implies her to be part of some form of community, though we never learn of any other medial under her rule. Regardless, she used her newfound power to organize her subjects into a monarchical government and developed a civilization named in her honor, just as Gwyn's kingdom was named for the sun with which he had become synonymous. Outsiders needed a new name to avoid confusing the witch with the city, creating the alias "Witch of Izalith". This name persisted over millennia while those who knew the Witch as simply Izalith dwindled to nearly none.

Observation from Nito's domain reveals that this new civilization resides within a huge complex of caverns stretching from the ceiling of the Lower World to even a little beneath its ground level. Izalith's rockface has roots growing down from every angle, making it impossible for all of them to be connected to the sprawling roots of the Bed of Chaos.

3 **"Art of the Flame of Chaos which consumed the Witch of Izalith and her daughters. Sweeps with a whip of chaos fire.**
Even among the daughters, Sweeping Fire seems to be an art of the elder sisters." - Chaos Fire Whip

4 **"Primal pyromancy taught by Craana of Izalith. Sweeps with a whip of fire.**
Pyromancy that became the origin of 'Ignition', but there seems to be a world of difference in its difficulty in the sense of controlling the flame." - Fire Whip



Furthermore, the Demon's Great Hammer is carved from an archtree,[5] implying that the Demon Ruins and Lost City of Izalith are within the vicinity of such trees. In short, the roots lining Izalith's cavern walls are archtree roots burrowing into the Lower World's foundation, thus this kingdom was founded beneath the archtrees. (*DS3* reaffirms this general location with the Smouldering Lake.) Naturally, these subterranean caverns are home to endemic life like "hole-digger maggots" (穴掘りウジ虫) that spit corrosive acid to help them burrow through the earth.

The Old Witch's Ring confirms that Izalith has a spoken language which predates Chaos, since it is the sole language understood by the Fair Lady. In fact, the use of *rou* (老) rather than *furu* (古) not only implies that the "old" witch who fashioned it has lived many years, but is also elderly.[6] Even the eldest of the daughters still appears physically young, so the ring was more than likely crafted by their significantly older mother. This ancient language may be the runic script generated with chaos fire, though that could also be related to the flame sorcery involved in the Chaos ritual. Regardless, the ring's powers of translation prove that the witches attempted to bridge the gap between Izalith and the world of man, which explains why Quelana happens to know human language. By facilitating communication with humans, Izalith could exchange knowledge and ideas that would lead to the development of new architecture and technology for a wholly unique culture. Indeed, her power had likely attracted humans to her kingdom after the Lords allied with the pygmy, the witches' apparent lack of fear of the Dark compared to the gods of sunlight perhaps stemming from their previous studies of the world absent fire.

All the Lords are portrayed performing different actions prior to the dragon hunts in the cinematic – in Izalith's case, the witches assemble in a circle while Izalith cradles what appears to be the Life Soul in her burn-scarred hands. Two daughters hold up Izalith Catalysts on either side of their mother, apparently in some sort of ritual. These same staves are later seen on either side of the Bed of Chaos, emanating a fiery runic script the same as most transformed members of the Izalith family; this implies that two daughters were morphed into part of the Bed of Chaos while performing a similar ritual – a fact Quelana also asserts.[7] In essence, they are conducting one in a series of experiments which will eventually produce the Flame of Chaos. However, all eight mother and daughters participate in the dragon hunts, and so the cinematic most likely portrays just one of many ceremonies that they had performed as the Witch experimented with her Lord Soul in pursuit of a life-giving flame.

5 **"Demon weapon made with the great trees of rock. It was used by the lesser demon of the Northern Undead Institute.**
It isn't tinged with special magic power, but it is one of the best weapons for heartily smashing enemies if you have the physical strength to swing this heaviness." - Demon's Great Hammer

6 **"Old ring that was sent by an old witch at one point.**
Text unintelligible to humans is tightly engraved on it, but it doesn't seem to have a particular effect." - Old Witch's Ring

7 **"... And then, my mother tried to light a fire of her own with that power... She couldn't control it. The Flame of Chaos engulfed my mother and younger sisters and made them into a seedbed for grotesque life." - Quelana**

Demon Ruins



During the dragon hunts, The Witch and her daughters used their sorceries to scorch the very earth. Fire erupts from the rocky foundation in great bursts of flame all around them in the cinematic – the indiscriminate destruction affecting not just the dragons, but also numerous archtrees that burn and crumble beneath the roaring flames.[8] Izalith herself is seen gesturing her arms while her daughters walk up from behind her with their staves raised, each wave of her arm seemingly conjuring another billow of flame. This suggests that the Witch is using her daughters as a sort of conduit to help her conjure and command fire without the need of a staff, a sign she was already making headway in what would eventually become pyromancy. Indeed, the magic we see in the cinematic would later be recreated as the Fire Storm and Fire Tempest pyromancies.[9] Clearly, helping Gwyn hunt down the archdragons furthered her research.

Creating Chaos

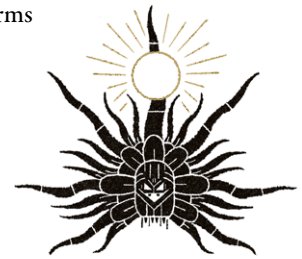
Izalith created the Flame of Chaos when she tried to light a First Flame from a soul – her Lord Soul specifically. Theoretically, the power of life would spawn a fire of life similar in nature to the First Flame, though this would necessitate the soul that sparked it to also be the fuel to keep it burning. This also requires the Lord Soul to exist separate from the Witch's soul to some degree, which is apparent by the Flame of Chaos demonstrating a will of its very own. By Quelana's own account, slaying the seedbed comprised of her mother and sisters frees them from the Flame of Chaos, and as we do so, a fiery avatar slowly frees itself from the seedbed and begins attacking us independently of the initial boss. This fire must be its own entity with its own soul, even if it were only part of the Witch's soul to begin with. Pyromancy is "the art of the primal life", yet was only invented after the creation of the Chaos Flame and the demons it spawns, implying this fire to be this original life. Unlike the First Flame, this Chaos Flame is undeniably alive, and its will, chaotic.

Chaos is the unspoken nature of both fire and life, so it is no surprise that a fire born from a soul with especially strong affinity with life would be chaotic in nature. The Flame of Chaos is wild and indiscriminate, becoming so hot it melts rock, resulting in lava like that found throughout the ruins of Izalith or produced by chaos pyromancies. (*DS3* explicitly defines the latter as lava arts.) A fire so powerful that

8 "Primal pyromancy taught by Craana of Izalith. Spouts many pillars of fire in the surroundings.
Fire storm doesn't choose a target and burns up all living things within range." - Firestorm

9 "Primal pyromancy possessed by Craana of Izalith. Spouts many giant pillars of fire in the surroundings.
The violently devastating Great Firestorm is a vestige of the art they once used to battle archdragons and scorch the world." - Fire Tempest

it can transform even static rock into new forms – that affects all life it comes in contact with regardless of identity or origin – would be incredibly difficult to control. And indeed, Quelana tells us that her mother had failed to actually harness the flame that she created.



Izalith most likely created the Flame of Chaos early in the Age of Fire. Most fixate on the fact that she attempted to "duplicate" the First Flame as indicative of a desperate attempt to prevent it from fading, shortly before Gwyn links the fire. However, no Japanese dialogue or item description actually suggests this, and the timeline for other necessary events makes that scenario unlikely. In fact, Izalith was ambitious, not desperate. Both Quelana and Chaos Storm reference the witch's ambition when attempting to create a First Flame,[10] drive which her eldest daughter believes to have been arrogance in retrospect.

Izalith was fascinated with fire and wanted to control it. She studied it more than anyone and made her daughters assistants to that end. Whereas the other Lords used their Lord Souls to create death, light, and Dark, she wanted dominion over life and thus attempted to use hers to make a First Flame. Key word: make. Japanese dialogue and descriptions only claim the Witch attempted to create the fire, not replace it. She wanted a beginning fire for herself, a fire that could create life the same way the First Flame had. It is the core of her motivation, and so it is unlikely for her to begin her experiments long before the dragon hunts only to finally "fail" so long after. These experiments are far more likely to have borne fruit much earlier in the Age of Fire. We may even see a more specific target for the witch's ambitions.

The so-called Bounding Demons found in the Lost City of Izalith are clearly the rotting tail ends of archdragons. Their model is otherwise only used as the passive, if glitchy, back half to a dragon zombie, and the enemy's name is "failed-to-be" (なりそこない), echoing snakes' failure to become dragons. The failed-to-be have unnaturally high fire resistance, but this may just be due the lava-flooded environment they reside in. They don't share the chaos demons' weakness to Black Knight weapons, and their decayed state is unlikely to be a product of the Flame of Chaos. Instead, they may be failed attempts to create or revive dragons, suggesting that Izalith's participation in the hunts was motivated by a desire to acquire the remains of these unique, immortal beasts for study. She wanted to experiment on beings that predate even fire and

10 "Art of the Flame of Chaos which consumed the Witch of Izalith and her daughters. Spouts many pillars of chaos fire in the surroundings.
The ambition of the witch who tried to make a 'First Flame' birthed a Flame of Chaos and a seedbed for grotesque life." - Chaos Storm

life, and Gwyn provided an opportunity to procure such specimens in abundance. Anor Londo was only claiming the heads, after all.

Once she obtained archdragon remains, the Witch explored the deepest mysteries of life no matter how dangerous or unscrupulous the means. Egg Vermifuge notes that "everywhere there is a reason to forgive a taboo",[11] and trading it with Snuggly appropriately nets us a dragon scale. But the failed-to-be's rotting state indicates that she never succeeded in resurrecting stone archdragons with the power of the flame that twisted their existence in the first place. (Later games use the same Japanese name for similar failed archdragon experiments.) Ultimately, Egg Vermifuge is a bitter acorn that we use to excise demon parasites, hinting that her taboo may have led Izalith down a different path with a more chaotic future.

The Witch intended to use the Life Soul's power to spark an independent flame that she could manipulate for her own ends. In her mind, the witches would succeed and gain power rivaling the First Flame, through which their civilization might reach even greater heights. But after actually accomplishing this feat, she lost control, and her creation consumed her along with the two daughters by her side.

If her daughters ultimately became the staves extending from the main tree body, then Izalith must have become the insect encoiled by the roots from which it springs out from the earth. Indeed, this bug is what we kill to defeat the seedbed and acquire the witch's Lord Soul – it even represents the boss for a console achievement. In short, the humanoid tree is just a husk, an avatar puppeted by the true seedbed harboring the Life Soul – and Chaos with it – at its core. The two daughters' souls may have been part of this bug, but they evidently transferred over to extensions of the wooden husk to protect their mother somewhere down the line. After all, it is this mother that keeps the Flame of Chaos alive and well, as ending it also stops the Flame.

This disaster didn't just affect Izalith and her daughters. Many of the rocky caverns their civilization rests upon are scorched black, rivers of lava spewing from the walls. The Demon Firesage likewise performs its flame sorceries by using a local lava rock as the catalyst.[12] Clearly, the outburst of flame following Chaos' creation permanently scarred the land, and likely brought destruction upon whatever civilization existed there at the time. (*DS3* outright confirms that Chaos ravaged the land along with the witches' home.)

However, Quelaag and the Fair Lady were *not* among those affected. Quelana's Japanese dialogue doesn't state that her mother and sisters were transformed into "deformed creatures", but a

11 "Very bitter acorn. Removes the parasitic egg from the body.
The egg-bearers are those who serve the Flame of Chaos of their own free will, and the eggs are a symbol of that.
Thus, this acorn is even a forbidden fruit, but everywhere there is a reason to forgive a taboo." - Egg Vermifuge

12 "Demon staff that sharpened a lava rock of Izalith. Can be used as a weapon possessing attack power of the fire attribute.
Demon Fire Priests were the first demons and the last users of the flame sorceries, not pyromancies, of before the Witch of Izalith was consumed by Chaos." - Demon's Catalyst

"seedbed for grotesque life" (異形の生命の苗床). There is only one entity that matches this description. If Quelaag and the Fair Lady took part in the ritual and were similarly caught up in the Chaos Flame's devastation, then they should have also become part of the Bed of Chaos. Even ignoring that, why cleanly cut off their transformation at the lower half? Wouldn't their fronts or sides be the more likely areas affected, depending on where they stood in the circle? Finally, if Izalith losing control of the Flame of Chaos transformed them into demons, then either Quelaag or the Fair Lady would be described as the first demon, and not their brother.

Miyazaki states clearly in the *Design Works* interview that Ceaseless Discharge is the first demon and the little brother of Izalith's daughters, born while the Flame of Chaos was still unstable. This requires that the Witch be pregnant with him at the time – a notion supported by his cries being the heavily-processed wails of a baby. Given the suspicious timing of her suddenly being with child after so long without, perhaps the pregnancy itself was part of the plan, and factored into Izalith's success deriving a flame from the Life Soul. Regardless, since neither Quelaag nor the Fair Lady became part of the seedbed or its first demons, their transformation must occur much later, *after* this period of instability where the Chaos Flame wreaked havoc.



"Still unstable" implies that the Flame of Chaos was eventually stabilized. The reason can be traced to the two daughters transformed alongside Izalith – the Chaos avatar wrests free from the seedbed only upon the destruction of each staff. The daughters aren't only creating a barrier blocking access to their mother, but also sealing the Flame of Chaos within the tree body, making it impossible for the avatar to escape until they are slain. Their ritual ended in failure, with all three participants transformed into an abomination, but they nonetheless adapted to their new form and eventually brought the Flame of Chaos under control. In other words, rather than cause their homeland's total destruction, their experiment triggered its rebirth.

Capital of Chaos

It is often assumed that Izalith was destroyed in the wake of the Chaos Flame's creation and that the demon-infested ruins we find are what was once a great nation. Indeed, the damage to the land can have its origin point traced to the city center. But there is a problem. The cinematic portrays Izalith and her daughters standing on bedrock and maybe branches, not the stone-tiled floor where we actually battle the Bed of Chaos – when we do, the witch's parasitic form is located a little outside the stone walls of the boss room proper. Nor are there signs of damage from intense heat on any of the stone ruins close to the seedbed, despite chaos fire melting rock on impact. Moreover, the wall encasing the city center should have prevented the majority of the earth outside of it from even being scorched. These ruins are simply too well-preserved to predate the creation of Chaos.

Therefore, the stone metropolis we find in-game wasn't built until much later, *after* the calamity. And with that in mind, the lava we find flooding Izalith didn't cause the ruins, but is a result of them – lava flow that would normally be blocked or rerouted has been left unattended, much like the overgrowth stemming largely from unkempt archtrees. Additionally, some of this flooding originates from Ceaseless Discharge's inborn sore, a gaping hole on his right side oozing lava that he can extract to attack us with. This is why he was given a ring that reduces lava damage[13] and why some magma cools after his death. The Flame of Chaos may have consumed the land and destroyed its original constructions, but the civilization survived, much like the witches did, and then built a massive city. Nowhere is this more obvious than when looking at its layout.

The Bed of Chaos boss room is located deep below the rest of the cityscape. It is a throne room, with the Bed of Chaos seated in said throne. A tunnel to the parasite cuts straight through the chair. Roots stemming from around the bug sprout out of this burrow to make up the seedbed's arboreal humanoid avatar, along with the mass of roots making up the two daughters' stave forms. (*DS2* later portrays similar roots sprouting from the Flame of Chaos itself.) These roots stretch outwards and upwards, converging at the center of the ceiling where they force through – and we can see a gargantuan tree trunk standing tall roughly above the area of the throne room. All of this suggests that the stonework was laid around the Witch's bug form after her transformation, with the arboreal aspects subsequently growing atop it.

Outside the throne room is the larger complex, modeled on the Cambodian ruins of Angkor Wat. Like their real-life counterpart, these ruins probably weren't the actual city but merely a large temple. While the area names segregate this "lost city" from the "demon ruins" preceding it, the architecture suggests that they are one and the same. Much of the architecture in the "ruins" functions as roads, residences, and the like, but we find no such framework in the "city" beyond what appears to be a rudimentary sewer system. Eingyi too refers to the wider ruins as part of the lost city, an "abandoned" or "ruined capital"[14] (廃都). Likewise, one structure outside the Wat-inspired ruins hides the soul of a hero within a chest, indicating that it was interred there – a suitable burial place if the land was consecrated. Similarly, the Chaos Eaters found solely within the temple complex drop white titanite chunks used in the creation of holy weapons.

Finally, a thick stone wall partitions the temple complex from the Demon Ruins, effectively forming a sanctum. And while this sanctum looks like an enclosed dome from Nito's domain, closer inspection reveals it to be just a concave wall. A long, narrow bridge through this partition is the only formal pathway between the two parts of the city. Why separate it like this? To protect a temple from the rest of the city, or to protect the rest of the city from the temple?

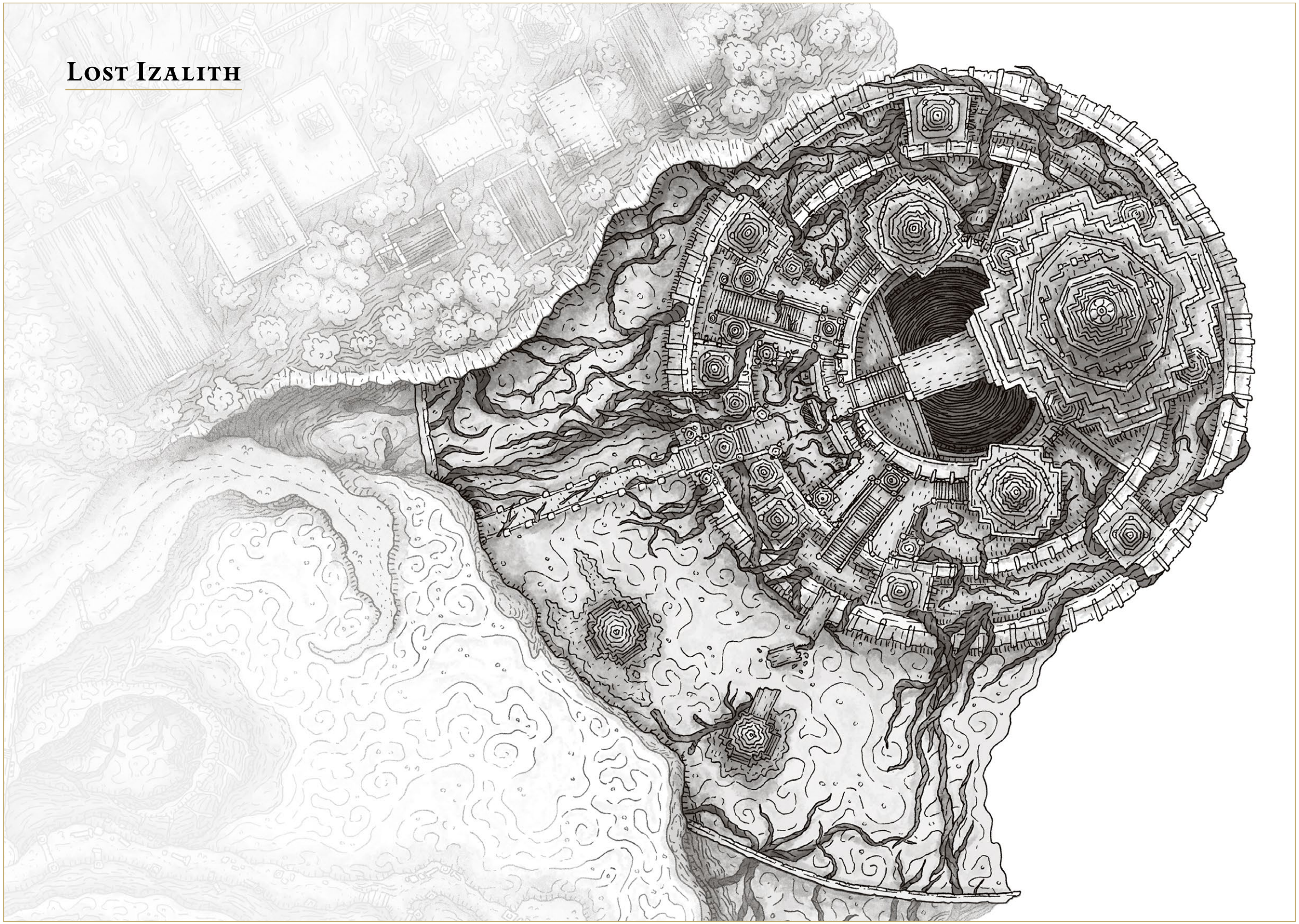
The only other path to this area is via a hole in the wall found at the end of a path leading through several caves. We discover this path in the boss room of the Centipede Demon, which guards a massive door that we can't enter. This gate is built into the same rockface as many of the ruins we just traveled through to reach the boss, suggesting that it is the actual main entrance to the city of Izalith. However, FromSoftware doesn't allow us to actually explore much of the city proper, and instead we are railroaded along to our target, an area which served as a literal house of god.

The unique architecture of Izalith betrays much about its culture. Despite becoming a dangerous environment in the wake of calamity, the civilization built massive, intricate structures into the rockface, extending as far as the roof of the larger cavern. These structures are adorned with stone statues, shaped as demons, everywhere we explore. Most of the architecture incorporates flames into its design, and wall reliefs portray men ritualistically dancing alongside a Buddha-like figure under a blooming flower, indicating the presence of a devout human population seeking enlightenment. While this flower symbol typically represents the First Flame, the demonic statues suggest that the Witch's civilization worshipped a different fire. The city is the "Ruined Capital of *Chaos* Izalith" (混沌の廃都イザリス), after all.

13 **"Orange ring filled with the magic power of a witch. Reduces damage from lava.**
It is a special ring that the witches, who are his older sisters, gave for his inborn 'sore' tortured by lava, but the fool dropped it before long. For a terrible centipede demon had been born."
- Orange Charred Ring

14 **"Below these ruins is the legendary ruined capital, Izalith. It is the ruins of the Flame of Chaos, guarded by a lava giant. For the Princess ran away from there along with Lady Craag. I don't know the full situation… and I don't think I want to know either…" - Eingyi**

Lost Izalith



Demon Civilization

After finally cementing her control over the Flame of Chaos, Izalith used it to become the "mother" of demons.[15] If her goal had been to conjure a life-creating fire, she succeeded, even if the results weren't what she had originally expected. While the first demon was born from an unstable flame, later generations of demons would be born at her own volition. This explains why Ceaseless Discharge appears far larger and more grotesque than the rest of his brethren, though him qualifying as a chaos demon simply by virtue of being infused with Chaos whilst in the womb illustrates the broadness of the category. Having embarked upon her experiments with the ambition to create life, literally mothering chaos life likely stroked the witch's ego. The god could now play god, and she used her power to create grotesque biological life either directly through the Chaos Flame or via the parasitic insects that it produced.

The combination of distinct entities, such as a parasite to its host, seems intrinsic to the nature of chaos demons. Take the Sanctuary Guardian, a four-winged lion with the horns and backside of a goat and the tail of a scorpion – appropriately named "gold chimera" (金キメラ) internally. The chimera's soul indicates that it is "closer in nature to demons" simply because it bears the traits of multiple animals.[16] This is true for many chaos demons, such as the Taurus and Capra Demons – "bull-head demons" (牛頭のデーモン) and "goat-head demons" (山羊頭のデーモン) respectively. The concept extends to conjoined creatures too.

The Centipede Demon spawned from a ring infused with chaos fire, but the band itself isn't the creature's heart; we can acquire that by severing and then slaying one of the demon's mouthy appendages. Its five heads plus "tail" are independent creatures with their own souls, separate from the item which their body had generated around – and *re*generates without, given enough time during the boss fight. Essentially, the demon is a bug hydra. Meanwhile, the Witch herself morphed into a bug that became a seedbed to nurture future lifeforms in conjunction with her two daughters and a living flame. In this way, parasitism is a quality inherent to Chaos.

Consider what the Flame of Chaos is: a fire of life lit from the power of the original fire of life. The Chaos Flame couldn't have existed if not for the First Flame. It is dependent upon the First Flame predating it, thus it is parasitic. And since the First Flame created self-sustaining life, then an imitation derived from it can only create life that depends on it: parasitic life. Just as Chaos is indifferent to what it affects, these relations between parasite and host can be as much

15 "Soul of the Seedbed of Chaos, which is the mother of the demons. One of the Souls of Kings that was found at the beginning of the Age of Fire.

A witch tried to make a 'First Flame' from a soul and created a warped beast of chaos fire. That power that became a seedbed for all the demons is sufficient to occupy the King's Vessel." - Lord Soul

16 "Soul of the white-winged lion, holy beast of the mausoleum. It seems to have been frightened by the spread of the Abyss.

It has various animal characteristics other than a lion, so one can imagine that it is probably not a natural living thing. Rather, it is closer in nature to demons." - Guardian Soul

harmful to life as they can be helpful to it. It is this harmful aspect to Disparity that lies at the root of the parasitism pervading Izalith.

The fire attacks of chaos weapons scale in strength with humanity, proving that souls adequately fuel chaos fire just like they do the First Flame, and that the fire actively feeds on the essence of life. Nothing showcases this better than the Chaos Blade, which inherits the Chaos at the heart of Quelaag and so drains the wielder's HP – parasitizing them – with each attack.[17] Chaos feeds indiscriminately off every life within its reach, causing harm or physical deformities. This holds true for even creatures derived from Chaos – Ceaseless Discharge shows us the worst effects of poorly integrating the flame's power.

Though chaos demons can reproduce conventionally, as the Fair Lady demonstrates, they still need to feed their chaos fire with either the flame itself or souls. The best example of this relationship is the Chaos Flame's first host. The Witch's life serves as the heart of Chaos, and killing her threatens the flame too. Conversely, Izalith parasitizes Chaos to form her avatar, hence we must destroy her to destroy the avatar and acquire the Lord Soul.



Quelaag and the Fair Lady, the egg-bearers, and the cragspiders are all examples of this chaos parasitism. The egg-bearers are hosts to the eggs laid by the Fair Lady, which hatch "parasitic bugs" (寄生虫) that can then lay more eggs. If grabbed by an egg-bearer, a parasite will briefly come out to plant its progeny upon our heads, causing what seems to be an increasingly irritating itch until a new egg matures. The cut description for this Parasite Egg confirms that the larva steals some of the souls we absorb from defeated enemies as it develops.[18] It becomes part of us, feeding on our soul to mature and eventually attacking per *our* will. The Chaos Servants' evident intent is for egg-bearers to hatch fully mature parasites that will then merge with the host to create new demons.

Meanwhile the cragspiders, or "diseased of chaos" (混沌の病み人), are Blighttown's ill residents twisted into an insectoid form by chaos fire, hence why they can "breathe" fire. Their grotesque metamorphosis

17 "Katana born from the soul of Craag, daughter of the Witch of Izalith who transformed into a chaos demon.

It inherits only Craag's chaos nature, and a characteristic erratic-style design is borne on its blade. A cursed sword that eats away at both enemy and owner." - Chaos Blade

18 "Egg planted on the head via an egg-bearer's parasite.

Once you feel some itching, it will steal souls absorbed when defeating enemies and mature before you know it… If you don't consider this an honor, you need to purge it." - Egg

can be directly attributed to Quelaag and her sister's demonhood. The two witches are internally named "Flame Witch Crag Spider" (焔の魔女クラグスパイダー) and "Crag Spider Little Sister" (クラグスパイダー妹) respectively, whereas the diseased of chaos is "Crag Spider (child)" (クラグスパイダー（子）) – all a reference to the crag spider enemy in the *Dragon Pass* board game, which served as the inspiration for Quelaag's name and design. If the diseased of chaos are the sister's "children", then they must derive from the Fair Lady's parasites. A cut Hollow variant may even show the transition stage in this metamorphosis. His skin is colored charcoal, his insides radiate blazing flames, and his back sprouts spider-like legs. In short, he looks like another Blighttown resident warped by chaos parasites, on his way to becoming the human-bug hybrids we face. This cut enemy's internal name "Undead (Craag Attendant)" (不死人（クラグ信者）) is an obvious reference to the Chaos Servants. In other words, this cut enemy would have served Quelaag like the egg-bearers, and probably *were* egg-bearers themselves.



The Flame of Chaos and the grotesque life that it creates are parasites. Izalith's fire intruded upon the existing universe and leeches off the world that birthed it for power, similar to the First Flame. And like the original flame, its effect on the universe only lasts as long as the flame itself does, making it essential to the life derived from it. (An idea ultimately explored in *DS3*.)

Fans are often confused about the early generations of demons. The English description of the Demon Catalyst claims the Demon Firesage to be the "first demon", seemingly contradicting the notion that Ceaseless Discharge was the first. However, Japanese can be vague when clarifying singular or plural. Therefore, the description can instead be read as, "the demon fire priests were the first demons and the last users of flame sorceries." It isn't necessarily speaking about a specific individual, but about the first demons in general, demons born after Ceaseless Discharge but still among the earliest generations to be transformed by parasites after Izalith tamed Chaos. This makes sense, as "demon fire priest" (デーモンの炎司祭) implies a hierarchy where the Firesage served as a religious leader in the same capacity as the Anor Londo gods' priests. There isn't only one priest in these faiths so of course there wouldn't be only one Firesage; we probably even encounter another in-game: the Stray Demon uses the same staff and flame sorcery.

Who would be more worthy of becoming a priest to demons than the first among them? They were the early adopters, the first to study directly under the witches before spreading those teachings to later generations. While attacks from the firesages we encounter deal magic instead of fire damage, this mechanic likely reflects the fact that they practice flame sorcery specifically, using principles of reason to conjure fire. (*DS3* reinforces this early adopter origin, claiming that the witches used their staves as both sorcerers and shamans, elements of both magic and faith shared with the firesages.) This demon hierarchy trickles down to the various "lesser" demons we face in-game, all serving their "mother" as warriors.

Sometime after teaching the first demons flame sorcery, two of the sisters become demons themselves – their mother likely producing special parasites to transform them into half medial, half spider demons. Meanwhile, Izalith goes on to mother many more demons after gaining control over the Flame. The witches and their demon priests develop a demon religion, build a stone metropolis around the Bed of Chaos, and adorn their work with demonic statues. The enemy variant of these statues' indifference to Black Knight weapons suggest that they truly are statues and not demons themselves, making them likely the chaos equivalent of the gargoyles.

The description of the Basement Key calls the Lower Undead Burg's thieves "subordinates" of the Capra Demon, alongside the local stray dogs,[19] several of which it has domesticated. This implies that even lesser demons have intelligence on par with humans. Can mere monsters forge cast-iron machetes?[20] No. These were a civilized people – an advanced culture gathering around and in support of Chaos – with a surging population of demons and humans alike.

The Chaos Flame Ember is explicitly an "art" of the city of Izalith using the old smithing techniques to forge chaos weapons, which are explicitly "demon" weapons.[21] The palace sanctum is also home to red titanite slabs imbued with the power of fire and a titanite demon – all derived from Anor Londo's blacksmith god. The country thus had friendly trade relations with Anor Londo. Snuggly provides these slabs or chunks of them in exchange for pyromancy flames, which may further narrow

19 "Key for the door to the shaft heading to the Lower Stratum that is at the wall side end of the Undead Town Below the Castle 'Great Bridge'.

Even in the Undead Town Below the Castle, the Lower Stratum is a dangerous area; there are subordinates of the terrible Goat-head Demon wandering around, such as thieves that aim for the back and dirty stray dogs." - Basement Key

20 "Demon weapon possessing a thick cast-iron blade and hook. It was used in pairs by a goat-head lesser demon.

It doesn't have any special magic power, but it is one of the best weapons for heartily smashing enemies if you have the physical strength to swing this heaviness." - Demon Great Machete

21 "Source flame required for evolving weapons. The Chaos Flame Source Flame is an art of the ruined capital of Izalith and can only be handled by the blacksmith who knows the old manners of production.

Evolves +5 fire weapons to chaos weapons. (Chaos weapons can be enhanced up to +5.)

Chaos weapons possess fire attack power and are demon weapons that are enhanced by humanity." - Chaos Ember

the timeline to after the witches invented that school of magic. Such friendly relations discredit the notion that Anor Londo invaded Izalith in reaction to the creation of the Flame of Chaos and wild demons. The conflict between the two divine kingdoms happened long after.

Let us return to Quelaag and the Fair Lady's own transformation. That it was by choice is evident by Quelana and Guelana still being medials. All the sisters were by their mother during the ritual, and Guelana remains closer to the Chaos Flame than anyone else we encounter – she even wields chaos pyromancies. Yet neither show signs of demonhood. Guelana neither fled nor transformed, and so those who haven't become demons exercised the free choice not to do so. The only exceptions to this are Izalith, the two daughters beside her, and Ceaseless Discharge – all victims of the initial creation of Chaos. In other words, all but a handful of demons opted for their grotesque form in order to obtain a new state of being, much like the dragon-worshipping transcenders or necromantic kingdom of the dead. Others, who ultimately elected to remain human, lived alongside the demons, developing a unique culture around the Flame of Chaos and its seedbed. Keeping a stable human population may have even been encouraged.

Quelaag pats her demonic half affectionately and cooperates with it during battle. The Chaos Servants choose to serve the Flame of Chaos. Eingyi congratulates us for becoming host to a demon parasite.[22] Guelana and the demons living alongside her defend the Bed of Chaos with their lives. The Fair Lady apologizes to "Quelaag" for the death of her eggs.[23] Are any of these actions made by beings transformed against their will? No. They are happy with their current state and worship the flame responsible for it, constantly working to create more demons and continue growing as a culture. The only Izalithian to push for the destruction of Chaos is Quelana, who believes that freeing her family of it will relieve them of suffering.[24] But by all indications, Izalith and her people were satisfied with what her mistake ultimately wrought.

This transformation of Izalith into a willing demonic goddess can be read in her name. The first half of "Izalith" (イザリス) appears to derive from the Shinto goddess of creation and death, Izanami (イザナミ). After giving birth to many of the Japanese islands and deities, the goddess finally died birthing the fire god Kagutsuchi, consumed by his flames. Afterward, she was trapped in the underworld as a hideous monster, becoming its ruler. The latter half of her name, however, seems to derive from Lilith (リリス), the rebellious precursor to Eve in Jewish mythology, a demon who willingly mothered demons.

22 "Oh!... You... You're the same as us... Your sincerity is well recognized." - Eingyi

23 "Hey, Big Sister. All this time, the eggs hurt. They're not stirring. That's why, I think they're no good this time... I'm sorry, Big Sister." - Fair Lady

24 "But I alone have run away and come to a place like this. Even though my mother and younger sisters have been suffering for so, so long... That's why, I want to ask you. Free my mother and younger sisters from the Flame of Chaos. I can't do it. I have neither the power nor resolve to... But if it is you... I know that it is selfish of me, but please, free them all..." - Quelana



To Touch Flame

The demon civilization developed pyromancy early in its history – albeit after the advent of Chaos. The Demon Catalyst states that the fire priests' flame sorceries predate Chaos and don't qualify as pyromancy. This means that pyromancy only developed after the witches trained the firesages, leaving them as the last flame sorcerers.

As a result, the first pyromancies must have been chaos pyromancies. Aside from it being the art of the primal life – the Flame of Chaos – pyromancy is propagated in part by giving a piece of one's own personal pyromancy flame to another. Pyromancers nurture these flames their entire lives, making them practically a part of them. Sharing a flame is thereby seen as something intimate to pyromancers, like welcoming one as part of a family. Indeed, Quelana knows to draw out "dormant power" within our pyromancy flame to make it capable of casting chaos pyromancies,[25] implying that our ascended flame's lineage traces back to those arts she and her sisters were familiar with.

Therefore, pyromancy must have originated from the Witch of Izalith sharing the Flame of Chaos with her daughters and then developing lava arts with that shared flame. The "Daughters of Chaos" aren't just Izalith's literal offspring, but daughters of the same fire shared between them. Quelaag's soul possesses "various aspects" of Chaos[26] but creates two different weapons. One is tinged with chaos fire and resembles her demonic lower half,[27] but the other possesses "only" the nature of Chaos and is an otherwise unassuming, if atypical, katana. Cut content suggests that there could be one other Chaos Blade in existence, so the katana represents the power of Chaos within the daughters, distinct from their demonhood. (Later games confirm that these same blades can be created from the souls of Quelaag's mother and sisters.)

Chaos is a part of Izalith's family, and the women developed pyromancy jointly. While the localization claims Quelana to be "mother" of pyromancy and Izalith its "godmother", both are simply "founders"[28] (祖). If Quelana and her mother were both the parents to pyromancy, why not the other sisters too? They were collectively the Daughters of Chaos after all. (*DS3* makes this implication explicit.) Ceaseless Discharge possesses Chaos within him too, of course, but he was born during the period of instability and thus can't control it – it burns him relentlessly, hence his name as the "continually sore one" (爛れ続けるもの). This relationship with Chaos differs from his elder sisters, so they must have been imparted with it after the flame was stabilized.

25 "Pyromancy flame drawing out dormant power at the hands of Craana of Izalith, a founder of pyromancy.
For a pyromancer, fire is something special and usually seriously raised by them for their entire life. Because for them, fire is surely half their body, and someone it is shared with becomes a flame blood relative." - Pyromancy Flame

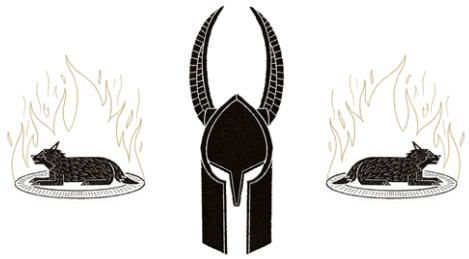
26 "Soul of Craag, daughter of the Witch of Izalith who transformed into a chaos demon.
Special beings possess special souls. Use the soul of Craag that has various aspects of chaos to acquire a vast amount of souls or create a unique weapon." - Soul of Quelaag

27 "Curved sword born from the soul of Craag, daughter of the Witch of Izalith who transformed into a chaos demon.
It possesses a tough outer shell and thorns resembling the lower half of Craag's body, is tinged with chaos, and boosts its might according to the user's humanity."
- Quelaag's Furysword

28 "This land has a special meaning to pyromancers. The 'Witch of Izalith', one of the first Kings in legend, is said to be the core founder of pyromancy. That's why I was ecstatic when I became Undead. I'd been chosen, I'd touch the primal pyromancies… Well, it wasn't such a sweet thing, now was it…" - Laurentius

All of this discredits the common assumption that Quelana abandoned her family when the Flame of Chaos consumed their mother, as do the pyromancies she teaches. Most of Quelana's pyromancies are described as "primal" (原初), the same term that Laurentius uses to describe Chaos as the original life and Izalith's chaos pyromancies as the original pyromancies. (*DS3* recycles the term to more explicitly refer to the chaos arts.) In other words, both chaos and Quelana's pyromancies are the earliest spells ever invented in the history of the magical art, from which all others would be born. But the early pyromancies that Quelana teaches are of the non-chaos variety, implying that she pioneered the art and stayed long enough to develop non-chaos variants.

Furthermore, the Orange Charred Ring was explicitly provided to Ceaseless Discharge by the witches "who are his older sisters", making it a collective gift to a brother tortured by the lava his sore had produced since birth. Not only does this nuance necessitate Quelana, the oldest, be among the group, it demonstrates their shared concern over their youngest sibling's suffering. Moreover, the ring is imbued with the magic power of a witch and spawned a demon, indicating that all the sisters already possessed control and understanding of Chaos power – in other words, it was crafted after the witches became Daughters of Chaos. And given the fact that we can wear it, they probably invented it while the giant was still very young. The orange jewel at its centerpiece is likely the source of the ring's lava damage-reducing powers.



But before long he dropped the ring, losing it forever to the Centipede Demon that it produced. Although it was a "foolish" action regardless, the Japanese wording to the ring's description opens up the possibility that he dropped it *because* the demon was born. In order to produce its own life, the ring must have contained a soul that interacted with the chaos power within it – the fact that the ring has been charred black within a *fire*-spewing demon reinforces this Chaos Flame origin. In that case, why would the ring only create a living body after its owner dropped it? Moreover, it is odd for Ceaseless Discharge to simply drop such a precious

gift. But, if the ring was dropped as a result of a new grotesque lifeform spawning from it, then his "foolish" act is understandable. What child *wouldn't* let go of their toy if it suddenly sprouted heads and limbs? This would explain why his sisters didn't reclaim the ring or fashion him a new one either, forcing the giant infant to try clogging up the sore with his only arm. But more than that, it would imply that the witches were still learning about the power they had been experimenting with at the time.



While all the sisters were involved in the creation of pyromancy, the art doesn't appear to have been commonly taught to demons. Other than the witches and firesages, no demon uses any form of fire magic. Similarly, their standard arsenal consists of the whittled-down bones of their kindred[29] or chiseled-down archtrees – they hit hard, but lack any fire attribute. Chaos-imbued demon weapons were forged in Izalith, and we see Quelaag wield one, yet there is still no evidence of pyromancers among the common demon warrior. Instead, pyromancy was probably taught primarily to Izalith's human population.

Pyromancy is not just a skill, but a philosophy. Quelana warns her pupils to fear fire or else be consumed by it for forgetting, an obvious reference to her mother and sisters' fate.[30] She believes that they made a terrible mistake, and her primal arts all highlight the difficulty in controlling flame, so it is often assumed that she alone holds this attitude to the art. In truth, it is a fundamental principle to studying pyromancy.

Laurentius reveres the Witch of Izalith and compares pyromancy to "longing" – an attraction to fire they can't touch but that those with a "strong longing" can wield a part of.[31] This directly parallels the witches' desire for power when creating the Flame of Chaos and later pyromancy. Laurentius also cites pyromancy being the art of the primal life as the reason behind pyromancers' attempts to immerse themselves in nature,[32] and he takes notice if we possess either chaos or Quelana's pyromancies,[33] rekindling his "romantic" fantasy of learning the original fire arts.[34] Yet his culture reveres Quelana's pupil Salaman, so it is unlikely that a culture so heavily influenced by Quelana's teachings would

29 "Demon weapon that is the bone of its kindred whittled down. It was used by a bull-head lesser demon.
It doesn't have any special magic power, but it is one of the best weapons for heartily smashing enemies if you have the physical strength to swing this heaviness."
- Demon's Greataxe

30 "Pyromancy is the art of fire, the art of lighting and controlling it. But, listen. Remember only this: Fear fire. Those who forget that fear are consumed by the fire, and lose everything. I don't want to see something like that again..." - Quelana

31 "My master is likely still in the Great Swamp, but master had a way of saying it. 'Pyromancy is, after all is said and done, longing. We're born into Dark and captivated by fire, but can't even touch it. Only those with such strong longing can have part of fire's power in their hand.' There was a strange stylishness to the withered old man's quirks..." - Laurentius

32 "That's why a pyromancer tries to be in nature. The Great Swamp that I'm from was also such a place. You too will understand someday." - Laurentius

33 "Oh, you. Long time no see...! You, what's with that pyromancy? Tell me! I've never seen such pyromancy!" - Laurentius

34 "... I see. I knew it, I see! Thank you for telling me. I too am a pyromancer, though not much of one. I'll find her with my own power. I'm indebted to you again." - Laurentius

revere her mother and chaos arts if their philosophies were intrinsically opposed. Rather, pyromancers are taught to be wary of fire despite their fascination with it, and to use that fascination to control it – the Witch of Izalith and her daughters learned this firsthand, through trial and error.

In essence, Quelana's teachings are intrinsic to the foundation of pyromancy, an art all the witches took part in developing. This explains why she continues to teach humans her pyromancy after abandoning her home. She doesn't disapprove of her mother's pursuit of fire, just her arrogance while doing so. The witches accepted that their reckless experiment caused undue damage and used it as a cautionary tale to humans hoping to follow the same path. The humans that flocked to Izalith, or had already settled there, learned these chaos arts or their simpler non-chaos variants, sharing in that same longing as Izalith and her daughters. But by learning the witches' philosophy, the humans learned from their mistake, ensuring that fire doesn't cause needless damage again like Quelana dreads. (A sentiment again echoed in *DS3* with the Witch's Ring.) Likewise, pyromancy's approach to magic as not just a rational science, but as a philosophy, ties to this school of magic's roots in faith.

The demons and humans affiliated with Izalith follow a hierarchical religion revolving around the Flame of Chaos. The Flame and its seedbed are at its center, and we see common devotees praying in their direction. The gods of Anor Londo already taught that fire was something to be revered, but the witches took a slightly different approach – flame must be feared as a hazard but could be controlled, satiating one's longing to touch it. Demon religion inherited this thinking. They worship the Flame of Chaos, but as a creator of new species of life and an example for how to control nature for themselves. Pyromancy was as much an expression of that faith as it was a discipline.

The firesages were the last to learn flame sorceries before pyromancy was invented. Knowing these traditional magics likely gave the priests an aura of respect and may be partially the reason for their position in demon culture. While pursuing the fire arts originally required extensive knowledge and study like any other sorcery, pyromancy opened them up to the masses. Anyone could learn to wield fire through sheer devotion to another's teachings, unlike the elites, who understood the deeper mysteries behind it. (*DS3* later expands on this with pyromancy-wielding demon deacons, a position typically below priests.) Nonetheless, the study of any fire arts demonstrates faith in the principles of the witches' teachings.

This mix of religion and science is encapsulated in the pyromancy name itself. As stated earlier, pyromancies are literally "spell arts" or

conjury. By that same token, pyromancers are "conjurers" or "witch doctors" with a connotation of shamanism. They are not strictly users of fire but masters of a broader spiritual power. Pyromancers of the Great Swamp surround themselves in nature, and Carmina takes in fire before actualizing that power within. Fire is the great creator from which all life derives its origin, and so pyromancers try to become in-tune with that core of the universe and then draw out its power after finding their own spiritual center. It is because of fire that the world as we know it exists, thus our alignment with fire and all its creation opens up possibilities previously unavailable to us. Izalith had a profound belief system that didn't consider fire itself sacrosanct, but the power it granted.

Unholy War

When we first ask Quelana about her mother, she requests that we drop the subject, admitting to abandoning her family but not when or under what conditions. Her only revelation is that she has since pretended to atone for the "sin" by questing the Poison Swamp, and she even calls herself a coward in the Japanese script.[35] She views her departure as a misdeed to atone for, but has failed to assuage any of her guilt by remaining in self-imposed exile. This implies that she chose to desert them in their time of need, and desert may be the operative word. After we return from Quelaag's domain victorious in the boss battle, Quelana requests that we also kill the Bed of Chaos before explaining how her family transformed into the seedbed. Since she only makes this offer after we have already killed one of her siblings, this line has been grossly misinterpreted as implying all the sisters, a problem compounded by the flawed translation.

The witch mentions her mother losing control of the Flame of Chaos, but not regaining control of it, because the latter isn't relevant to explaining how the seedbed came to be, which is key to explaining the motive behind Quelana's request. She then says that she alone has "run away", again without clarifying when or under what circumstances. While it is easy to conflate this flight with the creation of the Bed of Chaos, she is actually only explaining why *she* is unable to perform the deed herself. Her only hint to a timeline is when she describes her mother atoning for her "arrogant" ambition over the past millennium. And what event involving Izalith also occurred one thousand years ago? Its war with Anor Londo.

Izalith was ambitious. She accidentally transformed herself and two daughters into a grotesque beast after trying to create another

35 "... The Witch of Izalith, huh..... Forgive me, but stop speaking of her, will you?... I abandoned my mother, younger sisters, all of them, and ran way... And now I'm a coward who claims to atone for the sin... and plays at seeking..." - Quelana

36 "Demon weapon that is the bone of its kindred whittled down. It was used by a thin bat-wing lesser demon.

Despite being chaos demons, the weapons of they who live in Anor Londo have the power of lightning, unlike the other demons." - Demon's Spear

First Flame. She then continued creating more grotesque lives and building an entire civilization upon her newfound power, glorifying her mistake. It is quite understandable why Quelana became disillusioned with her mother's actions upon seeing Anor Londo invade and reduce that civilization to ruins.

Quelana isn't lying to us with her abridged explanation of events. She simply summarizes all the vital points to clarify her intentions, having previously refused to even discuss her family history due to personal feelings. Her departure from her family's position on the Flame of Chaos is driven by a belief that their presumed suffering outweighs the Flame's benefits. And for good reason. Despite the prosperity that Chaos brought to their civilization, Izalith went to war and lost.

The batwing demons are chaos demons, but reside in Anor Londo, acting as ferries to the royal capital as well as outdoor guards for the cathedral and royal manor. Their spears are made from the bone of their kin like many other lesser demon weapons, but also imbued with lightning.[36] Shiva offers to sell us weapons that he has collected during our second encounter in Blighttown, including demon weapons like the Demon's Spear. There is no evidence that the Easterner has ever been to Anor Londo, so he must have acquired this weapon from the local area, which connects directly to Izalith. Why would chaos demons wield sunlight weapons in Izalith? Because Anor Londo awarded them its power to fight against their own kin.

Whether swiftly crushed before being offered clemency or already disaffected with demon society, the batwings defected, steeping their hands in blood still worn to this day – perhaps creatures derived from the Life Soul remains fresh even in death. Such betrayal would be a significant blow to Izalith's fighting capacity and morale in a war where Gwyn's knights were already more than equipped to face any of them. Loyalists certainly were shown no such magnanimity.

Two such demons are serving as wardens for the Northern Undead Asylum. This prison currently facilitates the Undead mission, so it is unlikely that these demons have been serving the interests of Izalith. Why would chaos demons, especially a firesage, be jailers so far from home? "Stray" implies the Stray Demon – and presumably the Asylum Demon as well – to be cut off from their fellow demons. Most likely, they are prisoners of war like the giants, enslaved and repurposed as



guard dogs. (*DS3* later introduces its own Stray Demon acting as a human kingdom's gatekeeper as an implicit result of a similar war.)

The Sanctuary Guardians may be another example of defection or enslavement. Their lightning breath and "holy beast" description associates them with Anor Londo, but they are explicitly compared to demons, as opposed to "natural living thing[s]" in the Japanese description of the boss lion's soul. And yet, there are multiple of these very same lions, so they cannot be the one-off freak mistake of some magic experiment. Moreover, Frampt devalues the Guardian Soul by the same flat rate as Quelaag's soul while overvaluing many items associated with the witch and her chaos works, suggesting commonality between those two in particular. Given the holy beasts' highest resistance to lightning and lowest resistance to fire matches the resistance ratios of the batwing demons, these winged lions are most likely chaos demons – more traitors or captives that have since been incorporated into Anor Londo's forces and provided enough sunlight power to turn the hue of their souls yellow.



Betrayal, capture, or death. In short, the war went heavily in Gwyn's favor. Quelana believed that they were suffering retribution for their arrogance, the wrath of the gods. And then she escaped in the chaos, leaving everyone she knew to perish. Of *course* the witch feels too guilty to return home after the war. She was the oldest, but fled instead of protecting her mother and the younger siblings, instead of standing and fighting alongside her people. One can only imagine the confusion, anxiety, worry, dread, anger, sadness, and despair her sudden disappearance inflicted upon the others. Simply put, Quelana feared being ridiculed and reviled by both the nation and family she selfishly abandoned. She probably didn't expect Gwyn would leave any of them alive after bringing their city to ruins.

As noted, the advanced state of the chaos demons' civilization discounts the notion of war occurring in reaction to a rampaging Flame of Chaos and its creatures. Another key aspect to this theory is that nothing physically stops the demons from entering the outside

world, even now. Why didn't Gwyn annihilate them entirely if their existence were such a threat? Instead, he clearly concluded that the demons could be left alone without risking further harm to Anor Londo; indeed, they have largely remained in the ruins of their homeland for the entire millennium since the war ended. This is a clear recognition of territory and boundaries, requiring diplomacy by both sides. The war was an engagement between two nations. And if the losing side still exists as a population and as its own entity by the conflict's end, then there has to be a shared agreement ending the hostilities.

This implied treaty is directly referenced in Quelaag's cut dialogue. The witch mentions a pact, and the Japanese script confirms that she includes herself among those who have accepted being sealed from the outside world.[37] Miyazaki explains in the *Design Works* interview that this content was cut because Quelaag speaking detracted from the ambiance of her character, not that it contradicted lore, giving this information further credibility. We can infer from this dialogue and the earlier implications that the treaty involved both parties keeping to their own domains, making it "forbidden" for us to enter the Izalith ruins and for the demons to likewise leave them. This meant that Izalith could avoid complete annihilation but couldn't expand its territory or establish diplomatic relations with other kingdoms. The country of the chaos demons was in tatters, and completely isolated.

The fact that Gwyn settles for an armistice where he makes no obvious concessions shows that he was clearly winning the war, which puts his very reason for invading to begin with into question. It is possible that the First Flame's imminent end forced his hand, but that still wouldn't clarify his motive. Thus, Gwyn's goal wasn't the demons' total annihilation but some other purpose. That purpose was fulfilled, and so he immediately sued for peace. And what is the one thing Izalith now lacks without explanation? Its human population.

The timing for the war supports this motive. Izalith was cooperating with Anor Londo past the emergence of the Darksign. The Fair Lady is a Fire Keeper, which requires her to have inherited this knowledge from Anor Londo. While we find it in Izalith, Vamos claims that he "saw" the Large Flame Ember in New Londo, suggesting that the two nations had once engaged in trade.[38] The conflict only arose just before Gwyn decided to link the fire. At the time, the Lord of Sunlight was afraid that a Dark Lord would be born among the humans and end the Age of Fire. He took extensive measures to ensure this wouldn't happen, instilling mankind with a culture that revered fire and actively supported its continuation.

37 **"Turn back. Beyond here is the forbidden region of the pact. The land of chaos life. We have accepted the seal." - Quelaag**

38 **"Honestly, I've said there's nothing to talk about… If I am useful to you, it is just smithing. If there was that wonderful source flame I saw in New Londo, even more so, but since that city was submerged long ago…" - Vamos**

Izalith, with a culture teaching humans to fear and control fire, would be exactly what the god feared if the country didn't remain an ally.

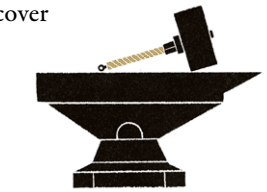
Given the timing, and the fact that Quelana blames her mother's arrogance, Izalith might have seen the First Flame's imminent fading as an opportunity. Even if the fire went out, the Witch would still have her own First Flame – a Flame of Chaos – and thus would have possibly lorded over the last bastion of fire in existence. She controlled this fire and had already used it to create a mighty race and grand civilization. Compared to the gods of Anor Londo, who relied so heavily on the power of Gwyn's Light Soul derived from the First Flame, she could easily dominate a coming "Age of Chaos". Therefore, Izalith's support for Anor Londo diminished and its intentions for independence were made evident. The Witch likely believed that Gwyn no longer had the capacity to stop her. (*DS2* reaffirms the implication of the witches challenging the other Lords.)

If a country independent of Anor Londo's influence instills humans with a fear of fire, what would stop them from then desiring fire fade? Or worse, desiring it be subverted and controlled by them and not the gods? If Gwyn was to prevent his age's end, he couldn't allow Izalith to snub his authority. The war itself was a clean-up effort, the last major preparation before the god formally left the future to his sons. Suddenly, Gwyn's benign pact looks like a clever ruse. He had already killed all the humans that could threaten the Age of Fire, and in doing so wiped out anyone needed to rebuild. Izalith was in ruins, filled with only demon warriors and priests. The witch's civilization had already fallen, and Gwyn was leaving it to its slow but inevitable demise without wasting more resources in a war effort.

This unforeseen development puts Quelana in a difficult position. She couldn't return home and face the family she betrayed, but neither could leave them to slowly die. So she wandered the Poison Swamp by her lonesome for centuries, pretending it made up for leaving her family to suffer in their broken kingdom. At least, Quelana assumes her mother and sisters have been suffering as the seedbed, and she may be right. Although starting seated in its throne, the Bed of Chaos slumps forward to fight us, as if exhausted – a sign that Izalith may be strained trying to maintain her kingdom's survival. The Flame of Chaos feeding off their souls may have been worth it at their apex, but what about now that they were barely holding on? Quelana knows her family supports Chaos, and the ramifications of "freeing" them from it. But, disillusioned with her mother's ambition, she would rather her family rest in peace than keep trying to revive a doomed civilization.

After the war, the broken nation built a memorial. We can determine this from the layout of Ceaseless Discharge's boss room. The Izalithian architecture is scant and comprised largely of small columns haphazardly stacked upon each other. This is an amateurish level of construction unseen anywhere else in the city – most likely the design of the surviving demons, not the slain human engineers. It is undoubtedly a memorial because the architecture leads only to a corpse enshrined upon an altar. The body is female and wears the gold-black hemmed set. This memorial, just outside the actual city, may have originally been the site of a battlefield, where one of the demons' gods fell facing Gwyn's invading army. But curiously enough, the description for the attire indicates it to be specifically Quelana's clothes.





Some suggest that Quelana faked her death to cover up her desertion. However, it would be difficult to render the body unidentifiable without sparking suspicion. Would she seriously expect her family to believe that a *flame* witch was charred by foes who employ lightning and metal blades, somehow sparing even her clothes? A similar discrepancy sees the elite knight set referencing Oscar, despite being found on a corpse in Darkroot Garden.[39] Cut dialogue confirms that there was a planned encounter with Oscar in the garden, but we can only kill the knight and his Hollow at the asylum in the final game – an event referenced in the set's description. Since both sets are generic equipment worn by many others, the descriptions referencing only their most notable wearers may be a legacy of an earlier stage in development, when the items probably *were* acquired directly from who they describe. There is an otherwise unaccounted for seventh Daughter of Chaos, so *she* is more likely to be the corpse's true identity, an actual victim of the war posthumously honored for her service. Hers may even be the hero's soul interred in just a chest back at her family residence.

This seventh daughter was probably originally planned to be encountered alive. Guelana is internally named "Craag's Sisters" (クラーグの姉妹), implying that her model wasn't originally going to be unique to her. The fact that this model has no distinct face beneath the hood like other unique NPCs – including Quelana – reinforces this notion. But "Craag's Sisters" ultimately became a unique character while another of the witch's daughters was killed off.

Ceaseless Discharge watches over this daughter's memorial and becomes hostile if her corpse is looted. While we can antagonize the molten giant by simply attacking him, he will only cry out in anger and remove his arm from his lava-leaking sore if we loot the body. He clearly cares for his sister, enough to even remove the arm reducing his pain after he foolishly dropped his siblings' gift. Miyazaki reaffirms that the boss only finds happiness in watching over his elder sisters in the *Design Works* interview. They showed him affection and he does the same in turn, making his loyal watch over her body just another tragedy of the conflict.

Izalith suffered terrible losses as a result of the war, forever changing the fate of its people. They are no longer a flourishing empire, just a dying nation, trapped with no resources or allies to help them recover. The Witch's ego ultimately brought ruin to countless lives and left only their mistake – their sin – in its wake. And to atone for yet another mistake she made, they have all had to suffer for a millennium.

A New Empire?

According to Eingyi's Japanese dialogue, Ceaseless Discharge guards the Izalithian ruins as a result of Quelaag and the Fair Lady fleeing to the Bell of Awakening ruins up above. Miyazaki expands on this in the *Design Works* interview, confirming that the boss is positioned not only to watch over his one sister's memorial, but also his two other sisters' new home. This suggests that he was assigned guard duty when they left and that he has since kept to that duty with the hopes that they will someday return. Eingyi admits that he doesn't know the details about the situation and is hesitant to learn them, implying that what he *does* know came from someone else. He cannot understand the Fair Lady,[40] which means that his source is most likely Quelaag. It is unlikely that she would mention her brother or his actions if they intended to wholly abandon their family and country, like Quelana had done. Instead, the two fled their home and have since attempted to birth more demons and recruit new human worshippers of the Flame of Chaos.

Quelaag's goal is most likely to save their dying nation, to revive and expand their old empire. The pact with Anor Londo sealed Izalith off from the outside world, but the Chaos Servants provide the demons with the human resources that they have thus far lacked. This effort must occur relatively recently for several reasons. First off, the ruins were already falling apart and half-buried *before* the sisters laid their eggs on top of them. This architecture is distinct from anywhere else in-game, but closely resembles the Romanesque style seen in the Undead Burg – indeed, cut content confirms that the Fair Lady's chamber would have originally connected back to the Undead town's sewer in Blighttown. However, there is an obvious difference in age between the two, so they were probably built by the same source but not at the same time. The ruins' two distinguishing features: the lift leading to Izalith, and the lever to the Bell of Awakening.

The latter is identical to the common levers found in Undead Parish, barring its color, and the bell itself bears few differences from its Undead Parish counterpart.[41] On the other hand, the lift's design is clearly Izalithian and incorporates chaos fire into its technology – the button emits a crackling chaos flame while active. The lift clashes with the aged ruins in both appearance and style, even surrounded by a ring of dirt that clearly partitions it from the surrounding stone flooring. This indicates that said ruins were built around it, meaning that the

39 **"Armor of a nameless knight. From the crest on the blue surcoat that defends against fire, it is in all likelihood the thing of a high-ranking knight of Astora.**

Even though that knight held a mission as an Undead, he fell in the Undead Institute and probably ended up becoming a Hollow." - Elite Knight Armor

40 **"I'm honestly envious of you. Because the likes of us don't understand the language... we can't even provide comfort for the Princess..." - Eingyi**

41 **"The Bells of Awakening spoken of in the Undead mission are two. One is above here, in the bell tower of the Undead Church. The other is far below here, in the old ruin at the bottom of the Diseased Village." - Crestfallen Warrior**

building was built on top of some existing Izalithian structure. The lift is the only formal means to enter the Izalith ruins and so was likely Quelaag and the Fair Lady's means of entry. The only other entrance is a hole in the wall demolished from the inside, evidently the route the egg-bearers used to burrow out of the complex.

In short, these old ruins could not be built without the citizens of Izalith noticing, and must have been constructed by the same builders as the Undead Burg significantly before the town was established. The Burg was built under Anor Londo's jurisdiction to facilitate the most recent iteration of the Undead mission, which means that the Izalith bell tower must have originally served an alternative purpose. The only time that the bell tower could be constructed without Izalith interfering is in the immediate aftermath of the war. The tower conveniently overlooks the lost city, and its layout allows one to easily reach the lever from that vantage point. By extension, the bell's ringing reaches those stationed at Sen's Fortress.



With all that in mind, the ruins were probably a watchtower, built to enforce the armistice. If Izalith ever attempted to defy the terms and act beyond its borders, Anor Londo would be immediately signaled about the approaching danger and react accordingly. This outpost fell into ruin in the ensuing millennium after years of no demonic activity, and so was repurposed as part of our Undead mission. While there is no trial to ring the second bell like the gargoyles of Undead Parish, whatever guardians may have been installed to impede us were likely put down by the demon sisters upon taking control of the facility. In effect, Quelaag has unwittingly assumed their role.

We can determine that the sisters took over in recent months due to the progress of the Undead mission. The Crestfallen Merchant confirms that Undead have challenged Sen's Fortress for the past century, but Frampt vaguely claims that we are the first to enter it in some time,[42] meaning that both Bells of Awakening were being rung for decades before the practice suddenly halted. This coincides

perfectly with the invasion of the Taurus and Capra demons, both of whom only showed up recently according to the Undead Merchant.[43] So what recent event triggered their arrival? The spider sisters breaking the pact and turning the bell tower into their domain.

Consider the circumstances. Izalith hears this alarm bell periodically ring for decades despite their years of inactivity. A barrier derived from Gwyn's power appears that prevents us from reaching the Bed of Chaos prematurely. These intrusions from the outside world are already obnoxious and suspicious if not direct violations of the pact. Whether stirred by idle curiosity or having divined Anor Londo's intentions, it is no surprise that two chaos witches would eventually take over the bell tower with a few demon underlings. It simultaneously stopped the ringing, gave them greater understanding of the situation, and provided them with a foothold to push beyond their borders.

During the cutscene preceding her boss fight, Quelaag's manner and posture exude a certain confidence and composure in her actions, which is reflected in cut dialogue. Upon hearing this dialogue, English fans are often confused by her use of the third-person,[44] but this isn't too uncommon, and can be used to suggest self-importance. Essentially, Quelaag comes off as self-absorbed, as if we should know who she is just by hearing the name. She talks down to us as a mere "sacrifice", with an aloof confidence[45] that her calm smile conveys in-game. Apparently, the witch inherited her mother's arrogance as well as her ambition, and this alpha personality may hint to the underlying cause for fleeing home. While the rest of the demons try to desperately hold onto what is left and await their inevitable extinction, Quelaag resists their fate and tries to make her mother's ambition a reality.

So, why have they only fled their ruined home so recently? The answer is an internal squabble among the sisters. Guelana and the others simply aren't committed to Quelaag's push for expansion, probably fearing that they will face the gods' wrath for a second time. The only exception to this is the Fair Lady, who directly expresses love and respect for her elder sister.[46] The younger witch is happy so long as the two are together and so wholly devotes herself to her cause. Perhaps this sister complex is a product of the Fair Lady's meekness compared to her self-confident, domineering older sibling – one standing strong in the face of mortal danger while the other shivers in fear at the mildest injury. Whatever the case, the two witches set out on their own, leaving the rest to protect their home in case they failed and Izalith faced retaliation.

42 **"Many mission bearers have challenged it previously, and none have returned. You are the first mission bearer in a while. Be careful." - Frampt**

43 **"Even around here's been getting dangerous recently. Below here, a goat-head demon had the nerve to settle down a little while ago. And up top, a huge wyvern and, recently, a bull-head demon have apparently appeared." - Itinerant Merchant**

44 **"Turn back. Otherwise, your all shall become fire's prey and become a seedbed for chaos life. What shall happen to fools who don't obey the pact… to those who have invaded the land of Craag? You best realize it for yourself!" - Quelaag**

45 **"Ah, new sacrifice. Beyond here is the forbidden region of the pact. The land of chaos life. Proceed ahead as you are." - Quleaag**

"Welcome, sacrifice. You best be burned by the fire of Craag and become a seedbed of chaos!" - Quelaag

46 **"Hey, Big Sister. I, sometimes remember it. Big Sister's face. It was so beautiful. It'd be nice to see it again someday…" - Fair Lady**

After the chaos witches move in, they make contact with the ill residents of Blighttown, and some convert. Since her life is tied to the bonfire in Quelaag's lair, the Fair Lady must have become a Fire Keeper only after they moved into the ruin. Though the bonfire is certainly convenient for any Undead servants, this act primarily serves Quelaag's plan. The younger sister insists on being Quelaag's strength in cut dialogue,[47] and all of the humanity offered to the witch through her covenant goes to her Fire Keeper soul which then manifests as the countless demon eggs littering the domain, "cradles" for each humanity spirit.[48] Cut content reveals that this would have also improved her health,[49] but the Servant Roster only implies that our action vaguely helps relieve her pain in-game.[50] Regardless, these offerings strengthen the chaos fire within her and fertilizes the future demons. The Fair Lady functions essentially as a new Bed of Chaos, and Quelaag says as much in cut dialogue. A Fire Keeper soul imbued with Chaos acts as the medium for this new seedbed.

To demonstrate their dedication, the Fair Lady's attendants bear her eggs on their backs and act as hosts to the demonic parasites until the parasites transform the host into chaos lifeforms. Eingyi mistrusts us until we prove our loyalty by bearing a parasite ourselves,[51] though bearing it in inconvenient areas like the head permits servants to excise these eggs from the body. While serving the chaos witches would clearly be enticing to pyromancers like Eingyi, they weren't alone. The Undead citizens of Blighttown all have an unusually high fire resistance for their nature and environment, making the chaos demons the likely source. Indeed, many of their fellow residents have morphed into grotesque life with no obvious friction between the two parties, and they in fact cooperate to kill us. These newborn creatures of Chaos are living among the rickety platforms of the village because the populace permits and accept them.

The residents also command fire-breathing "stray dogs of chaos" (混沌の野犬). These comparatively smaller strays radiate heat that hues their skin red – an evidently new breed which has yet to reach maturity – and have mostly been corralled in one large drainage area of the Undead Burg sewer. Some have already been trained as guard dogs and assist their human masters, while another is employed as a beast of burden to power Blighttown's rudimentary lift system. They are a core part of the community's way of life. Behind the bars of one sewage drain in the corral lies a woman's corpse with a Fire Keeper Soul. The residents trapped their local Fire Keeper with their new pets; we can see the result. Undead need Fire Keepers to avoid hollowing, but they have found a replacement in the Fair Lady.

Outside of the village proper, some of the brawnier residents have gathered around the entrance to Quelaag's lair. One pair has cornered and killed another Undead carrying the Great Club, but the rest have begun digging up the rocky area with their bare hands. The entrance has many archtree branches or roots jutting out from the earth around it, but they are smothered in webs that make it obvious that this is the sisters' domain. There is no way for these Blighttown denizens to be working there without the sisters' approval, meaning that their actions are likely part of some construction effort – the mining pickaxe that they carry furthers the notion. Most likely, they are building up a land bridge to connect their new gods' lair to their village without having to wade through the Poison Swamp.



In short, the chaos witches' influence has taken root in the local area, with Quelaag actively recruiting devout followers who would bolster the motherland's ranks as humans or new demons. The covenant roster Eingyi manages decides who is worthy of formally entering Izalith based on the amount of humanity offerings tallied, a task that Quelaag likely delegated to him. This indicates that their attendants were permitted or even expected to come in and out of the ruined capital, which Kirk demonstrates. The Knight of Thorns invades us thrice – including in the deepest part of the city – before a corpse with his equipment spawns near the Fair Lady. This implies that he is harvesting humanity for the Chaos Servants, and Miyazaki confirms his membership in the Game no Shokutaku podcast. Eingyi addressing the Daughter of Chaos as the "Fair Lady", or *hime-sama* (姫様), an address for highborn daughters like royalty, further supports the notion that the sisters were acting in their royal capacity. The family is feuding over how to go about it, but they are all acting to preserve their civilization.

However, not everything has gone according to Quelaag's plan. The Fair Lady pitied the residents' sorry fate and chose to share in their

47 "... Big Sister? What's wrong? I'll be all right, I want to become your strength." - Fair Lady

48 "Soul of a Daughter of Chaos, Fire Keeper of Craag's Dwelling.
The soul of a Fire Keeper is a vessel for humanity, and this doesn't change within their bodies. There are countless humanity wriggling under the entirety of their skin, so their form becomes a most disgusting thing.
As for her, they materialized as countless eggs. For those eggs are all a cradle for the humanity." - Fire Keeper Soul

49 "I'll be all right. Somehow it doesn't hurt too much. Maybe because Big Sister's been talking to me recently...?" - Fair Lady

"I feel very good... It becomes an immense comfort..." - Fair Lady

"It doesn't hurt anymore..." - Fair Lady

50 "List of the attendants who serve the Daughter of Chaos, the egg-bearer Enjii's Princess, which he manages. Those who have offered lots of humanity to the Daughter and relieved her pain seem to obtain a high evaluation from Enjii.
... It doesn't appear to have much meaning though." - Servant Roster

51 "... Hmph, a half-hearted person who doesn't even bear eggs, are you. Well, fine. In that case, you should see the Princess ahead. Please, take care not to be crude!" - Eingyi

illness.[52] Despite what the localization suggests, Eingyi's Japanese dialogue clearly states the Fair Lady sympathized with *all* the diseased Undead forced to suffer in the waste-filled dregs of the Undead Burg, not just him in particular. His English dialogue likewise implies that "Blightpus" is something notable and specific when he in fact only claims that she had ingested "diseased pus" (病の膿), essentially any infected material from the ill there. The Fair Lady's show of compassion ignored the words of Quelaag, who likely feared it would jeopardize the plan and – more importantly – cause her sister undue harm. The Fair Lady's compassion clearly resonated with Eingyi and the others, but at grave cost.



The Fair Lady has gone blind and is delirious enough to believe that we are Quelaag simply because she can understand our speech. While her elder siblings are portrayed with dark hair, hers appears sickly white, matching her decrepit, likely dead, lower-half. Her dialogue indicates that Quelaag cried over her health[53] and overworked herself as a result,[54] but the damage was already done. The witch apologizes for the eggs hurting her and not stirring, the Japanese script further worrying that they are no good "this time". Every egg that the invalid has produced in the wake of her sickness has been stillborn, dooming her sister's ambitions – the implication, of course, that chaos life ironically cannot simply reproduce conventionally. Since our offerings help alleviate her pain, her condition may still be curable, but not anytime soon. (*DS3* suggests that she will eventually recover.)

It is around this point that two chaos demons move into the Undead Burg, likely under Quelaag's orders. Both demons exhibit very specific behavior. The more recent Taurus Demon guards the upper wall leading to the bridge and thereby the parish. We can see the damage it has caused solely to this area, and there are a few Hollowed burg soldiers stationed opposite, confirming it appeared recently in the midst of the chaos befalling the city. Meanwhile, the Capra Demon has long become the local mob boss of the lower

52 "We are all troubling persons, Undead as well as afflicted by disease. Like a great excrement of the Great Swamp. But, nevertheless, the Princess wept for us… And then, she ignored what Lady Craag told her and consumed pus of the disease…" - Eingyi

53 "Big Sister? Hey, Big Sister, don't cry. I've been happy all this time. Because I have my Big Sister here…" - Fair Lady

54 "I'll be all right, having Big Sister. That's why, Big Sister, don't overdo it so much…" - Fair Lady

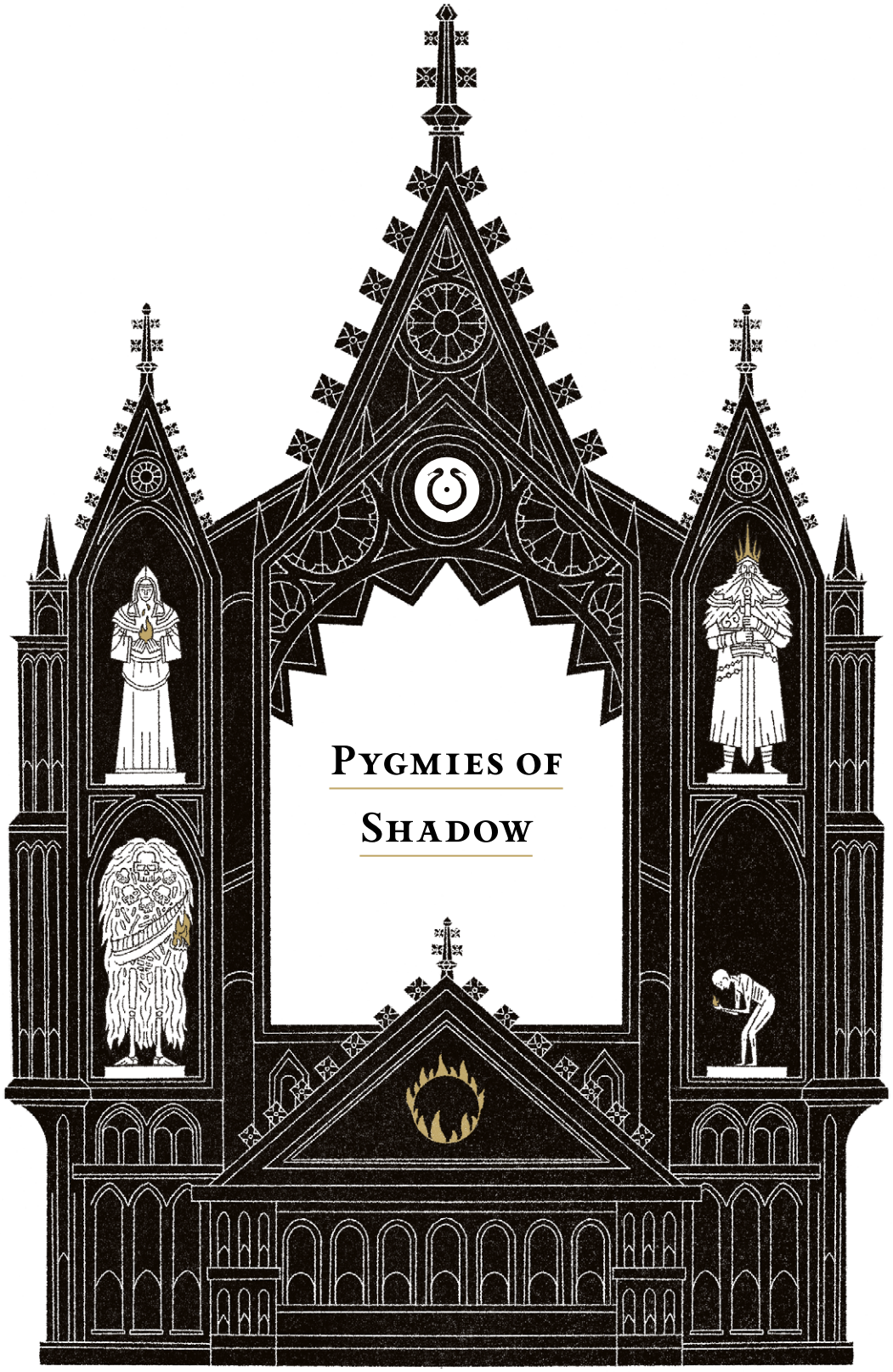
stratum, commanding the seedy residents and stray dogs. A pyre of bodies was lit before we even came to town, and a mob of torch-carrying citizens have already ganged up on one woman by the time we arrive. This demon also carries the key to the Depths, which leads straight to Blighttown. Such behavior is too peculiar for them to simply be running amok. What do their actions accomplish? Obstructing our two primary paths leading to the Bells of Awakening.

The demons are intentionally hindering attempts to fulfill the Undead mission. The Burg exists to facilitate the mission and has done so for over a century. This must be known to the residents and thereby Quelaag. And once the witch knew why Undead have been ringing the bell, it wouldn't be hard to surmise its connection to the barrier in Izalith and the ultimate goal of killing their mother. Miyazaki even admits that the Centipede Demon is the boss originally planned to guard the Undead Parish bell tower in the *Design Works* interview, meaning that there would have been four demons directly impeding our goal to ring both bells. In a world of man subordinate to the gods, the chaos demons are alone, demeaned, and unwanted, but still they fight to survive. Their very existence may be a mistake, but that doesn't stop the pursuit of life.

On Reflection

For the third pillar of the setting, Miyazaki and Uchiyama equate Izalith to purgatory and chaotic flames. In many respect, the Witch of Izalith herself is a foil for Gwyn. Whereas the narrative has the Lord of Sunlight constantly leapfrogging off his successes, it leaves the equally arrogant Witch to always be building upon her failures. In the end, fire cannot be controlled, and the life born from the attempt is an aberration. As a result, the entire Izalithian civilization has been condemned to burn in their fiery prison time and time again for their sins, even as these devils futilely attempt to resist that fate.

However, one might say that they are just the microcosm of every being's destiny in this universe. Gwyn and his ilk are no less guilty of trying to control the contrary nature of a flame, and the result has been no less disastrous for the world, if more slow-moving. In Izalith, Gwyn saw his own folly reflected back at him, and still he went off to link the First Flame without skipping a beat. And in the wake of *his* sin, we have all been left to suffer in our own worldwide purgatory.



Pygmies of Shadow

Lord of Dark

The "furtive" pygmy was dubbed the "pygmy of the shadows" (影の小人) on the game's original Japanese website,[1] but the implication of secrecy remains regardless. The character is a mystery due to the fact that no one knows about him – while I say "him", even the pygmy's sex is never confirmed. Although this has led to much theorizing about his identity, there is little merit in exploring this mystery. There are certainly characters in-game who must know who he is, but the pygmy has been forgotten by the world at large. With that in mind, it is unlikely for the character to be a recognizable historical figure – if he was, then he has not been forgotten and there is no mystery. In truth, the pygmy's identity is irrelevant. It is what he did and represents that truly matters.

The pygmy is portrayed as the last to find a Lord Soul, and Kaathe recounts that he found the fourth soul *after* the other Lords. Some have questioned why no Lord found the titular Dark Soul before him, but the same could be asked of any Lord Soul found after the first. Presumably, the Lord Souls were hidden enough away that finding just one was miraculous and no one thought to look for more before it was too late. Regardless, the pygmy acquired the power of a King, which implies that he had a kingdom and subjects. In fact, the pygmy wasn't the only one of his kind – he ruled over other pygmies like him.

The opening cinematic portrays humanoid figures identical to the pygmy loitering around the First Flame, before the Lords even find their Lord Souls. This suggests that the pygmy had kindred like the giants and medials. Many assume that the pygmy's position as mankind's "ancestor" must make him the biological progenitor of all humans, but Miyazaki clarifies this reference on the Game no Shokutaku podcast. Using much more imprecise language, he compares the pygmy to humans' ancestor because he fragmented the Dark Soul into humanity, which every human carries within them. Humans are his "descendants" in that they all inherit a piece of his Dark Soul, which they then pass onto their next of kin. This doesn't necessitate that he be the only source of the human race, just that he shared the Lord Soul with all the race, similar to Gwyn.

For this reason, it is unclear what actually differentiates a pygmy from a human, so they are in all likelihood virtually one and the same. The term "pygmy" (小人) literally means "small person" and typically refers to a dwarf or small child. In the context of medials and giants, this description is true for both humans and the race seen in the cinematic. Even if we

1 "The first dead, Nito. The Witch of Izalith and the Daughters of Chaos. King of the Sun's Light Gwyn and his knights. And the pygmy of the shadows none know about. They acquired the power of Kings and challenged the archdragons to battle." - Website Prologue

assume the pygmies to be another subspecies of giant, there are obvious anatomical differences between the two, unlike pygmies and their descendants. (Though we cannot confirm a pygmy's visage in the cinematic, *DS3* does portray their face with more ape-like qualities.) Since both humans and pygmies possess the power of Dark, the only major difference between the two seems to be semantics. Therefore, I will use "pygmy" to refer to the race from before and up through the start of civilization, and "human" for when the race spread out and later came to lose touch with its heritage.



The pygmy divided the Dark Soul's power amongst his people, making them truly beings of Dark, mirroring the gods as beings of fire. The black soul's name "humanity" has a very obvious double meaning – human nature – that dialogue and item descriptions frequently play on. Mankind is said to be loving as well as envious, treacherous, and greedy. It is all tied to the "true state" of human nature, which the red eye orb links directly to the Dark.[2] These vices are intrinsic to the term "pygmy", which Miyazaki clarifies to be specifically read as *shoujin* in the Game no Shokutaku episode. On top of its literal meaning of a small person, *shoujin* can refer to someone lacking in moral virtue. None of these malicious emotions are exclusive to humans, but the Dark's consuming nature has an evident influence upon those in touch with that affinity, for good and ill. Artorias highlights this close relationship in cut dialogue, citing that the Dark corrupting him is synonymous with man itself.[3] In other words, the Dark Soul shaped the pygmies and decided their future as a civilized race.

The pygmy is the only Lord Soul-bearer who belongs to a different race from the gods. The medials conquered and enslaved the giants before they could find a comparable power, yet present-day humans enjoy a measure of independence and freedom comparable to the gods themselves, reflecting that the pygmies avoided the giants' sorry fate. The medials ignored them, and it is easy to see why. The giants have the size and brawn conducive to building kingdoms while humans are smaller and generally weaker. Why have a rat pull the cart when there is a horse? The fact that the Butcher Knife instinctually reminds humans of the fear of being prey – which they have "forgotten"[4] – proves that their species was originally at the bottom of the food chain. Ancient man was below the gods' notice, an insignificant race with little potential.

The Dark Soul changed this dynamic. The pygmies now had immense magic power comparable to the other Lords. But the medial triumvirate lacked the strength or will to squash this fledgling power outright. At the same time, the furtive pygmy merely "waited" for fire to fade, and so clearly lacked the ability to overthrow all the gods at their zenith. The pygmy chose to bide his time, foreseeing his people's dominance once the light of fire waned. He took advantage of the gods' need for allies in the upcoming war to advance his own people, appeasing the medials while he awaited the coming Age of Dark. Kaathe is aware of this plot, suggesting that he was personally acquainted with the pygmy Lord and likely voiced his support. Unfortunately for them both, the pygmy Lord didn't realize the full extent of the gods' treachery.

We learn very little of the pygmy kingdom's involvement in history outside of the dragon hunts, but man evidently spread far beyond its limits, and settled in every corner of the world, from right next to the gods to far east of them. This worked to the medials' advantage in isolating the original pygmy culture. Once the rest of humanity was gradually distanced from its history with the Dark, and made dependent upon the light of fire, humans lost all knowledge about their ancestors and their key role in civilization, including that of the pygmy Lord. When man's time did come, the vast majority of humans didn't know it, for the generous gods of light told them that the Dark was something to fear. As Kaathe elucidates, no human arose to succeed the pygmies and rule this Age of Dark. If the pygmy Lord ever noticed Gwyn's scheme, it was apparently far too late to stop it. He may have died unaware that his plot was even sabotaged.

Far and Wide

We can still see the effects of the gods' influence upon early human culture. Human kingdoms use crowns to symbolize royalty, as demonstrated by the Four Kings and to a lesser extent Princess Dusk. Of the three medial Lords, only Gwyn wears such a symbol on his head. His crown's long points resemble the rays of the sun, befitting the Lord of Sunlight. Essentially, humans must have inherited their particular symbol from Anor Londo. (*DS3* even depicts Gwyn offering the pygmy such a crown in a statue.) The same principle holds true for human kingdoms' concept of knighthood and, more broadly, feudal hierarchies, as in the case of Balder – an ancient kingdom enshrining knights at the core of its society, even ruled by a legendary figure known as the "Knight King".[5]

Nonetheless, humans' ostensible freedom still let them develop as an independent people. Mankind invented the crossbow, suggesting an

2 "Art of the Darkwraiths who were tempted by Kaathe. They seek humanity and fall still more to the Dark. Or perhaps that itself is man by nature?" - Red Eye Orb

3 "... I don't know who, but do not approach..... I shall very soon be consumed... by Dark..... by man..." - Artorias

4 "Giant butcher knife used by an Undead man-eating woman who lives in the Lowest Stratum.
Rather than a 'weapon', it is a tool for hunting and dismantling game, and casually swinging it reminds man of the fear of prey they have forgotten, as if instinct."
- Butcher Knife

5 "Helmet that knights of the old kingdom of Balder used. Plate armor that was manufactured with thick iron plates.
Balder is the home country of Knight King Lendl, but it produced many Undead at one point and was no sooner completely destroyed." - Balder Helm

innovative spirit lacking in the other races, still relying on the traditional bow. Balder also develops thick-plated iron armor and a ring imbued with the "divine protection" of iron for emphasis on physical defense, mundane qualities which may be inspired by the Dark's weighty physical properties. Similar enterprising behavior is seen in New Londo and Astora. The people of Zena, meanwhile, have an "old face" (古顔), while the country itself is "historical".[6] The one citizen we meet even has a unique dialect, suggesting that Zena is even older and more isolated than Balder. Its people's ancient features are denoted by wrinkles, and this aged look has become a symbol of wisdom in the country's culture. Despite losing memory of their lineage, humans are still a thinking species at heart.

At the same time, the world of *Dark Souls* exists in perpetual feudalism, which may be to some extent an effect of the gods' influence. Humans obviously struggle to farm enough to feed their populations, making the blessings and bounties of gods like Gwynevere welcomed everywhere. We never visit the Five Fingers River basin, but it is easy to imagine why a peasant there,[7] provided basic necessities and simple luxuries through acts of reverence, would become dependent upon fire. This may have stifled mankind enough to entrap them in the static, feudal system.

However, all these nations developed within a reasonable distance of the gods' civilizations in Lordran. Areas like Catarina are supposedly on the frontier, but nothing suggests that human migration ended there. The "East" – a country so far removed from Lordran that its citizen, Shiva, doesn't even bother sharing the name – is a land heavily immersed in a completely foreign culture, producing such alien things as katana, samurai, ninja, and haka. All of this makes it an obvious proxy for Japan in *Dark Souls'* western-inspired fantasy setting, specifically Japan during the early Edo period in the 17th century going by the artisanry of the wood grain rings.[8] Does this cultural distance extend to religion? The Way of White fails to unify local nations' religious practices, so how much have they changed in the far East? Do Easterners even worship the same pantheon of gods, or have the figures and beliefs become entirely their own?

This eastern nation shows the gods' success in eradicating the Dark from man's collective memory. In the face of life's everyday struggles, humans clung to the gods for help but still explored the vast reaches of the Upper World, pushing farther and farther from their roots. We don't know how many nations rose, fell, or were forgotten in time, but humans have easily become the most prolific of the bipedal races due to their industrious nature. And the gods of Anor Londo would

6 **Old Face of Zena**
Old-fashioned countenance, mostly in historic Zena. Prudent image.

7 **Peasant Face of Five Fingers River**
Face common to peasants that reside in the Five Fingers River basin.

8 **"Special ring made in the land of the East. Although it is metal, it has a wood grain pattern on the surface.**
It has the power to make reducing weapon durability difficult, so many users of fragile katana made in the same East love using this."
- East Wood Grain Ring

have seemed to have always been there, supporting humans, promulgating them. The neglected traditions of old receded in time, becoming the occult.



In a world where Anor Londo's pantheon was the dominant form of worship, the "occult" was a kind of pagan heresy. This form of the Dark is typically a faith-based power, not reason-based, revealing how far even its worshippers had drifted from the memory of their forebears. Humans who maintained memory of their origins became few and far between, and those memories warped into practices and belief systems completely foreign to history – demonstrated best by the occult Effigy Shield bearing the image of a false god. In a far corner of the Poison Swamp we find Server on the corpse of a poor sap feasted upon by the local giant leeches, making this "sacrificial blade" carrying the "sinister" power of the occult the likely tool of primitive barbarians practicing their heathenous faith in hinterlands outside the walls of civilization.

What pockets of Dark worship do still exist are seen as primitive, antiquated, and unenlightened in the eyes of modern civilization – heathens that mainstream society treats with suspicion and fear. This isolated fringe has preserved warped fragments of its ancient heritage, but this culture isn't subject to scrutiny. It was only when undeath entered the stage that these pagan tribes received any attention, for all the wrong reasons.

Ye Immortal

The Undead curse manifests once a "dark ring" appears on the body after death, as seen in the cinematic. Despite the narrator claiming that it appears on the "living" in English, this is only "humans" in the Japanese text, reaffirming that the curse is a solely human phenomenon. This ring is dubbed a "Darksign" (闇の印) in reaction to the resurging Dark within man, and its curse appears to be both random and indiscriminate. Characters of every background and personality have turned Undead, and yet those same Undead, like Laurentius, imply becoming Undead is mere fortune – good or ill. Undeath doesn't await every human born since the advent of the sign of the Dark, just some, and with no obvious warning for who will be afflicted.

But once afflicted, the dead come back to life as immortals, unable to age. The homes of the Undead Burg are filled with cooking and tableware, implying that its residents still eat and drink, though this sustenance probably isn't necessary for survival. By that same notion, the town sewer system and the dungpie dropped by Blighttown's residents indicate that they still defecate like the living as well. They likely can even still reproduce. The ghost women of New Londo carry the "corpse" of their baby, meaning that they were Undead parents with likely living children. And Undead can still contract disease. They are still very much human, but their immortality nonetheless comes at a cost.



The Japanese for Hollows is *mouja*, or the "dead" (亡者). This is different from the typical term for one of the dead (死者) and can be traced to the underlying meaning of the kanji. *Mou* (亡) has a much more abstract connotation for death than the physical *shi* (死), like saying one is gone or has been lost. And much like the kanji's vacant appearance would indicate, Hollows aren't dead physically but mentally and spiritually. Indeed, in Buddhism, *mouja* refers to departed souls who have lost their way to Nirvana and therefore can't rest in peace.

Hollows are likewise driven to eternal madness, acting erratic or otherwise unnatural. The actual person we could know and interact with is gone, replaced with the hollow shell of the intelligent being that once existed. This mental degeneration is accompanied by the body rapidly deteriorating into an aged and haggard state before finally decaying like a corpse. Both Undead merchants are walking corpses in their own right – each already beginning to show signs of insanity – and every unique NPC that hollows immediately becomes uncharacteristically hostile.

The Darksign seems directly responsible. The Dark Soul devours other souls by nature, and so the emerging Dark from humanity does the same. As the ominous Alluring Skull description elucidates, Hollows are starved for souls, victims of the Dark's appetite – even we lose our souls upon death and Hollow,[9] though we are also given the chance to

retrieve them for gameplay purposes. As victims are drained of their souls, their body loses the vitality that their immortal lives have so far provided, and often dozens of veiny roots sprout from around the heart area, though not always as seen with Blighttown's "giant Hollow" (巨漢亡者) among others. Since the heart is the cradle for the soul, these roots are likely the result of the Dark's power to self-generate, showing the Dark's pervasiveness as it grows in strength – the Four Kings' twisted form corrupted by the Abyss centers around the heart in the same manner. Mental decay accompanies the physical, driven by a thirst for new souls that explains Hollows' commonly violent behavior.

Nonetheless, we see Hollows perform high functioning tasks like cooking, capturing, setting traps, coordinating, managing, and organizing as groups. And when we hollow, we interact with others normally – though some are still concerned about our sanity long-term. All of this belies the Hollows' popular depiction as base monsters. Undead undoubtedly suffer mental degradation, but it exists on a variable scale. Some Hollows appear to act solely on instinct and residual memory, perhaps even being trained to serve others like pets. Others seem to still act as functional members of society, whatever that society is, and attack us only because we invade their territory. Both Undead merchants look like Hollows and show early signs of eventual insanity, but otherwise act no different than the "normal" humans we socialize with. In all of these cases, we cannot determine the full extent of their consciousness, but it is still there.

Hollowing cannot solely occur on death. While it certainly makes sense for Undead and Hollows to flourish in the wake of violent conflict, the saner Hollows we encounter are unlikely to have all been felled by the sword. And while murder at the hands of hollowed former comrades is possible, many Undead remain part of peaceful if harsh environments that would remain undisturbed if not for our trespassing. And as the male Undead merchant readily admits, mad Hollows are less inclined to attack still sane Hollows, since they possess fewer souls. The Crestfallen Warrior alludes to hollowing just by sitting around doing nothing like him.[10] Likewise, if we suddenly attack NPCs in either state, many will assume that we have just gone Hollow even though we were lucid moments prior. So what causes many Hollows to be able to forestall total lunacy? And what causes hollowing absent death?

The answer is a loss of will; in other words, determination. Even as a Hollow, we refuse to give up in stark contrast to characters like the Crestfallen Warrior. "Crestfallen" is more accurately "heartbroken" (心折れた), reflecting their dejection. *Kokoro* (心) often refers to the

9 **"Mark of a cursed Undead. The person who this ring has appeared on revives even if they die and will eventually become a Hollow that has lost its mind.**

The ring also has a power of self-death. The user loses all humanity and souls and returns to the last bonfire rested at." - Darksign

10 **"What's wrong? Getting cold feet? Then you should sit here all day just like me. Woolgathering until you eventually Hollow is most comfortable. Hahahahaha!" - Crestfallen Warrior**

heart in the emotional sense, but is also used to refer to the mind, spirit, or anything that can be considered one's core. In other words, the Warrior's spirit is broken – he has lost the motivation to keep going.[11]

This phenomenon is associated with pain felt in the physical heart, which makes sense since the soul is also a source for mind, memory, and emotion. In fact, Sieglinde uses the phrase "loses heart" to reference hollowing. To "lose heart" seems to thus have an adverse effect on the soul's ability to resist being devoured by humanity, thereby turning the victim into a mindless husk. Indeed, this will to live is likely the same factor involved in death and reanimation by emotional curses.

Whenever we first approach the Crestfallen Merchant, he is often lost in thought[12] and laments the inevitability of failure.[13] Cut dialogue reveals that he would have eventually succumbed to insanity despite his desperate attempts to maintain focus. At first, he struggles to remember things. Later, he tries to focus on counting, until even that fails and he loses mind.[14] What is this, if not hollowing? Even after avoiding the physical threats of Sen's Fortress, the merchant was to eventually turn.

If one's mental state only affects the rate at which humanity devours our souls and not the souleating itself, then it is only logical to acquire more souls to feed it. This explains why Undead have adopted the gods' currency of souls in Lordran. If only souls can stave off madness, then they are the most valuable resource for trade. Thus, even non-magic users sell their goods and services for souls. The Crestfallen Merchant was probably intended to hollow after we purchased all of his wares, ending the supply of souls that prevented his rapid mental decline. Since he became the only infinite source of certain arrows, this idea was cut, but his fear remains. Undead aren't ever safe from oblivion. It is only a matter of which aspect of you dies first. When it is a physical death, you will revive, but not necessarily as yourself.

And definitely not at the bonfire.

Many think of respawning at a bonfire as part of the Undead experience since it is so ingrained into the gameplay experience. But no one we meet ever acknowledges this seemingly basic truth, and that is because it is a false preconception. The Crestfallen Merchant strips his inventory from the corpses of defeated warriors before they become Hollows and "stir" again. He admits the danger of this,[15] implying that these warriors *do* hollow in the course of revival but *don't* relocate from their place of death. This is impossible if the Darksign actually transports us to the last bonfire we rested at through some magical means. If this were the case, why aren't the

11 "So, what will you do? I'm doing this. Miserable, but it is because I'm heartbroken..." - Crestfallen Warrior

12 "... Oh... Ah, you? It is you. What is it? Still need something, anything, right?" - Crestfallen Merchant

13 "There is nothing to talk with you about. It's already over for me. You, too, soon enough. That's it. You just don't know it yet." - Crestfallen Merchant

14 "... Uugh..... Uuuuuugh..... Guuuuuuuugh..... Gaaaaaaaagh... think... remember..... what should I... count... one, two, three, four, five, six, sev, en... what should I..... Garrrrrrgh..." - Crestfallen Merchant

15 "...Ah, the things I sell? Of course, I stripped them. From the corpses of wannabe heroes, like yourself. It is dangerous. Because it is tough stripping them before they become Hollows and stir." - Crestfallen Merchant

areas around bonfires hives of death absolutely flooded with Hollows? How did Undead even revive before the creation of bonfires?

An obvious counterpoint to this assessment would be Domhnall's recommendation that we have basilisks curse us so that we can attack the ghosts of New Londo.[16] Doing so, which "kills" us by turning us into a stone statue, would be pointless if we didn't immediately revive at a bonfire. But there are a few caveats to his wording. One, his recommendation is on the basis that it is "quick and easy" to be cursed by the basilisks, who prowl the sewers that he is located in at the time. His Japanese dialogue then immediately qualifies that he thinks we "shouldn't" with no further elaboration. This opens up a double meaning, informing players of a convenient way to get cursed while not breaking the suspension of disbelief. After all, a basilisk's curse is petrification – to be a stone statue until someone breaks either you or the curse. (An idea ultimately explored in *DS2*.)



In short, Domhnall is warning us that the quick and easy way probably isn't viable if we want to actually contend with ghosts with a cursed body. Of course, petrification is the only kind of permanent curse that can afflict us in-game, and so we must ignore his warning. Likewise, we know that we will revive at our last bonfire and retain the effects of a curse regardless of our stoney fate moments prior; characters will even acknowledge our cursed state. This gap in logical possibility is another example of gameplay trumping lore. (Later games radically change and mitigate the curse mechanic's effects to ignore this.) The suspension of disbelief required by this can be attributed, in large part, to the inherent flaws of the bonfire system.

Bonfires function as an in-universe checkpoint system, which largely alleviates the risks to suspension of disbelief other implementations of said system suffer from. We restart from a certain point because we rested at a bonfire, and our journey from this point ends once we rest at a new bonfire. These are tangible actions well rooted in lore; they are also completely arbitrary. The vast majority of bonfires exist in areas

16 "Hmm... Well, since it appears I can make a good deal with you... I'll tell you various things. The ghosts of New Londo are cursed, so you usually can't hit them. If you want to do so, you'll need a special weapon... or a cursed body. If you want to be cursed quickly and easily, I recommend the eyeball lizards of the sewers... Though I think you shouldn't." - Domhnall

inconvenient or illogical for the location in question, in some cases just spawning right before our eyes after a given boss battle. The only purpose for these bonfires' placement is game balance, or the need to escape otherwise inescapable areas via warping. Otherwise, the only bonfires that we can independently confirm do exist beyond gameplay are the three presided over by Fire Keepers, which will go out should we slay their corresponding Keeper. One other potential example is the unlit bonfire Solaire sits before in Anor Londo, though the knight never acknowledges it.

This friction between gameplay and lore complicates every related mechanic. For example, we receive the ability to warp between certain bonfires once we receive the Lordvessel – and yet the vessel is a glorified key doubling as a bonfire, with neither function explaining it enabling our ability to warp. We also retain this newfound power even after relinquishing the vessel, which instead suggests that the ability originates from the bonfires themselves. In that case, we should theoretically be able to warp freely from the start of the game, Lordvessel or no.

The level design up until receiving the Lordvessel ensures that warping between checkpoints is unnecessary, but areas from then on exponentially expand the size of the game world and introduce otherwise inescapable areas This necessitates a form of fast travel, making acquiring the Lordvessel the perfect point to introduce this teleportation art. (Later games reinforce this notion by allowing us to warp between bonfires without a Lordvessel from the start.) There is a clear gap between the reality of the game's setting and how game mechanics express that reality, just as with curses. This may at first seem inconsequential, but these issues plague the checkpoint system to its core.

Because it is impossible for us to go insane as a Hollow, it is equally impossible to have a true "game over" in *Dark Souls*. Our death results in hollowing, which various characters acknowledge in dialogue, but otherwise has no permanent consequences. Similarly, most enemies automatically respawn upon death or when we rest at the bonfire, negating what progress we have made. And for good reason: we have to repeat the challenge or else completely unbalance the game. In order to create a fulfilling experience, the rules of lore have to be bent for the sake of game mechanics.



Many believe that enemies respawn as part of the lore, but the evidence doesn't support the claim. Enemies that respawn do so arbitrarily – those who don't include NPCs, rare enemies, and bosses. And the stagnant –

not "convoluted" – flow of time does not explain this inconsistency. FromSoftware is selective in how far game mechanics reflect the reality of the universe they take part in. It might make sense for Hollows to ignore our corpse after they pillage our souls, but certainly not the snake-men prowling Sen's Fortress with the intention of capturing and caging those who fall there.[17] But because they can't capture us until *after* our first encounter with Seath in the main plot, we just respawn as if our failure never happened; the same is true for most bosses and enemies. The checkpoint system simplifies this reality from a gameplay perspective and allows the developers to fine tune the experience, but it is absolutely not reflective of the lore in all regards.

With these particulars in mind, the popular theory that Seath imprisons us by manipulating the principles of the bonfire system is ludicrous. Narratively, we invade Seath's research lab, realize we cannot harm him, and are defeated only to later wake up in a cell. Nowhere does this scenario require an actual bonfire *be* in that cell, and the idea defies both the mechanic and the non-existence of that very mechanic in the setting. If manipulation of such a process really exists, then Seath should have bonfires installed in every cell to gather endless test subjects. But in reality, that bonfire only exists as a limitation of the game's checkpoint system, hence why it is impossible to warp to any bonfire from it. From a lore perspective, we have simply been dragged to a cell with no hope of escape if not for the key a napping jailer conveniently carries right in front of us. This is true in every scenario where necessary events must occur in order to advance the plot and thus cannot follow the normal ruleset.

The Ring of Sacrifice behaves with similar arbitrariness. We lose nothing when we die and respawn at our last bonfire – in effect negating death – by sacrificing the ring's power in our place. The similar effect of the cut Escape Death miracle reinforces this. But then why don't we remain at our current location, completely unphased by the death blow, losing only the ring? Most likely because the ability to stockpile lives for a single encounter, such as a boss, or die out of bounds of the game world, required the ring's in-game effect to be more conducive to game design. This arguably downplays the full extent of the ring's power, but that is evidently true for the entire checkpoint system. Ultimately, Undead never return to the bonfires after death and can't manipulate them to reset the lives of the fallen or escape being petrified. These events are necessary compromises for a video game and nothing more. Which leaves but one question unanswered: Just what *is* the role of the bonfire?

17 **"Key to the cages that hang in Sen's Old Castle.**
The snake-men that protect the old castle don't immediately kill those who used up all their strength recklessly challenging the trial. For they are imprisoned in cages and, if the snake-men don't forget, eventually taken somewhere." - Cage Key

A Fiery Trap

The Lords of Light and Death collaborated to create a fire fueled with the bones of Undead that could then be strengthened by offerings of humanity – fitting the typical purpose of bonfires to burn up "trash" or other unwanted substances. While the Lordvessel appears to have the innate power to produce this fire once placed upon the firelink altar, bones are the typical fuel for bonfires, and the resulting flame is special. The fire gives off heat that retains healing properties, completely curing physical injuries and ailments when we rest by it. It is never clarified whether this healing power can only affect the Undead, but other parties have yet to subvert this rather convenient healing source for themselves, at least.

The Homeward miracle supposedly teleports the user to their "home", but Undead warp to their last bonfire. The description initially blames the curse for this, before pondering if the bonfire is actually their home[18] – and we can imagine why. Undead suffer harsh discrimination and total rejection by society as condemned prisoners, or exiles. Whatever friends or families they had likely share the same fear and disgust, so what other home do they have to return to? The bonfires created specifically with and for them provide their only solace – the description for Homeward Bone confirming that they have grown a strong affinity towards the flames. Besides, the bonfires are a consequence of undeath, not vice versa, so there is no reason for the curse to somehow affect one of the gods' spells unless they themselves fiddled with the magic.

The bonfire's heat can be stored in liquid form called Estus, or "Est" (エスト). The name is likely taken from the Latin-derived "estelle", meaning "star" in reference to the sun – quite fitting for heat derived from the power of Anor Londo gods. With this, Undead have a ready source of healing mid-journey without the faith or knowledge of miracles, and Lloyd recognized the threat of such flexible recovery enough to develop a talisman to counter it and any heretics abusing it. Regardless, Estus has incredible utility, which is why Undead treasure Estus Flasks.[19] These dull green bottles are apparently the only vessels capable of containing and retaining the bonfire's special heat; they may even be responsible for converting it to liquid form. Undead only use this bottle to drink Estus, and these flasks are remarkably rare given only a handful of Undead – often knights or similarly prestigious individuals – use one to heal during battle. And that appears to be because they are created from the souls of deceased Fire Keepers.

18 "One of the great miracles used by high-ranking clergymen. Returns you to the latest bonfire you rested at.
Primarily makes the return to home possible, but the curse of Undead warps it. Or maybe the bonfire is the Undead's home?" - Homeward

19 "Dull green glass bottle that is an Undead treasure. Fills with Est at a bonfire, and drinking it recovers HP.
It seems to be deeply involved with the Fire Keepers, protectors of the bonfire, so there is one theory in a dark legend:
That bottle is born from the soul of a Fire Keeper. For the women live to protect the fire and continue to protect its heat even in death." - Estus Flask





While the localization exaggerates it as “the Dark Tales”, the Japanese description for the Estus Flask acknowledges a “dark legend” theorizing the bottles’ origin, where the soul of a Fire Keeper is used to preserve the bonfire’s heat in death as they did in life. This legend proves accurate since we can present Fire Keeper souls to live Fire Keepers, who will then use them to reinforce our flasks and thereby increase our Estus’ healing power. The souls’ properties seem to keep the heat from leaking out or cooling, allowing us to drink from the bottle at theoretically any time of our choosing. By the same token, converting additional Fire Keeper souls into reinforcements for the flask boosts the efficiency of the preservation, making the power of the Estus we drink that much stronger in its concentration. (Later games employ a similar concept with flask shards imbued with strong concentrations of Estus for the same end result.)



Even more interestingly, the Darkmoon Knightess asserts that bonfire flames are actually connected to one another,[20] which is likely the underlying principle behind our ability to warp between bonfires at will – and this despite the fact that a bonfire can be lit at seemingly any time and anywhere by anyone. The process as a whole is completely self-automated so long as the bonfires are lit and we are aware of the intended location in the network. (Later games further prove that there are no prerequisites to warping to specific locales.) This implies that there exists some conduit to the network, some third element metaphysically tying these waypoints together. They may act as independent flames we can flare up or diminish individually, but something enables those flames to exist in the first place. What else could act as the source of all bonfires but the First Flame? And why else would there be a bonfire sword impaled in the Kiln?

Undead use bonfires in order to reverse hollowing and preserve their human form. Hollows who are still decently sane offer what humanity they have collected to the bonfire to consequently undo their body's state of decay. This humanity isn't necessarily part of the actual essence of the Undead, as many characters instruct us in how to barter or steal the souls from one another to make our offerings. The Way of White holds the lion's share of this currency. The Crestfallen Warrior recommends cooperating with clerics especially,[21] and Lautrec notes that young clergymen in particular are expected to possess plenty of it.[22] This isn't surprising since the church leads hunts where it can reap countless humanity from Hollows and share the dark souls amongst its ministry, but it nonetheless adds to the importance of piety for Undead. Regardless, redirecting our curse to these bonfire offerings is the only means to stave off hollowing to our knowledge, so Undead have every reason to rely on the bonfires and thereby have a close relationship with the Fire Keepers.

Fire Keepers are "fire defense women" (火防女), confirming the duty is only carried out by females. The Darkmoon Knightess reaffirms their roles as "defenders" of the bonfire, who guide prospective Undead heroes in the firelinking mission. In other words, they exist for the express purpose of keeping their special flame from going out until a successor to Gwyn's firelinking actually arrives. This duty ties the bonfire directly to their lives. Fire Keepers possess a unique soul that makes them a personification of their bonfire – their life preserves the flame, and their death kills it. This appears to require they remain near the bonfire as well. No Fire Keeper is found very far from their corresponding fire, and the Darkmoon Knightess

20 "The defenders' bonfires are special things. They are connected to each other without ever going out. Of course, fellow defenders don't even know each other's faces…"
- Darkmoon Knightess

21 "Hm, what is it? Humanity, huh? Well, the manner depends on you but… Collect it from dead bodies on the road… or summon one another and get along, like those clergymen."
- Crestfallen Warrior

22 "Well, good information, right? Since young clergymen possess plenty of humanity…" - Lautrec

points out that Fire Keepers don't ever meet one another despite the bonfires themselves being networked together. They are in effect anchors to each waypoint in the network and so can't leave the flame they protect. (*DS2* reveals that there are ways around this limitation, however.)

Because of this, Fire Keepers double as vessels for the humanity offered to bonfires when Undead reverse their hollowing. Rather than be consumed by flame like in the Rite of Kindling, this humanity warps to the Fire Keeper's soul which it devours from within. The Fire Keeper Soul states that "countless" humanity wriggle beneath their skin. While these dark souls' movements allegedly deform the Keeper, these scars aren't visible in-game. The Darkmoon Knightess has a perfectly unblemished face beneath her helmet, and Anastacia additionally reveals no scars on her exposed hands. Therefore, the effects must only be visible on areas both of these women cover up – the knightess' full body armor explicitly doubling to hide her disgusting appearance.[23] We see no scars anywhere on the Fair Lady either, but she transfers humanity to her eggs, reducing the souls' opportunity to inflict any permanent damage. (*DS3* ultimately reveals that a Fire Keeper's scars start below the wrist.)

Aside from the body, these countless humanity also gnaw on the Fire Keeper's soul. Unlike the standard soul with one tail, the Fire Keeper's soul has innumerable tiny spirits coalescing toward the center – their tails progressively greyer the further they are from the core with spots of black in-between. Despite the soul's overall resemblance to a sun, these spirits are likely humanity, hence why it will fully heal us and provide five additional humanity when used. Therefore, the soul appears to be absorbing humanity, and the dark souls' reaction is to feed off the soul in turn. This naturally would suppress the Dark and explains why our offerings reverse hollowing: Fire Keepers act as a purging stone for the undead curse, receiving it as a surrogate. This must be extremely painful for the Fire Keeper. Even though the Darkmoon Knightess claims that it is not a bad way to live, she does acknowledge that her duty isn't easy for us to understand.[24]

So, why is this duty bestowed only to women? The Way of White dresses traveling clergywomen in a unique uniform regardless of status within the church.[25] The white garb's sole purpose thus seems to be recognizing potential Fire Keepers – Anastacia continues to wear hers even after becoming one. There must be something that makes women necessary, or at least preferable, for creating a Fire Keeper, and this most likely lies in their function as vessels for humanity. Twin Humanities is described as "rare" in its English description, but *mezurashii* (珍しい) can mean "unusual" as well as scarce.[26] Unlike standard

23 "Soul of the Darkmoon Knightess, Fire Keeper of Anor Londo.
The soul of a Fire Keeper is a vessel for humanity, and this doesn't change within their bodies. There are countless humanity wriggling under the entirety of their skin, so their form becomes a most disgusting thing. Her brass armor was for also hiding that form."
- Fire Keeper Soul

24 "Hm, what is it? Me? I'm… yes, the defender of this bonfire. Isn't guidance for the braves needed even at the abandoned Anor Londo? You might not understand, but… it is not a bad way to live." - Darkmoon Knightess

25 "White hood that traveling holy women wear. Uniform of the holy women regardless of status.
It is soft and well-tailored, but it has low defense power and isn't suited for battle."
- Maiden Hood

26 "Small black spirit on rare occasions found on corpses. Unusual twin one. Use to gain 2 humanity and greatly recover HP.
This black spirit is also called humanity, but the details are unknown. If the soul is the source of all life, then what is humanity that is only within man?"
- Twin Humanities

humanity, the graphic for twin humanities portrays two souls slightly bending toward each other in close proximity. They aren't directly linked, but there is a clear affinity shared between the two.

Most corpses that we acquire twin humanities from are female, and the human huntress Pharis drops it upon death. This can't be mere coincidence. Women cause humanity to manifest an attractive force not seen in men, resulting in some humanity coming in pairs rather than singular souls. This likely relates to women's role as child-bearers, their ability to combine the father and mother's souls to create a child's unique soul while retaining their own during pregnancy. Women thus seem to naturally form twin humanities before transferring one to their offspring after conception; they are likely even born with higher concentrations of humanity in preparation for this event. Considering that Quelaag also provides twin humanities upon death, the effect isn't limited to human women and thus probably stems from Disparity, hence the existence of different sexes – though non-humans presumably don't often form pairs with *dark* souls specifically.

This makes human women ideal Fire Keepers. If women naturally possess more humanity within their bodies due to some innate attraction of their own soul, they must have expanded the capacity of their vessel for that humanity far more than the average man. Likewise, that same attraction serves as a unique draw for fragments of the Dark Soul. By building upon their innate capabilities, Anor Londo devised a means to turn women into vessels capable of confining the innumerable humanity their souls attract. It isn't a painless duty for a woman to endure, but it is one perhaps only a child-bearer *could* suffer.

Knowing all this, it is safe to conclude that the gods created the bonfires in order to preserve and extend the lives of Undead for their mission. Said mission was designed to create a proper Undead hero, and the bonfires give those prospects the time to become one – even the Fire Keepers exist solely for the sake of that firelinker according to cut dialogue.[27] Furthermore the principles behind the bonfire parallel the firelinking ritual. A fire kept alive via an avatar to drown the Dark in its power and light? It is quite possible that the bonfires were themselves originally experiments into the concept of firelinking as a means to exorcise the Dark. The bonfire essentially serves as a microcosm of the First Flame, and makes the Undead dependent upon its survival, which in turn can inspire piety in them. It certainly doubles as an effective tool for control, but it begs a new question: why did the gods opt to manage the curse and not simply exorcise it from the human race?



27 "Are… you going… one to link the fire of the Great King Gwyn? Forgive me… But we only exist because of you…" - Darkmoon Knightess

The Grand Invention

The gods use Undead as fuel for the First Flame, but Gwyn's firelinking proves that they aren't necessary to perform the ritual. Theoretically, any being with a powerful enough soul could be kindling. Moreover, the gods' expertise in lifting curses should have been invaluable in diagnosing undeath and subsequently developing a cure for it. But instead, the curse continues unchallenged while the gods attempt to funnel its victims through a suicide mission. This is extremely inefficient, even after you factor in the gods' fear of the Dark. If the curse is such a threat, it would be better to nip it at the bud and focus solely on preserving the Age of Fire. Human-medial relations had gone on just fine before fire waned and would certainly continue unabated without undeath.

Some may argue that the Undead mission itself is their solution. Its proponents all tell us that rekindling the fire drives out undeath, but this makes no sense. Offering bonfires our humanity only staves off our curse, not every Hollow in existence. Why would one Undead's self-immolation free every Undead from their curse? If the reasoning is that strengthening the First Flame weakens the Dark and thus subsides the curse, then this should have been solved the moment Gwyn linked the fire, but New Londo's continued existence post-firelinking proves that the Undead didn't just die as Anastacia implies would happen. If the argument is that a soul even more powerful than the Light Soul is required, it is doubtful that any would suffice. Even assuming it could, there is still the underlying issue of the new fuel eventually burning out. Our sacrifice keeps the Age of Fire alive, but there is no reason to believe that it is the solution to undeath that parties aligned with the gods claim it to be. (Subsequent games confirm the entire notion to be abjectly false.) In short, the gods have lied to humans, hoping to motivate would-be heroes to continue their mission. This suggests that either the curse is so intractable that not even the medials could find a solution to it, or they refuse to.

There is something rather odd about undeath. Curses are typically inflicted upon the soul by another party or otherwise inflicted upon oneself due to one's strong negative emotions, or a similar cause. Yet the Undead curse manifests randomly on the newly dead while simultaneously remaining exclusively a problem for the human race. The criteria for who turns Undead isn't stated, but the curse can't be caused by simply having humanity within you, since the Dark at its root is common to all humans. In other words, the curse must originate from some outside

source afflicting it upon all of mankind. That is an enormous undertaking , but it becomes more likely when considering the principles to hollowing.

Look at the souls left on hollowed corpses. The Dark is the true soul of man, but each of these souls is a standard white soul with no particular affinity. They may grow in size or change in properties during the course of certain individuals' lifetimes, but they never incorporate humanity. *This* is the soul with which we develop memories, consciousness, and personality. Yet it is a false self, a will cultivated from the power of Disparity we collect sans our human essence.

Ultimately, Undead lose themselves to madness as the burgeoning Dark of humanity devours these souls. But humanity is the true soul of man, thus the body remains animate as a Hollow and so should retain a source



of self. But not all Hollows do retain their sanity, because their feral dark souls – effectively their own true self – devours the source of their memories and consciousness. Why is it that we carry two souls, the more primal of which is essentially estranged from us? Humanity can't be partitioning itself into becoming a mad beast. Some other force is responsible.

That force is the "shackles of the gods". Kaathe mentions freedom from these fetters in relation to teaching us Lifedrain so that we may, "continue to be human as an Undead," – simply put, maintain our self and sanity. Kaathe places the blame for the worst aspects of hollowing squarely on the gods, and so we must take life from others to rectify this. And as previously established, the shackling of man occurred early in its shared history with the medials so that every subsequent generation of mankind would inherit these restraints as the race spread across the world.

Wouldn't suppressing a soul be considered a curse? Wouldn't that cursed soul be prevented from being man's source of memory and personality? And wouldn't that Dark Soul, devoid of persona, push against the fetters as the power of fire waned, releasing a base beast acting solely on instinct?

For additional proof, look no further than the sole mark of the curse found upon humans. The Darksign is called a "dark ring", but what we actually see is a dark hole enclosed in a ring of fire. Why fire if the curse is truly caused by the Dark? We know the gods as beings of fire, associated with rings. Aside from the white aureoles connected to the Way of White, a similar ring of orange light appears after we defeat the Iron Golem, which signals the batwing demons to escort us to Anor Londo. The gods are the only party with the knowledge and resources to conjure such a mark. Therefore, they must have used the power of fire to restrain humanity early in their alliance with the pygmies. These shackles manifest as a ring when the black spirit attempts to break free of them after death. The end result is the mind breaks, the only means to take full advantage of undeath lost. This is an accident of its design. (*DS3* later makes the gods' involvement in the "seal" of fire explicit.)

If this ring of fire enclosing the Dark is a shackle of the gods, then it presumably functions as a means to cordon off the Dark within man from the rest of the body. So, what happens when that Dark resists the fire seal and begins devouring our regular soul? Who we are gets devoured with it, absorbed into a soul which our will has had no presence in, hence the madness. Our very selves are eaten until we are just a hollow shell controlled by a wild Dark soul.

However, this ring of fire doesn't stop us from wielding Dark magic, so what *did* the gods fear about humanity specifically? There is something

odd about the human form. Despite being how we first recognize each other as humans, it is not unique to us. All the medials we encounter have these same physical traits even though both races share little resemblance to giants. The only way to tell the two races apart is their difference in size, and the Daughters of Chaos permit not even that. But despite these remarkable similarities, the medials' lives span potentially millennia while a human is fortunate to last even a century. Giants are equally long-lived, and even animals like Alvina and Sif live infinitely longer than humans. Why is that?



The pygmies portrayed in the cinematic look far scrawnier, hairless, and emaciated, nothing like their descendants. It may just be malnutrition in an era predating civilization, but they resemble Hollows. The Hollow form directly correlates to Dark flourishing within us, while the human form persists so long as fire keeps the darkness in check. If Dark is the true state of man, then wouldn't the same be true for its corresponding form? If so, then a Hollow's aged, haggard appearance might explain why wrinkly faces and silver hair characterize the people of historical Zena – they are surviving traits of their pygmy forebears. By extension, wouldn't the qualities arising from the Dark's liberation also be mankind's truest being? And Undead, Hollow or otherwise, are undoubtedly ageless immortals. In short, humans weren't just like other life; they were superior to it.

The Dark Soul gave the pygmies eternity, allowing them to outlast even the medials. And in response, the medials inflicted a most terrible curse upon man: time. Consider the consequences. In our world, limited lifespan is a fundamental part of the human condition. Life is a constant struggle with reality, and time is a reality that inevitably limits our potential. To have infinite time would give a people a huge advantage over the competition.

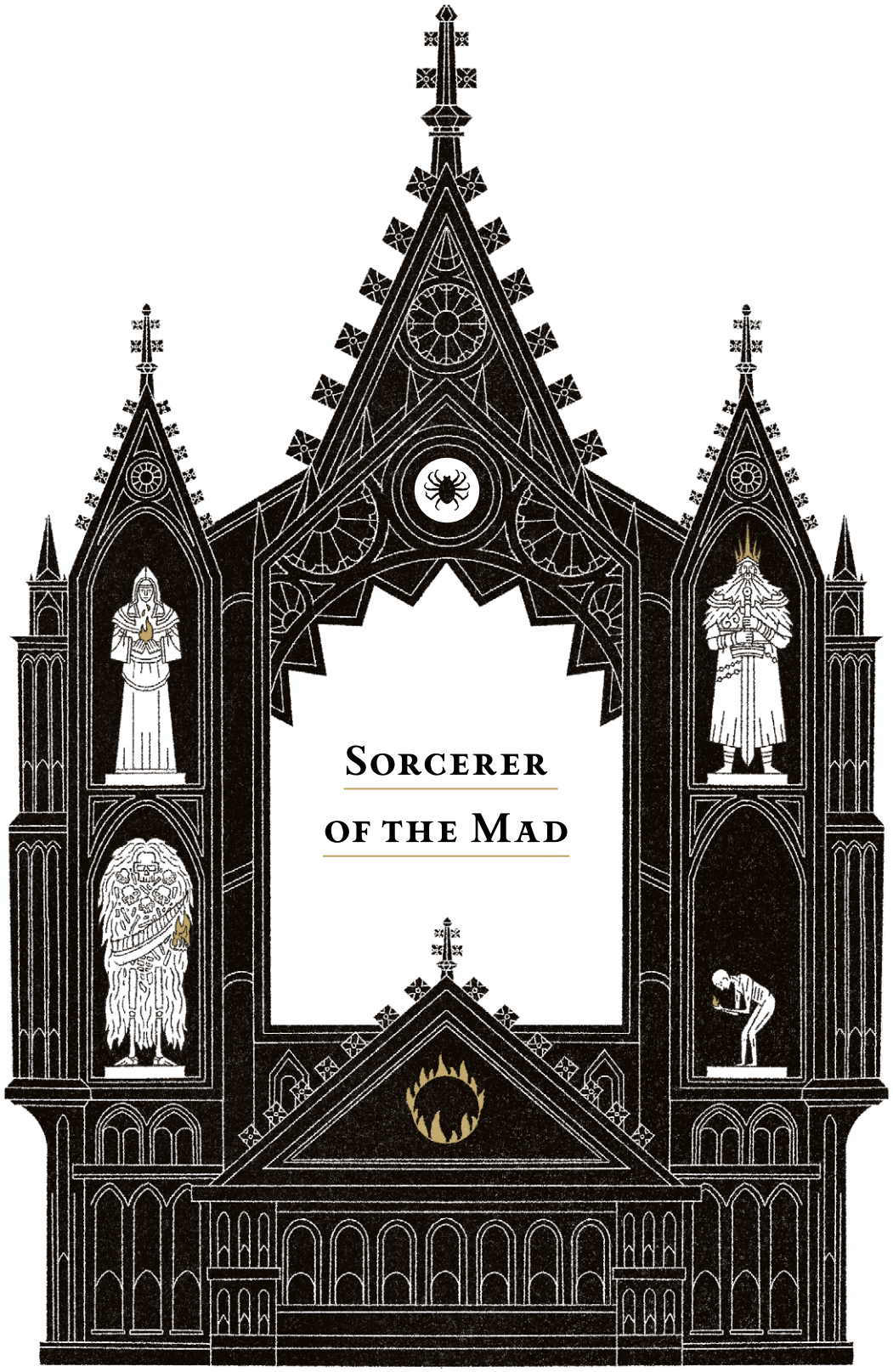
Of *course* Gwyn feared mankind. It threatened the future of his dominance. By using fire to limit man's power and thus its time, most humans struggle to barely become self-sufficient and reproduce

before death comes for them. Such short lifespans make it harder for humans to acquire and retain knowledge, to sustain growth, to develop as a collective. On the flip side, this makes them easier to mislead and manipulate. The shackles of fire were key in restricting human potential, but even they couldn't avoid the inevitability of fire's wane. While the gods blame man's sins for the Darksign, the whole narrative is a lie. Our heritage cries out for release from its chains only to leave us broken before it can break free. The irony is that, for all the panic and chaos over its sudden appearance, the gods brought the curse upon themselves. They have only their own arrogance and lack of foresight to blame for not realizing that they couldn't restrain the Dark with fire forever. And they have only their own good fortune to thank for the shackles making the Dark an enemy to man's sanity.

That is why the gods failed to free mankind from its curse. Even after finally realizing the cause, there is no way that they could remove undeath without unshackling human potential. They spent countless generations brainwashing mankind to forget its history and lineage, enough that humans saw their return to form as a horrifying mystery. The medials' only option at that point was to coexist with the curse, and they did adapt. Humans have been convinced that they have and want nothing to do with the Dark, innumerable Undead have sacrificed themselves in the pursuit of firelinking and ending undeath, and those who still remember the truth to any extent are few in number and even fewer in scruples. The pygmies were but one more culture shattered for the gods' empire, and both races continue to suffer the consequences of resisting the logic of the world.

On Reflection

No trope is more ubiquitous to Japanese fantasy than man's ultimate conflict against "god" or some associate approximation. From a narrative perspective, it is the manifestation of a deeper psychological truth: that man is constantly struggling against forces beyond itself. Bound by an unequal status quo, we desperately seek freedom from those shackles. When those forces aren't fundamental to existence itself, there is hope for rebellion. But to become masters of our own fate is still not without hardship, and man wrestles with god at his own peril. But if *Dark Souls* is any indication, that resistance is our truest nature.



All is Fair

Seath was born after the First Flame came to be. The Age of Ancients was characterized by a rock uniformity lost with the inception of fire, so it is impossible for the dragon to have predated it. While he *is* an archdragon according to multiple item descriptions, his physiology only barely meets the requirements. His back legs are hairy tentacles like his tail, his wings are insectoid, and his hide is soft pale skin. Without stone scales of immortality, the paledrake has none of the rock element that even the dragons' distant kin like wyverns possess, dating his birth to after Disparity emerged and jump-started the archdragons' evolution. The emergence of life caused the race to change and warp in all kinds of ways, and a scaleless archdragon was among the end products.

Nonetheless, Seath found himself different even by those standards. Many, appropriately, compare him to an albino. When Disparity affected the archdragons, the paledrake lost the genetic lottery, resulting in a lack of what distinguished his kind from other beings the most. For white dragon wasn't simply atypical, he was uniquely vulnerable. The dragons' rock element insulated them from harm and death. Seath may have a lengthy lifespan, but the archdragon is never once described as everlasting. He could age, he could bleed, and he realized this fact. Wrestling with your own mortality was something no other archdragon could possibly understand, let alone the sense of inadequacy that comes with it. How could he stand beside his immortal kin and *not* feel pathetic? Even his physical appearance was more reminiscent of bugs, slugs, and other diminutive, pitiful creatures.

The opening cinematic describes Seath's lack of scales as he crushes some in his bloodied hand before roaring triumphantly upon a huge mountain of his brethren's corpses. He resented his fellow dragonkin. He didn't share their sense of safety in immortality, and it infuriated him. Why was he so different? Why did *he* have to fear the end to his existence? Why was it everyone *else* who had it all? Bitterness, insecurity, anxiety, envy, frustration, these are all driving emotions, and all of them brought about by Disparity. It defined the era for the archdragons, and it certainly defined Seath.

Seath's insecurity led to the foundation of sorcery. We discover this in relation to the magically-powered crystals laced throughout his body, which protrude from his lower half as far back as the dragon hunts. The magic that Seath has crystallized is specifically the power

of moonlight, and all magic stremming from Seath's branch of sorcery also derives from this affinity. He invented no magic related to fire, sunlight, or any other light-based element, and so his interest in the art most likely resulted from studying himself. Through rational study of his body's magical composition, Seath gained insight into what made him different, the power it possessed, and potentially why he had it, which became the basis for his sorcery. And as with the medials, such research into magic inevitably led him to study the soul itself.



Seath's desire to fix his scaleless condition naturally led him to ponder the nature of life and thereby the soul. Homing Crystal Soulmass suggests a close relation between the soul, crystals, and sorcery.[1] The paledrake wanted to understand the fundamental relationship between primordial rock and the power of fire – embodied as moonlight – and manipulate what crystallized that power within him – Disparity – to create the stone scales that he lacked. If Disparity made him so different, then he could maybe find a means to reverse or subvert it. His unique body was already infused with the power of moonlight via a crystal medium, giving him both the talent for the arts that he studied and a starting point for all future research. As a byproduct of this research, he developed sorcery, including soul sorcery; he learned to command magic and souls channeled through a medium such as himself as seen with his crystal breath.

Dusk hints to this single-minded motive when contrasting the sorceries of Vinheim and Oolacile, noting a difference in philosophy.[2] Vinheim's Seath-derived school of sorcery is more serious, rejecting everything other than oneself. It isn't designed for lighthearted amusement, but to efficiently solve the problem for the caster without concern for other parties. A very academic mindset, if intrinsically self-serving – Seath's foray into sorcery was done with only his own interests in mind and a specific goal to accomplish, and that attitude trickles down into all arts branching from his school of thought. Before even the witches of Izalith began exploring the mysteries of fire, an archdragon in pursuit of his missing scales had already formalized the science behind all kinds of magic into recreatable spells.

1 "Sorcery that was enhanced by Logan according to the great knowledge he acquired from the Gods' Archives. Fires crystal soul mass of a high pursuing nature.
Souls and crystals, or maybe sorcery, appear to have a close connection."
- Homing Crystal Soulmass

2 "The sorcery of Oolacile slightly differ from that of this age. I cannot word it well, but… Oolacile's sorcery is, how do I put it, open-minded, heh. It is a slightly perfunctory place, but the sorcery of your age is more earnest and looks like it rejects all other than oneself. It is very interesting if you think about it…" - Dusk



One might recall the archdragons' power to transform life into stone-scaled dragons like them and rightfully ask why Seath even bothered. Surely it would have behooved him to first study the power of rock if his aim was scales made out of it? In all likelihood, Seath hasn't undergone draconification because he can't. The transcenders of the Path of the Dragon are humans who elect to turn into archdragons. Yet Seath already is an archdragon. One cannot transform into what one already is, even if one's body doesn't express certain traits for their kind.

When the Lords challenged the dragons, Seath initially supported his brethren. But eventually, he defected to the Lords' side and slaughtered his unsuspecting kindred, bringing about the hunts' conclusion. While his decision was rooted in long-held resentment, and may have been triggered by seeing the tide turn against his brethren, his primary motivation was likely what he stood to gain for betraying them. Seath received access to a treasure trove of information in the gods' library,[3] a fragment of the Light Soul for potential study, and the Primordial Crystal for extensive experimentation as a direct result of turning traitor.

While his contributions to the war effort must have been quite significant considering the rewards that Gwyn showered him with, he didn't leak intelligence to the Lords as is often theorized. Although called Gwyn's "confidant" in English, he was just their "ally"[4] (盟友) without any connotation of sharing a secret, and there is no secret for the paledrake to even share. The Lords' methods for combating the dragons had already proved effective – by the time Seath turned traitor, his brethren were already on the backfoot. Nonetheless, Seath helped bring a decisive end to a conflict that would have otherwise dragged on, in effect saving countless citizens of Anor Londo who would have died trying to slay the same dragons that he doublecrossed. If a god had done this, he would be heralded as a great hero, so of *course* Gwyn would hold Seath's show of loyalty in high regard.

A Most Holy Sacrament

Following his betrayal, Gwyn granted the paledrake godhood. White Dragon Breath notes Big Hat Logan's desire to make "the art of the archdragon who is like a god" his own. Miyazaki mentions in the *Design Works* interview that he wanted Logan to be naked after he had gone mad to give the impression that the sorcerer found "enlightenment".

3 **"By the way, do you know about the white dragon Seath? It is said in legend that he is a traitor to the archdragons. He became ally to Great King Gwyn, obtained the name of Duke, and was given the freedom to seek, immersing himself in the research of scales of undeath, which he lacked, in the massive Archives." - Darkmoon Knightess**

4 **"In other words, Grave King Nito and the Witch of Izalith, Kings of key souls the same as Gwyn. Plus the kings of New Londo and the Great King's former ally, the white dragon Seath... who were given a share of Gwyn's soul... All of their souls are required in order to fill the King's Vessel." - Frampt**

Logan also wields a so-called tin catalyst, or *shakujou* (錫杖), that Buddhist monks typically use; the staff isn't necessarily made of actual tin, it is just somehow holy. These religious connotations culminate with Seath's channelers, who are actually "evangelists" (伝道者) with armor explicitly labeled as "holy garments"[5] (聖衣). These aren't just followers of Seath, they are his worshippers, converting others into the white dragon's adherents on top of learning his sorcery. Logan just so happens to become one of these adherents, and even Seath's "creations" (創造物), such as the Moonlight Butterfly[6] and Crystal Ember can refer to something made by a god.

In Anor Londo, godhood is a status: a member of any race could theoretically ascend to the divine. Seath's divinity, like his Dukedom, could easily be one of the many rewards that he received for his part in the dragon hunts. The Dukedom is rather remarkable in itself. It is typically the highest rank one can receive within the aristocracy. Seath was an archdragon – an enemy of the medials – and yet Gwyn gave him a title of nobility that would rank him above many gods. Navigating the resulting courtly politics would require a great deal of finesse, but Gwyn knew how best to handle the situation. The English description for his Lord Soul piece states that Seath was "embraced by royalty", but this oversimplifies the matter. He was actually bequeathed the fragment *when* he became the king's "outside relative" *as* the Duke.[7] *Gaiseki* (外戚) refers specifically to family of the king's mother, consort, or princess. In other words, Seath married into Anor Londo royalty through a woman of Gwyn's kin for political benefit. The only woman in Gwyn's family that we know was and has remained alive is his eldest daughter, Gwynevere.

Two of the pisaca located at the back of the monsters' cage in Seath's prison tower merely weep as we kill them, suggesting that they are the most sane of the archdragon's experiments. They both possess miracle texts associated with holy women of Gwynevere. We find no other members of her covenant in-game, so these maidens must have served the goddess before she abandoned her country. The description for the key to the nearby cage further implies that the pisaca are byproducts of Seath's experiments on all the holy women,[8] and these maidens would be easy test subjects for the paledrake to acquire if he was married to the goddess they served.

It is peculiar that the description for Gwynevere's covenant ring points out her later marriage to Flann after leaving Anor Londo – this is the only time that the flame god is mentioned, and we are certainly not told of Gwyn's firstborn's deeds after he left the city. But if Gwynevere were hitherto in an arranged marriage, then the fact that the goddess leaves only to then marry Flann suddenly becomes key to understanding the circumstances leading up to and surrounding her departure. Cut content also reveals plans for a "Gwynevere's Talisman" – the graphic and model for which clearly shows a dragon bone similar to the Dragon Tooth wielded by Havel, except this stone-colored fossil is wrapped in some form of thread; the cut item's description even simply reads "archdragon talisman" (古竜のタリスマン). A curious item for a goddess of good harvest and grace to possess, but it was probably planned to be another hint to her marriage. Like Havel, Seath could have taken a piece of his kin back as a souvenir of war and gifted it to his new wife upon their wedding, reciprocating the many gifts his father-in-law provided.

By marrying Seath to his own daughter, Gwyn's justification for giving the archdragon his titles and honors was unassailable. No one could openly object to the King doting on his son-in-law. (*DS3* reaffirms the relationship through Shira, who is explicitly both the Duke's daughter and related to gods and royalty.) Peerage, godhood, a wife, knowledge; quite the boon for a scaleless paledrake.



While none of this tells us much about Seath's character before he devolves into the mad state we find him in, we can gain insight into his dimensions and nuances through another. Rickert describes Big Hat as a *gaiseki* the same as Seath,[9] an obvious parallel foreshadowing the sage's ultimate fate in pursuing the white dragon's work. This detail implies that Logan is a narrative cipher for Seath, providing us a peek into who he was and what he was like before succumbing to madness. If so, then Logan's behavior suggests that there was a certain warmth and charm to the paledrake. Logan is described as antisocial and eccentric, but the man speaks with a wise candor and friendly openness when it comes to his craft. The famed Big Hat might have shut us out if the subject wasn't related to sorcery, but he is not a cold or nasty individual. If Logan *is* a reflection of Seath, then the paledrake only became cruel as he fell down the rabbit hole of his obsession.

5 "Holy garments of the evangelists, sorcerers who serve the white dragon Seath. They continue to be under Seath even after his madness, and have occasionally headed to various places and become the limbs of Seath, who cannot move. Thus, the evangelists are also called 'abductors'.

For sorcerer equipment, it is the heaviest. Also retains the power of magic." - Robe of the Channelers

6 "Soul of the Moonlight Butterfly, the mysterious creation that flutters about the Garden of the Black Forest.

Special beings possess special souls. Use the soul of the butterfly said to be a creation of the white dragon Seath to acquire a vast amount of souls or create a unique weapon." - Soul of the Moonlight Butterfly

7 "Soul of the 'scaleless' white dragon Seath. Fragment of a Soul of Kings found at the beginning of the Age of Fire.

When Seath betrayed the archdragons for King Gwyn and later became the King's outside relative as Duke, he was given a share of that great soul. Even though it is a fragment, it is sufficient to occupy the King's Vessel." - Bequeathed Lord Soul Shard

8 "Key to the large cell at the bottom of the Duke's Archives Tower.

The giant cell that once imprisoned many holy women is now empty and imprisons only important prisoners. At that place where a large quantity of spawn squirm before their eyes, it would likely be difficult for the ordinary person to maintain their sanity for long." - Archive Tower Giant Cell Key

9 "Big Hat? Oh, I know him. Because he's a famous legend even in Vinheim. I hear he was an outside relative of the Dragon Academy but became Undead or something like that." - Rickert

Prism of Thought

With his new freedom to research and an entire library of reference material, Seath "immersed" himself in the archives, and the presence of the Primordial Crystal and Crystal Cave suggest that he spent much of his time working from there. Building on his previous research into moonlight and soul-based sorceries, he developed crystallization. The giant blacksmith is familiar with the Crystal Ember and how to work it,[10] confirming that Seath's success was shared with Anor Londo and predates his descent into madness. This success presumably resulted from acquiring the Primordial Crystal. Logan says that Seath "pillaged" the item from his brethren in English, but the Japanese script only vaguely claims that it was something he "acquired by betraying" them, opening up the possibility of it being another gift from his father-in-law.[11] The Silver Pendant proves that Anor Londo kept various treasures, though Logan only describes the crystal as a "secret treasure" (秘宝) which Seath implicitly keeps in good care rather than a "sacred" treasure as English dialogue states. This leaves the crystal itself as the only clue to its original owner and purpose.

A "primeval" (原始) crystal means the original, existing from the beginning of time. A crystal is a solid substance fashioned by rearranging something's molecular structure into a strong, ordered form, and we can see crystal items exhibit identical effects in-game. Crystal weapons and armor are strong and resilient but can't be repaired once they break[12] – or, at least, it is very costly to do so – unlike malleable metal or replaceable wood and leather. In the case of sorcery, the magic power of the soul is crystallized to strengthen existing spells. Basically, crystals become the medium to enhance the power of Disparity. And that power originates from the First Flame, implying that fire too can be crystallized, which the Crystal Ember affirms.

But crystals can also be clear, transparent minerals and this is how they are typically portrayed in-game. Minerals were all that existed before fire, so the Primordial Crystal likely resulted from fire's manifestation in a mineral environment. The Primordial Crystal's thin, spindly form, with tails curving at the top, in some ways resembles fire, and this notion is further supported by the fact that it "bleeds" dark ash like the Black Knights rather than the rainbow mist shed by crystal-based enemies created via Seath's sorcery. Much like the knights, it was formed during a sudden massive surge of fire. (*DS3* introduces more crystals which form in the aftermath of intense heat interacting with minerals.)

10 "You, come. I forge, weapons. Shiny shiny. If there shiny, of Lord Duke, I can do, shiny weapons. I glad." - Giant Blacksmith

11 "The secret of the white dragon Seath's undeath, is it? If you fought him and were captured, I think you know, but he is a true Undead, different from us. His wounds are immediately healed, so he suffers no fatal wound and never dies. This appears to be the effect of the Primeval Crystal, a secret treasure that Seath acquired by betraying the old dragons. That's why, if you don't destroy the Primeval Crystal first, you can't harm Seath. And the Primeval Crystal is in the courtyard of these archives, the Crystal Forest." - Logan

12 "Source flame required for evolving weapons. The Crystal Source Flame is a creation of the white dragon Seath and can only be handled by the giant who is the gods' blacksmith.
Can evolve +10 normal weapons into crystal weapons. (Crystal weapons can be enhanced up to +5.)
Crystal weapons boast high power but are disposable, fragile, and unable to be repaired."
- Crystal Ember

This explains the Primordial Crystal's healing powers. A crystal formed at fire's start would be an enormous concentration of Disparity, namely souls, in a solid mineral form. We have already seen the healing power of life and fire's light, so it is no surprise that the crystal can heal any injury. One need only connect themselves to that power, as Seath does, to gain effective immortality, and we likewise only need destroy the source to sever the connection.

By studying the Primordial Crystal, Seath could examine a key moment in the advent of fire and its effects upon the environment that predated it. And by understanding it, he could replicate the process and apply its effects to his sorcery. This mineral-specific association for crystals may even be why we don't see crystallization in other forms of magic, which aren't rooted to primordial rock in the same way that sorcery derived from Seath's research into moonlight seems to be.

With all this in mind, the Primordial Crystal seems more likely to have been possessed by the gods than the archdragons. Firstly, its composition would suggest that it formed at or near the First Flame located deep beneath the rocky crags and archtrees. We see evidence of the medials and giants visiting the area and erecting constructs around the region, but not the archdragons. Secondly, Anor Londo's store of treasures implies a vested interest in keeping unique items for their potential use in the future, which the Primordial Crystal certainly qualifies as – but not to the stone beasts who would have had no obvious motive for collecting a crystal with the power to grant effective immortality. Thirdly, the Primordial Crystal's effects can be tied directly to fire, making the crystal something that the medials would surely keep for future study. The archdragons had no interest in understanding such power or else there would be no reason for Seath to supposedly "pillage" it to begin with. Altogether, there is a far stronger case for Seath acquiring the treasure from the gods as a result of his betrayal rather than from the dragons he betrayed.

But regardless of how he did so, once Seath acquired the Primordial Crystal, he studied it, replicated the process for forming it, and applied his knowledge – ultimately aiming to apply it to himself. He bonded his being to the Primordial Crystal, and he already had his own body as a precedent. The paledrake was trying to infuse crystallized Disparity into himself once again and somehow manipulate that Disparity into creating stone scales. Connecting himself to the Primordial Crystal was a proof of concept, theoretically showing that he could use crystal to maximize fire's power in relation to rock.

This also explains why Seath's crystal breath inflicts petrification. Logan fails to replicate this aspect as a standard sorcery,[13] indicating that Seath's ability to do so is either innate or a very advanced development in his research. His crystal golems likewise possess the ability to spread their element through petrification, hence the Crystal Cave. Had he been given more time, Seath hoped to use crystallization to, in effect, turn his own being to stone – how other dragonkin were naturally born. Similarly, the expression of fire's power as crystals helps explain the unique "blood" shed by crystal enemies. This rainbow mist evokes the manner in which crystals can form a prism, which bends white light into a rainbow spectrum. The "blood" is the power of moonlight dispersing into the air after that energy has been crystallized, dividing it into the rainbow of color ultimately released.

The Prism Stone is another example of this phenomenon. Each "seven-color stone" (七色石) emits one of the colors of the rainbow or white.[14] The latter is described as, once again, *mezurashii* –"rare" in the sense of standing out, bringing the white dragon to mind. On our way to the Crystal Garden, we pass through a storage room filled with gears, cogs, fallen bookshelves, and other spare parts; accompanying them is a chest containing twenty prism stones. Back in the library, we see what looks like a measuring device with two prism stones installed in it. These stones seem to be Seath's early and now largely discarded attempts to understand the creation and effects of crystals. This is further supported by the fact that various merchants sell them despite Seath's crystal works remaining largely confined to the archives, indicating that they spread outside the library long before Seath became a recluse.

On that topic, Twinkling Titanite is another product of this early stage in his research. The stone originates from the blacksmith deity's slabs but is imbued with a "special", powerful energy that gives it a pale glow.[15] We commonly find this stone on crystal lizards and in chests at the archives, suggesting Seath to be the cause. Titanite imbued with magic is typically red, white, or blue depending on the source of power, but the nature of twinkling titanite is apparently unknown. Its relation to crystals is obvious since crystal lizards consistently provide it, and it upgrades high-quality equipment that otherwise can't be improved.

It makes sense for Seath to take a vested interest in titanite for his research. "Titanite" is actually "keystone" (楔石) or more literally "bond stone", with *kusabi* (楔) referring to a lynchpin or tie, a concept which fits well with Seath's attempts to bind souls to

13 "Sorcery of Logan, who was consumed by Seath's deep-seated delusions. Fires the crystal breath of the white dragon Seath.

Although the horrifying death by curse effect is already lost, wasn't making the art of the god-like archdragon his own what 'Big Hat' sought?" - White Dragon Breath

14 "Warm stone that emits a pretty glow. It is said that it has seven changing colors and an unusual eighth color.

There is no special effect, but it becomes a guidepost if you put on the ground, and you can also estimate cliff heights from the sound of it falling.

If you throw it over a cliff and it makes a large sound, certain death will be waiting if you jump down." - Prism Stone

15 "Thing tinged with particularly strong power even among the bond stones that enhances weapons. Enhances weapons that cannot normally be enhanced up to +5.

It is different from other bond stones. It is said to have been tinged with power after it came off from an original, but the details are unknown." - Twinkling Titanite

matter via crystallization. Titanite follows the same principle, binding the stones to weapons to reinforce their durability and strength – why wouldn't Seath apply his research to this power, to test the effects?



Such experiments are probably behind the crystal lizards' very existence. These lizards have a rocky hide resembling standard titanite and consistently drop twinkling titanite among others related to their local habitat. They thus most likely ingest the local titanite and make it part of their skin before crystallizing it into the twinkling variant, hence the crystals protruding from the lizards' back. Seath is both familiar with crystals and was in a position to access titanite and its creator. Why else would they carry such a variety of solely these rare stones if they weren't intentionally bred to do so? Much like the prism stones, the crystal lizards were likely early experiments that escaped into the wild before the archives were closed off from the outside. (This notion falls perfectly in line with *DS3*, which reveals that the lizards' scales transform if they eat souls instead.)

This tie between Anor Londo's smiths and Seath doesn't end there. Not only is he familiar with the Crystal Ember, but the giant blacksmith also sells twinkling titanite, and can use Seath's source flame to temper titanite-enhanced equipment into unique arms via boss souls. The art of transforming things bonded to rock into new forms via the power of Disparity sounds eerily similar to the overall goal of Seath's research. Therefore, this forging technique was likely learned from the paledrake, who apparently already provided all the necessary materials for the blacksmith to use before cutting ties with Anor Londo. In a sense, Seath was a smith, reshaping matter to his liking, and the result of his investigation into bonding pervades all of the archdragon's research.

From the nature of the soul to the interaction between moon and sun to the power of bonding, Seath's research into crystals covered a variety of angles. Logan's crystallized catalyst states that crystal-augmented sorcery is more powerful, but requires an impressive intellect to cast just half as much.[16] It is no surprise, then, that the paledrake required in-depth knowledge of the subject matter. He was toying with a fundamental aspect of existence, intending to apply it himself no less. He needed to study and experiment carefully, iterate on it for centuries. The gods had their library of knowledge, but it was Seath who invented the process, and he had only himself to turn to.

16 "Sacred staff of Logan who was consumed by Seath's deep-seated delusions. Catalyst tinged with the terrifying magic power of crystals.

Brings tremendous might to all sorceries but demands extremely high intelligence of the user and also halves the number of uses for sorceries." - Tin Crystallization Catalyst

Road to Madness

During the early stages of his research, Seath applied sorcery to items in preparation for his later work with crystals, including the enchanted falchion found in the archives. The falchion is noted for its effectiveness against flesh but not scales, and we find it in a mimic, suggesting that the paledrake feared it being used against him. Therefore, it was probably enchanted before he obtained immortality via the Primordial Crystal. Enchanted weapons can only be forged with an Enchanted Ember. The one we can acquire is a vestige of Oolacilian culture, but it is ultimately just a "source flame of magic power" (魔力の種火), so both parties probably developed their own independently. Also, the falchion being enchanted, not crystallized, reaffirms that it was a very early experiment. Thus, it serves as a prime example of Seath's works after gaining access to the gods' knowledge and their fire but before he successfully replicated crystallization.

Seath must have attracted human worshippers relatively early on, since his channelers "continue" to serve him even after the onset of his madness. Like other gods, the paledrake imparted knowledge to these followers, though they are instructed in reason and sorcery rather than faith and miracles. Ironically, these evangelists are just as fanatical, wearing heavy-plated robes to presumably reflect their master's ideal of possessing stone scales. Or perhaps their fanaticism perfectly complements their mad god, as the evangelists also perform a nonsensical, downright bizarre dance with their tridents in order to inspire their allies to fight harder – even more insane is that it works.[17] They are truly no different from other religious zealots.

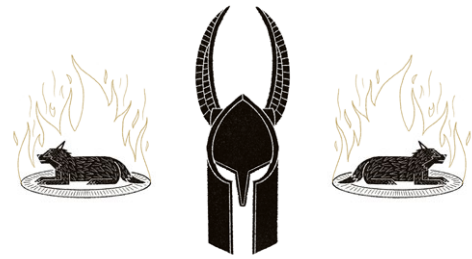
These sorcerers resemble the medials' adherents in other ways too. Besides their variant of soul arrow, channelers also utilize a teleportation spell which emits yellow light reminiscent of Gwyndolin's translocation spell, minus the rings of glyphs common to miracles. While the god's choice of catalyst is a staff dependent on faith and the channeler's weapon is a spear dependent on intelligence, this nonetheless suggests that Seath's evangelists exchanged some arts with Anor Londo and applied them to their sorcerer training.

Seath must have also captured man eater shells and lake beasts from Ash Lake for study at this early stage. Despite the Lower World being their natural habitat, we encounter one such beast in a lake in Darkroot Basin, and neither this hydra nor the Crystal Golems around it are present in the valley during the fall of Oolacile. Seath, of course, would

17 "Three-pronged spear of the six-eyed evangelists, abductor sorcerers who serve the white dragon Seath.
Thrust at enemies in order to rotate tip in a circular motion, and also perform a unique whirling dance to inspire surrounding comrades due to its madness." - Channeler's Trident

be interested in examining a species demonstrating a crucial point in the archdragons' evolutionary history, as the power of fire diversified into the various snake races. The hydra made for an excellent research specimen and perfect watchdog once it had been exhaustively studied.

The physiology of man eater shells, or "five-legged bivals" (五足のバイバル) in reference to bivalve mollusks like oysters, also best fits Ash Lake, where they can comfortably burrow into the sand. Curiously, the shells possess purging stones. The stones' description says that they are treasures of Earl Arstor, but the bivals seem to produce their own naturally. The stone's in-game graphic features a skull etching – presumably representing the human transformed into it – and we find dozens of human skulls overcrowding the membrane of this enemy's mouth in place of a pearl. Bivalves form pearls out of countless microscopic crystals to encase foreign entities. Therefore, these skulls' unnatural smoothness and color indicates these victims have been coated in layers of crystal and transformed into naturally-occurring stones with the same function as Arstor's artificially-produced variety.



This makes the mollusks of great interest to Seath, who would want to analyze their process of turning substances into stone via crystallization. The oysters' close proximity to the Primordial Crystal may even suggest that Seath used what he learned from studying them to link himself to it, and perhaps even crystalize the courtyard. While his inquiry probably stemmed from pearls initially (as Shira's bival pearl crown reinforces in *DS3*), he eventually examined how the process affects the living. He experimented on humans to produce the pisaca, so feeding test subjects to giant oysters wouldn't have been a moral concern. But before that, the paledrake used such specimens to begin engineering his own creations.

The snake-men loiter around Sen's Fortress to imprison Undead and later drag them off to the prison in the Duke's Archives they also guard. Juxtaposed with the item-finding Gold Covetous Ring, they are clearly collecting research specimens on the paledrake's behalf.

Their four-armed shamans also cast lightning spells that instead deal generic magic damage, reflecting the influence of both Anor Londo and Seath's sorcery. They serve the archdragon, their creator, perhaps even worshipping him as a god. In a PlayStation.Blog post, Miyazaki refers to both the snake-men and crystallized Hollows as "failed experiments" in Seath's efforts to obtain scales of immortality. This explains why the race is solely found serving the duke and has remained so primitive. They don't originate in prehistory like the other bipedal races, but are a relatively recent product of unnatural science. Seath evidently tried to create a species that would produce dragon scales like the hydra, but this artificial offshoot drops none, making them a failure he has since repurposed as menial labor.

Regardless, as his research advanced, Seath moved onto creating creatures through crystallization. One example is the moonlight butterfly, which channels moonlight via crystals and then releases that magic as sorcery according to the description of the Crystal Ring Shield.[18] The ever-spinning disc on its back, always facing the sky whether the butterfly is airborne or grounded, seems to be designed to absorb the power of moonlight and channel it into the butterfly's horn. This horn, imbued with the "pure power of magic" and which deals 100% magic damage as a weapon,[19] seems to serve as a type of magic battery and catalyst, a source of energy supplementing or even replacing traditional sustenance. It is this same conduit which allows the butterfly to cast sorcery when not lazing around magically-rich environments. Seath then moved onto less biological creations like the crystal lizard and finally pure mineral beings like the Crystal Golem.

In short, the paledrake made great strides in his research before going mad, and deserves his place in the legends of sorcerers like Logan and Griggs. Yet, few of his works are widely seen outside Anor Londo, especially the archives. Crystal weapons aren't even the standard arms of Anor Londo despite Seath sharing his crystal technology with the royal smithy. The weapons are powerful but ultimately fragile, making them unviable for long-term use. This is acceptable to Seath, who only crystallizes them for only his personal knowledge, but this pattern of exchanging ideas suggests that his results were at least at one time taken under consideration by the gods. Regardless, it was only once the paledrake succeeded in applying crystallization to objects and reaffirmed his results that he moved onto the next step: live experimentation.



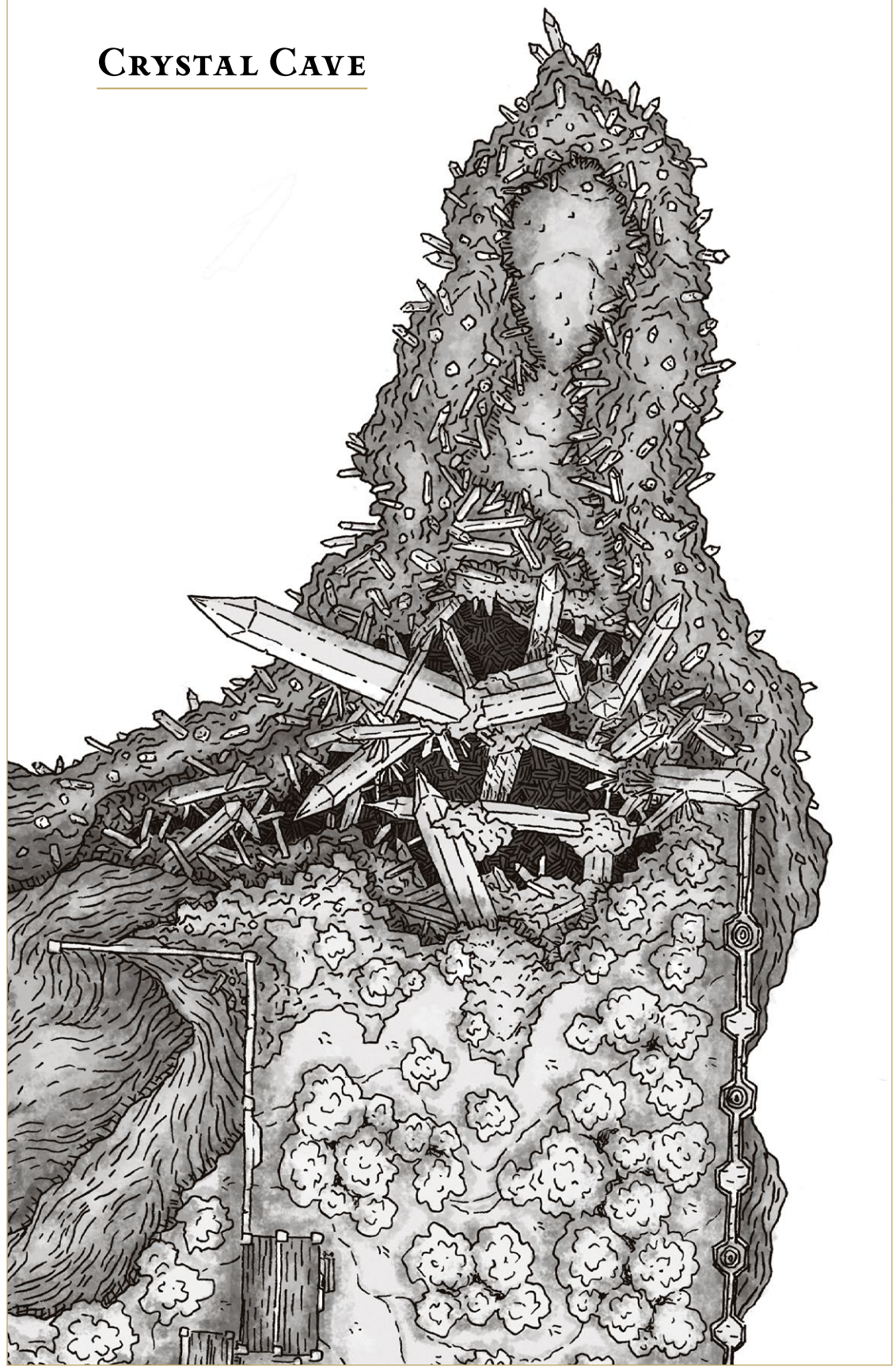
18 "Shield born from the soul of the Moonlight Butterfly, the mysterious creation that flutters about the Garden of the Black Forest.

Similar to the butterfly that was a creation of Seath, it is tinged with strong magic power of crystals and can fire a crystal aureole."
- Crystal Ring Shield

19 "Weapon born from the soul of the Moonlight Butterfly, the mysterious creation that flutters about the Garden of the Black Forest.

The horn of the butterfly said to be a creation of Seath is tinged with the pure power of magic." - Moonlight Butterfly Horn

Crystal Cave



Mad and Furious

Seath's end goal was to apply his research to himself, so it was inevitable that he would require extensive live-testing before risking self-administration, and this requires test subjects. We see the first hints to this move with the crystallized Knight Shield. Its description suggests that it was wielded by a knight of an old noble line,[20] and the fact that both Petrus and the corpse of a Balder knight own one imply the wielder to be human. In short, Seath likely abducted a knight visiting Anor Londo and experimented on him, equipment included. The victim was unlikely to have been an Undead, snatched in more recent times, because the paledrake stores the shield in a mimic, just as did the enchanted falchion. The shield poses little threat to him, so he must have been trying to hide it – hardly the behavior of someone who acquired the innocuous item through innocent means. If the shield dates to after his descent into madness, then there is no reason to do this – his atrocities are already public knowledge to Anor Londo according to the Darkmoon Knightess.[21] The abduction may have been a one-off transgression in the middle of more acceptable research, but it clearly foreshadows where the depths of Seath's obsession would lead.

The Darkmoon Knightess equates Seath's madness with his transformation of the archives into a prison for his horrifying experiments, so we can presume that he reached a breaking point when he needed to apply his principles to live test subjects on a larger scale. The collective descriptions of the archive tower keys support this. The tower was originally another wing of the library, and its entrance still uses the key from that time.[22] Based on the rubble and half-finished contraption at the center, it had a kind of lift to access this towering collection of books similar to the rotating staircases in the main building. However, Seath very suddenly ordered his snake-man followers to convert it into a prison and act as the jailers.[23] This is reinforced by how the other keys are notably different from the exit key, and their descriptions imply that they were created as a result of the tower's conversion.

The Spare Tower Key describes the snake-men haphazardly creating multiple keys that only open certain cells,[24] while even the layout of the tower is nonsensical. Both of these are observable facts – we can see numerous cells that are simply impossible to reach along the spiral staircase we traverse. Perhaps the central contraption reached them at one point, but the slapdash detail suggests that the snake-men either didn't take the time to properly plan out this prison or didn't *have* the time. It was

20 "Medium metal shield that was given a careful engraving and painting.
It is thought that noble knights of old used it, but the defense effect itself is no different from a normal shield." - Knight Shield

21 "... But, that research eventually drove him mad. The Archives became a prison and made a place for horrible experiments. Even now the Duke's Archives is a forbidden castle no one approaches." - Darkmoon Knightess

22 "Key to the giant doors leading outside that are at the top of the Archives Tower that became a prison.
The design that doesn't suit the key to a prison conceals the form of the former Archives Tower." - Archive Tower Giant Door Key

23 "Key to a cell made for the Duke's Archives Tower.
The Archives Tower that once overflowed with a valuable collection of books became a prison with Seath's madness, and the snake-men who didn't care for the books' value became its jailers.
And it is said that the repulsive spawn of experiments squirm at the bottom of the Archives Tower." - Archive Tower Giant Cell Key

converted hurriedly, on unexpected orders from a god, who apparently didn't even clarify what its maximum capacity should be, and so they simply added new cells with a whole new key when necessary. Simply put, it is sloppy, even ignoring that a pyromancer could burn down the entire complex of bookcase-walled cells, and this sloppiness suggests that Seath was desperate to act quickly. Perhaps he feared his darker deeds being uncovered, or perhaps he was simply too engrossed to wait.

Whatever the case, he abducted all of his wife's holy women and imprisoned them in the large cell at the bottom of the tower. From there, his human experiments began in full force, and all of the women became pisaca as a result. Their Japanese name "scylla" (スキュラ) is a fitting allusion to the monster woman of Greek mythology. Yet these "spawn" (落し子) surely aren't the ideal outcome for Seath. The scaly monstrosities can shoot water similar to the hydra, but don't provide any dragon scales, only humanity – a reminder of their previous form. They are closer to the snake-men in nature. The fact that Seath reattempts the process with all of them before finally giving up not only reflects frustration in this failure, but a dead end in his research.



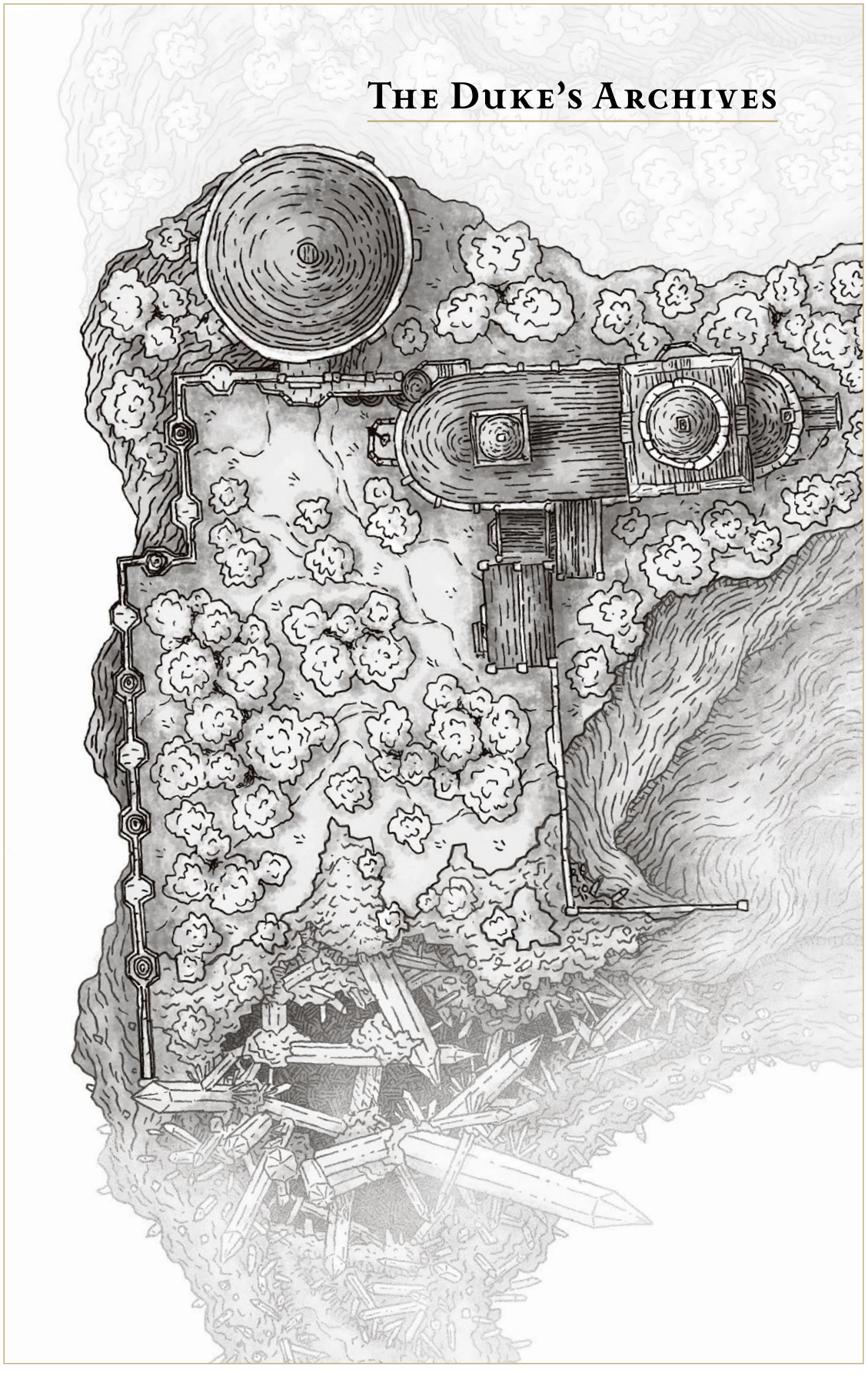
The two picasa weeping at the back of the cage were likely the first subjects, whereas later failures lost even their sense of self and have become no better than wild beasts. As a result, they are corralled near their original prison and repurposed. When we escape our cell in the archives, the snake-men activate a peculiar siren that aggravates the more animalistic pisacas and drives them up the staircase toward us. The guards immediately flee up the ladders and out of reach, completely ignoring us, suggesting that these pisacas aren't trained guard dogs but wild beasts that will attack indiscriminately. If we turn off the siren, they calm down and return to their "den", demonstrating that their intent is simply to find and stop the noise. Such baseness alone shows how pathetic these failures really are. One can only imagine Seath's rage.

This likely set back his research, as later prisoners were made into crystal Hollows,[25] and we find them in droves outside the prison. Seath

24 "Another key to a cell made for the Duke's Archives Tower.
Perhaps because of the haphazardness of the snake-men who are its jailers? There seem to be several kinds of keys to the Archives Tower's prison, and the arrangement is bad too." - Archive Prison Extra Key

25 "Armor that was worn by a Hollow knight half-consumed by crystals. The whole armor is crystalized.
It has high defense power due to the power of crystals." - Crystalline Armor

The Duke's Archives



clearly needs to refine his magic at the crystal level and thus requires more test subjects to crystallize. And so, he tasks his servants with collecting more victims. The Channeler helm is often misinterpreted as claiming Seath is blind, but the Japanese description specifically says that his evangelists are substituting "for that which Seath cannot see".[26] Likewise, their robes actually claim that they "became the limbs of Seath who cannot move", a demonstrably false statement if taken literally. Together, they evoke the phrase "eyes and ears" and indicate that the channelers are simply acting on Seath's behalf, as he cannot leave the archives while in the midst of his research. His senses are preoccupied, not crippled. The more unique specimens they collect are ultimately imprisoned in the original cell – such as Logan and at least one Fire Keeper, based on the soul that a female corpse behind the sage bears.

Seath probably took these actions during the same period that Anor Londo fell into chaos and was subsequently abandoned. It is unlikely that Gwyn, who entered a decisive conflict with Izalith shortly before linking the First Flame, would ignore a rogue Duke who made the gods' library a prison, especially when his daughter's worshippers are involved. This is true of any period where the royal capital has the leadership and military capacity to deal with these civil threats. There was no way for the paledrake to hide the maidens' disappearance from his wife, and the truth was eventually uncovered since the Darkmoon Knightess knows the circumstances in detail. Therefore, at least Gwyn must have already left by the time Seath's atrocities were actually discovered, during a period of decline for the gods. And we have already established that the gods left en masse less than two hundred years ago.

In that light, Anor Londo's reaction to Seath makes sense. There are two chests on either side of a statue of Smough along the direct path to the archives. One contains twinkling titanite and the other is a mimic carrying a crystal halberd. At some point, the government clearly wanted Seath's research, particularly arms, kept well secure, in stark contrast to the time when the giant blacksmith was cordially learning from the Duke. Additionally, the items' proximity to the library suggests that they were confiscated from the archives and quickly stored on the spot. This level of caution implies that there was some conflict, maybe a small skirmish, at the entrance. Yet the only retaliation we see at present is a magic barrier and a few giant guards stationed nearby as sentries. These are actions to contain, not eliminate, the threat. If Anor Londo lacked decisive leadership and the many knights who followed Gwyn to the Kiln, this response is reasonable. In fact, the incident likely contributed

26 "Helmet of the evangelists, sorcerers who serve the white dragon Seath. The six eyes lined up in two columns are to substitute for that which Seath cannot see.

For sorcerer equipment, it is the heaviest. Also retains the power of magic." - Six-Eyed Helm of the Channelers

to the gods' ultimate decision to leave the city. With no meaningful interference, Seath has continued with his experiments unimpeded.

While Seath was without a doubt mad, this lunacy can't be tied to his human experiments as the Darkmoon Knightess claims. The dragon's actions are too measured and calculated to interpret as wholly irrational, and live experimentation was always an inevitable step in pursuing this kind of research safely. The horror of Seath's actions is a matter of ethics, not rationale, hence why he initially hid evidence of the occasional misdeed. It is only after he has dropped all pretenses that he has been branded a madman by "decent" people incapable of comprehending his self-serving mentality. In truth, his total disregard for even the appearance of moral character is just the byproduct of an actual, more pathological problem.

According to the Tin Crystallization Catalyst's description, Logan becomes consumed by Seath's *moushuu* (妄執), which refer to deep-seated delusions – unhealthy obsession. For every great stride the paledrake has made in his field, does any of it actually bring him closer to his ultimate goal? Is that goal even possible? The true madness to Seath's method is that he has failed to produce one iota of empirical evidence that he can actually use crystallization to yield stone scales of immortality, yet still he pursues these methods to that assumed end. This is already a bastardization of scientific inquiry, but the archdragon nonetheless religiously sticks to human experimentation, as if somehow it was just the execution and not the whole concept that was erroneous. In this manner, he and his followers are more akin to fanatical cultists. They follow a coherent philosophy, even if the viewpoint is perceived by most others as extreme. But in the end, it is a worldview. It is not sorcery.

Put another way, Seath's insanity is not that he is merely beyond reason, but that he is married to the idea of reason on an unreasonable basis, lacking any sense of self-reflection or moral consideration to temper his actions. To accept that his research is wrong, that it is impossible to obtain what Disparity denied him, is unthinkable. He invested his entire life into this search. He refuses to believe that he is the ugly duckling that couldn't become a swan. There *has* to be a way, some reason, some unseen byroad obstructing the path to true enlightenment. He is so close, he just has to find it. Maybe his hypothesis is correct, but at what cost? The tragedy is that Seath had the status, talent, family, and resources to live a privileged and fulfilling life, but was so consumed by his insecurity over what he lacked, he threw it all away without even realizing what he had lost.

Beyond the Archives

Even after the gods abandon Anor Londo, Seath continues experimenting on what humans he can acquire, sending his evangelists to various lands to abduct persons of interest for their lord's research – dubbed "abductors" as a result. The cell now only used for "important" persons suggests that he is especially interested in specimens possessing strong or at least unique magic power. This is the first indication that the paledrake has begun searching beyond his traditional resources to inform his research and may motivate his presence in the Darkroot Garden, at least in part.

Like the channelers, his Crystal Golems collect humans and bring them to the library. We encounter one such golem seemingly right after



it has captured Princess Dusk, and another after it has already brought Sieglinde all the way to the archive courtyard. This is unlikely to be a coincidence. The golems capture their victims by encasing them within a large crystal sprouting from the golem's back.[27] This appears to put the captive in some form of stasis, and Miyazaki further implies that all their senses are shut down whilst restrained in the *Design Works* interview. The victim's "comfortable" experience as Sieglinde describes[28] may even parallel petrification – befitting the mineral cause. In both examples, the golems in question are amber in color and stronger, but we encounter another such golem guarding the depths of Crystal Cave with no one in its custody, making this likely no more than a design decision intended to emphasize the enemy's importance. This is reinforced by the fact that a standard crystal golem found just inside the library complex has obtained the Broken Pendant in the same manner.

Seath is clearly interested in procuring new research materials whether they be human or magical, and these events are fairly recent. For one, the golems and hydra have only moved into Darkroot Basin within the past two centuries. But there is one other creature aligned with the paledrake loitering around the black forest, the moonlight butterfly. The insect settles around a ruined fort and attacks us when we attempt to approach it. If we defeat it and explore the ruined tower, we can acquire the Divine Ember off the "corpse" of a divine blacksmith. The surrounding tools and arms suggest that the blacksmith set up shop in this tower and so was likely killed by the encroaching butterfly. Andre has heard rumors about this blacksmith from clergymen who "often" pass by in pursuit of his services, suggesting that the move only occurred after Undead Burg was established. This narrows the timeline further, to within the past century, maybe only the past few months.

The key that the clergy smith carries references a "friend" locking away the Hollow warrior encountered at the bottom of the Undead Burg tower.[29] The blacksmith is probably this "friend" and had likely decided to imprison the warrior in the tower after he began to Hollow. This places his time of death to only after the recent chaos befalling the Burg, and thus pushes the butterfly's invasion of the area to around the same period. If so, then Seath has only extended his reach within the same timeframe as the chaos demons, and likely for the same reason. From the Undead Burg, we can clearly see the towering archive sit atop the mountain and later find Seath nestled within that same tower. There is no way that he wouldn't have noticed such a massive township being built down below and not grow curious about the implications behind it.

27 "I was captured by that crystal golem for such a long time. I was separated from my homeland and wandered the world distortions with it. There, I was gone and saved by you. Already I had lost all hope the whole time before. That's why I was pleased and very much couldn't believe it..." - Dusk

28 "... Did you rescue me? Thank you so much. I am Sieglinde of Catarina. Somehow, I was captured in that crystal before I knew it...It was surprisingly comfortable, but I couldn't move and was troubled. I must thank you." - Sieglinde

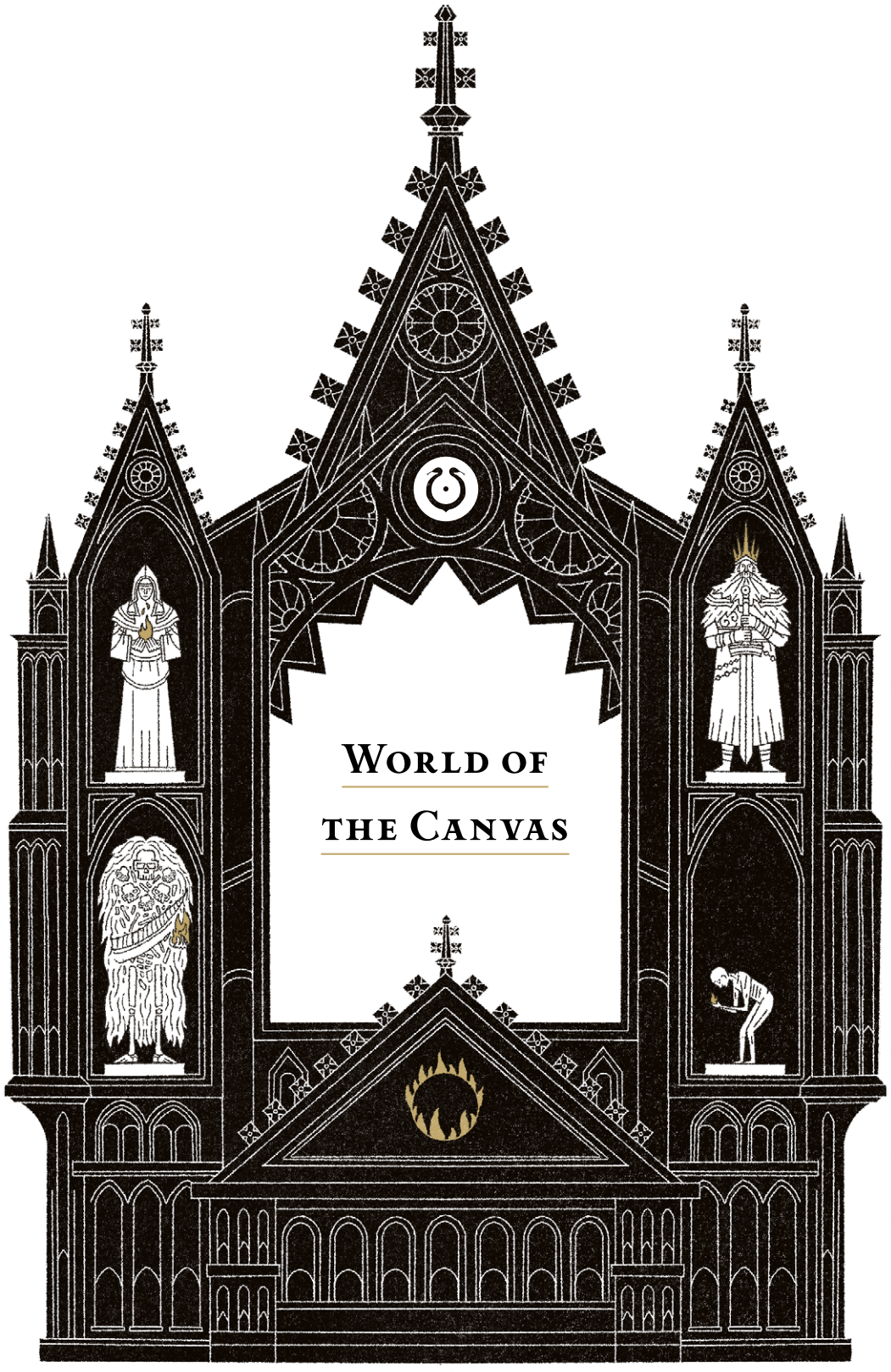
29 "Key for the door of the watchtower lower stratum that is in the Undead Town Below the Castle.
It is said that the watchtower's lower stratum has become a stone prison and that a hero who became a Hollow was confined there by the hands of a friend and shut in there ever since."
- Watchtower Basement Key

Once he investigated the situation and learned that it facilitated a new Undead mission, the paledrake saw an opportunity for gathering new resources. The Undead Burg supplied a healthy supply of test subjects practically to his front door. Of *course* he would take advantage of Anor Londo's plan by stationing his snake-men at Sen's Fortress, where these would-be heroes would be easiest to collect. Regardless of whether Anor Londo knows or cares about the unexpected extra trials, this take-over is recent enough for Seath's followers to harvest Undead uncontested. Meanwhile, he also sends his various creations to explore the surrounding forests and ruins. Even his channelers have wandered the streets of the Undead Burg, one in particular overlooking the Gaping Dragon's lair in the Depths and even assisting the beast should we fail to kill the evangelist first. Seath, or at least his servant, is interested in studying a live archdragon to help further the paledrake's research.

In the meantime, Seath has immersed himself in crystals, particularly his lower half. This implies that his research has reached the point where he is confident in applying it to himself, though he may have simply lost all sense of fear – he will only abandon his tower and hurry over to us after realizing his escapee is heading for the source of his immortality. Much like his bug-like form would suggest, he enveloped himself in a partial cocoon of crystal in an attempt to undergo a metamorphosis. Where that path would have led him in the end, who knows? He dies either a mad god on the cusp of completing eons of research, or a pathetic failure of a dragon clinging to a mere fantasy.

On Reflection

During a Game no Shokutaku episode, Miyazaki notes that Solaire was created partially in response to accusations that he had a slant against religious people. If we are to interpret any of his narrative's critiques as being aimed squarely at religion, then we would also have to acknowledge that Miyazaki frames the atheist perspective in no better light. The scientist who detaches himself from everything beyond rationality is doomed to irrationality. Conscious beings aren't some amoral computers calculating and compiling data tables, we are driven by things unquantifiable. The result is Seath committing no shortage of atrocities on faith in his premise alone, making his hypocrisy all the more horrifying. If nothing else, Seath conveys that blind reason is as dangerous as blind faith, for they are in many ways two sides of the same coin.



World of the Canvas

Home to the Condemned

The Painted World of Ariamis, or the "Eremias Painting World" (エレーミアス絵画世界), is a snowy realm that exists within a canvas hung in Anor Londo. Priscilla refers to Ariamis as the painting's creator in English, though the Japanese script somewhat more vaguely references the creation of "this Ariamis world".[1] However, the internal name for a cut "Painter Ereamis" (絵師エレーアミス) NPC still remains in the game files. "Ereamis" is an obvious typo of "Eremias" similar to how the "wisp" enemy is erroneously codenamed "wips" (ウィプス) due to a comparable misordering of the katakana, strongly suggesting that the localization's name change to "Ariamis" was influenced in part by this typo. Moreover, it proves that FromSoftware had intended for us to actually meet this world's creator at one point in development. (This naming convention becomes a tradition in *DS3*.)

Considering that the painting hangs in the realm of the gods, this painter was likely a deity himself, or at least a medial in their employ. The gods have extensive experience with manipulating time and space, so fashioning an entire separate dimension via brushstrokes is feasible for their sunlight magic. Nonetheless, such an amazing feat must have required specialized skill in that art, else it would appear more often in their culture. Enter Ariamis, an artist powerful enough to make entire worlds out of his landscapes and who curried enough favor with the gods to create a painting that an entire building was dedicated to hanging.

The painted world contains an old church, and we see outdoor pews facing an elevated stand, indicating masses have been held there. But it isn't *just* a simple church on an isolated mountain. Behind the stand is an outbuilding used as a storehouse,[2] which in turn connects to an outdoor smithy, based on the tools surrounding the blacksmith "corpse" found within. This area bridges directly to the opposite end of the complex, which the increased amounts of tables and chairs indicates were living and dining quarters. Between both of these buildings was a massive tower with two layers of bridges leading to another tower complex at the far back. And the courtyard adjacent to this outdoor mass area doubles as a graveyard. This house of worship seems to have also been a monastery, and something more.

The main courtyard and adjacent cliffside are covered with large stone cages, literal cell blocks. We can obtain an egg vermifuge in the painted world, and its description reminds us that every place

1 "Why don't you leave me alone… This Eremias world is for that, isn't it?" - Priscilla

2 "Key to an outbuilding of the Eremias Painting World. The snowy world of the painting is made in the shape of an old temple, and the outbuilding seems to be a kind of storehouse." - Annex Key

has a reason to forgive taboos. The painting apparently locked away "taboos" that wouldn't be permitted to exist otherwise, making it in effect a prison. And this prison was overseen by the Goddess of Sin, Velka.



We loot the robes and rapier of Velka's priests from among the corpses in the painting, confirming that her servants had a presence at the church. These pardoners are actually called "prison chaplains" (教戒師) implying that they would normally be stationed at penitentiaries to fulfill the religious needs of inmates. Their mask symbolizes separation from the worldly populace,[3] portraying them as impartial stand-ins for the god who forgives sin. Yet the rapier they wield also holds symbolic implications,[4] suggesting that these skilled swordsmen doubled as jailers and would discipline inmates if provoked. Aside from their weapons and garments – which are resistant to "every" magic[5] – the painting also contains Vow of Silence, a magic-sealing secret rite that Velka teaches as a miracle.[6] All of this would be useful for dealing with a variety of prisoners skilled in equally various schools of magic. We can even find a ring of sacrifice, a death-defying ring that Velka developed.

All of this frames Ariamis as a prison governed by the Goddess of Sin, and her influence can be seen throughout the area. The crow demon is actually "Velka's crow-man" (ベルカの鴉人). Since "crow-man" is localized as "corvian" in *DS3*, I shall refer to the race as such from here on for the sake of consistency. The corvians' arms are contorted into lanky, wing-like appendages with long, multi-jointed fingers. This anatomy matches that of the Dried Finger also found in Ariamis[7] (albeit moved to the male Undead Merchant's inventory in *Dark Souls: Remastered*) and its description implies that these shriveled digits belong to something that was once human despite all appearances.

Miyazaki elaborates on the corvians in the *Design Works* interview, stating that their bodies have been reformed in their deep-seated delusions as adherents of Velka. In other words, these formerly human worshippers' obsession with the goddess has twisted them into a new, grotesque form, another example of curses arising through strong emotions. The artist behind the design for the Gaping Dragon, Hiroshi Nakamura, even points out that both designs are rooted in this same idea.

The corvians' form highlights a broader association between crows and the Goddess of Sin. Velka's prison world is crowded with crows, and her priests wear black with beaked masks while the goddess herself sports black hair, which she cuts for her priests' talismans.[8] This miracle

3 "Mask that chaplains of the Goddess of Sin Velka wear.
The chaplains who listen to the confessions of sinners and prompt reflection and salvation should be beings far removed from the lay streets, so the mask is a symbol of that." - Mask of Velka

4 "Powerful thrust sword of symbolic implications that chaplains of the Goddess of Sin Velka carried on them.
But, it isn't limited to being a mere symbol. Due to the sword blade tinged with magic power and the unique sword technique, the chaplains are also excellent swordsmen." - Velka's Rapier

5 "Clergy clothes that chaplains of the Goddess of Sin Velka wear.
The chaplains' apparel are all uniformly black, and it is said to have resistance to every magic due to the mysterious power of Velka." - Black Cleric Robe

6 "Secret rite imparted by the black-haired witch Velka. Makes all magic unusable within the effective range.
The Goddess of Sin Velka is heretical but well-versed in every secret rite old and new, and said to possess a strong influence even among the gods." - Vow of Silence

7 "Dried, multi-jointed fingers. These fingers are dry and still warm.
Even from the number of joints, they don't appear to be an ordinary person's fingers, but..." - Dried Finger

catalyst relies on intelligence instead of faith, as does her rapier, and crows are notoriously intelligent creatures. Velka is also depicted as a witch knowledgeable about secret arts and in possession of mysterious power – crows and ravens have long been seen as witches' familiars and symbolized magic and mysteries. The crow is thus the perfect animal to represent and serve this Goddess of Sin, and the fact that these corvians are found in the painting world suggest that she has quite a fervent following there. Velka's role as a goddess is to define sin and mete out the punishment for it, so it is only natural that she be given charge of Anor Londo's correctional facilities and use them to expand her cult. Her priests regulated the prisoners whilst proselytizing, and many converted.

Ariamis was originally a development prototype, out of place in the finished game since Lordran has a temperate climate. Nonetheless, Miyazaki states that he created the painting world to house ideas that would have otherwise been cut. He "cheated" by putting them on the prototype map, turning it into a world where things that didn't have a place to belong could find a home. While certainly very meta, this is reflected in its in-universe role as a prison – Miyazaki describes Ariamis as a place where those driven out from the normal world reside. The population are mostly criminals, rejected by mainstream society, leaving the prison as the only place which will accept them, similar to the way the bonfires become home for those suffering from undeath. But Velka proves to be a rather generous goddess, forgiving sins in exchange for an indulgence of souls rather than blood, and offering a refuge guaranteeing the inhabitants' lives if not their freedom. Those who recognized that mercy have repented and become her loyal followers.

First of the Forlorn

We gain access to Ariamis after acquiring the Peculiar Doll. Legend says that it belonged to an "undesirable" (忌み者) who had no place to belong, and that this abhorred being was eventually guided to the painting's cold world.[9] Given a doll's typical association, this undesirable was presumably a young girl, but for her to be attached to such an odd-shaped doll suggests that she and the family that probably gifted it to her were rather abnormal. She must also be a notable figure if her story has continued to be passed down into the present era. The doll's role as our "key" to enter the painting frames its owner's identity as the central

8 "Catalyst to perform miracles of the gods. That of the Goddess of Sin Velka is her black hair and makes intelligence into provisions for miracles regardless of faith." - Velka's Talisman

9 "Funny-looking doll, a funny shape not seen much.
According to a certain legend, only an undesirable held onto this. It is said that she had no place to belong anywhere in the world and was eventually guided to the cold world of a painting." - Strange Doll

mystery for the area. And the answer to this mystery is the optional boss encountered at the very end of our exploration, Priscilla.

Priscilla is a "half-dragon" (半竜) crossbreed,[10] and it shows. Despite her basically humanoid form, white scales cover her neck, tentacle-like horns and hair sprout across her forehead, slit-like pupils fill her eyes, and a long tail coils behind her. More indications of her dragon lineage may be hidden beneath her white fur dress, which was designed with her tail in mind. There is no woman within the painting more abnormal than Priscilla, and Miyazaki further hints at a connection between the two in the *Design Works* interview, albeit whilst avoiding giving a direct answer. Aside from comparing Ariamis and Priscilla's snowy color, he hints that *her* original home was "slightly different" than the ordinary homes that the other exiles left behind. Indeed, she grew up in another prison just like the one she would eventually reside in.

We find the doll on a corpse in our old cell when we return to the Northern Undead Asylum, blocked by a lone Black Knight. Neither are present during our first journey through the asylum, so we can presume that these events developed after we left. The only reason for the corpse to possess the doll is either because the Hollow brought it from outside the facility when imprisoned, or found it already in the asylum during confinement. And once the Hollow escaped, it wandered with the doll in-hand before being slain in our cell by the Black Knight. If the doll was already there, then so was its owner. This "Northern Undead Institute" (北の不死院) is more a prison than a proper asylum, and a fairly old facility given its state of disrepair. It is definitely not a normal place for a child to live, which perfectly fits Miyazaki's comment. Furthermore, it is staffed by humans and chaos demons affiliated with Anor Londo and close enough to Lordran for a giant crow to ferry us to and from Firelink Shrine. All of this suggests that this northern facility was a remote prison established by Anor Londo well before the Undead Burg and the current Undead mission.

It is the perfect environment for a girl despised by gods to spend her childhood before eventually being guided to a new prison within the painting. Priscilla claims that the world itself exists so that she would be left alone, so she can't have been interred there from the start – the painting must have been commissioned only after she was already born and caged. The painting guardians support this notion. Like Priscilla, these long-time protectors are garbed in white. They likely originate from within the painting, since their uniform is found in a chest in the living quarters building.

10 **"Soul of the pure white half-dragon Priscilla, who was imprisoned in the Eremias Painting World.**

Special beings possess special souls. Use the soul of the half-dragon who is an illegitimate child and enemy of life to acquire a vast amount of souls or create a unique weapon." - Soul of Priscilla



Whether former priests to Velka, reformed convicts, or something else, they passed down their guard duty for generations. Their unique sword technique in particular[11] is shared with Priscilla's Dagger, which is derived from her tail.[12] This suggests that the original guardians emulate the crossbreed to create their swift and graceful fighting style, and maybe even revere her. In the same vein, it implicitly links Priscilla's imprisonment in the painting world to the creation of the painting's guardians and thereby the painting itself.

Priscilla was the painting world's first prisoner, but why?

Priscilla is described as the "enemy of life" (生命の敵) in apparent reference to her Lifehunt ability. This power originates from her and not the scythe that she wields, since the dagger derived from her tail also possesses it. We can recreate her scythe and imbue it with the power, but this requires her soul, and the weapon will ultimately harm us too, since we aren't the crossbreed.[13] This power is extremely effective against all life and expressed as the bleed status effect, which most enemies and bosses have a low resistance to, in contrast to the toxic status dealt by weapons imbued with the power of death. Meanwhile, Priscilla is equally weak to fire and lightning while her tail weapon deals the god-hunting occult damage, implying that her body was born with a Dark affinity. Lifehunt bears a resemblance to Lifedrain, too (Even sharing HP-draining mechanics in *DS3*). In short, Priscilla's Lifehunt power derives from the Dark.



Blood is a medium for the soul, making the bleed status another possible expression of the Dark's life-eating ability. And since the gods feared this greedy habit, a being that could harvest life like the Grim Reaper would understandably be labeled a taboo and sealed away – this Death parallel is likely the inspiration behind Priscilla's sickle-wielding design.

And yet, Priscilla calls her prison peaceful and its inhabitants kind.[14] She feels welcome in this cold world, in contrast to the outside world that loathed her. She knows how to leave but still remains there willingly. The inhabitants attack us not because they

11 **"Curved sword of the painting protectors of Anor Londo. Has a flat-pointed, unique shape. The consecutive attacks unleashed from their dance-like circular movements were handed down to them for generations and tore those who threaten the Great Painting to pieces." - Painting Guardian Sword**

12 **"Weapon born from the tail of the half-dragon Priscilla, the taboo sealed in the Eremias Painting World. One of the rare dragon weapons.**

It possesses the power of lifehunt, and the dance-like sword technique has something in common with the painting protectors in white." - Priscilla's Dagger

13 **"Scythe born form the soul of the pure-white half-dragon Priscilla, who was imprisoned in the Eremias Painting World.**

It possesses the power of lifehunt feared by even the gods, but if the person utilizing that power isn't the half-dragon, that power will rebound on the user." - Lifehunt Scythe

14 **"You, please return to your world. This place is peaceful and everyone is kind, but it is not your world, correct? Please, jump down beyond here and return." - Priscilla**

are monsters but because we invade their refuge, the one place where they can live in peace. And more specifically, because we threaten Priscilla.

Priscilla exists in the innermost chamber of the complex and every action we take is in service of entering that chamber. The inhabitants attempt to stop us at every turn, but we push onward until we finally reach the crossbreed. And as soon as we enter, she stands with her scythe at the ready, poised to defend herself from us. This is the behavior of a cornered animal or scared girl. It implies that she expects us to bring her harm, which her dialogue reaffirms. Yet despite her fear, she still attempts diplomacy, explaining how we can escape if our arrival was unintentional.[15]

Attacking her prompts her to rhetorically ask why *everyone* rushes toward their death.[16] This half-dragon is used to invaders coming to kill her only to end up dead by her hands, and her comment about being left alone further suggests that the attempts on her life predate imprisonment within the painting. Considering her location, gods are the most likely culprits behind these various attacks. Yet if she is housed in one of *their* facilities, why not execute her in the first place?

Evidently, Anor Londo's royal government has already arbitrated her case, and the king was at the very least indifferent to this dangerous individual remaining alive. She was locked away at a far-off prison, but

15 "Who are you? You aren't a friend of ours, correct? If you made a mistake and went astray, please jump down beyond here and return. And if you were seeking me, it cannot be permitted..." - Priscilla

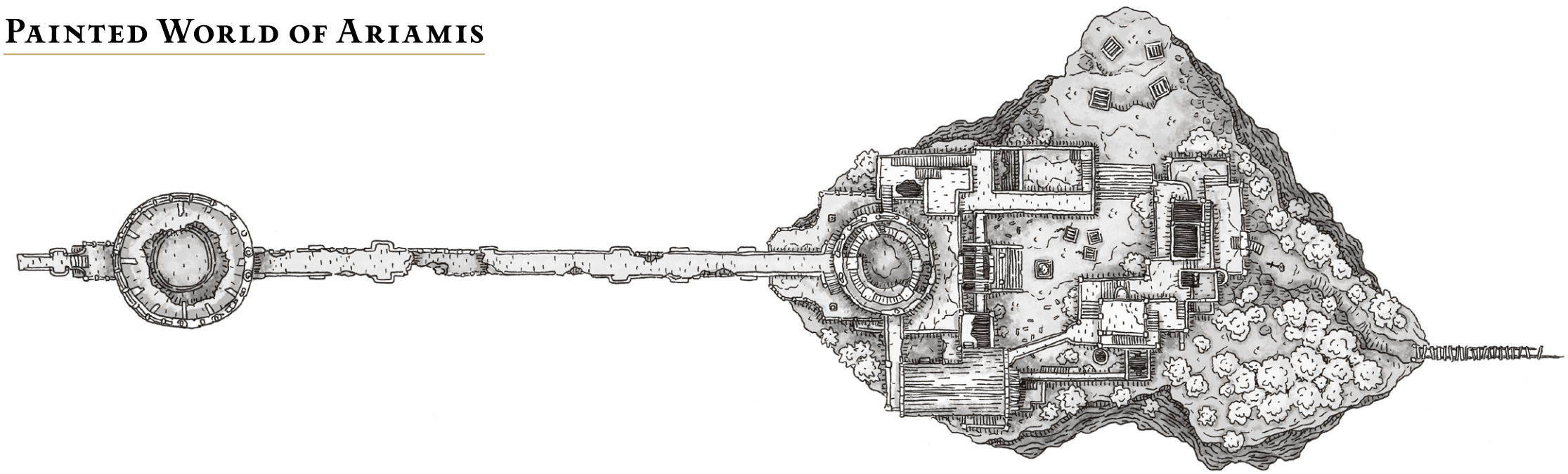
16 "So you too are as I thought? Why do you all rush toward your death...?" - Priscilla

some gods continued to make clandestine assassination attempts on the child. Then, she was moved to a facility where the gods could keep a closer eye on her while still keeping her in a world entirely separate from their own. But the attacks continued, prompting the creation of guardians to keep people out rather than in. And despite the purpose for their mission having been long since forgotten by the world at large, they obstruct would-be assassins to this day.



Priscilla was clearly a controversial figure in Anor Londo politics, and factions within medial society didn't feel safe with the girl still breathing, even when she was still just a child. So why *was* it decided that she would be kept alive and given such extensive protection? The answer lies in her lineage.

Painted World of Ariamis



Most Unholy Matrimony

The description for Priscilla's soul claims her to be an illegitimate child, making her most likely a product of infidelity among the gods. And the fact that she must be the product of a union between a medial and a dragon leads to but one conclusion: she is the daughter of Seath. The paledrake shares the same silver and white coloring and is the only known dragon living in Anor Londo. Moreover, he is married, perfectly explaining the crossbreed's illegitimate status. However, Seath bears an affinity for moonlight, not the Dark that Priscilla definitely inherits. Thus, that element must have come from her mother, and the only medial that meets this requirement is Velka. Not only is the painting world Velka's territory, but plenty of evidence links this black-themed witch, who had knowledge in every art old and new, to the Dark.

We learn that Velka is "heretical" from the Japanese description for Vow of Silence, implying that she isn't limited to the traditional divine powers employed by other gods in Gwyn's kingdom. Her Lord's power derives from the Light Soul, so heretical power would naturally derive from the Dark Soul, such as the heresy of heathens. These two heresies are different terms written in different kanji, with Velka's *itan* (異端) referring more broadly to being on the "different end" compared to the heathens' *jakyou* for a false and wicked faith. Nevertheless, the implication of unorthodoxy remains, and we can draw a connection between the goddess and the heathen worshippers of the Dark because Velka's Rapier deals occult damage, a firm indicator as to her mysterious magic's true nature. Her corvians too are weak to holy weapons effective against the Dark's agents. We see this again while equipping her mysterious rings of sacrifice, which have a humanity graphic represent their active effect. Snuggly provides these rings in exchange for humanity, proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that Anor Londo's witch-goddess practices Dark magic.

A statue in the painting world's central courtyard portrays a hooded woman lightly caressing the head of a long-haired child hugging her – an intimate, reassuring act. The statue is part of an underground mechanism linked to the church's front right defense tower, indicating a security purpose. And this machinery opens the pathway to Priscilla's chamber when the statue is turned towards her direction. The narrative framework to this suggests that it depicts Priscilla's mother as she is about to lock her child away from prying eyes and dangerous threats. That woman is Velka,

as suggested by the murder of crows perched upon the statue, as well as the hooded woman's general air of shadow and mystery.

All of this makes Velka the best candidate to be Priscilla's mother and Seath's mistress. Their relationship isn't so unthinkable. Both gods value reason over faith and have spent their lives studying magic, commonalities that leave plenty of room for love to blossom. And Seath's marriage to Gwynevere was political in nature, leaving no guarantee that he actually ever cared for his wife. Priscilla's actual birth can be dated back to the height of the Age of Fire, before Seath's madness, when the gods were flourishing as a society – the painting guardians have passed down their duty for generations despite their last generation having become Undead. There is plenty of room during this largely uneventful period for the Duke to socialize with his fellow gods and take on a mistress who shares his field of expertise.

The Ariamis church's iconography makes sense if Velka established the prison to house her daughter, who would naturally be treated more gently there than in the world of the gods that had already locked her up in a remote prison. Even Priscilla's stark white fur clothes protect her from the cold and are specially designed for her adult form, including the tail. Someone made these for her to wear, likely her mother. There is an obvious bias being given to this prisoner's appearance and wellbeing, and Velka, as prison warden, is most likely the one responsible. Her huge presence in Ariamis was no accident. Management of the prison directly correlated to raising her daughter.



However, Seath's absence in any depictions of Priscilla is notable. Velka's statue depicts her as alone in her support for their child, and the crossbreed neither demonstrates any knowledge of sorcery nor wears anything distinctly associated with Seath. Perhaps the mistress' affection for the Duke was a one-sided love? If we were to infer a more insidious motive for the affair, one need only consider the singular motive for all other actions taken by Seath: his obsession with obtaining his missing scales. Velka's knowledge in every secret rite imaginable made her a valuable

resource. It is possible that the white dragon only courted the goddess in the hopes of furthering his research, promptly abandoning both her and their child once the affair was discovered and his position as Duke and the privileges that came with it could be potentially threatened by the scandal.

Why was Velka even given the position of prison warden to begin with? Nepotism. The Vow of Silence notes that, despite her heresy, Velka is extremely knowledgeable and has a strong influence among the gods. This suggests two things in particular. The first is that the goddess probably isn't hiding her heresy – she is simply too valuable a resource for the gods to cast out. There are many reasons that a civilization might want an expert on its enemy, after all, and Velka's wisdom extends to otherwise lost magics or useful esoteric arts. It was



to the gods' benefit to keep her close, so long as she remains loyal. And the second is that her clout likely relates to the painting's creation.

Consider the scenario: the daughter of an influential witch is sent to a remote prison where she is constantly assailed by political agents. She is later moved to a new facility within the nation's borders, under that witch's supervision. Velka used her pull among the gods, particularly the royalty, to negotiate a compromise. Her daughter would remain sealed away, albeit somewhere safe. This eventually required a location nearby that Velka could secure to her liking. Such an arrangement benefits the royal government as well, allowing it to lock away all manner of undesirables – safe in the knowledge that mother bear was keeping watch. There were risks in giving this half-breed anathema any level of freedom, but it ultimately didn't matter so long as she was contained. And with a secure prison so easily accessible from Anor Londo while being literal worlds apart, there was no reason to still use the remote facility, hence why it was abandoned and left in severe disrepair before finally seeing use again as the Northern Undead Asylum.

This deal even explains Velka's role as Goddess of Sin. Her job is essentially to act as the gods' record keeper, tracking sinners in need of punishment and implicitly reporting their crimes to the necessary authorities.[17] Yet she herself is a heretical witch who studies esoteric arts, a background hardly conducive to becoming Anor Londo's judicial logistics manager and prison warden. Stranger still, she is to this day considered a god despite being a practitioner of heresies they abhor, when even Gwyn's firstborn was stripped of his godhood for his transgressions. Not to mention her daughter is living proof of a grievous sin, an irreversible stain on the witch's reputation.

Velka's current status and responsibilities were likely part of the deal to keep Priscilla safe and a mild punishment for her mother's faux pas. Assigning a homewrecker the job of overseeing sin is ironic, but so is turning a coterie of greedy gods into security chests. Her past gives her reason to sympathize with sinners and gives the contrite a figure to rally around. This led to her offering indulgences for forgiveness, but Velka still judges the gods' enemies appropriately. The corvians drop Souvenirs of Reprisal despite their avian heads' lack of ears, suggesting that they took these "proofs of vengeance" (復讐の証) from impenitent sinners as a warning, similar to the Blades of the Darkmoon.[18] Becoming the Goddess of *Sin* specifically contextualizes Velka's heresy and status as an example of what not to do or be for mankind as a whole. Her acceptance of the role demonstrates Velka's maternal instinct, to her child and all sinners.

17 **"Record book managed by the Goddess of Sin Velka. Sinners are those who have slighted the gods or covenants and are destined to one day fall to the Blades of the Darkmoon." - Book of the Guilty**

18 **"Blood-drained, shrunken ear. It was cut off from a defeated sinner.**

The knights of the Blades of the Darkmoon put sinners, who are enemies of the gods, to death and bring this back as proof of that.

The sinners' earless corpses serve as objects of fear. Mankind knows the blade of revenge and will thereby honor the gods. That is the Sun of the Shadows' eternal mission." - Souvenir of Reprisal

Criminal Procession

Considering that the painting world was envisioned as a temple and not a traditional detention center, Priscilla was probably its lone "prisoner" for a time. But the facility evolved as circumstances changed in the outside world. Velka was no longer taking care of just her daughter, but swathes of criminals that needed to be imported in giant stone cell blocks. The fortress temple of Ariamis simply wasn't designed to house so many.

But many prisoners repented and joined the ranks of Velka's followers. They worshipped the Goddess of Sin and thus naturally came to worship her child. Not all of them became corvians, though. The phalanx enemies encountered within the painting conglomerate around the courtyard statue of Velka and Priscilla, protectiveness which demonstrates a certain respect for the two women. (This harkens back to the Phalanx boss of *Demon's Souls*, whose similar hoplite blobs surround a core representing their female commander.) Their grotesque form bears no resemblance to crows, but they are still clearly loyal to the goddess, and she may still be responsible for their current state. Unlike the standard Hollow, each phalanx has slightly less lightning resistance and moderately higher general magic resistance, indicating experience with magic of the Dark variety. They likewise grow the curse's heart roots wherever spears impale their bloated flesh. It certainly wouldn't be odd for Velka to experiment on prisoners, and the phalanxes might be products of her work.

The phalanxes and the painting guardians also imply that the prison remained active up through the emergence of undeath. Up until then, human prisoners died and were buried in the dozens of graves marked by weathered tombstones scattered across the central courtyard, if the Skeleton Wheels found directly beneath them are any indication. Yet now the prison is filled with Undead of all kinds, and with undeath came the gods' fear of the Dark's resurgence in the world. We know that Sen's Fortress became a prison facility to deal with this heretical threat, and it is quite possible that some of these prisoners were transferred to the painting world for maximum security.

The Bloodshield contains weak magic which still manages to boost all resistances on its blood-red face.[19] Given that it has particularly higher fire and lightning resistance, it may be a product of the Dark painted in actual blood. If so, then it is no surprise that legends of the shield have been lost, purged from history after its owner was apparently locked away in the painting. Likewise, the Dark Ember found off the "corpse" of a blacksmith indicates that he too was moved to Ariamis

19 "Shield of blood recited in lost legends. The red of the blood seems to be enveloped with weak magic power, so it boosts all resistances." - Bloodshield

as part of the Way of White's attempt to scrub out evidence of the Dark. However, he didn't remain a prisoner. The body is found on the top floor of the outbuilding used for storage, surrounded by smithing tools. These are the trappings of a forge, not a cell. The blacksmith appears to have been hired on by the prison, likely because Velka's priests had use for someone experienced with working occult weaponry.

Still, the fact that the ember has otherwise been lost alludes to the Way of White's subsequent involvement in the prison. We can acquire a gold coin portraying Lloyd from the painting world, implying that the church under his supervision has contributed heavily to the prison's supply of inmates – all of whom had to originate in the world of man where the church operated and Lloyd rose to prominence. While the gods mostly succeeded in using the church as a tool to consolidate influence over human beliefs and culture, they could also secretly siphon off what heretics they didn't kill to the painting prison.

And heathens weren't the only agents of the Dark locked up inside. Darkwraiths own the Red Sign Soapstone, suggesting that the one we find in the painting world belonged to an imprisoned member of the covenant. Velka's prison proved extremely effective in removing elements of the Dark from human society.

The dragon zombie, meanwhile, confirms that the residents weren't limited to humans and Priscilla, but it likely served as another warden, not a captive. The gods had dragons among their arsenal following the hunts, and this archdragon zombie's position perfectly blocks the path to Priscilla's chamber from the upper level, as if it were stationed there. Maybe the royalty just wanted insurance? Or maybe Velka herself requested the massive bodyguard? Either way, the bridge behind the zombie has collapsed, which seemingly ties its death to some conflict within Ariamis. The bodies leading up to the creature carry a dragon scale and the bloodshield, suggesting that the dragon died battling prisoners specifically.

In other words, there was a prison break.

Evidence abounds. Numerous corpses litter the facility, including Velka's priests, pyromancers, brave warriors, and famed knights. Then there are the bodies strung up across the complex, the various cell blocks now empty and occasionally still left open, the prisoners moving about the halls, and the numerous Hollows impaled on trident pikes everywhere in-between. We find the key to the outbuilding on a corpse behind an illusory wall in the basement, suggesting that the keyholder managed to escape and hide before apparently succumbing to sustained injuries. Clearly, a facility-wide struggle resulted in the deaths of countless prisoners and prison wardens alike. Even

the local smith was apparently shown no mercy, making the claim that no blacksmith alive today knows about the Dark Ember ring especially true. The battle with the dragon zombie indicates that the attackers attempted to enter Priscilla's chamber to either do her harm or interrogate the crossbreed about a means to return to the outside world. But they evidently failed.

The only survivors of this conflict are Jeremiah, various Hollows, the phalanxes, the corvians, and the dragon zombie. Half of these forces are explicitly aligned with Velka or the prison hierarchy, while the other half have reason to consider the world their new home since they have been rejected by the outside. Unlike the actual staff to this facility, these repentant undesirables banded together and returned peace to Ariamis. Whether out of loyalty to Velka and Priscilla or a genuine love for their lives there, they put down what was essentially a coup within their own ranks and continue to coexist in peace despite their various differences. So, who were the rebels?



The breakout was likely orchestrated by Darkwraiths. We never encounter a single living Darkwraith within the painting world, only a plethora of knight souls and the one Red Sign Soapstone. If the Darkwraiths had been on the winning side, then it is less likely that all the knights in the painting would have been killed in battle, and we would have likely at least seen some Darkwraiths outside of New Londo as escapees. Moreover, Jeremiah invades us, which requires that he somehow obtain a Darkwraith's red eye orb, such as off an enemy's corpse.

Whoever led the coup, it failed and left the residents with a new problem. All the prison wardens and ancillary staff were killed and haven't been replaced. This leaves the prisoners to patrol the halls and manage the facility in their absence, a true case of the inmates running the asylum. It is unlikely that Velka and the gods would permit what had transpired within the facility. Therefore, these events probably occurred after the gods abandoned their home, sometime within the past century, but long enough ago for snow to have settled on the bodies – maybe only mere days before we ourselves arrive; the corvians possessing sinners' ears along with fresh-bloodied talons and necks reaffirms the implication. What

priests weren't already stationed within the painting likely left with their goddess, leaving no one to replace them in the aftermath of an incident.

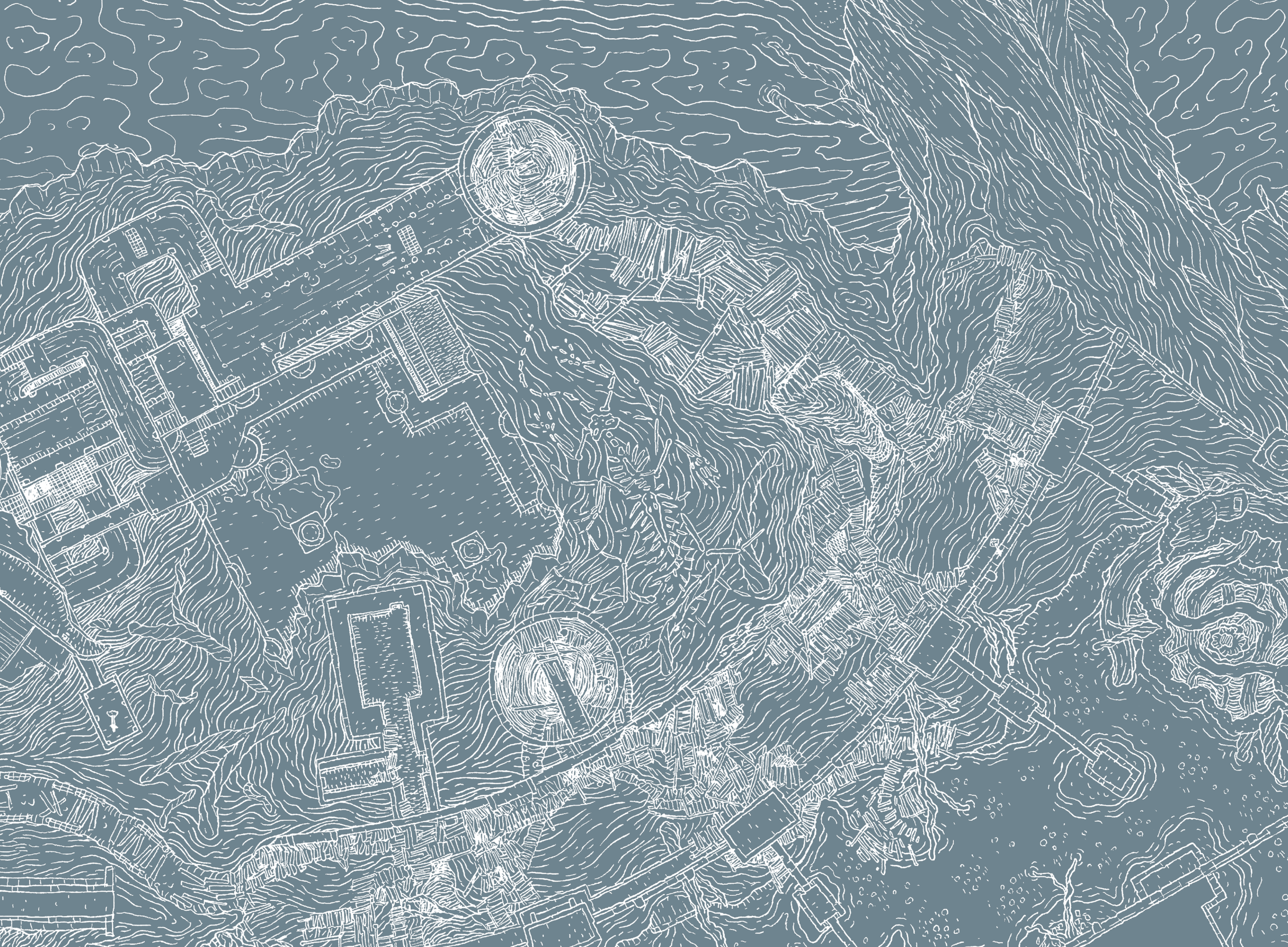
The residents' behavior implies deference to Priscilla's judgment. Her dialogue implies that they all agreed to live together peacefully under one banner (becoming their own village community as of *DS3*). Priscilla herself has lived in the painting longer than any other prisoner, so she definitely had the experience to lead. Moreover, her abilities leave her uniquely suited to do so.

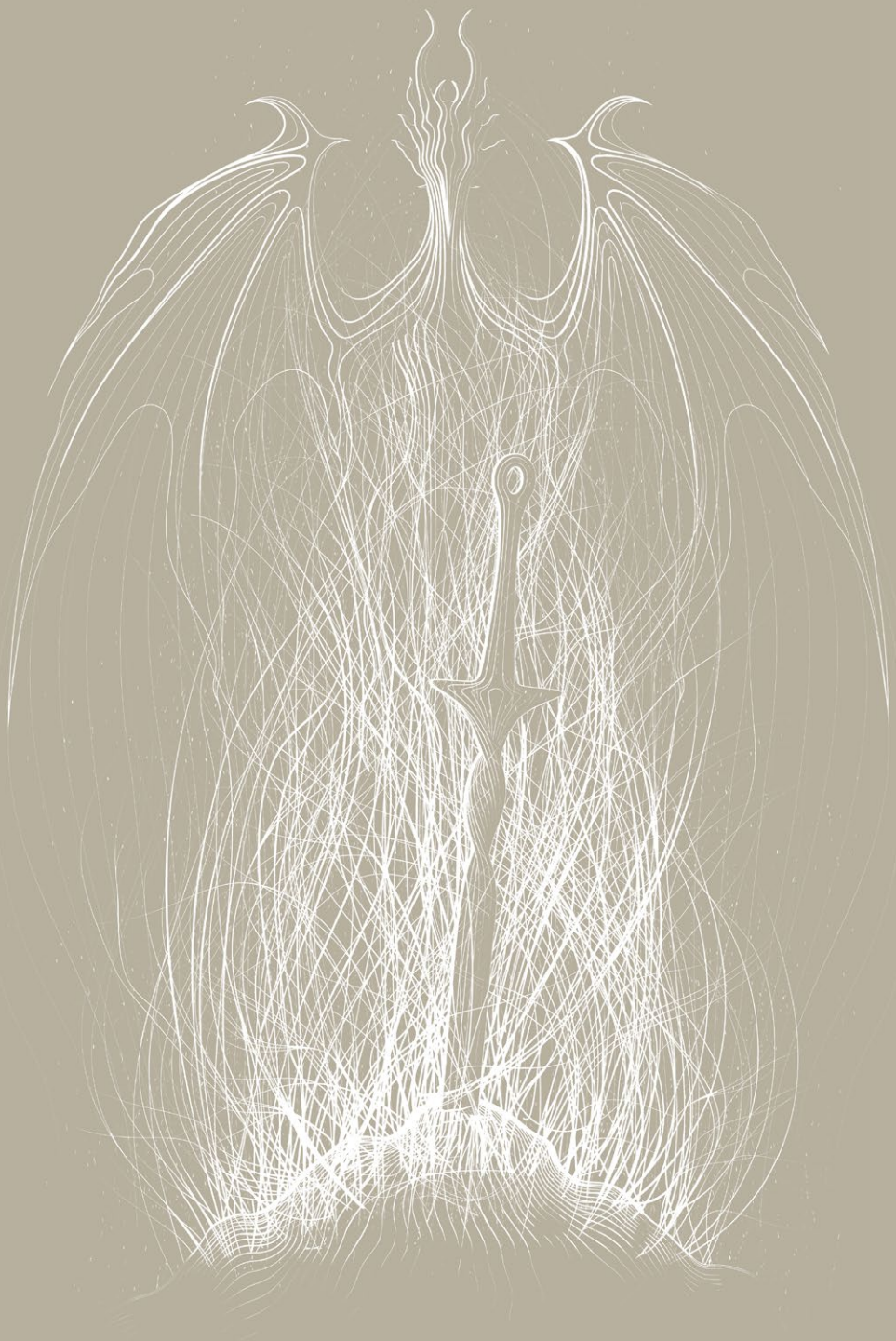
Priscilla casts unique magic based around the cold. One attack consists of blowing a small concentration of frost conjured in hand into a harmful mist, and the other conjures a huge blizzard that turns her invisible until disrupted. The latter may function partially according to the principles of fog, but the spell can be easily dispelled with fire attacks as well, reaffirming its link to the power of cold. Complete invisibility should be impossible since it negates existence, but the crossbreed interacts with the world no differently than if she were visible – leaving footprints on the snow-covered floor, and attacking with just as much lethality. This girl simply suffers no ill effects for her magic, which is likely due to her half-dragon lineage anchoring her being into reality so it can't be negated; we do come across similarly invisible mineral paths in the Crystal Cave.

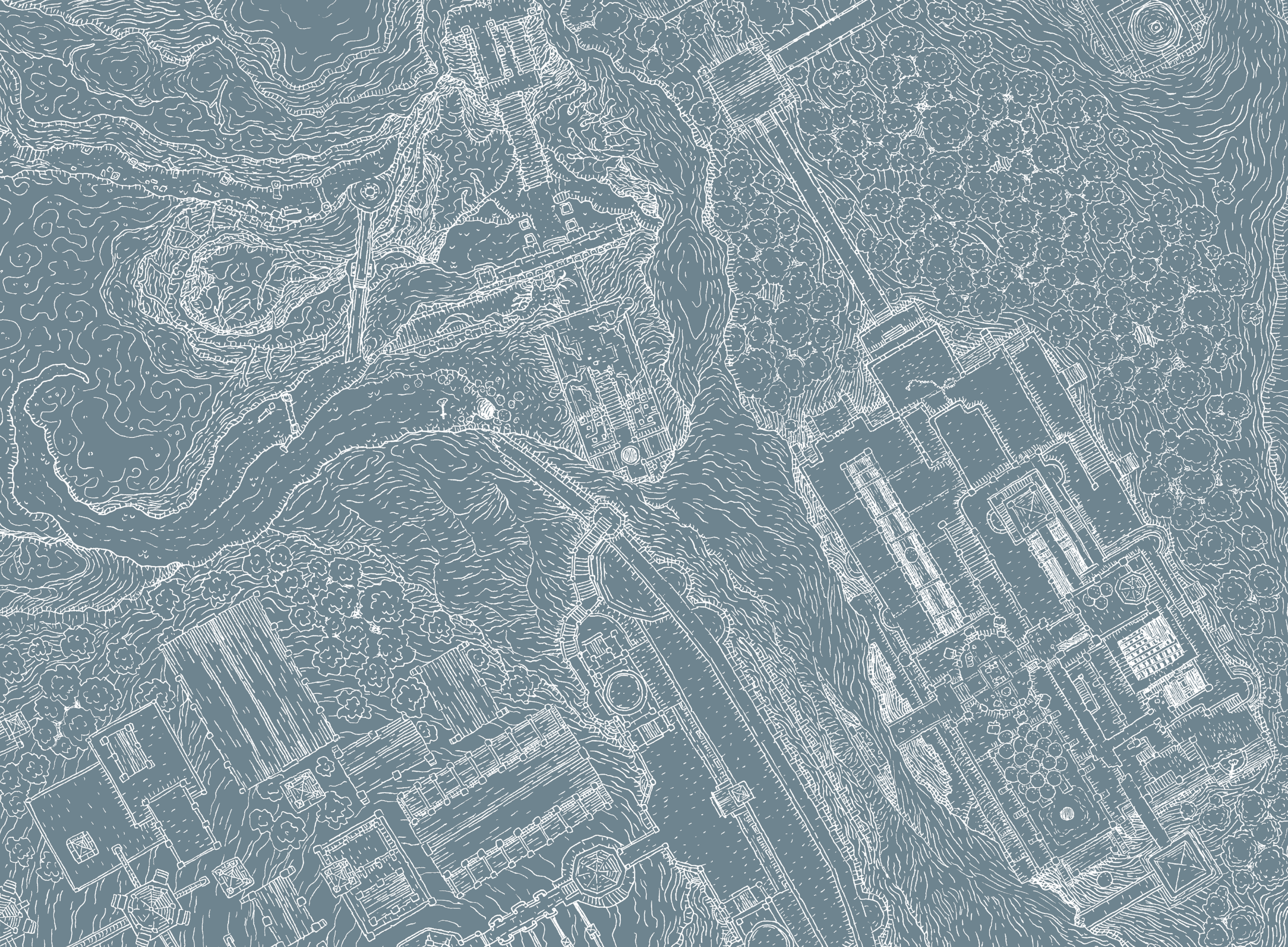
Whether they were picked up from her mother or developed as a consequence of her life in Ariamis, with these abilities, and her experience of life lived in exile, Priscilla is the only one fit to lead Ariamis and its prisoners. Miyazaki reveals in the *Design Works* interview that Priscilla was initially planned to be the game's "heroine" like the Maiden in Black in *Demon's Souls*, but this idea was ultimately dropped, just as Ariamis was a prototype created at the start of development that ultimately didn't fit the finalized setting. A cut heroine ruling over a cut prototype map is very meta, indeed.

On Reflection

For an easy-to-miss optional area, the painting world couldn't be more critical to the narrative. Aside from revealing the extent of the gods' willingness to shove their greatest fears out of sight, Ariamis sets up some of the most consequential characters in Priscilla and Velka. First impressions might deceive that our detour through this land of rejects is of equal insignificance to the narrative. But more secrets are locked away in that mother and daughter's territory than initially appear, with lasting repercussions. If not for the gods' arrogance, perhaps they would have realized this themselves.





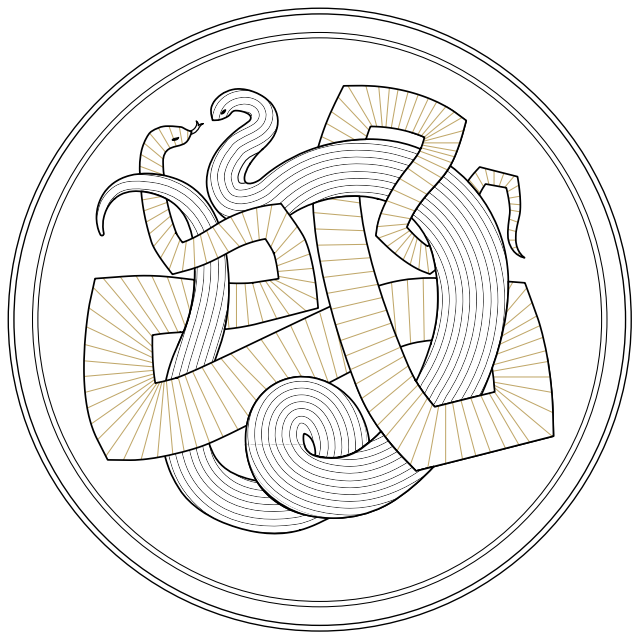




ABYSSAL ARCHIVE

By Lokey

TUNE & FAIRWEATHER
DUBLIN, IRELAND



Tune & Fairweather, 2022

Text © Lokey

Cover illustrations © Andrew P Hind
Etching-style illustrations © BLOC
Lordran map illustrations © Judson Cowan
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Print ISBN: 978-1-9162799-5-7
Digital ISBN: 978-1-9162799-6-4

First printing, 2022

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Typeset at Tune & Fairweather in Garamond with Priory as display. Printed on Munken Pure paper at L.E.G.O. S.p.A. in Vicenza, Italy, and bound at their facilities with original cover designs by Andrew P Hind.

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Volume II

The two wolves likely cared for "everyone", but their fear of burdening others left them marooned in their heroism and ultimately without others' support when they needed it most – leaving Sif lost without his partner (page 371) — *frontis*

The Four Kings that led the Undead state were effectively appointed governors in perhaps the most literal expression of divine right imaginable (page 215) — 218

The lie must be preserved, or else everything Artorias did was for naught (page 375) — 255

He is a proud and honorable knight, but also a slightly plump and bumbling do-nothing (page 308) — 302

Havel must have encountered the paledrake during the conflict and faced such difficulty in dealing with the dragon's sorcery that he developed armor, weapons, and miracles specifically to resist it (page 393) — 339

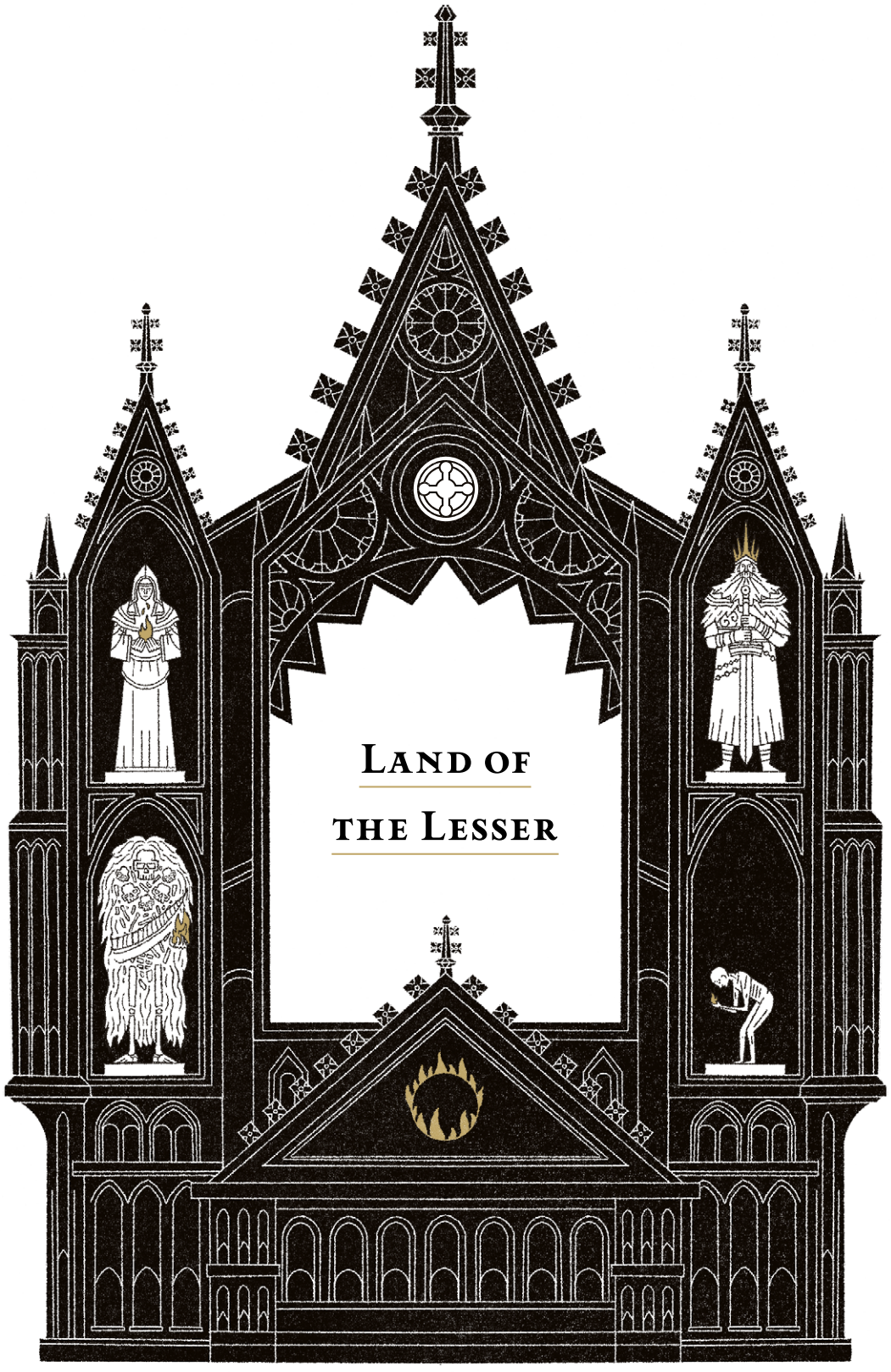
All in all, Ornstein epitomizes chivalry and was rightly recognized for it, becoming a literal golden boy (page 364) — 350

Clearly, Smough is a sadist, gleefully using a blunt instrument to ensure the condemned suffered a painful and most dishonorable demise (page 378) — 375

Simply put, Lautrec has discarded whatever knight's honor he once had in life to survive by any means necessary in undeath, losing all empathy for others in the process (page 430) — 386

Ciaran was part of both the Four Knights and the Lord's Blades, the king's elite band of female assassins (page 367) — 447

ABYSSAL
ARCHIVE



Land of the Lesser

Culture of Death

New Londo's rise and subsequent fall is inextricably tied to its leaders, the Four Kings. While we battle these monarchs as grotesque, tree-like beings in the Abyss, we may catch a glimpse of their original forms in cut content. The model for an unused New Londo enemy internally named "Undead King Jar-eel" (不死王ジャ=イール) portrays a humanoid figure with spiky armor and long hair, reminiscent of the Four Kings' design, while the Four Kings are internally named "Jareel Demon" (ジャイール・デーモン), reinforcing the connection. Between them, the two character models seem to portray a king before and after he fell to the Dark. "Jar-Eel" is a character in the *RuneQuest* RPG series, known as the Fourth Inspiration of Moonson; this title was likely the reason for the four-man boss' internal name. Some link the cut model to a Darkwraith mentioned in Ingward's cut dialogue, but there is no evidence that this abandoned plot thread would have involved facing anything but a normal Darkwraith.

New Londo was set up to be a vassal to Anor Londo, with the overt goal of producing an Undead hero to link the fire. The Four Kings that led the Undead state were effectively appointed governors in perhaps the most literal expression of divine right imaginable. Unlike other countries with kings that rule by birthright, their office was provided directly by the gods, and they acted essentially as feudal lords. We are not given much insight into the individual nature of each king, but they were all notable enough in their own right to come to Gwyn's attention and be appointed – even granted a fragment of Gwyn's Lord Soul. The role required that they be compliant to the gods' will, strong enough to effectively manage their nation, and yet too weak to unite against their masters.

Despite its millennium-old origins, New Londo had an advanced culture, which is reflected in its architecture. Miyazaki admits that the area was inspired by the relatively more modern Mont Saint-Michel in the *Design Works* interview, distinguishing the area visually from the other areas inspired by classical or earlier medieval styles. With such a vibrant melting pot of different peoples coalescing in New Londo, simply due to their shared undeath, it is no surprise that their collective knowledge would help their society's development, especially when trading with similarly impressive civilizations like Anor Londo and Izalith. There were even Undead mothers raising children. This was very much a thriving society, which can be credited in part to the Four Kings' "great" leadership.

Some have suggested that the four appointed governors each represented one of four particular cultures in the city, usually posited to be Astora, Carim, Vinheim, and one other. The basis for this interpretation is that items tied to these countries can be found in the city, but this line of reasoning is too narrow. Firstly, it precludes the possibility of New Londo predating these cultures – none of the nations cited are explicitly ancient, and several can in fact be traced back to more recent times. What's more, there was no rationale for singling out these four countries to meet an arbitrary quota of cultures when undeath is a universal problem that affects every human nation. The items we find from those nations need only indicate that their citizens visited the country of undeath at some point, potentially long after New Londo had already fallen to ruin. And other items linked to certain cultures may in fact have had little to do with them.



For example, proponents cite Astora as one of New Londo's constituent cultures on the basis that we find the Very Large Ember in a chest in the New Londo ruins, which the English description notes is used by "blacksmiths" of Astora. However, the Japanese description isn't explicitly plural, and can instead be read as "the blacksmith of Astora",[1] namely Andre. Almost every ember vaguely identifies the individual who can make use of the source flames in this manner. In fact, Andre openly admits to having never seen such a high-quality ember[2] despite familiarity with the more obscure divine embers present in his homeland,[3] leaving no evidence that Astoran "blacksmiths" made widespread use of the Very Large Ember, or ever contributed to New Londo's advanced culture.

Gwyn installed exactly four kings to ensure systematic inefficiencies in his puppet government, which hints at the gods' underlying caution towards their new vassal. The fact that the kingdom flourished at all is a testament to its leaders' ability to unite a hodgepodge of Undead into a singular people – a process helped along by other societal elements, such as the local sorcerers. The sealers of New Londo were originally healers[4] and possess sorceries that cure bleeding, poisons, blights, and even curses. Like Logan, these sorcerers wield a *shakujou*, which is clearly not a literal

1 "Source flame required for evolving weapons. The Very Large Source Flame is of the highest quality and handled by the blacksmith of Astora.
Makes it so that you can evolve +10 standard weapons and enhance them up to +15. Those are already legendary weapons themselves." - Very Large Ember

2 "Oh, you, that's an amazing source flame, isn't it! I've been a blacksmith a long time, but never have I seen such a thing!" - Andre

3 "Oh, you're in possession of an unusual source flame, aren't you? It's a thing I've seen only once... That's the source flame of a clergy blacksmith." - Andre

4 "Robe of the sorcerers of the seal, who submerged New Londo in the watery bottom and sealed the Four Official Kings and Darkwraiths who fell to Dark.
The sorcerers of the seal were originally called healers, and vivid crimson apparel was their symbol." - Crimson Robe

tin staff; just a holy staff.[5] This religious element frames the sorcerers as something more akin to witch doctors or spiritual healers. Their exceptional role in New Londo society was denoted by their red robes, a color that commonly symbolizes energy or enthusiasm. The healers were clearly respected, enjoying a position of prestige within this diverse society.

Similarly respected were the knights that defended the kingdom. Their equipment – the Dark set and Dark Sword[6] – is described as having transformed, "now" symbolizing their allegiance to the Dark. "Transform" is specifically "degenerate" (変質), thus much like how a "degenerate"[7] (変質者) hasn't necessarily physically transformed so much as become associated with negative elements, the equipment's skeleton motif and the wielders' unique sword technique probably haven't physically changed from before they became associated with immorality. These skeletal-looking knights were once seen as proud and noble souls serving the great leaders of their country, with the imagery implying that death was the societal ideal. This is appropriate for a city of immortals who wanted nothing more than to die human instead of becoming monsters. Undead are reviled as profane sinners in every god-fearing society, and the gods had promised them freedom from their curse if they can produce a firelinker. New Londo knights thus embodied this ideal of death and sacrifice.

The knights' thick broadsword encourages wide, heavy swings in its technique. This heavy weight seems to be a consequence of the titanite slabs in the city's possession, which indicates that Anor Londo provided these now rare blocks of titanite in abundance when the two parties regularly interacted. While Vamos claims that he saw the Large Flame Ember in New Londo, we can only find regular titanite and the Very Large Ember in the ruins, suggesting that the knights focused on forging strong, heavy weapons without a particular magic or fire affinity. We don't find any physical shields in the city ruins either, though this may be because the Dark Hand can create its own – the Darkwraith Kirk uses a shield, so it wasn't entirely foreign to their fighting style. Regardless, the blade had the greatest impact and remains signature to the knights' technique.

New Londo associated death with honor and gallantry, cherished cures for terrible afflictions, and respected equally divided authority. All of this was conducive to a nation set up for the sole purpose of siphoning Undead through suicidal rituals for creating the Lord of Cinder with the promise of freeing them from their sinful curse. This was the central pillar of their ethos, the underlying idea uniting them as Undead. And for that reason, their culture worshipped one god of the pantheon in particular. Statues of Velka with and without her child are erected extensively

5 "Sacred staff of the sorcerers of the seal, who submerged New Londo in the watery bottom and sealed the Four Official Kings and Darkwraiths who fell to the Dark.
Has attack power due to being made of metal unlike other staves, so can just barely bear being used as a weapon." - Tin Banishment Catalyst

6 "Sword of the knights who served the Four Official Kings of New Londo. The broad blade gave birth to a unique sword technique.
After the Four Official Kings fell to the Dark, the knights became the servants of the Dark, Darkwraiths, and their swords are also called Dark Swords." - Dark Sword

7 "Armor of the Darkwraiths who fell to the Dark, former knights of New Londo.
Their armor has degenerated and is now known as the symbolic form of the servants of the Dark along with the art of Spiritsucker." - Dark Armor

throughout New Londo's elevator shafts and the entrance to the boss room for the Four Kings, identical to the statue found in Ariamis, and another sculpture of a hooded woman sitting upon a branching tree stump with babe in-hand can be spotted in Firelink Shrine.

Velka's prominence is unsurprising. The Undead are ashamed to be cursed beings that disrespect their gods, and naturally desire atonement. Velka, beloved by the unwanted and herself forever marked by living proof of her own sin, is the deity most sympathetic to their plight, and thereby enshrined in the city's architecture – even the place where they are to perform the firelinking ritual. The floor of the shrine opens so that Frampt or the actual firelinker can travel to the underground altar, but our eyes will invariably be drawn to the statue presiding over our plunge into deliberate martyrdom. The babe in Velka's arms symbolizes her infidelity while proving it is a burden that she can and has carried, leaving hope for us Undead to also find redemption in our efforts to preserve the First Flame. But Velka isn't a mere idol; the witch's profound influence permeates New Londo to its very core.

The creature that brings us to Firelink Shrine is a giant crow, which even makes it nest high-up in the ruins instead of the adjacent archtree. Recall that Velka is associated with crows, suggesting that the creature may be a familiar or servant acting on her behalf. If so, then it is no accident that the bird ferries us to the ruins of a nation that once venerated its mysterious master. Cut content reveals that a similar giant crow was originally planned to be our means of leaving the area, reinforcing the connection.

Velka's presence is felt even in New Londo's very engineering. Even with human ingenuity, is it any wonder that a country venerating a goddess with an emphasis on reason became so uniquely advanced in such a short time? Cut content reaffirms this. The Ring of Displacement derives from a lost miracle and is described as an example of New Londo's unique culture. Its effect? Substituting damage for the wearer with a chance that the ring will break[8] – the same concept of negating death that Velka's rings of sacrifice demonstrate.

While garbed in red instead of uniform black, New Londo healers wear rather bird-like masks reminiscent of the beaked masks of Velka's priests. The masks not only represent their current duty, but also their "atonement" for the lives that the sealers sacrificed;[9] in other words, for the profound sin that they committed. The association of this mask with penance makes sense for the religious leaders of a culture that worships the Goddess of Sin. Yet despite this, the healers are ultimately sorcerers, not priests, reflecting Velka's preference for reason over faith.

8 "Ring of a now lost miracle of New Londo. Receives damage in the equipper's place, but will have a fixed probability of breaking.

As seen with this ring, New Londo had established a unique culture, but most of it was lost with its submergence." - Ring of Displacement

9 "Mask of the sorcerers of the seal, who submerged New Londo in the watery bottom and sealed the Four Official Kings and Darkwraiths who fell to the Dark.

It exemplifies their resolve to eternally live as sealers and their atonement to those who were sacrificed, but two of the three sealers tired of their eternal duty and have already abandoned New Londo." - Mask of the Sealer



Moreover, their ceremonial jewelry depicts both a sun and a moon, revealing a more holistic perspective on magic better fitting Velka than her fellow gods. With that in mind, the sealers' use of Heavy Soul Arrow and its stronger variant may simply be the result of this all-inclusive attitude, or a direct byproduct of Velka's past association with Seath.

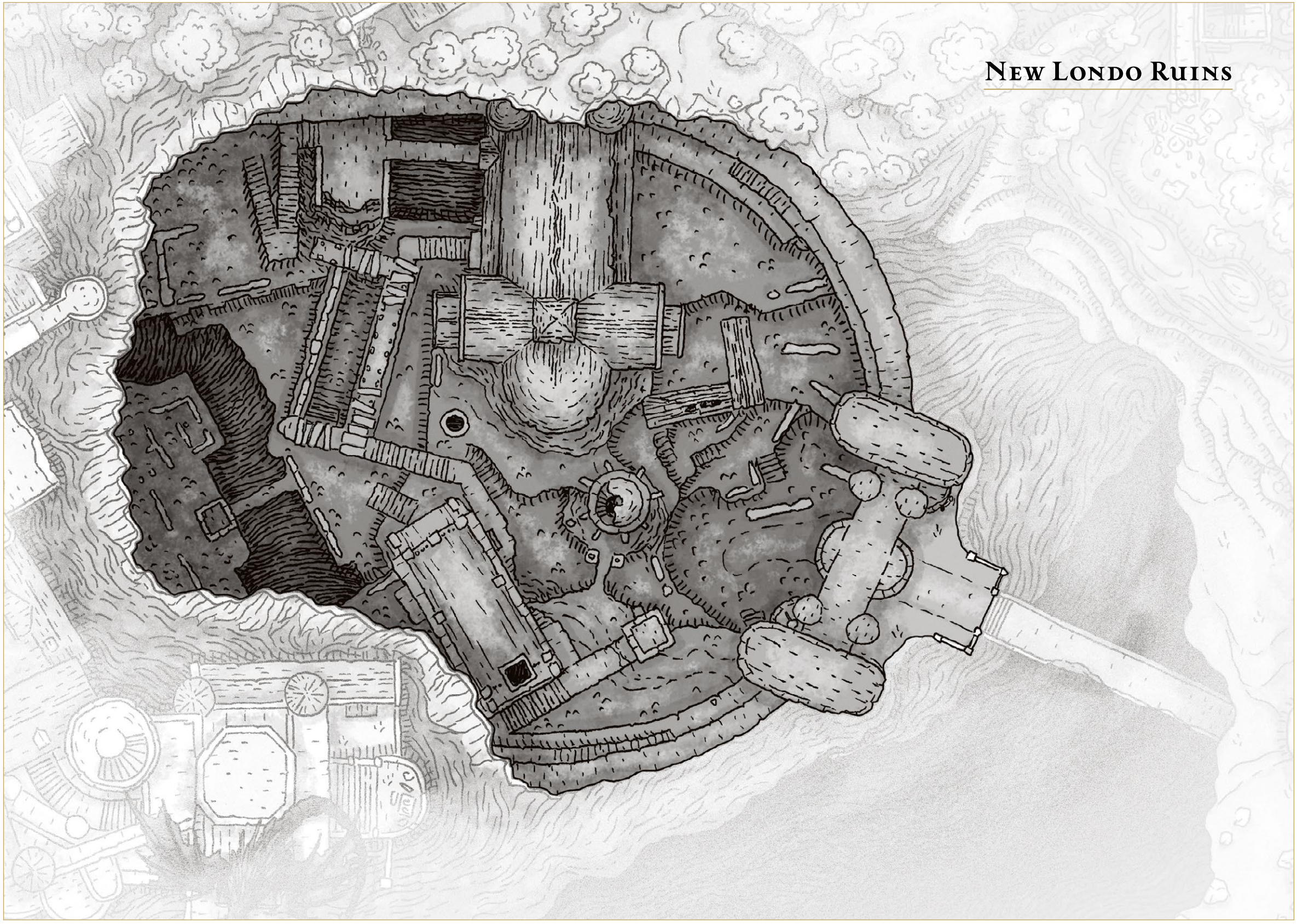
One part of New Londo clearly functioned as a kind of church. The main building is the second largest city structure – a whole three stories high – seated on the highest elevation in the city. This gives it an air of importance, and we see this same emphasis granted to similar religious centers in other cities. Ingward posts himself on the roof of this building, which can only be accessed from a hidden ladder within a fireplace in the top floor's main chamber, suggesting that these spiritual healers were quite familiar with the floorplan. It was likely their base of operations before the city's destruction, and has remained their haven to watch over the New Londo ruins ever since.

While the cramped spaces of the top floor were likely the healers' living quarters and office – seeing regular activity if the pots in the antechamber is any indication – the lowest level of the building contains an open passage straight to another building. Aside from serving as the entrance to the Four Kings' boss room, this building is unique in that it is among the smallest structures we can explore and can only be reached from the church complex. In fact, the building itself is more akin to a tower, with a spiral staircase drilling deep into the earth, though whatever existed at the bottom has long since collapsed into the expansive Abyss the Four Kings lurk within.

This building was likely a chapel, shrine, or sanctum dedicated to Velka. Statues of the goddess and her child adorn the entrance and top its dome, while its sole connection to the parish implies at least some religious significance or purpose, perhaps a private laboratory or ritual chamber.

One cannot separate New Londo's culture of death from the Goddess of Sin, and her cult grew deep roots in this new Undead society. Of course, even if she *had* visited the city, the absence of Velka's actual priests affirms that she didn't keep a concerted presence there. The witch was still a god of Anor Londo, and likely remained with the medials. She was New Londo's spiritual symbol, but the city was ultimately ruled by four men, and both parties were there by the will of Gwyn and his royal government. Just as Lloyd and his church functioned as an intermediary between Anor Londo and mankind as a whole, Velka's role was to keep the cursed faithful and focused, both on their sin and the path to penance through the system that Gwyn so brilliantly set up.

New Londo Ruins



City Layout

The city can be split into five parts. The first is the enormous main gate, which served as the city's primary entrance. The overlook above the gate watches over the entire bridge up to the opposite gate across the Valley of Drakes. There is a corpse with a Composite Bow and arrows lying up there, indicating that it was a security post to monitor traffic in and out of the city, with access to the gate's lever only one lift ride away. The gateway on the opposite end is missing its actual gate and blocked by rubble, but a side route still lets us take a lift to Darkroot Basin, implying that this route was originally intended to connect New Londo to Oolacile before both nations' destruction. Therefore, the opposite gateway was likely the main route connecting New Londo to the world of man, where caravans or armies could pass through these wide passages with ease.

The second zone is the prison complex that we first enter from: a veritable fortress built high up into the cavern wall, clearly separate from the main city. Windows to prison cells line the broken staircase leading to the city proper – Rickert securing himself in one such cell. The primary entrance to the area from the Valley of the Drakes is similarly blocked by an iron-barred door, suggesting that the inhabitants were deliberately kept inside. Much of the upper level has been destroyed or eroded away, but the lift leads straight to Firelink Shrine, and yet another iron-barred cell. Anastacia is the one locked away in that dark space now, but the layout implies that prisoners were commonly transported to the ritual site. This requires that the prison play some role in the firelinking.

As previously established, using Lord Souls to fill the Lordvessel is an addendum to the original plan – it may not have even been called the King's Vessel before Gwyn linked the flame. That most of our marks, including the Four Kings, were still ostensible allies when Gwyn left only emphasizes the dramatic shift in strategy. And while we require the bowl obtained from Gwynevere to be our key to the Kiln, another vessel just like it sits in the Firelink Chamber, along with many other smaller but still oversized cups. In other words, New Londo already had access to vessels for measuring and storing soul power. Perhaps placing a vessel on the altar to create a bonfire was always required to open the Kiln's doors, but the trial to receive Gwynevere's revelation is clearly another later addition. In fact, with no Bells of Awakening during this period, we cannot be sure if there even were trials for cultivating a "Lord of Cinder" before Gwyn's firelinking. The emphasis seems to have been placed entirely on soul harvesting.

And from where would they get these souls? The prisoners, of course.

Both before and after Gwyn's firelinking, an extraordinary concentration of Disparity's power was needed. The ever-growing Undead population would be gathered into one spot under the gods' close purview – incentivized by the persecution and extermination at home. From there, they would be monitored by a council of kings appointed by Anor Londo. Criminals, as judged by this council, would then be filtered out of society and shuffled into the gods' sacrificial rituals above, where their souls would be stored as future offerings for the First Flame in one form or another. This was a slow and methodical process for dealing with the undeath conundrum, perfectly embodying the gods' decision to gradually weed out problematic elements while also perpetuating fire.

But this approach was too slow, and Gwyn needed to sacrifice himself as a stopgap so that the Four Kings had more time. The system likewise had to change in order to accommodate these new circumstances. No longer could New Londo just passively build up soul offerings; it now needed an individual capable of defeating the most powerful Lord inheriting the most powerful Flame. We have no evidence of what trials New Londo might have developed, but the prison was likely still central to this updated system if only for its soul harvesting. Much like the Northern Undead Asylum in the present era, the gods used prison facilities to help gather necessary resources. And like with the asylum demons, they supported these institutes.

The building adjacent to the shrine proper houses a large number of pots, indicating that it was some sort of storehouse. This building directly connects to the lift for reaching Sen's Fortress, further suggesting regular contact between the two nations. Maybe they were storing the sacrifices for inspection, or maybe the royal capital regularly delivered new supplies for the mission. Whatever the case, the gods maintained the Undead city's function as a human slaughterhouse.

After crossing the makeshift bridge to a defense tower and then another one to the city proper, we reach the third zone: a ruined district of halls and rooms. One small chamber is segregated from the rest by a bridge and contains the corpse of a Fire Keeper. The body lays on its back with arms calmly resting atop the chest, suggesting that this is a burial chamber. This respectful entombment makes sense for an Undead city where Fire Keepers would help prevent the general populace



from hollowing. The building may be a mausoleum, but its elevated position and direct connection to the city's most predominant building could also imply a residential district for the upper class. We begin to see the cursed ghosts from this juncture – especially as we approach the corpse of the Fire Keeper – adding to this notion of a housing area. In that case, the Keeper's "tomb" may have originally been her lodging, and only later converted into her final resting place.



Leading up from this residential area is the most prominent building in the city. It has a total of four floors, the topmost serving largely as a lobby to reach other levels or overlook them from the center chamber. Among these lower levels is a side route to the healers' church. The bottom floor uniquely features wooden rooms with barred windows and ornamentation lining what is otherwise just a sizable hall. Given that the surviving ruins are mostly stone, these wooden structures stand out. The same material is also used for the large shack behind the main building, and it is doubly notable that both wooden structures are filled with the same pots. The shack in particular leads to the main gate, indicating that this was some system for trade and storage of goods. The building's only other major gateway leads to an open courtyard, further indicating that a decent volume of traffic passed through its wide halls from both ends.

While the zone's elevation, size, complexity, and proximity to both residences and the healers' "church" suggests it was the city's most important building, it definitely wasn't a palace or otherwise traditional city center. The Very Large Ember is found on the third floor, meaning that New Londo's high-quality flames were employed there. The lesser version of this same ember is found in the kitchen area of the Depths. This placement indicates that the ember wasn't originally used for forging but instead for food preparation – where good fire is needed, especially for cooking meat. If the New Londo ember was employed for a similar purpose, that would make the third level part-kitchen. This kitchen and all other paths lead back to the bottom floor, which sees a lot of traffic and takes delivery of imported goods. All of this suggests

that the building was a kind of market or food hall for Undead. Indeed, Ingward outright dubs the building a dining hall (食堂) in cut dialogue.

The ghosts' weapons of choice support this food hall notion. Both blades are daggers, cursed much like their wielders, but where did they acquire this stockpile of peculiar knives to fight with and why? Item descriptions designate both weapons as *hamono* (刃物), which can be essentially any bladed object, but commonly refers to cutlery. The blade wielded by ghost women even resembles a kitchen knife,[10] which is a classic motif in Japanese horror. Likewise, the weapons held by the ghost men look like serrated knives designed to butcher meat during food preparation.[11] Perhaps they were public provisions, but the blades were undoubtedly common household items before New Londo's destruction, only later repurposed as the weapons of vengeful spirits.

It all indicates that food played a central role in the Undead city's culture. Why would the gods build Undead a city where dining was their way of life? Likely to experiment on the citizens.

We cannot doubt that New Londo's Undead were of an unnatural variety. The ghosts' elemental resistances are comparable to other Undead save for their unusually high lightning resistance. The ghost women use their baby's corpse to shoot lightning – though it deals magic damage similar to Seath's snake-men. If even the children had a strong lightning affinity, then they must have been infused with the power of sunlight. This can't be a result of the sealing since neither the Darkwraiths nor the mass of souls enemies exhibit these phenomena despite sharing the same long-term exposure to the seal. In other words, the ghosts' affinity predates the sealing and provides a snapshot of their condition in life.

Anor Londo is the only party that could have introduced lightning to the citizenry, and ingesting the power would be an excellent means to transfer that affinity to them over time and even pass it on to their children – "you are what you eat," as they say. Perhaps the populace were even knowing participants; the blades of male ghosts have bells tied to their hilts similar to the ones tied around talismans that the Way of White provides the average believer.

Vamos also implies that New Londo traded for Izalith's Large Flame Ember at one point. But this ember – used to imbue materials with a fire element – is described as a "secret rite" from long ago,[12] and the gods' monopoly on fire's power is the primary reason for their historical success. Why allow trade secrets to be shared with a human civilization? The flames clearly weren't used to forge fire weapons in New Londo. Likewise, no such ember is found in the dining hall's ruins.

10 "Sharp cutlery that ghosts of New Londo possess along with a corpse. Slashes enemies repeatedly.
It is one of the cursed weapons and can deal damage to ghosts." - Ghost Blade

11 "Jagged cutlery that ghosts of New Londo possess. Stabs enemies repeatedly.
It is one of the cursed weapons and can deal damage to ghosts." - Jagged Ghost Blade

12 "Source flame required for evolving weapons. The Large Flame Source Flame is a secret rite of old and handled only by the blacksmith who knows the old manners of production.
Can evolve +5 fire weapons and enhance them up to +10. It is supreme for fire weapons." - Large Flame Ember

Perhaps the ember's presence was part of an earlier effort to increase fire's power within Undead as a way to combat the Darksign.

The Dark has already proved susceptible to the power of fire and lightning, so the seals of fire at the root of the curse could be strengthened and further suppress the resurging darkness within the human body, at least in theory. New Londo was established to gather Undead and manage the curse. Perhaps Anor Londo applied fire and later lightning to Undead as part of a larger effort to reduce hollowing, or better understand what it was that the deities were dealing with. Considering that Velka was the city's patron goddess, research and experimentation there wouldn't be beyond the realm of expectations. Whatever the case, it is undoubtable that the dining hall wasn't just a quirk of their culture.

The final zone of note is of course the healers' church and adjacent sanctum, which bears an even greater significance considering its juxtaposition next to the dining hall. Examination precedes treatment, of course, and the sorcerers' apparent loyalty to the gods and sorcery complement the medials' desire to research and experiment. This is in no way to suggest that the healers were shams and that their desire to cure the ill and invalid wasn't genuine. Ingward and Yulva both demonstrate concern for their fellow man's wellbeing expected of physicians. But in its totality, we can see that New Londo was very much another cog in the gods' machine, organized into an effective system with various checks and safety measures designed to minimize the chance of complete disaster. The healers with their ties to Velka are no exception.

But no system is perfect, and Gwyn's choice of governors in the end proved to be disastrous.

Temptation Afoul

According to Ingward's Japanese dialogue, the Four Kings were simply "weak men" who didn't have much fortitude of character.[13] As the sealer recounts, Kaathe took advantage of their weakness to turn them evil after giving them the power to devour life. The world serpent makes us a similar offer after elucidating the truth about man's Dark history, so there is no reason to doubt Ingward's words in that regard. Kaathe saw an opportunity to derail Gwyn's plans by converting all four into agents of the Dark, and he succeeded.

13 "... The Four Small Kings, long ago, were simply... weak men. But at one point, a Dark serpent took advantage of their weakness and gave them the power of life-eating, turning them evil..." - Ingward

14 "Art of the Darkwraiths who were tempted by Kaathe. Performs the art of Spiritsucker that steals humanity and also becomes a special shield via the Dark Soul.

In the case of the great people of old, they were able to rob even a holy man overflowing with humanity of it all at once." - Dark Hand

The Four Kings broke free of their subservience to Anor Londo and set out on their own to overthrow the gods and rule over the universe as the Lords of Dark. Since Kaathe considers Lifedrain to be the power of the Dark Lord, he naturally taught them the art, and the four then spread Kaathe's knowledge to their knights. As a result of them becoming more acquainted with their true soul, Darkwraiths bleed a black, viscous substance, which isn't considered blood by the game's toggle options. They fully embraced the Abyss their four lords offered, reintegrating their shackled humanity to the whole. The conversion occurred as early as just after Gwyn's firelinking. The Dark Hand refers to the knights as the "great people of old" in its Japanese description,[14] and Leeroy's apparent history with them requires them to exist within the Way of White's first few decades at most.

This "fall" to the Dark was accompanied by a similar decline in morals. The Red Sign Soapstone states that some didn't forget their knightly chivalry,[15] meaning that many did. With their new power, the knights terrorized the world of man and gave their weapons and armor the negative association with "Darkwraiths" that persists to this day – including tales that their skeletal masks are their actual face.[16] Their crimes included sucking the life from holy men replete with humanity – likely Way of White clergy given that New Londo's religious leaders were sorcerers. Church paladin Leeroy apparently encountered these knights and acquired one of their red eye orbs since he can invade us as a dark spirit; they may even be his cause of death and undeath. Concept art portrays Darkwraiths on horseback – a necessary mode of travel to other nations – and Kirk is referred to as an "infamous" Darkwraith,[17] meaning he became widely renowned in the world of man. Ingward even alludes that they have been "released into this world" before and must never be again.[18]

It would be counterproductive for the knights to have fed on their own populace, especially when many likely had friends and families within the community. Given that the entire population subsequently drowned, there is even less chance that the Darkwraiths' reputation spread from within. In short, the knights must have raided other human states to pillage life and humanity for themselves. Some maintained their honor and let their victims volunteer with a fighting chance via red sign soapstones, but most assaulted their victims without warning. The horrors that they performed



15 "Even amongst those who fell to the Dark as Darkwraiths, there are those who haven't forgotten the pride and chivalry of man. This is the means for such individuals." - Red Sign Soapstone

16 "Mask of the Darkwraiths who fell to the Dark, former knights of New Londo.

Maybe because of the skull-like appearance, it is handed down that the object partially transformed into the real body for the Darkwraiths of old." - Dark Mask

17 "Armor of the infamous Darkwraith 'Spike Knight' Kirk. Sharp spikes protrude tightly on the surface.

If you roll with this sinister armor equipped, it becomes its own attack and deals damage to enemies. It is just the thing for the murderous Kirk." - Armor of Thorns

18 "This New Londo was destroyed simply to seal the Darkwraiths. Take this to heart. The Darkwraiths are the enemy of man and all that lives with a soul. They must never again be released into this world..." - Ingward

with the Dark seared their skeletal appearance into the minds of people everywhere. They were no longer recognized as the proud knights of New Londo but the monstrous Darkwraiths.

The red eye orbs are the "art" *of* the Darkwraiths, implying that they were first to employ invasions. (*DS3* makes this implication explicit.) The question, then, is what these orbs are and where they came from. Like the rest of their power, the answer likely lies in the Dark. Ingward affirms that the Four Kings live in the Abyss, which they apparently spawned within Velka's sanctum. Since the void hasn't spread beyond there, it was likely created intentionally and under their control, though their legs unnaturally stretching and fading into the darkness below shows that it still has an independent pull. They don't permit trespassers and have morphed into grotesque beings as a result of long-term exposure. Why steep in Dark for so long unless there is something to gain? The most reasonable answer would be that they wanted to increase their power, which fits their much larger forms and various Dark abilities that they employ in battle. It also fits the creation of new works derived from the Dark, like red eye orbs.



Eye orbs outwardly appear like a living mass of flesh with an eye, which seems to home in on a specific person based on the orb's location and the most ideal spot to cross the gaps in time. But cracked orbs prove that these magic devices are in fact made of stone rather than organic material. When broken apart, we see that they are solid mineral throughout. A rock constitution explains the orb's ability to anchor us into different timespaces, but this rock undeniably has a will if its independently moving eye is any indication. And this living magic item is the work of agents of the Dark who are conveniently motivated to target and steal from humans. The Dark can generate new life and manipulate spacetime, so creating the eye orbs falls perfectly within its jurisdiction. And we see that these orbs can be produced naturally with Anastacia.

Despite the numerous corpses found throughout our journey, Anastacia's body alone leaves behind a Black Eye Orb after her death. This "mysterious" orb leads us straight to her killer and thus provides us the

opportunity to retrieve her soul and return it to her body, which will then be fully restored even beyond the state she was in at her time of death. Whether or not the latter is due to the healing powers of light or Dark, the orb itself could only have been spawned from the Fire Keeper herself. There is no reason for her killer to leave a trail to follow, and Lautrec even insults our intelligence if we pursue him. So, why does the Black Eye Orb form? It likely relates to the circumstances of her death.

While other Fire Keeper corpses still have their souls, Anastacia's soul is stolen as the prize for her murder. And, of course, a Fire Keeper soul contains a high concentration of humanity. It seems that the Dark comprising Anastacia's soul created the Black Eye Orb as a reaction to it being stolen after its hosts' death, regardless of her actual will – the orb manifesting the soul's desire for justice.

If the Dark within a Fire Keeper's soul can independently spawn a Black Eye Orb, then an entire Abyss would allow the Four Kings to mass produce such orbs. But rather than an orb, naturally created to retrieve a stolen soul, the great leaders of New Londo developed red orbs that sought souls regardless of owner. The kings' knights could then pillage humanity from just about anyone while minimizing the risks to their own lives.

This also explains why the only red eye orbs we can acquire before joining the Darkwraiths are the cracked variants barely functional enough for one jump across space and time before becoming completely powerless.[19] The orbs were created in New Londo's Abyss that none could readily access, and so humans unaffiliated with the Dark typically collect the orbs left in the world of man, most of which would have been recovered already damaged from slain or captured Darkwraiths. (*DS2* reinforces the notion by lacking any undamaged red eye orbs in the Darkwraiths' absence.)

Furthermore, Darkwraiths encountered in New Londo don't drop any orbs, so the art was likely only provided to knights sent to the world of man. While there was still a supply in the homeland, it was spoiled by the flooding. One corpse carrying five hangs over a well in the church courtyard, and Kaathe will sell more as part of the Darkwraith covenant.

With the ability to manifest as dark spirits in their skeletal armor, it is no wonder that they became reviled as "wraiths" of the Dark. In the *Design Works* interview, Miyazaki notes that Kirk's thorn armor was inspired by the trial of the 77 rings from *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*. The developers thought to add spikes to the metal rings claimed from that trial's 77 participants in battle, leading to Kirk's design. This slight deviation from the original concept, as Miyazaki himself admits, still leaves the

19 **"Item for playing online. Makes you invade another world. (Cannot be used with Hollows.)**
You can acquire humanity if you defeat the owner of the world you invade there.
This cracked red orb is meant to temporarily imitate the art of the Darkwraiths who were tempted by Kaathe."
- Cracked Red Eye Orb

possibility of the spiky armor representing a trial among New Londo knights. But if so, then it only highlights Kirk's ruthlessness and barbarity to earn his equipment; either way, his weapon[20] and armor embody the threat that the Darkwraiths represent. They were infamous and feared for their cruel and merciless slaughter throughout the world of man.

As Ingward recounts, the Darkwraiths were such a threat to the world that the sealers needed to sacrifice their whole civilization to stop them. Invading others is certainly terrible in its own right, but was there more to it?

It is doubtful that the Four Kings could keep their new alliance with the Dark secret for very long. At the very least, the elite class would catch wind of the government's defection. And who is to say that the knights were the only converts? Eating was a large part of New Londo's culture, and there seems to have been a change in diet.

Between the shack behind the food hall and the main gate is an open plaza piled with corpses. While one may initially assume them to be New Londo's citizens drawn in by the flood waters draining out into the valley, this idea doesn't hold up to closer scrutiny. First off, the corpses pile up in every corner of the plaza when the angle of the water's flow should make this impossible for the bodies directly opposite the main gate. There was nothing blocking them, so why have they piled against the walls opposite the flow? And if we examine the corpses themselves, we discover that none of them bear the heart roots common to Hollows.

Every other human corpse we come across looks like such a Hollow, including those we can find *in* New Londo mere meters from these corpse piles. One can argue that not every single body necessarily belongs to an Undead, but the fact that these piles don't use the same generic corpse as every other instance can't be discounted. That is to say, it strongly indicates them to all be cadavers of humans *not* afflicted with the curse. And in that case, they cannot be the citizens of the Undead city we find them in.

Recall that the ghosts of New Londo are in fact tangible entities, whose cursed hands we can lop off to utilize for our own benefit. These ethereal spirits *are* the actual citizens, body and soul. We cannot find corpses of the Undead citizenry in the floodwaters, for they have escaped the seal in death due to their curse by grudge. By contrast, the corpse pile lying against Velka's sanctum consists of skeletons, many of whom are still wearing generic armor. In other words, while the New Londo knights were pilfering humanity from neighboring nations, they were also bringing back the bodies of those that they slew. The corpses were then piled up along



20 **"Favored sword of the infamous Darkwraith 'Spike Knight' Kirk. Sharp spikes protrude tightly on the blade.**

A sinister weapon that forces massive bleeding due to the effect of those sharp spikes." - Barbed Straight Sword

the edges of the plaza, probably so the bodies wouldn't severely restrict movement around the square. Why bring back so many bodies from the countries that they terrorized? Because they planned to make use of them.

Consider the location and circumstances that the bodies were dumped in. From the main gate, there is the corpse-ridden plaza. From there, we climb up the stairs to the shack serving as a storehouse. From there, we head into the dining hall. This is an efficient setup for receiving and processing goods and ingredients brought in by trade. But from there, we cross the courtyard into the church littered with bones, from which we then head to the sanctum where skeletal remains seem to have been haphazardly dumped by the wayside. The connection is obvious. Citizens previously fed only what the gods had preapproved were now provided something *darker* to feast upon, ingesting the souls – regular and dark alike – lacing human flesh and blood in place of devouring life directly from their palm. The Four Kings likewise partook of this cannibalism, leaving only bones to discard. However, their gluttony seems to have been more about luxury, while the citizenry's communal dining seems to have been more about the state regulating the flow of souls.

We can see this from the placement of the masses of souls. They are only encountered in the dining hall and the bottom floor of the church immediately preceding the sanctum, framing these mountains of corpses as those about to be eaten. Like the ghosts of the citizenry, these sealed souls' collective enmity over their deaths has reanimated their flesh, coalescing the bodies into a giant version of the crawling carrion formed in similar conditions in the Depths – only these creatures are far Darker in nature. The masses are weak to holy weapons, and a corpse behind the one in the dining hall carries humanity. Taken together, this variant of crawling carrion is infused with the Dark stemming from humanity, implying that the bodies were prepared specifically to nourish the indulgers with dark souls. Indeed, that was likely the Four Kings' motive for these horrors.

Offering Snuggly a red eye orb nets us a purging stone. Aside from reaffirming the orb's mineral composition and man-made origin, the stone's description reminds us of lifting curses. The invasions weren't simply a mindless rampage across the land. The Darkwraiths wanted to stave off the curse threatening their sanity, as does any Undead. And the souls that they harvested were, in Kaathe's own words, a means to that end, a way of breaking the gods' shackles over them. With the power to control the Dark and achieve immortality without fear of mental decay, New Londo could thrive independently of Anor Londo's support. No longer would they need to rely on bonfires and

Fire Keepers, sacrificing their humanity to maintain the illusion of normality. The Dark was their true nature, and they could satiate its curse with the spirits sucked out from their fellow man.

And so, like the four Lords had first done with souls, the Four Kings shared their newfound soul power to solidify the hierarchy. Lifedrain was shared with the knights for both practical reasons and because good dictators always pay their soldiers. Others interested in escaping hollowing would be recipients of the governments' generosity, but never gifted the power to personally procure the means – how else would the rabble be made to continue obeying their betters? The Four Kings and their loyal knights thus became the gatekeepers to mankind's freedom from the gods, and the enlightened masses were now hungry to know the Dark, in more ways than one.

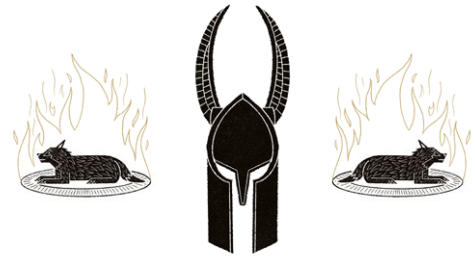
Of course, without the god's moral platitudes holding them back, a newly emancipated civilization could so easily slip into vice, and that is exactly what happened with the society's descent into cannibalism. Greed, hedonism, murder, sin – these were all just human nature. There was no higher calling, or moral absolutism, just a power struggle between oppressor and oppressed. New Londo moved to become the oppressor of their fellow oppressed, and perhaps of their former oppressors themselves in time. Until then, they would indulge in their cardinal nature, imbibing the Dark in the most grotesque way imaginable.

Fault for this can be partially laid on Kaathe, who is commonly described as having "tempted" the Darkwraiths, drawing upon the image of the Biblical temptation of Adam and Eve by the serpent and the fruit of forbidden knowledge. He is, at minimum, indifferent to the people that would be inevitably killed by anyone willing to learn Lifedrain. In the broadest strokes, Kaathe sanctioned wholesale genocide on the assumption that it would benefit his chosen Dark Lords. His approach bred the self-serving mentality that New Londo exhibits. However, not *everything* that transpired was Kaathe's intention, nefarious or otherwise.

Recall that the world serpents act in accordance with the natural order to the universe, and that logic is for Dark to overtake fire. Kaathe teaches humans how to use the power of the Dark Soul because it is their birthright denied to them by Gwyn and the gods of fire, and it is in human nature to take as beings of the Dark. From Kaathe's perspective, such actions follow the moral good as the universe deems it. While this explains Kaathe's motives, the serpent's account of the subsequent events partitions the Four King's actions from his moral standard. In his Japanese dialogue, the world serpent demeans the four

as failures, conceited with the power he revealed but not understanding the value of his revelation.[21] In other words, the four didn't heed Kaathe's teachings. The snake makes the exact same claim if we side with Frampt, equating the fours' actions to choosing enslavement to the gods and their fire. Both paths miss the point of the "truth" in Kaathe's eyes, the reality that fire fades and Dark remains.

As Ingward is hesitant to admit, the four weren't men of integrity. They heard Kaathe's revelations but were only really interested in his offer of power and freedom. This made them easy to sway to the Dark, yet failed to substantiate any loyalty. The Four Kings did whatever advanced their power-hungry ambitions at solely their own convenience, sowed unnecessary chaos in the world of man, and never reached the Kiln to kickstart the Age of Dark. How was this to the benefit of man's evolution on the world stage? How did this follow the logic of the universe? Their destruction was purely the fault of their own capriciousness.



Consider how we convince Kaathe that we are his champion. The world serpent will only reveal himself when we slay the Four Kings of our own initiative, not under Frampt's direction as a champion for the Age of Fire's perpetuation. Simply put, we have to acknowledge that the Four Kings are evil without acting as the gods' mindless puppet in order to be worthy of the Dark Lord mantle. Kaathe believes that our independent actions are evidence that we will be "different", both physically and morally superior to the Four Kings who failed to take his revelations to heart and further tarnished the Dark's reputation, scaring humans all across the region with tales of skeletal, life-stealing revenants. The gods now had their Dark-infused boogeyman while the world serpents achieved nothing. Kaathe needed to refine his criteria if his race were to guide man to their rightful place in the world. The King of the new age *had* to be someone of integrity, receptive to Kaathe's truth independent of personal gains. To a point, the serpent sought a philosopher king, and perhaps even found that person in someone who wasn't even a king to begin with.[22]

21 **"Those fools failed. Without understanding the value of the truth, they simply became conceited with power… I have hopes for you." - Kaathe**

22 **"Magnificent… You responded well to my, the world serpent's, guidance. You are without a doubt the true King of Man, the King of Dark. Now, go. To kill the going-out Gwyn. I, Kaathe, shall wait here. In order to serve you upon return and begin the Age of Dark…" - Kaathe**

Seal It All

The Four Kings and the Darkwraiths' heinous actions prompted the local sorcerers to take extreme measures. The church's proximity to the sanctum makes it impossible for the government's actions to go unnoticed, and Ingward is perfectly aware of Kaathe's involvement in his kings' corruption. Perhaps they too heard the serpent's revelations and initially sided with their rulers. Bones lie around the church's fireplace chamber, yet they are too high above water level to be victims of the flooding. Why then have corpses in this chamber specifically? Perhaps to cook meat at the fireplace? Indeed, the Four Kings wouldn't be able to access the sanctum without the church's cooperation. And if the sorcerers did participate in New Londo's cannibalism, then Ingward, Yulva, and their final compatriot must have been a secret splinter faction, disillusioned with the Dark after the state began terrorizing innocent civilians to commit further depravities.

With the lever to the main gate just down the road from the church, they were in the perfect position to act. Once they acquired the key,[23] the healers locked the door to the lever and flooded the city. No one escaped. Since the sealers alone held the key, there was no way to access the lever and drain out the water into the valley – like when we later break the seal. The floodwaters destroyed much of the city and drowned most of the citizens, but only succeeded in imprisoning the Darkwraiths and their Abyss-lurking masters. Considering that they alone possess the Dark Hand, perhaps the power of the Dark Soul is to blame. But if so, there still has to be more to their containment.

The Abyss was also submerged along with the sanctum, which should have turned the underground chamber into a giant well. But after we drain the city's floodwaters, the Abyss and sanctum lack any water to speak of, even as lower parts of the city remain flooded. Therefore, the Abyss either somehow kept the water out, leaving the sanctum only superficially submerged, or the Dark had successfully drained the water into itself, which would have required the seal to constantly resupply itself while it remained active. There is no evidence of still-flowing water coming in to substantiate the latter option, so the former seems more likely. The sealers knew that this would be the result since they chose to atone for those sacrificed by guarding the seal thereafter.

If the seal wasn't an assassination attempt gone overkill, then there is probably some special quality to the water; it is hard to imagine the Four Kings and their Abyss being stopped otherwise. The water suffers neither any apparent corruption nor obvious resistance by those trapped

23 "Key for opening the floodgates of New Londo, which are the seal of the Four Official Kings who fell to the Dark.

To seal the Four Official Kings and the Darkwraiths, the sealers submerged the city and all its people in the watery bottom. Thus, New Londo's rich culture was lost and its people died and became cursed ghosts." - Key to the Seal



inside. Nor do the countless submerged bodies and bones float to the top or even seem to move. The only beings able to escape this water take a non-corporeal form, leaving the Four Kings and their heavily armored Darkwraiths trapped at the bottom. In other words, this water must also be in some manner resistant to the Dark. We know Gwynevere can imbue holy water with remarkable healing properties, so perhaps the gods specially blessed water that the sealers then used to trap the Dark, maybe even temporarily freeze it. However, if this water was designed to be a failsafe for New Londo's fall, surely the corrupt government would have sought to disable a system put in place explicitly to stop them.

Where did the water come from? New Londo has a well, so it could have originated from below the city, but that would have required pumping

a tremendous volume of water at an incredible speed to be effective. Firelink Shrine is located directly above New Londo and also has a well, meaning that there are some pockets of water between the ritual spot and city proper. In that case, releasing large volumes of it wouldn't require any sort of pumping system; gravity would do the work. The *Design Works* interview recounts that Firelink Shrine was originally imagined as a water temple before the developing setting forced FromSoftware to drain practically all the water from it. Maybe this idea inspired the developers to flood the city below it from above? Regardless, the observable destruction supports the notion. The dining hall and church at the highest level have intact roofs yet everything in the lower levels has been reduced to walls and floors, which could result from pressure from large volumes of water being dumped upon them like a flash flood.



The sealers must have known or had control over where the water would flood in from since they guaranteed their own safety within the city. The emergency exit to the church roof, where we find Ingward, gives the perfect view to safely observe the destruction, assuming the owners knew the flooding wouldn't reach there. This is emphasized by the clutter of ghosts found in the same room as the hidden fireplace exit, including one woman with her dead child. If these citizens flocked to the church to seek shelter or guidance during the initial flooding, they would have taken the emergency exit had they known it existed. Instead, they were trapped. The sealers may have escaped to the roof to avoid a watery grave, but they alone knew of this way out, condemning many innocents to their fate.

The sealing of New Londo was likely a crude plan executed suddenly and out of desperation. A blanket quarantine implies a lack of time or preparations for a more precise, conclusive solution – planning also risks the enemy receiving forewarning. The government was corrupt, and already reigning terror upon fellow humans outside its borders. The sealers clearly considered containing the threat as soon as possible to be the greater good, regardless of the collateral damage. This meant that decisive action was needed, and they had neither the time to alert Anor

Londo of the situation and await a military response nor the capability to eliminate the Dark knights and their vile masters themselves. The sealers felt obligated to atone after the fact because they potentially sacrificed an unnecessary number of lives for their quick solution.

Opportunity may have also played a role in this decision. There are four corpses of hollowed knights lying beneath the waters. We come across the first along the conventional route to the Four Kings, a Darkwraith standing over him. Further along the route we find two more as we approach the bottom floor of the church – one of which even lays along the church staircase. The fourth body can be found outside the church wall on the farthest side. All seem to have been heading for the sanctum where the Abyss and its masters reside. And all were apparently all stopped, with lethal force, by the Darkwraiths. The only knights that would be there are locals, so some apparently attempted to challenge their lords. There were knights who maintained their chivalric honor despite accepting the powers of Dark, so a few ultimately choosing loyalty to the gods over their lieges is possible, especially considering the depths that their masters stooped to.

If the knights were busy fighting amongst themselves, then the sealers had a suitable distraction to enact their plan without much interference. And the regime was certainly strained for resources of all kinds, which could have further precipitated violence. There are two chests containing titanite chunks in New Londo, one behind an illusory wall in a small building near the church and the other within the church itself by the sanctum. It seems that after cutting ties with the gods, the government began rationing the remaining titanite, perhaps desperate to maintain its military capacity – or maybe even create red eye orbs, based on their proximity to the sanctum.

Once the healers put their plan into action, New Londo was submerged and its rich culture was lost. Some citizens tried escaping to higher ground, but to no avail. We see a number of Hollows lazing about, despairing, or even praying as we enter the prison zone. These are most likely survivors who made it above ground during the flooding. Cut content reveals that the lift to this zone was originally planned to be locked, and it likely was when the sealing took place. The nearby broken staircase leads to the flooded city below, and the wooden bridge we cross to the rest is too makeshift and conveniently above water to have predated the calamity. This means many citizens escaped the initial destruction only to then be trapped and left to hollow before any help eventually arrived. They aren't violent, so they have been left there along with the ruins of the city for centuries, ignored as part of the scenery. Such was the fate of the once impressive kingdom of the Undead.

Cleanup Effort

Once Anor Londo realized what was happening, it made contact with the sealers and took the necessary precautions. The exterior switch to the main gate is missing from its fulcrum and nowhere to be found, preventing anyone from breaking the seal from outside New Londo's walls. On top of that, debris blocks the main route to the ruined nation so that no one from the world of man can enter the valley easily – even if they did, wyverns now patrol the area. This is unlikely to be the work of the sealers with their limited time and resources. The New Londo government would have noticed such overt movements ahead of time. In contrast, the gods of Anor Londo are both in close proximity to the Undead city and have an obvious motive to keep the Darkwraiths sealed away.

The sealers must be in contact with Anor Londo since Ingward implies that he is familiar with Frampt and holds great respect for him in his dialogue,[24] even trusting the snake's faith in us slaying the Darkwraiths freed from the seal. New Londo was an important part of Gwyn's original plan for the firelinking ritual, so no surprise that they know its loudest proponent. However, Ingward immediately infers our objective is to kill the Four Kings after learning that we have acquired the Lordvessel[25] when no such trial existed prior to New Londo's downfall, and the sealers who had dedicated themselves to watching over the seal show an implicit disregard for the possibility of someone breaking it from the outside. Thus, they must have also been receiving instructions from Frampt to coordinate both their efforts and keep the current Undead mission running smoothly.

As for the sealers themselves, their guard duty seems to consist of keeping the key to the seal on their person and patrolling the ruins. Both the makeshift bridge and several walls of the ruins are illuminated by torches burning blue fire, suggesting the use of magic to light them. While it is possible that this kind of lighting was standard practice in New Londo, the sealers would still need to rekindle the fires at some point throughout the centuries, especially for the bridge built after the flooding. The sealers may even be responsible for creating the bridge in the first place, perhaps just to heal the ailments of the occasional friendly visitor. The Ring of Blind Ghosts indicates that the sealers used such magic bands to move around without being seen by the violent spirits,[26] but the item was ultimately cut, so they may well be risking their lives committing to this mission.



24 "... You have broken the seal, huh...?... No, I have no regrets. I believe in you, and Frampt." - Ingward

25 "Oh, you... really have the King's Vessel...? I see, so you are... I know your objective. You have business with the Four Small Kings, whom I seal. This is the key to the seal. The Four Small Kings are in the deepest part of these ruins. With this key, you can break the seal... open the floodgates, and proceed." - Ingward

26 "Ring possessed by a sealer of New Londo. Makes you undiscoverable to cursed ghosts.
The sealers were originally three people, but two tired of their eternal duty and have already abandoned New Londo." - Ring of Blind Ghosts

The Darkwraiths out stalking the world of man at the time survived the destruction of their homeland – Kirk invades us in the present era, long after the city was sealed. Even ignoring the Darkwraiths imprisoned in the painting world, Kirk is unlikely to be the only one who happened to be away from home when it was submerged. But, without a base of operations, they were disorganized and drifted in separate directions, some ultimately captured by the gods and thrown into the Ariamis prison. As for Kirk, he has recently abandoned old allegiances and joined up with the Chaos Servants. But why has this fallen knight been hunting humanity in Izalith's interest?

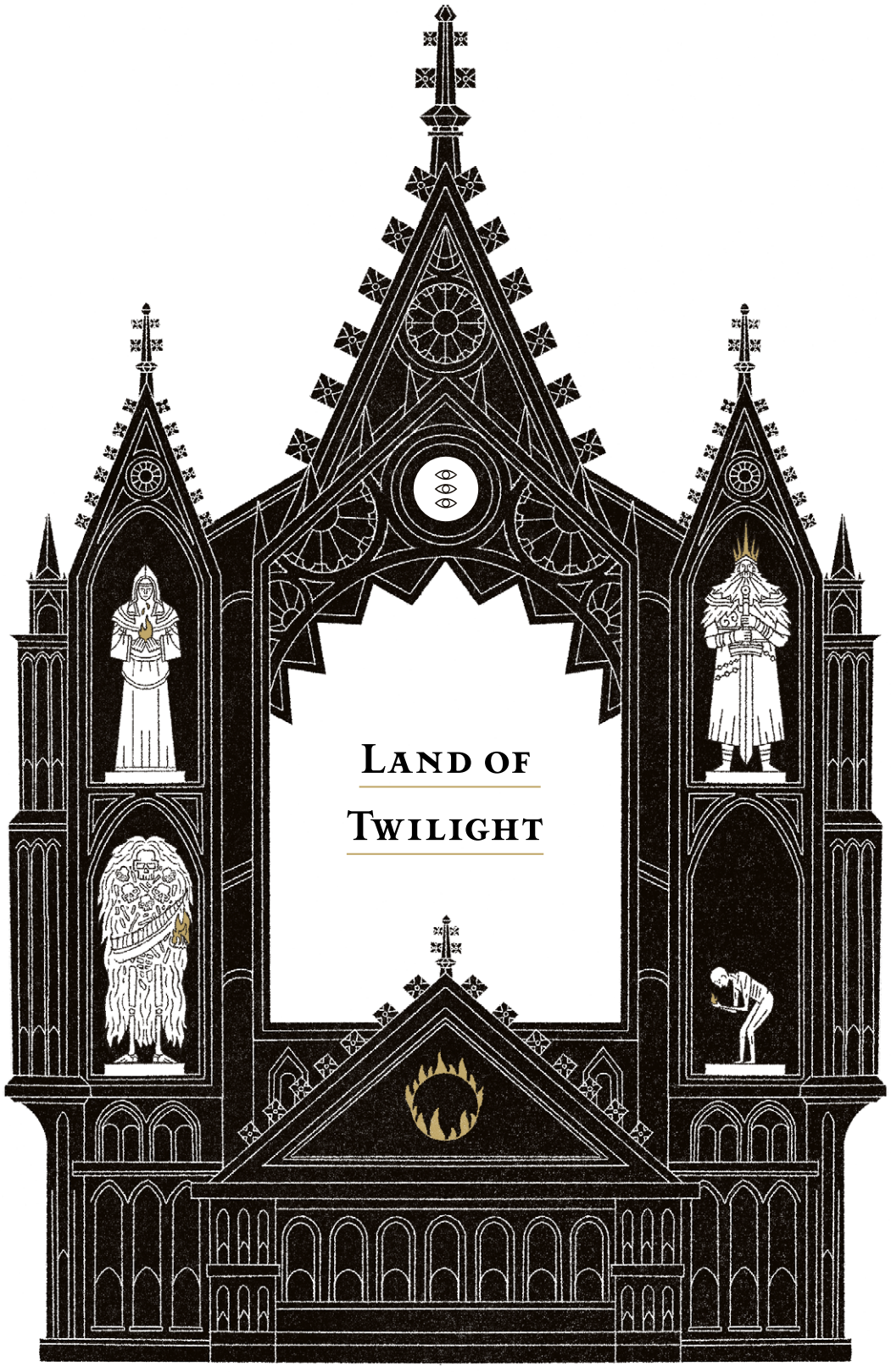
Many have inferred Kirk's motive to be love for the Fair Lady. Indeed, she has garnered many followers due to her compassion, so it is possible for the Darkwraith to also be touched by that kindness. But Kirk has slaughtered countless people to serve himself and the whims of his masters, permanently stained his reputation as a malevolent sinner, and become a vagabond with no purpose. Dedicating his life to one who is "better" than him and helping to alleviate her suffering may well fill the hole in his heart that many Undead like him have gained. He may even be outright hungry for her affection himself, hoping he can garner the goddess' favor through harvesting humanity on the witches' behalf. (He has since joined another covenant dedicated to a similarly motherly figure in need as of *DS3*.) This religiosity, befitting one named "church", adds another layer to the legend of the ill-reputed Darkwraith, perhaps even hinting at a path to redemption. He, and a few others like him are all that is left of their fallen homeland, for good or ill.

On Reflection

I had previously alluded to the link between the Dark and vampirism, and nowhere does this manifest more clearly than in New Londo. In the Darkwraiths, the gods have their boogeyman to brandish against the rest of mankind. The horrors on display in their city provide a window into just how terrifying the Dark can be, with the life of even our fellow man becoming second to the power obtained in exchange for it. Feeding off one another like sharks in the womb, even in a figurative sense, is almost too natural an impulse. Human nature is a scary thing, and it should not be underestimated just because we might be suspicious of its denouncers.

Valley of Drakes





Land of Sorcery

As we explore Darkroot Garden, we see a number of overgrown ruins and relics left over from the now destroyed country of Oolacile, known for its unique brand of sorcery that differed from the magical arts descending from Seath's school of thought. According to Dusk, Oolacile is a bit more careless than Vinheim, and this is reflected in their spells. One's ability to reason has no impact on powering these techniques despite their great magical power, and none of them serve a strictly combat function; for instance, the stone knights found throughout Oolacilian ruins cast Tranquil Walk of Peace, which is designed to give the caster time to escape from enemies.[1] In other words, Oolacile's sorceries are indicative of a non-academic, pacifistic country historically devoid of large-scale conflict.

As a result, the culture has spent much of its time immersed in magic without outside interference. The Enchanted Ember is a vestige of Oolacile with immense magic power.[2] Rickert claims to have never seen one like it,[3] meaning that the magic source flame is too advanced for Vinheim's magic academy even now. Indeed, Oolacile uses magic to seal doors that can only be opened with grooved crests,[4] power lifts, and even enchant clothes. It even substituted conventional knights with those stone golems,[5] which we can only encounter around the ruins of an Oolacilian fort – perhaps a border outpost or city police station. Clearly magic, especially sorcery, became a huge focal point of the Oolacilian way of life. This focus came at the cost of self-preservation, however. Oolacilian equipment greatly increases the power or amount of magic one can cast at the expense of magical defense[6] or even vitality. These are not the designs of a people very concerned about imminent conflict. The only other time we see HP halved for good or ill effect is with curses, which speaks to both how advanced Oolacile's understanding of magic was and how dangerous it *could* be.

Despite their magical technology's pervasiveness, or perhaps because of it, not every Oolacilian was a sorcerer. Most of the corrupted citizens that we encounter employ no magic whatsoever, while the few who do have clearly undergone far more severe mutations – indicating that being a sorcerer in Oolacile wasn't truly the norm. The bloathead sorcerers appear to lead the other citizens, all while laughing and gesturing like a stereotypical haughty noblewoman in Japanese media, and the sorceress Dusk is royalty. Therefore, sorcery was probably limited to a highborn class, and for good reason. Sorcery requires knowledge and understanding, which

1 "One of the miracles of the frontier, not known to the Way of White. Slows the walk of all within the effective range.
Miracle probably mostly used for escaping since it just slows walking while attacks act normally. In other words, it is truly sufficient at peace." - Tranquil Walk of Peace

2 "Source flame required for evolving weapons. The Magic Power Source Flame is one aspect of sorcery and the legacy of the destroyed country of Oolacile.
Evolves +5 magic weapons into magic power weapons. (Magic power weapons can be enhanced up to +5.) Magic power weapons possess magic attack power and are sorcerer weapons that are enhanced by intelligence." - Enchanted Ember

3 "Hey, you. Is that… a sorcery source flame…? Incredible… I've never seen it, even in Vinheim… It is an incredible fire…" - Rickert

4 "Bent key with a crest.
There are vestiges of magic power in the grooves of the crest, so its door is probably shut with magic power." - Crest Key

5 "Armor of the stone knights, guardians of the forest of the Mausoleum.
The stone knights are golems animated with magic, and the armor is also tinged with the power of magic, but it has tremendous weight." - Guardian Helm

6 "Head crown of special magic that was given to Dusk, who is Princess of Oolacile, with her birth.
The equipper is blessed by all magic, so it boosts the might and effects of magic but also greatens damage to magic." - Crown of Dusk

requires education. Before the introduction of a national institution like the Vinheim Dragon School, the arts were mainly limited to those with some status in Anor Londo or New Londo. And with sorcery so central to Oolacile in particular, of *course* its casters were placed on a pedestal.

Its location, surrounded by nature, was also a huge influence on Oolacile's development, as shown with the detailed floral imagery of the Dusk Crown Ring. Laurentius tells us that pyromancers immerse themselves in nature as a means to better approach the essence of creation,[7] namely the fire that created life and is at the root of every school of magic. Oolacile too may have practiced this concept, since the very air of both Darkroot Garden and the Royal Wood is filled with blue magic particles. The land also produces animate flora unique to the region, one species of which was employed as gardeners.[8] However, the fact that these particular tree-men ignore the Abyss spreading around them to continue their work, like the stone golems of the past but unlike the local fauna, suggests that they are domesticated labor, grown and raised like beasts of burden. To be close with nature doesn't require being equal with it, after all.

Despite the connection between Oolacilian sorcery and light magic, Oolacile's arts are considered "mysteries", to the point that not even their most basic spells have been replicated in Vinheim.[9] What prompted this unique cultural divide? The answer lies in that natural setting. For example, Repair is a spell deeply rooted in Oolacilian daily life due to its ability to easily fix all kinds of broken physical objects, surviving outside the country as repair powder.[10] This powder has a golden hue matching the gold-and-black color scheme typical for Oolacilian sorcery, and is imbued with "weak" magical power. Another extant item related to the magic nation is Golden Pine Resin. This lightning-empowering turpentine emits a golden light,[11] not "sparks" like the English description purports. Both items can be acquired from the mushroom-men found in the ruined land. This peculiar race, as Elizabeth herself humorously admits,[12] drops the latter upon death, and Elizabeth sells both items while claiming to be "one" with Oolacile's sorceries[13] – her innate connection to the light magic even allowing her to smell that we are from another time.[14] In short, the mushroom-men are the source of Oolacile's unique magical heritage.

Take the white trees unique to Oolacile. They are only found lining the Sanctuary, but the Oolacile catalysts indicate that their branches were widely used as sorcery staves.[15] The catalysts sold by Dusk and Elizabeth in particular are tiny, but still possess impressive magical power. Likewise,

7 "That's why a pyromancer tries to be in nature. The Great Swamp that I'm from was also such a place. You too will understand someday." - Laurentius

8 "Four-pronged plow possessed by the scarecrow-like tree men, gardeners of the forest of the Mausoleum.
As understood from their role as 'gardeners', the tool isn't primarily used for battle, but the sharp points also make for a dangerous weapon." - Four-pronged Plow

9 "Old sorcery of the destroyed country of Oolacile. Makes a light that brightly illuminates the surroundings.
It is a simple sorcery that creates a light, but it is surely a mystery of Oolacile and has ultimately not been realized in Vinheim." - Cast Light

10 "Gold metal powder tinged with weak magic power. Repairs right-hand weapon.
Weapons lose durability as they are used, and their efficacy falls greatly once they fall below a certain level.
This powder, which doesn't require a Repair Box, is a valuable means for repairing a weapon on the battlefield." - Repair Powder

11 "Very unusual turpentine that emits a golden light. Applies lightning to right-hand weapon.
That weapon gains the unusual attack power of the lightning attribute and becomes effective against enemies strong to magic and fire. It will demonstrate great might against dragonkin in particular." - Golden Pine Resin

12 "Heheh... Am I strange? It is all right, because I am strange. I'm a mushroom. Heheheheh..." - Elizabeth

white flowers radiating strong light grow around Darkroot Garden, and Oolacilian plant lamps emit similar light. This flora's natural magic and connection to light suggest that it is the bedrock to the Oolacilians' development of light sorcery. Perhaps these magical properties related to light and time were studied in the fungi race, extracted from them, and then imbued into a new breed of white flora that Oolacile alone germinated. With this monopoly on such rare species of plant, they were the only society working with light magic enough to advance it as sorcery, applying their previous knowledge of the art – hence their equipment is often resistant to both lightning and general magic.

So where did this fungal race come from? The only other place we find the mushroom-men is within the Great Hollow of an archtree in Ash Lake. Fungi typically prefer moist and dark areas, so their presence down there isn't surprising, but it also hints that they originate where the Age of Fire began, among the medials and the pygmies. Perhaps some of this fungal race were relocated to the forests of Oolacile by the Anor Londo gods. The mushroom-men carry turpentine imbued with lightning magic and are surprisingly resistant to the attribute themselves – plenty of other creatures and creations were imbued with lightning by the medials. Elizabeth even derives a "secret medicine" with remarkable regenerative powers from her own mushrooms,[16] a trait mirroring the gods' healing miracles.



Plenty more links Oolacile to Anor Londo. We can loot a gold coin featuring Lloyd in the Royal Wood, which will anger the tree-men who otherwise ignore us to focus on their gardening. The stone knights are golems with similar resistance to lightning, and golemcraft originated with the gods. The sanctuary guardians are lightning-breathing holy beasts "frightened" by the Abyss to the point of destroying the forest around them, implying that their presence there predates Oolacile's destruction. Various titanite slabs can be found in chests within the country's borders. Oolacilian architecture depicts icons of a blooming flower akin to the reliefs seen in Anor Londo. Moreover, the country owns mimics otherwise only found in the medials' territory. Even the use of

13 "I shall cooperate with you as much as I can. Because the sorceries of Oolacile are together with me." - Elizabeth

14 "Well, how unusual. You're very much a human of the future, aren't you? Moreover, you smell awwwfully human... But, it doesn't appear to be bad..." - Elizabeth

15 "It integrates a white-barked tree branch tinged with magic power. It has high sorcery might scaling from the magic power tinging it, but the sorceries of that country aren't offensive to begin with. Intelligence won't influence the might of attacks either." - Oolacile Ivory Catalyst

16 "Secret medicine of Elizabeth, protector of the Mausoleum. It is some kind of large fungi, right?
Rouses and uplifts one's flesh body and greatly recovers HP continually for a limited time if ingested.
Its strong effect will probably become a warrior's trump card." - Elizabeth's Mushroom

miracles like Tranquil Walk of Peace and unambitious sorceries emphasize devotion to the gods over independent reason. Therefore, if Oolacile's light-based sorcery is specifically employing sunlight, derived from fungi, then the country must have developed it all under the gods' influence.

The only other human states in Lordran are the Undead Burg and New Londo, both established by the gods. Andre's Japanese dialogue claims that the old church that we find him in was deliberately connected to Sen's Fortress and Darkroot Garden before it was abandoned and eventually replaced by the Undead Parish. Since the garden is simply the overgrown Oolacilian ruins, and the church's architecture matches these ruins, Oolacile was directly linked to Anor Londo via its house of worship.

While some descendants of the pygmies spread far to found their own nations, the founders of Oolacile settled near Anor Londo and established close ties with the gods there, leading to the medials infusing much of their culture, knowledge, and technology into the human settlement over time. This was extremely convenient for the humans, since Anor Londo's strong military presence provided an excellent deterrent to invaders, likely resulting in Oolacile's non-violent culture. But considering the gods' plan to obscure man's ties to the Dark, Oolacile was most likely an early victim of this long-term brainwashing project. A people that inherited so much of their culture from Anor Londo would lose their identity as creatures of Dark relatively quickly, and end up both favored by the gods and completely subordinate to them.

Dusk's status as princess confirms that Oolacile had a royal government. Since Gwyn personally appointed the Four Kings, there is a strong possibility that Oolacile's own royalty was also established by heavenly mandate. The largest building we can explore in the township is a massive manor, likely the royal family's estate. Aside from its sheer scale, one of the building's chests carries red titanite chunks. Red titanite slabs are primarily found in Izalith, which has been isolated from the world for a millennium and no longer produces the flame-infused mineral, so their owner must either be an avid collector or a longtime inheritor. The slab was thus probably gifted by the gods and passed down generations, and the most likely recipients of such a precious treasure would be the royal family, who also keep a blue titanite slab in Royal Wood – the "royalty's forest garden" (王家の森庭).



The royals' importance cannot be understated. The sanctuary that the royal garden is cultivated around is actually "Oolacile's mausoleum" (ウーラシールの霊廟), making the stone

effigies there grave markers for the dead – at least for highborn folk if not the populace in general. Elizabeth calls herself both the mausoleum's guardian and the closest thing to a wet nurse for Dusk, implying a close relationship between the mushroom-men and Oolacilian monarchy. This collaboration makes sense politically – one cannot betray the royalty so long as they alone are the intermediary between the Oolacilian sorcerers and the source of their sunlight power. Oolacile wasn't wholly limited to sunlight-derived magic, of course, and one can theoretically replicate their unique sorceries with other light-based magic. (A concept later explored in *DS2*.) But how much closer to the full power of light can you get than the light of fire, the source of it, itself?

Through the mushroom-men, the royalty had a strong hold on Oolacile, and the gods had a tight hold on the royalty, solidifying the power dynamics for centuries to come; it was all thanks to the sunlight-based power Anor Londo provided. Due to the human nation's proximity to the divine capital, many Oolacilians likely travelled across the border to serve their deities during the era predating undeath. Tranquil Walk of Peace is acquired in the Catacombs where the gods' priests and similar such servants were buried. The fact that it is described as a miracle from remote regions and thus unknown to the Way of White, which is based far off in the world of man, implies that the miracle we find had belonged to a local Oolacilian buried in the Catacombs, not a visiting churchman. Likewise, Nito's pinwheels are skilled in fire and light-based magics, which would be magic readily known to the nearby light sorcerers. It makes sense for the majority of the gods' human servants to have come from the human kingdom that could most readily reach them. Perhaps the country even deliberately educated and trained these servants.

This doesn't mean that Oolacile had no hegemony whatsoever. Elements of Oolacilian culture like the gold pine resin have been handed down long after its destruction, and we find human currency within its borders. This means that the nation maintained at least limited contact with the world of man. For more specific examples, the New Londo lift located past the gateway opposite the city's main gates leads up to the Darkroot Basin cliffside and the nearby Grass Crest Shield. While it is supposedly of ancient but unknown origin, its nature iconography, weak enchantment,[17] and placement imply the shield to be Oolacilian in its make. Therefore, we can conclude that the two countries had contact with one another. (Similar diplomatic relations are seen in *DS3*.) But if the holy beasts around the mausoleum are any indication, Oolacile was firmly in the gods' pocket.

17 **"Old, medium metal shield of unknown origin. The grass crest seems to be imbued with weak magic power, so it slightly raises stamina recovery speed." - Grass Crest Shield**

Another Haven

Despite their shared subservience to Anor Londo, there is nothing to suggest that Undead were Oolacile's primary populace, as was the case in New Londo. The nation predates undeath, and the verifiably Hollow corpses scattered around the Oolacilian township can be residents who turned after being killed in the local chaos. However, this doesn't sufficiently explain the sheer number of bodies. What *would* explain them is if Oolacile had served as another staging ground for creating a Lord of Cinder, much like New Londo before it and the Undead Burg after it.

The trials for the Battle of Stoicism are accessed via Undead bonfires, an anomaly for a country populated by the living. Like Sen's Fortress in the present-day Undead mission, these trials were a path to Anor Londo. The Silver Knight statues watching over the fortress' challengers remind participants of who they were proving their mettle to in Oolacile's trials; the reliefs acting as a backdrop to the trial bonfires likewise employ this same imagery.

Undead trials require Undead to try them. There are two notable buildings in town besides the manor. The first was built with military ramparts and a dungeon – a prison. The second is a large forum within an open tower and a side chamber serving as the entrance to the Battles of Stoicism – a coliseum. Jails require prisoners and arenas require gladiators. A lift abridging the path between both buildings would have allowed the quick transfer of criminals to enter the arena. It seems that Undead were imprisoned at Oolacile and then forced into combat, much like how we are captured before following a similar path.

More evidence that the arena functioned as an Undead mission proving ground are the statues of Gwyndolin found at both locations. While their heads have been removed, the statues' clothes are identical to the Darkmoon deity's dress, and he wields an Oolacilian staff, implying that the statue represents the god's cooperation between the god and the local government. As a god of vengeance and thus justice, his presence around a prison sends a resounding message: the gods back Oolacile, and together they will punish your sins. Gwyn bound his sons to guide man, and Gwyndolin continues to help orchestrate the Undead mission in the present era from a similarly background role. It is unlikely that these two facts bear no connection with the god's influence upon these two areas.

The Purple Coward's Crystal notes that the Battle of Stoicism now lacks an administrator after Oolacile has fallen into ruin, and "its part" has since been lost.[18] This fits with the idea that Anor Londo organized these

18 "Item for playing online. Withdraws you from the 'Trial Battle'. (Session is disbanded once the host leaves.)
That battle has been a path to Anor Londo since time immemorial, and even now that it is long without an administrator and its part has been lost, withdrawing doesn't exempt you from being slandered as a coward.
Thus, this purple crystal shouldn't be used lightly. If you seek meaning in battle even slightly." - Purple Coward's Crystal

events to serve a purpose, and what would that purpose be except finding a worthy heir to the First Flame? Gwyndolin, whether in person or through proxies, was overseeing another firelinking system at Oolacile. The only question left is when the city became this staging ground; the answer, after the destruction of its predecessor, New Londo, within the last millennium.

The downfall of Oolacile occurred 200-300 years ago, making it impossible for New Londo to have been built afterwards; Gwyn wasn't sharing his Lord Soul with the Four Kings *after* linking the fire. And the city can't fall after Oolacile, since Ingward believes Artorias to still be alive.[19] It isn't as if the knight's death is a secret either, since Andre knows about his grave, and countless other warriors have apparently attempted to reach it before being slain by the Forest Hunters and Sif.[20] Ingward, however, has isolated himself within his ruined nation since the sealing,[21] so the only way for him to know about Artorias' legend but not his subsequent death is for the events in Oolacile to take place after New Londo's fall; the implication that Leeroy – the millennium-old Way of White's first Undead – acquired his red eye orb from a Darkwraith only reinforces the notion.

Many believe that the Abyss beneath New Londo and Oolacile are one and the same, often citing Darkroot Garden's name as evidence that Oolacile had the first and only Abyss. But its actual name is just "Garden of the Black Forest" (黒い森の庭). Similarly, Manus is actually called the "Master of the Abyss" (深淵の主), not the "father" of the one and only Abyss, but the owner of the Abyss encountered in Oolacile. There is thus no evidence that the two Abysses we visit are one and the same, and the fact that New Londo's fall must occur before Oolacile's collapse makes this proposed sequence of events impossible. An Abyss is not a singular all-encompassing entity but a general, local, manifestation of the Dark's power. (Later games prove that there can even be more than one at a given time.)

It is true that the two Abysses overlap when overlaying map data – line up the Royal Wood with present-day Darkroot Garden, and the Four Kings and Manus boss rooms will be in the same general area. But mapping the game world this way is flawed. The fact that the New Londo Abyss overlaps with the Chasm of the Abyss is simply coincidence, the result of designing the DLC months after the base game was finished. We cannot work our camera to see the bridge to New Londo over the cliffside in Kalameet's boss room like we can from the same



19 "That place is not somewhere ordinary people can go, but… it's said that only the knight Artorias walked an Abyss long ago. If you can find him and borrow his power, you may be able to enter the Abyss…" - Ingward

20 "Ah, that reminds me, there's another story about the Garden of the Black Forest. I hear there's the grave of the 'Abysswalker' knight Artorias. Although, none of those guys who said that and headed into the forest ever came back…" - Andre

21 "Oh, a visitor to a place like this. Ignoring ghosts, it's been a while, but…" - Ingward

vantage point in Darkroot Basin, even though the bridge must exist in both post-Gwyn eras. This is because all the spots where this obvious oversight would be more easily noticed don't exist in the DLC map. It simply wasn't designed to perfectly mesh with the base game.



Meanwhile, we can see that the earth of the Royal Wood has cracked, unleashing the Dark of the Abyss. We can furthermore spot this same crack letting in sunlight when looking up from the Chasm. Add the lift connecting the Chasm to the Royal Wood, and it is clear that the former is situated below the latter. We know that the Royal Wood corresponds to present-day Darkroot Garden, and this spot in the latter is far and away from New Londo, on the complete opposite side of the Valley of Drakes. Therefore, the two Abysses must be separate places, with Oolacile's Abyss emerging long after New Londo's fall.

Oolacile's Undead gladiators evidently failed to pass muster, even as of the era of Dusk, whose parents were presumably the reigning monarchs of their peaceful nation. We aren't told much about the period immediately prior to Manus, but we can infer a few details from Dusk's life. The magic "crown" ring given upon her birth[22] and the detailed embroidery in her clothes confirms that she was given royal treatment, but she didn't spend much time at home. Elizabeth implies that she was a huge presence in the girl's childhood, with the floral motif of her birth ring reinforcing their close ties. (*DS3* confirms it as the wet nurse's personal gift.)[23] However, her inexact language indicates that being a nursing mother wasn't her official capacity, and the mushroom lives far from the human-populated city. The likely explanation is that Dusk spent much of her childhood in her family's garden, where she was cared for by Elizabeth.

The Japanese script has Dusk giggle whilst describing her homeland's half-hearted sorcery, implying that she speaks from personal experience. Elizabeth sells the same spells and stave, so the mushroom likely doubled as the royal's magic instructor. The spells vary in function, but the most notable involve camouflage,[24] the type of magic a child would use to play hide-and-seek. Miyazaki insists in a Game

22 "Special magic finger crown that was given to Dusk, who is Princess of Oolacile, with her birth.
It has an effect that increases the number of uses for the equipper's sorceries, but halves their HP." - Dusk Crown Ring

23 "Thank you. I am the Mausoleum's protector, Elizabeth. Something like a nursing mother to Princess Dusk, you could say?" - Elizabeth

24 "Old sorcery of the destroyed country of Oolacile. Transforms into something appropriate for the location.
A different spy lineage sorcery from 'Invisible Body'. First off, if you don't know what to transform into and where, you probably can't say you have come of age as a camouflage sorcerer." - Chameleon

no Shokutaku episode that Dusk is pure, so her innocence probably bleeds into naiveté. Despite being the princess, she seems to know very little about the underlying cause behind her country's destruction. All of this suggests that she is fairly young, possibly still in her teens.

Perhaps Dusk's parents neglected the child or were too busy to be a major presence in her life. Either way, the princess grew up lonely and spent much of her time playing with a mushroom in her family's massive garden, hence her overall innocent demeanor and specific repertoire of spells. This also explains why she apparently fled to the royal garden during her kingdom's destruction – it was a familiar locale where she could likely find comfort, protection, and company.

Because of her innocence, Dusk can only describe what happened to her nation in the broadest strokes. The princess knew very little about Oolacile's internal affairs and played no role in politics. In fact, she probably knows as much as the common citizen about the actions of her parents. And because of this, she was ignorant of their covert dealings with an unexpected visitor to their court.

Dabble in Dark

We learn that a Dark serpent lay at the core of Oolacile's fall.[25] Some have attributed this to Frampt, but there is no reason for him to suddenly sabotage the gods' plans. It was Kaathe who revealed man's connection to the Dark to the royals controlling New Londo, and so that world serpent likely approached the Oolacilian royalty in a similar manner, though he didn't convince them as easily. It is much easier to sway those motivated by a thirst for power than justice. Oolacile had a long history with the gods. Even assuming that Kaathe's revelations were convincing, it would take a lot more than that to sway their allegiance. Yet the world serpent had learned from his mistake with the Four Kings – he wanted humans who would remain committed to the truly righteous path. Hence, the serpent referred them to Manus' grave as proof of the truth to his words.

The lift shortcut to the Chasm of the Abyss leads back to the base of the Royal Wood. Moreover, the forest guardians wield stone axes more suited for civil engineering than combat[26] – one of the golems' "attacks" digs deep into the ground before unearthing the soil; this contrasts the swords and shields of their knight counterparts,[27] who likely acted as the city's main army and law enforcers. Therefore, the forest guardians likely

25 "Nevertheless, you really are a fanciful one. Oolacile definitely brought the likes of the Abyss upon itself. They were deceived by a great, toothy serpent, dug up a grave, and disgraced the corpse of an ancient man and all that. Just shameless fools, no?" - Chester

26 "Great stone axe possessed by the stone knights, guardians of the forest of the Mausoleum.
This weapon that demands unusual physical strength is more suited to construction work than battle, but it is probably sufficient to pulverizing the body of man." - Stone Greataxe

27 "Moss-covered greatsword of the stone knights, guardians of the Garden of the Black Gorest.
The stone knights are the products of old magic, but this sword is also tinged with the power of magic and unleashes that power with both hands." - Stone Greatsword

constructed the shortcut under the crown's purview. Once the lift was constructed, Manus' grave could be excavated to confirm the snake's claims.

But who was Manus, and why did he become this proof? His boss soul is simply his humanity, so he was definitely human. Furthermore, his unique pendant employs a vine string of apparently Oolacilian origin and possesses a strong magic power unknown and inoperable by anyone of the present era,[28] meaning that he was both Oolacilian and well-versed in magic. Meanwhile, his burial site is located deep below the Royal Wood, which itself is part of the mausoleum that Elizabeth and the holy beasts watch over. The area thus seems to be an ancestral burial ground that the royalty manage, but the depth and complexity of the chasm grave tells us two things about Manus in particular. The first is that he is very old, potentially among the first to ever be buried at the site. The second is that he was an extremely prominent figure in his lifetime, prominent enough to warrant such a distinguished burial and be remembered by Kaathe long after his death.

The Japanese description for Manus' sorcery staff reveals it to be specifically made from archtrees,[29] not Oolacile's typical white trees. In fact, the text implies that Manus' lifetime predates such trees, so very early in Oolacile's history, while the weapon also doubles as an axe unbefitting Oolacilian culture as of Dusk's era. We can thus be certain that Manus was a sorcerer alive during the period when the four Lords were allies – the ancient man's gravesite even resembles stone age architecture. Taken together, this would make Manus one of the earliest magic users in Oolacile's history, from one of the earliest points *in* history. Why is this notable? Because it served as Kaathe's tangible proof of man's Dark heritage.

Manus wields dark sorceries with finesse during his boss battle, and indeed, Pursuers – the most advanced dark sorcery in-game – is explicitly of his creation. We acquire this spell by trading Manus' soul with Snuggly, which requires Manus to have written the very pages that ended up in Snuggly's possession. Likewise, the Japanese description for his staff confirms that it halves our sorcery uses because our bodies are from the present era, indicating that only Manus and similar casters have both the capacity and familiarity with these arcane arts to wield it to its full potential.

Therefore, Manus was likely a dark sorcerer in life, probably the very first sorcerer of his ilk in human history. (*DS2* later reaffirms that personified fragments of his dark soul recall the "creator" of these Dark arts.) Many fans believe that Manus is in fact the pygmy

28 "Fragment of a broken stone pendant. Isn't the string vine that of Oolacile?
It seems to be very old, but strong magic power is felt from its stone. That power, which present-day people don't know and can't handle, was the kind of very strong nostalgia, and affection." - Broken Pendant

29 "Sorcery catalyst born from the soul of the Master of the Abyss Manus. Gnarled archtree staff. Can be used as a strike weapon due to its great size.
It is close in nature to the Crystal Sacred Staff, so it boosts the might of sorceries but, if the bodies of present-day people use it, the number of uses will decrease." - Manus Catalyst



Lord, but his background as a dark sorcerer doesn't necessitate that he be the one who first discovered the Dark Soul. He was an exceptionally talented Oolacilian buried on Oolacilian soil, and nothing more. Still, Kaathe and Gough were familiar with Manus, the latter even knows the sorcerer's name,[30] and the sheer scale and ceremony of his burial implies that he was a prominent figure; given the grave's age and location, perhaps he was even Oolacile's founding king. Since Elizabeth is keeper of the mausoleum and well-informed about Manus' identity,[31] it is possible that she too knew the ancient man, depending on when mushroom-men first migrated to Oolacilian soil.

Manus reveals that Oolacile's culture was originally based around the Dark. This explains why their light-based magic manifested as sorcery in particular, as it is a vestige of their heritage from when they performed rational studies of the Dark like Manus, their potential founder. The gods had subtly eased them into only studying the light, leaving holy beasts to protect the evidence from outsiders once the spread of Dark heresy became an imminent concern. This light and dark duality is likely why the princess is named "Dusk" (宵闇), the period straddling between day and night that leans closer to the darkness of sundown. Manus was fascinated by the Dark, studied it, imbued it with a will, and was celebrated for it. No Oolacilian could look at his gravesite and see a heretic or outcast. Manus was a fundamental part of this ancient land's culture, undeniable proof that Oolacile had once embraced the Dark. The fact that the royalty went this far for proof demonstrates their interest in Kaathe's claims, and they received their verification.

Manus' grave wasn't just dug up, however. His corpse was "disgraced" and awoke from its eternal rest. Consider how remarkable this revival truly is. The man was dead and buried for untold centuries, and yet Oolacile resurrected him without any obvious signs of necromancy. He was also unlikely to be an Undead prematurely buried, since his lifetime predated the curse. Either Manus wasn't really dead, or something negated his death. The most obvious cause would be his humanity, which was instrumental in him becoming Father of the Abyss and something that he would be in touch with more than the average man. But if the sorcerer had died, then the shackles of mortality were already restraining his dark soul. Indeed, even if his lifetime dates to the early period in human-medial relations, it still all but guaranteed that mankind had been shackled by that point. In other words, the Darksign

30 "... If you want to stop the Dark like Artorias, you should challenge the master of the Abyss, Manus... The Dark is generating from Manus. Even if this country is destroyed, any further destruction will be avoided." - Gough

31 "I have been waiting for you. You have rescued Princess Dusk, yes? Moreover, that monster of ancient man has been exterminated, and you even stopped the Abyss." - Elizabeth

was already dormant within Manus when he died, and likely retroactively triggered the effects of undeath upon his corpse after being disturbed.

The axe head carved into his staff and the offensive nature to his sorcery suggest that Manus was experienced in combat. The only major conflict we know about during this era are Gwyn's dragon hunts among the very archtrees from which Manus' staff derives, so he may have participated and been slain on the battlefield. The shackles then kept the sorcerer in eternal slumber while fire's waning strength was changing everything for mankind. Desecrating the grave later stirred the powerful humanity within Manus, rousing him from his deathly repose. His shackles then finally broke when his humanity went wild, consuming his original soul and driving him mad like any ordinary Hollow. (*DS2* introduces Darklurker, a creature spawned from Manus' Abyss that has fire attacks resembling the Darksign.) Like the rest of mankind, the sorcerer was a victim of Gwyn's schemes.

Once he was uncovered and revived, the ancient man was imprisoned. We can confirm this from the layout of the dungeon bonfire. The bonfire is situated in a cell where the back wall partitioning the prison from the chasm has been destroyed. Numerous chains hang from the ceiling, suggesting that someone had been heavily secured there. Drag marks lead from the cell over the edge of the chasm, which leads to the open ceiling directly over his gravesite. The escaped prisoner must therefore be Manus. His humanity went wild while he was still imprisoned, turning him into the "master" of an Abyss spawned from his soul.[32] This Abyss emanates from Manus and stops after we slay him.

The fact that he was driven mad from his cell and has had his body "disgraced" implies that he suffered physical torture and severe mental stress. So, what did Manus have, and what did Oolacile want from his mind or body to treat him so? At this juncture, we cannot place the blame for Manus' fate solely on the royal family. Gough and Chester point fingers at "Oolacile" but don't specify a particular party, a stark contrast from the blame laid squarely on the Four Kings for their country's downfall. Excavation, graverobbing and imprisonment requires more than the involvement of a select few, and the nobles and sorcerers of the Oolacile court likely shared the royalty's interest in Kaathe's revelations.

And so, what Oolacile sought from Manus was likely his deep knowledge of dark sorcery. Its sorcerers "discovered" their Abyss sorceries "in the midst of madness". This wording is extremely peculiar as it neither states that they invented the spells nor does it clarify what constitutes their madness. We find the written instructions for Dark Orb in a chest beside two other open chests, which correspond to the two other dark sorcery texts found off bodies located at the royal manor and the chasm. These bodies lack the

32 **"Soul of the Master of the Abyss Manus. It is no ordinary soul. It is a viscous, lukewarm, gentle mass of humanity.**

Manus was evidently human in oldest times. Even after his humanity went wild and he became Master of the Abyss, he had been constantly seeking that broken pendant." - Soul of Manus

33 **"Head of an Oolacile citizen who was consumed by the Dark of the Master of the Abyss Manus and had their humanity run wild.**

It is greatly swollen, jagged, and frayed; at the same time, there are countless lumps of red eyeball shapes.

The outside is hard but the inside is damp with wet body fluids, and you won't consider wearing it if you are sane." - Bloated Head



Bloatheads' horrible mutations, thus their "madness" is unlikely to refer to abyssal corruption.[33] Like Seath, their lunacy was probably their obsessive desire to rediscover their heritage leading them to perform depratives.

We find Gough locked away in the arena's tower, which can only be opened with a key that removes the strong magic seal placed upon the door. Someone with influence imprisoned him, not just a random citizen. We acquire the key from a mimic casually located on the royal manor's upper floor, next to a fireplace in what appears to be a living or dining room. This not only suggests an effort to hide Gough's imprisonment, but to also hide it from residents within the household especially. The royal family likely ordered Gough's capture. When we meet the giant, he has already learned that Manus is the source of the Abyss, that it is swallowing Oolacile, and that both Kaathe and the government triggered this catastrophe.[34] Whether having investigated beforehand or learning from someone involved after the fact, he couldn't be allowed to leak what had transpired to Anor Londo, Oolacile's new and unknowing enemy.

The fact that he was restrained and not killed may imply some mercy on the part of the royals. If so, however, then they must not have been aware of how badly Gough was treated in confinement. Despite being Gwyn's honored knight, Gough is looked down upon as a "mere giant", racism unlikely to exist in a god-fearing nation. This prejudice results in his captors filling his helmet's specially-designed eye holes with resin.[35] That alone would disrespect the famed Hawkeye, but to add injury to insult, he was still wearing the helmet as they poured it in; this torture blinded him, so he relies wholly on sound to locate us if provoked.

When Gough brushes off his life story, he admits that he is fortunate to not have been "boiled" in his Japanese dialogue.[36] Boiling alive is a painful method of medieval executions, so the fact that he even mentions it implies that the giant either nearly experienced such a fate or faced such comparable cruelty that he is surprised he *didn't*. Regardless, the Oolacilians used his vulnerable state to test the limits of their cruelty. While this abuse eventually ended, Gough's captors took souvenirs – his wood-carvings, stored within the city; the "I'm sorry" carving rests in a normal chest while a mimic holds the "Very good" carving, implying that the sculpture in which Gough begs for forgiveness is kept like a toy to be easily retrieved, while the one in which he expresses elation has become a sealed taboo.

Similar wanton torture likely produced the "chain-coiled prisoner" (鎖巻き虜囚) encountered as we approach the prison. His entire body is completely wrapped in chains, and concept art further reveals that his bulging form is the result of heaps of heavy material he is being forced to

34 **"You have probably already seen it, but the Dark of the Abyss which ate away at my friend Artorias is presently about to swallow up this country, Oolacile… I dare say, its destruction is unavoidable. But, even if tempted by a Dark snake, it was their own desire to awake that guy and drive him mad… It is what you'd call a destruction of their own making…" - Gough**

35 **"Helmet of 'Hawkeye' Gough, one of the Four Knights of King Gwyn. Item of honor awarded in conferring knightly decorations.**
Thanks to those who looked down on him as a mere giant, the eyeholes prepared especially for the celebrated 'Hawkeye' are completely blocked with not a crack due to tree resin."
–Gough's Helm

36 **"What's my story? Something like that isn't anything interesting.**
If there are no hares, a good hound dog's already unnecessary… I suppose just not being boiled can be called fortunate."–Gough

bear upon his arms and back. Such treatment goes way beyond restraining a criminal, and the green moss on his legs implies that he has been trapped in this state for a fair amount of time. The only justification can be discerned from the one uncovered portion of his face, revealing blackish skin and an ominous red eye – signs of being subjected to Dark experimentation. The prisoner was turned into a monster, then weighed down with anything on-hand as his captors struggled to restrain him, not that it ultimately worked.

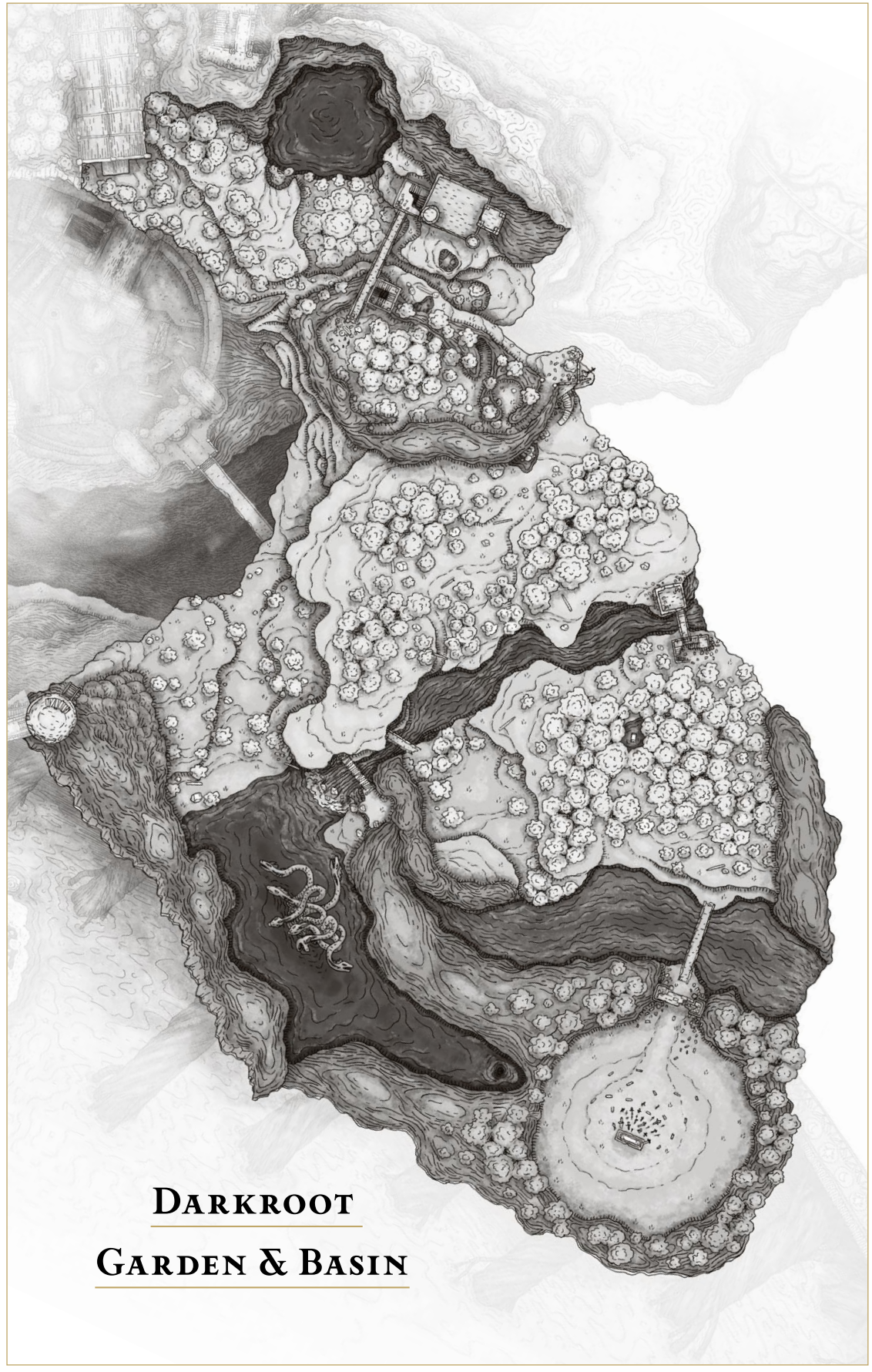
Such blatant cruelty and abuse of the Dark arts makes torturing Manus for his profound knowledge likely. And as a result, Oolacile's mad sorcerers discovered these old, dark arts, wrote down their findings, and experimented with their use. But they went too far, and Manus escaped in a mad rage. Something had to be the trigger that drove him over the brink – and that something was likely his pendant.

Manus' soul claims that he constantly sought his pendant "even after" his madness, implying that he had already been seeking it before becoming a monster. Dusk recalls feeling his yearning for a "happiness that didn't return", which the pendant reminds him of – leading her to doubt that he is truly a monster.[37] Likewise, Pursuers references relentlessly pursuing your objective even if it ends in tragedy, closely mirroring Manus' ultimate demise at our hands. The text subscribes this pursuit to love, implying the pendant to be a memento of someone dear. Pendants are gifts commonly shared between family or lovers, so the loved one is most likely a wife or child. The person in question, however, is long dead or otherwise beyond his reach, hence the sorcerer's unrequited longing and fervent desire to acquire the trinket. And yet, we obtain this cherished belonging already broken.

The pendant is a symbol of what this man cherished most, a nostalgic memory, one that relieves his suffering and perhaps gives him hope. To see it taken from him and broken right before his eyes, after all the torment he endured, would represent the obliteration of that memory. Did his torturers make the mistake of doing just that? With his deeper connection to the Dark, the enraged sorcerer could have even intentionally unleashed that power to escape his fetters. But his humanity consumed his soul and the mind with it, turning him into a rampaging wild beast. This monster broke the wall of his cell and dragged himself down into the chasm and back to his grave, perhaps seeking safety or reprieve. There are no bodies within the destroyed cell, and whoever had the broken pendant likely fled during the rampage, forcing the mad sorcerer to search for it once he had finally calmed down. The Oolacilians succeeded in their objective. They broke Manus, and brought about their own destruction in doing so.



37 "... Before, the story was that I was attacked by the monster of the Abyss... at the time, I had lost consciousness... But there was a feeling I remember, just one. A strongly nostalgic feeling... A happiness that didn't return and an item of its memory... the desire to seek that... Was that perhaps that of the monster of the Abyss...? Should it be called a monster, holding such feelings...?" - Dusk



Downfall

Manus' wild humanity has transformed him into a true monster. His skull has broken apart into horns resembling tree branches, while his eyes have become many, red, and beady. These mutations follow along the spine down all the way to the draconic tail he now sports, as well as parts of the shoulders and chest. His legs too have converted to a digitigrade stance with only four toes similar to Kalameet and other dragons. Add a giant size, profuse amounts of hair, and a massively deformed arm with a mouth and external teeth, and the ancient man now looks nothing like a human being. Since his ardent desire is retrieving the pendant, it is no surprise that his deformed left arm which reaches out in search of it is the only body part consistently emitting a Dark aura – befitting one named "hand" in Latin.

But this feral Dark emanating from him turned Manus into the eye of a hurricane, spreading an Abyss and pieces of his soul with it. Concept art portrays the boss unleashing countless living humanity with the Abyss like a storm, and we find these "abyss-gushed" (深淵湧き) throughout the chasm. These spirits seem to act independently of Manus, but they are nonetheless fragments of the mad monster's soul.

The Abyss then slowly spread from his lair and cell to the city proper, forming a kind of swamp. Without foundations to stand on, many buildings began sinking into this abyssal ooze, leading to Dusk and others to already consider Oolacile lost, and soon to be swallowed by the Abyss entirely.[38] The calamity also made the prison a breeding ground for Hollows, corrupted monsters, and escapees. The corruption itself transforms humans into creatures similar to Manus: disproportionately enlarged arms, numerous beady red eyes, and mutations to the head, spine and chest. Left unprovoked, many of these bloathead citizens show signs of insanity, though the corrupted sorcerers seem to have remained more stable – presumably due to their greater mental capacity.[39] Even the magically-rich air in Oolacile has turned black within the township. While the situation was certainly on the cusp of total bedlam, Oolacile's collapse wasn't instantaneous. As we explore the city, we come across makeshift wooden platforms connecting two sinking buildings, implying that residents remained uncorrupted long enough to adapt their environment.

Nonetheless, the situation was a crisis for Oolacile's government, worsening so long as Manus lived in that dark and hazardous gulf. Efforts were made to stop him – a corpse found near his boss room carries a white titanite slab, likely a pious local priest – but things probably went sour for the royalty. Dusk implies that she is the only royal to escape the destruction,

38 "If you too go beyond here, you will understand. Oolacile is right now about to be consumed by an Abyss born of a monster of ancient man." - Elizabeth

39 "Head of an Oolacile citizen who was consumed by the Dark of the Master of the Abyss Manus and had their humanity run wild.
It is greatly swollen, jagged, and frayed; at the same time, there are countless lumps of red eyeball shapes and many clusters of brain large and small protruding.
This is a thing of one who was a sorcerer in particular, so it therefore hides the power of sorcery, too, if only slightly."
–Bloated Sorcerer Head

and doesn't once question or express concern about her family's well-being.[40] The princess seems to already be aware of her relatives' death or corruption by the Abyss, which further implies that she escaped during a sudden and pressing danger to them all. Worse yet, she sells her spells and staves for *souls* despite supposedly offering them to her savior in gratitude. This need for souls when Oolacile apparently traded in coin suggests that Dusk is Undead. In other words, she may not have escaped her family's fate so much as been the only royal "fortunate" enough to revive and slip out after the fact.

Such a scenario would require a complete breakdown of law and order, which held up for a period after the abyssal swamp emerged. Even in the present era, some of the nation's stone knights remain perfectly functional. The actual threat came later, perhaps a coup from within

40 "My homeland, Oolacile, even in my age, is already destroyed. That is why I am still alone… Being summoned by you and talking like so… That makes me happy… Oh, forgive me. I shouldn't be telling you this sort of thing…" - Dusk



the government. The royal manor is filled with bloatheads led by two sorcerers. The sorcerers benefitted the most from the royalty discovering Manus, but they needed kings no longer. They had learned enough from the ancient man to conjure dark sorceries for themselves, which only required the Dark already within them. The royals' age-old monopoly over Oolacile's unique resource, the mushroom-men, was irrelevant now, meaning no more political authority over or protection from their subjects. And the maniacal behavior of the sorcerers shows that they are quite satisfied with the Dark's spread despite the destruction.

A corpse strung up within the manor carries the text for Dark Fog, which notes that many men often "eat away at" man – a phrase doubling to mean undermine. The implication is that the sorcerers were as self-serving and power-hungry as the Four Kings before them. Kaathe had swayed the royals on the grounds of righting the gods' wrongs against mankind, playing on their implicit moral integrity. With the situation spun out of control, they no doubt questioned their foray into Dark, perhaps even reaching out to Anor Londo for help. This altruism would have been antithetical to the sorcerers' selfish pursuit of power. And so, they betrayed and murdered their rulers, Dusk "surviving" by tragic happenstance. The madmen plunged their whole country into chaos.

With no government to maintain any order, the sorcerers seem to split into their own factions. Many of the standard bloatheads congregate around one or two sorcerers, so these are either servants or citizens too simple-minded to disobey after their corruption. These random gangs seem, at best, loosely aligned, and some even turn on one another. The corpse strung up in the royal manor has a sorcerer standing on the platform behind it, and another sorcerer and their entourage surround a cadaver carrying Dark Bead in the chasm. We don't see any stone knights in the township, so these gangs likely destroyed most of the golems who would be enforcing order; the only survivors were stationed at a fort, which was apparently too far from the Abyss and the resulting chaos to be heavily involved.

It is during this period of anarchy that some of Seath's forces arrive and begin taking captives for their master's research. Dusk implies that they have traveled from the future via the distortions in spacetime, and their presence in the Royal Wood is further supported by the twinkling titanite that forest guardians possess, a sign that the golems have successfully dealt with the white dragon's servants by the time we arrive. Even so, at least two Crystal Golems had managed to capture both Dusk and Manus' broken pendant before returning to the present era. The latter makes its way back to Seath's archives while the former lingers behind long enough for us to slay it. Though Dusk

claims that she has been trapped within the golem for a "long time", we can only confirm that it was long enough for the princess to "lose hope" in being rescued; hours or days, perhaps. Regardless, we do save her. And because the grateful princess was artificially displaced from her world, she is quickly forced back to her era and must be properly summoned back to the present day.

From there, Dusk returns to Elizabeth and details her savior's appearance, allowing the mushroom to recognize us.[41] But this is not her last abduction. While he remains at his grave, Manus begins reaching out across time and space – presumably in search of his dearest pendant – and inadvertently abducts Dusk,[42] Chester,[43] and eventually even us when we approach a black rift in Darkroot Garden while possessing the pendant. Since Manus fails to pull anyone but Dusk back to his lair, he likely isn't making a concerted effort to drag us the whole way through spacetime, especially considering the wild flailing of his arm. The princess is pulled into his lair, however, and rendered unconscious for the duration of her capture. Curiously, her unconscious body spawns wherever we kill Manus, and she claims to have gained a mental connection with him in the process. In that case, Dusk may have been physically absorbed within him to forge this bond and thus not visible during the monster's boss battle.



Why kidnap Dusk? Perhaps she resembled someone Manus knew, a past Oolacilian princess who owned the pendant. This seems all the more plausible if he is the founding king of Ooacile and thereby progenitor of the royal line. However, Manus continues to search. Why seek a memento of your happiness if you believe that you have reunited with the woman herself? Dusk describes his yearning for the trinket, decreasing the likelihood that he mistook her for his darling or child. Moreover, Chester is also pulled into the past but doesn't seem to possess any items that would attract Manus' attention. The monster may simply be instinctively grabbing onto anyone or anything from anytime in the hopes of latching onto his objective – he *has* gone mad, after all. Dusk remains with Manus for some time without suffering from the Abyss, but this can be attributed to Manus' affinity for their shared royal blood rather than his affection for a particular someone.

41 **"... You're Princess Dusk's savior, aren't you? Without seeing who, you're exactly as Princess Dusk described. Thank you. You have my thanks as well, for saving Princess Dusk..." - Elizabeth**

42 **"But, Princess Dusk isn't here anymore. A monster of ancient man, she was snatched away by its horrifying arm. That's why, will you... once more, save Princess Dusk?" - Elizabeth**

43 **"Hm? You are... perhaps, the same as me? Dragged in by a black arm and arriving in the past...?" - Chester**

Whatever the case, it is at this juncture that Artorias and Sif arrive and meet up with Elizabeth. Dusk is unfamiliar with Artorias and mistakes our "aura" for his in her stupor,[44] meaning that she was likely absent for his arrival. Likewise, she is convinced that Artorias came to save *her*, which is difficult to believe if her abduction occurred after the pair had already come to stop the Abyss. Considering the mausoleum's distance from the town church leading to Sen's Fortress, Elizabeth had likely alerted Anor Londo about the problem somehow and was expected to brief Artorias, else it would have been more reasonable for the knight to head straight for the corrupted township.



After we rescue Dusk and stop the Abyss, Elizabeth informs the princess that she was saved by Artorias, and the knight is heralded as a hero. Based on the architecture and use of old magic, the survivors of Oolacile then band together to construct a grave honoring Artorias in the same location as the original mausoleum. Andre sells the crest key at the church,[45] and the blacksmith implies that he doesn't have any connection to the Forest Hunters who currently safeguard the grave. Therefore, he likely found it after taking up residence in the building, which had evidently been previously occupied by the surviving Oolacilans – hence his claim that the church saw use until the Undead Parish was constructed. We know that there were other survivors due to the ambient cries and screams echoing throughout Oolacile Township. We never encounter them, but there are uncorrupted citizens being terrorized in town even as we descend to the heart of the Abyss. These grateful survivors buried Artorias as thanks for "his" help escaping the chaos and destruction with their lives.

Besides the church, however, it seems that most of Oolacile was left dead and buried. Presently, both the corruption and the chasm to Manus' grave are long gone. Most of the buildings and golems have fallen into ruin and become overgrown.[46] The Royal Wood's magic lifts have been replaced with bridges, and the dam blocking a river which would flow into Darkroot Basin was never finished, creating the present-day lake in the gulch. The tree-men have devolved into another element of the wildlife. Little of Oolacile remains, and that which we can explore is mainly an old fort that

44 "Forgive me for proposing something so silly the other day. But, it was a truly strange thing. Because you and Lord Artorias, I feel the same presence in both who decided to rescue me. Maybe it is that sort of thing with heroes…" - Dusk

45 "Crest that opens a door closed by old magic which is in the middle of the Garden of the Black Forest.

Beyond it is said to be the grave of 'Abysswalker' Artorias, but there is a band of thieves that aims for warriors who aim for the grave in the forest, and no one has returned safely.

That is why it shouldn't be handed over to the inexperienced who haven't gathered the souls." - Crest of Artorias

46 "Moss-covered armor of the stone knights, guardians of the Garden of the Black Forest.

The stone knights are the products of old magic. This armor is also tinged with the power of magic, but it has tremendous weight." - Stone Armor

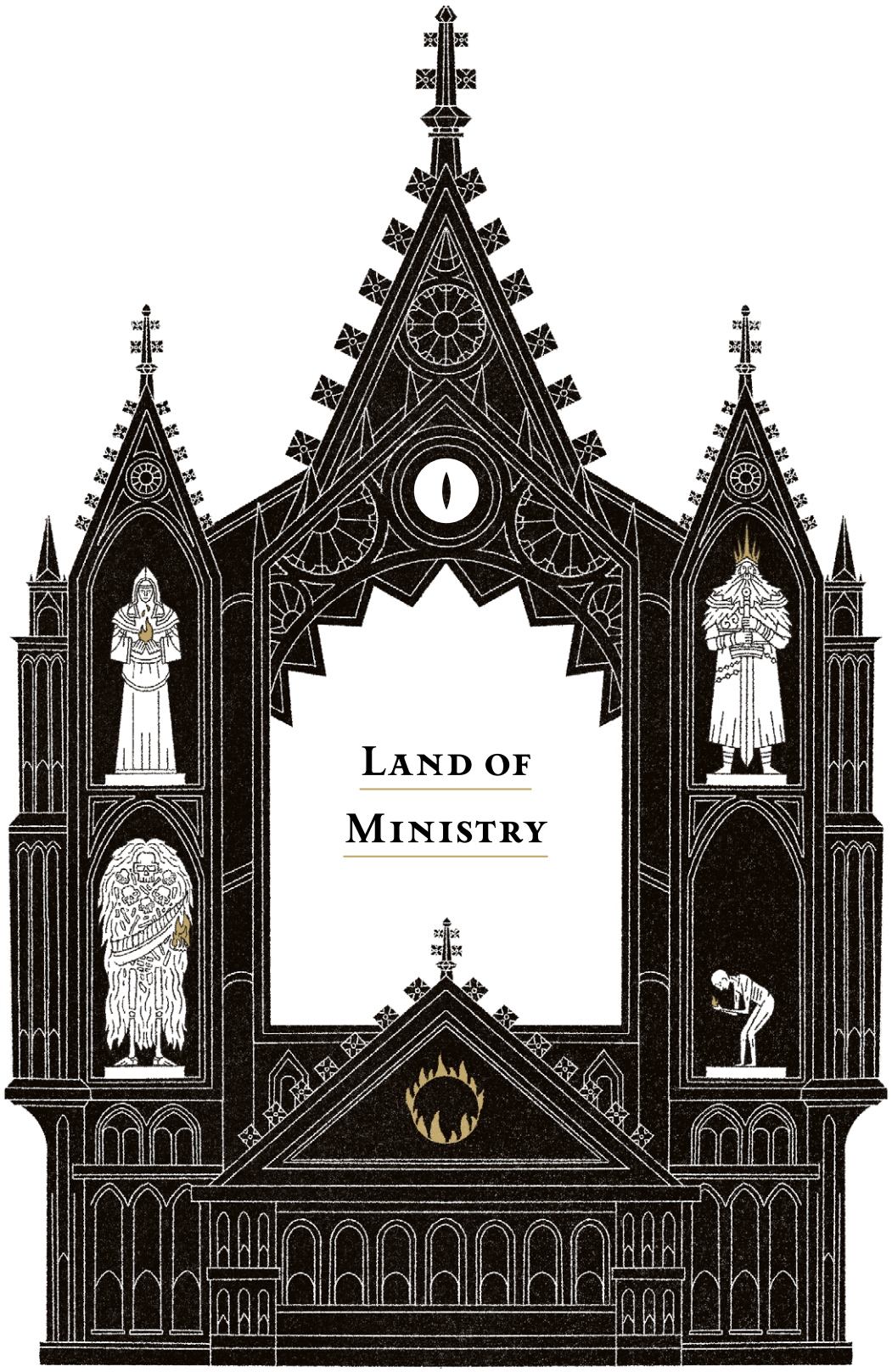
one of the Way of White's blacksmiths recently occupied. Even the structures built for Artorias' grave have largely fallen apart in the many years since their construction. Much like New Londo, there is little reason for anyone to ever visit the area and potentially discover what had actually happened – anyone who does would only see the fragmentary remnants of a once grand culture.

This doesn't necessarily mean that Oolacilians have gone extinct. A chest located in the backyard of one residence in the Undead Burg carries a curious amount of Gold Pine Resin. Other than the mushroom-men, we can only acquire this resin from Domhnall, who himself is a collector of curiosities and similar odd items. This hints that some survivors eventually turned Undead – assuming they weren't already –and took up residence at the Burg once the new city was constructed. At least *some* must have survived up until that point to be making use of the old church, and a proper city would be preferable to overgrown ruins.

Dusk is unlikely to have joined them, however. While the latest we can summon her is shortly after her rescue, her ring drops from the Darkroot Basin hydra. The lake it resides in connects to a large cave where we find the Crystal Golem imprisoning the princess, and where we can later loot a corpse with her equipment. This cave doesn't exist in her time, but it is possible that the princess lived in these caverns directly below Oolacile's mausoleum. But since we can kill Dusk, the ring needs to have been left behind in the area before she was even captured by the Crystal Golem. She received the ring upon her birth, and it likely represents her royal status, hence the name Dusk Crown Ring. Leaving it with the land suggests that the princess-in-exile chose to let her status be laid to rest along with her collapsing nation. If she is not killed, then she is unlikely to have returned to her people and probably lived a quiet life, away from humans.

On Reflection

The gods were right to bury Oolacile with Artorias. Its secrets present all the evidence needed to confirm their deception throughout all of human history. We are fortunate then that Miyazaki was given the opportunity to share this story in DLC. It may not be critical, but the side story is still a huge accessory to the overarching plot. And by introducing the character of Manus, we see how the gods so readily used and discarded mankind's ancestors, covering up their achievements and struggles along with their bodies. Manus may not be the furtive pygmy, but he serves as an excellent proxy. To the medials, as seen with Gwyn, nothing could be worse than having your existence forgotten.



State and Church

If the nation of Thorolund existed before the Way of White, we aren't provided any indication. The Japanese for Thorolund (Sorurondo) can be read as Sol-londo – "haven of sol", or the sun, same as Anor Londo. This is appropriate for a country dominated by a church dedicated to sun worship; it may even imply that Lloyd founded the country to establish a foothold in the world of man while avoiding nations potentially already corrupted by the Dark. Whatever the case, Thorolund society has revolved around the Way of White for centuries. As the "holy man face of Thorolund" (ソルロンドの聖者顔) we can select for ourselves would suggest, the land is a country of clergymen known for their stubbornness,[1] implying the rigid culture of a nation dominated by a dogmatic church. And while said church has spread to many human states beyond Thorolund, it has had the most impact there. The "distinctive" priest hat is worn only in Thorolund for the sole purpose of denoting one's status in the church,[2] making it a meaningless article of clothing anywhere else.

In short, Thorolund culture emphasizes rank, resulting in strong ties between church and state. Like its Darkmoon variant, the White Séance Ring is actually a "White Faith priest ring" (白教の司祭の指輪) given to Way of White "high priests" (高司祭), not head bishops. These high-ranking priests double as Lloyd's apostles,[3] meaning that they are his most fervent followers and promote the church's religious policies on their god's behalf. As part of their duties, they are protectors of law, preserving church doctrine and thus enforcing rigid norms within the country. But they also act to protect social class, and are themselves great Thorolund nobles, not "royals" like the ring's English description asserts. In other words, the most influential of the nobility join the highest ranks of the church and then work to preserve the very social hierarchy that keeps the nobility in power.

There couldn't be a more blatantly corrupt system, but it reflects more on Lloyd than anyone else. For one, these are his personal priests, handpicked by the god. Likewise, this culture appears limited to Thorolund, suggesting that such corruption isn't systematic to the church as a whole. And finally, while the talismans for common believers and low-ranked clerics require faith to cast miracles, high-ranking clerics in Thorolund receive special talismans granted divine protection,[4] the production of which requires Lloyd's involvement. This divine protection substitutes the faith requirement – in other words, high-ranking clergy aren't required to practice what they preach. Petrus exemplifies this hypocrisy,[5] teaching us some advanced miracles when he can only cast weaker spells with lower prerequisite faith. In short, Lloyd must know that his church is run by mostly self-serving aristocrats.

1 **Holy Man Face of Thorolund**
Countenance of Thorolund, country of clergymen known for their stubbornness.

2 **"Unique hat that only those of Thorolund wear even among Way of White priests.**
It is only for denoting one's status within the church, so has practically no meaning in the land of Lordran." - Priest's Hat

3 **"Holy ring given to Way of White high priests, who are apostles of the chief god Lloyd, King Gwyn's uncle. It has an effect that increases memory slots for magic.**
High priests of the Way of White are guardians of law and class and also great Thorolund nobility." - White Seance Ring

4 **"Catalyst to perform miracles of the gods. The Thorolund one is given only to high-ranking clergymen and realizes high might scaling regardless of faith thanks to divine protection." - Thorolund Talisman**

5 **"Then, I shall teach miracles to you. Although… their effectiveness depends on your effort and sincerity." - Petrus**

Yet the Way of White was established specifically to fight – through propaganda and force – the threat posed by the Dark. It isn't a humanitarian organization, though benevolent practices are an aspect of the institution. While lost in the localization, Great Heal Excerpt isn't a great miracle itself but a "generalized" version of one. The original Great Heal is used by high-ranking clergymen – presumably *not* from Thorolund – who bother to study the extremely long text and have the high faith requirement to perform it.[6] The church simplified the text so that the "common people" could gain access to its healing powers, proving that the church's higher echelons aren't as homogenous as Thorolund clerics would lead us to believe.



Nonetheless, what goodwill and charity does exist within the church seems calculated on behalf of Lloyd, the gods, and the Thorolund clerics. The gods lose nothing in providing humans comfort, and potentially inspire loyalty while quelling rebellious sentiment. Discouraging sedition would be of particular interest to Thorolund nobility, who would have the most to lose should the masses rise up to topple the current social infrastructure. They reap all the luxuries of the current system, and need only be concerned with fighting amongst themselves for who is on top.

Of course, Lloyd is the ultimate benefactor. As in New Londo, the infighting divides humans and makes them easier to control. Nobles act in this system to his ends, allowing him to maintain control over both them and the world of man at large. The irony that the gods maintain mankind's blind faith in them through virtually faithless proxies might raise a chuckle in itself, but it is even more amusing when considered in regards to Lloyd. The Allfather seems to act in his own self-interest more than for the benefit of the gods. There is as much hypocrisy in Lloyd using his close relation to Gwyn, no matter how tertiary, to justify his current position as Allfather as there is the church in Thorolund expecting its lay members to have faith while not necessarily having much themselves. The fact that the dogma that he imposed on the country gave it such a strict hierarchy in its social, political, *and* religious elements only emphasizes these double standards.

Thorolund's broken class system explains why several characters view clerics as self-motivated elitist hypocrites,[7] despite the good that the church's true believers undeniably do. This isn't a sham religion. The Canvas Talisman and holy set which comprise the starting gear of the cleric class reveal that clergy dissatisfied with church teachings embark on journeys to affirm their faith, acts of "self-cleansing"[8] through personal experience akin to religious retreats. These tough journeys through the elements – requiring

6 "One of the great miracles used by high-ranking clergymen. Greatly recovers HP.
'Great Recovery' is an enormous story, and there are few who study it for that reason, but the amount it recovers is more than sufficient for the body of man." - Great Heal

7 "By the way, y'know the sham clergyman Petrus? You're my bro, so I'm warning ya, but that guy... is scum. Don't be fooled by the appearance that he's a good man. 'Clergymen' are all like that." - Patches

8 "Trousers of clergy continuing on a journey. Since it is simple yet reliable, it protects from wind and rain, and warms the body.
Those not satisfied with the church's teachings go on a journey and affirm their own faith. It is the Way of White's act of self-cleansing." - Holy Trousers

simple, coarse clothing – aren't forced upon them as the localization implies. Rather, they are personal pilgrimages in search of the truth of the faith – out in the world rather than in a house of God.

We can choose to be one such practitioner of this tradition. Although we start with this traveling attire even as a *female* cleric – who have their own uniform for journeying – this can be attributed to us embarking on one such journey of self-cleansing, likely suffering from our own crisis of faith after the curse manifested within us. Rather than staying to follow the church's directive, we wrestled with our newfound unholy existence by going out into the world on a personal mission, only to later be captured and thrown into the Northern Undead Asylum by that same world of man. The Way of White has a real spiritual element that goes beyond the pragmatic applications of the institution itself, as demonstrated by these wayfaring pilgrims. That said, the fact that these self-cleansing journeys became an established practice says much about the church's systemic failings.

At the same time, the biggest critics of church corruption are characters of ill repute themselves, those with likely just as weak faith as these clerics. These scoundrels would probably be more indifferent to Thorolund's corruption if they weren't subjected to a holy man's sermonizing against murder and stealing when he is liable to do the same. For most, the positive impact that the Way of White has on their otherwise arduous lives makes it easy for most to overlook these problems. And so long as the church remains popular with the masses and keeps the gods' control over mankind steady, what's wrong with letting some bad apples run the show?

A Telling Lie

A perfect example of Thorolund's hierarchical culture, as well as potential insight into the mind of their Allfather, can be found in the story of Petrus and Reah. Befitting a character sharing a name with the Biblical Peter, Petrus is a high-ranking cleric equipped with a Thorolund talisman and the elite cleric set provided to clergymen of his stature. The armor is also typically for ranking clerics on missions,[9] fitting for an Undead sent after the Rite of Kindling. He mentions that it is *his* job to protect Reah and company on this Undead mission,[10] not "their" job to protect "her" as the localization asserts. He is an "overseer" akin to a platoon captain, which explains why he alone wears the elite equipment for this mission. On a more personal note, Petrus wields the Knight Shield indicative of an aristocratic

9 "Helmet worn by clergy warriors of the Way of White, famous for tenaciously not falling.
Even among them, the black one in particular is one of warriors entrusted with a mission, and many are also high-ranking priests." - Cleric Helm

10 "The people I am waiting for are my master's daughter and young knights. They are young and bear an Undead mission. I am their guardian, hence why I am called an overseer." - Petrus

upbringing, which is reinforced by his bob-cut hair and formal speech. His family has a fairly old history, likely providing Thorolund cleric knights for generations and receiving the accompanying prestige and dignity in return.

However, the knight's weapon of choice is a morning star, a particularly barbaric weapon even for the Way of White.[11] His talisman also suggests that he has very little faith, as does the fact that he can only cast a weak Heal spell despite knowing Great Heal Excerpt. The dichotomy between how he looks and acts doesn't end there. Behind the building that Petrus hangs around at Firelink Shrine, we find several chests storing Lloyd's talismans, homeward bones, another morning star, a talisman, and some cracked red eye orbs. It all seems to be Petrus' property; indeed, he would need homeward bones since he lacks the faith to cast Homeward itself despite also teaching that miracle. Furthermore, the placement of this collection indicates that he deliberately kept it out of sight. He is hiding his questionable behavior.

Oswald alludes to Petrus being a "sinful man",[12] implying that the church official has been nonetheless using those cracked red eyes to invade others before going to Velka's pardoner for absolution. This isn't the only sign of the man's personal foibles, however. When we first encounter him, he ignores us[13] only to later apologize by gifting a copper coin.[14] Not only is this an extremely cheap, patronising gesture, but it is absolutely worthless in Lordran. Petrus knows this, as we later have to bribe him with souls to learn about the Undead mission.[15] As Lautrec and Patches both allude, many clerics act holier-than-thou while being as sinful as those they condemn, and Petrus is a prime example. The cleric knight even admits to his hypocrisy when he kills us after no longer seeing a reason to keep up the act. "A wolf in sheep's clothing,"[16] indeed.

Petrus is the typical Thorolund noble turned clergyman, a stark contrast to Reah. She is a daughter of a distinguished noble family in Thorolund[17] and not the "youngest" daughter of *the* good house of Thorolund as the localization words it. Despite her particularly prestigious lineage, the holy woman shows genuine dedication to the church's teachings and is determined to succeed in its Undead mission. Exemplifying this, she carries an Ivory Talisman[18] and casts Great Heal, both of which demand a large amount of faith. Even the miracles that she teaches surpass Petrus' repertoire, meaning that she has studied many of the church's longest and most obscure texts. On a more personal note, she mentions her father in her last words,[19] suggesting a great deal of respect for and a sense of duty towards the head of her household. In both her religious and social life, she is portrayed as dutiful and sincere, humble in both station and personality – though somewhat snooty. This extends to her somewhat complicated relationship with Vince and Nico.

11 "Hammer with sharp spikes on its pommel. The cruel image is strong even among the weapons of clergymen.
Due to the effect of the sharp spikes, it has a bleeding effect despite being of the strike attribute." - Morning Star

12 "Oh... are you acquainted with Petrus of Thorolund? Surely, he might get along with you. For he is also a deeply sinful man... Nyaheheheheheh..." - Oswald

13 "Oh, hello. Nice to meet you. I am Petrus of Thorolund, but do you have some business with me?... If there's no business, it is best that we don't get involved with one another." - Petrus

14 "Oh, it is you. I should have told you, 'it is best that we don't get involved with one another'..... Well, I understand your feelings too. I don't like being insensitive either. Here, my feelings. Please, take care of it. Come on, it is fine. Don't hold back." - Petrus

15 "The Undead mission, huh? I am sorry, but I cannot tell you that. But, since you became my student, depending on your faith..." - Petrus

16 "I am a wolf in sheep's clothing." - Petrus

17 "Lady Reah is the honorable daughter of a distinguished family of Thorolund." - Petrus

18 "Catalyst to perform miracles of the gods. The white talisman is given only to women of the clergy and it greatly changes its values according to the owner's faith." - Ivory Talisman

19 "Ugh! Guuugh... Father..." - Reah

The two are Reah's childhood friends from school, but Petrus is skeptical.[20] This isn't simply the cleric casting aspersions as the localization might impress, but legitimate doubt on his part about their supposed friendly relationship. The young men are of significantly lower social status than Reah or Petrus given their use of basic, widely-used caduceus shields.[21] Moreover, Vince comes off as whiny and unpleasant while Nico little more than grumbles whenever we try engaging with him in conversation. Yet Vince claims that they have an inseparable relationship, hence he can't abandon them despite the trouble.[22] He also initially pleads for us to not approach Reah with our "dirty" appearance, fearing that we will scare the noblewoman.[23] No matter how much he or Nico complain, genuine bonds of friendship compel them to share the burden of their mission.



Consider the situation. Three childhood friends just so happen to die and turn Undead around the same time. Why? The same reason that young clerics like them are typically replete with humanity.[24] *They* are the ones risking their lives hunting Undead in the world of man and collecting humanity as spoils. With how stratified Thorolund society is, senior members of the church no doubt ensconce themselves in cushy administrative positions safe from harm. And Vince, Nico, and Reah certainly seem familiar with Undead hunts. Although more a healer than a fighter,[25] Reah readily becomes hostile if provoked, coldly describing us as an enemy of the gods.[26] Meanwhile, Vince and Nico are church knights and accomplished warriors – the latter in particular casting Replenishment and wielding a crescent axe. In all likelihood, these three fought side-by-side against Undead only to end up cursed themselves after a hunt gone wrong.

Vince and Nico care for Reah, who in turn expresses great sorrow over losing them while blaming herself. Indeed, outside of Undead hunts, the girl seems innocent and naïve. Her two friends possess Thorolund talismans, so they have enough rank to be familiar with the church's corruption despite their young age. Perhaps they are so protective of Reah in part because she is ignorant of the darker sides of her church and country? She claims to be uncomfortable around strangers[27] and so is unlikely to have many friends, especially with her status. Petrus also claims that Reah isn't worth anything without her lineage,[28] further implying that she is a pampered aristocrat who has never needed to protect herself

20 "The young knights are her so-called school friends...? But, in what way? From my point of view, I do not think them to be very good friends..." - Petrus

21 "Medium metal shield. An old symbol, twin blue snakes, is depicted on it. One of the standard shields that is widely used." - Caduceus Kite Shield

22 "Oh, you again. Do you have some business with me? But, I most likely won't be able to help. We share a mission with M'lady. It is troublesome but, well, it's because M'lady, Nico, and I can't get rid of each other. There's no way I can abandon them at this point." - Vince

23 "Hm? What the, and you are? You are extremely dirty... even if it is a place like this, not so much, okay? At the very least, don't go near M'lady in that state. She will definitely be startled." - Vince

24 "Well, good information, right? Since young clergymen possess plenty of humanity..." - Lautrec

25 "It is long overdue, but I am Reah of Thorolund. I should assist you somehow, but I have a feeble body and know nothing other than miracles. If those are fine, please speak to me again." - Reah

26 "... An impious one!? Or already a Hollow!? Whatever the case, I cannot forgive you! Fool who spits on the gods!" - Reah

27 "... I am not too good with people with whom I am not familiar. So, the bonfire below is a little lively... I couldn't stay. I have lost everyone I knew..." - Reah

28 "I do not understand why you did that, but it was pointless. Because if not for her pedigree, that young girl is of no use alive..." - Petrus

or play politics. When stripped of her family's status, wealth, and protection, the noble clergywoman is helpless and thereby "useless" without friends to protect her.

Intertwining politics and religion has created a complex web of relations in Thorolund. Petrus is expected to ensure that Reah and her entourage make it through this mission alive so that they can return home as heroes despite being Undead. People like Petrus supposedly keep the worthless copper coin because they hope to one day return to the world of man. Indeed, Reah insists that we both focus on our individual missions instead of fraternizing, and further implies that her mission for the Rite of Kindling is a sort of penance for the "sin" of being Undead. There is much at stake for the Undead nobles assigned this historically suicidal task; it will decide if they are welcomed back into high society.

But after the group finally departs for the Catacombs, only Petrus returns, having abandoned Reah[29] and feigning ignorance.[30] Many fans believe this to be a premeditated act, perhaps even a regular offense. However, this hypothetical conspiracy theory ignores Petrus' actual crime.

Lautrec heard about what happened to Reah straight from Petrus[31] and is willing to sell us the information. Yet if we talk to Petrus before buying the knight's tip, he is clearly stressed and stumbles over his lie, as if he is coming up with it on the spot. This is not the behavior of someone who regularly leaves his charges for dead in the Catacombs; he is flustered and not thinking any of it through. In fact, Petrus went into the Catacombs fully expecting to fulfill his duty as overseer and protect the party. But the three under his charge unexpectedly fell into a pit and were trapped.[32] While we can also fall into the pit because of Patches, the clerics' fate isn't strictly his fault. If the thief is killed before they depart for their mission, the scenario plays out identically save for Reah *not* blaming Patches for pushing them in. Therefore, their fate does not seem linked to some larger conspiracy wherein the church or another third party colluded with the ne'er-do-well.

Either way, it is visiting the pit to begin with that leads to tragedy. Even when Patches does push them, Reah still blames her "helplessness and foolishness" for the awful outcome, suggesting that it was her lack of self-awareness that led to her "involving" Vince and Nico – and that she in particular was to blame for the three's fate. While the localization states that she and her friends were all "fooled" by Patches, she in fact only acknowledges that they were all thrust into the pit. And although she apologizes for us having to kill her hollowed friends due to all three's mismanagement, she later implies her naiveté to be the underlying cause of their predicament. Either she mistakenly trusted Patches, or she got too close to the pit on her own accord; the end result is the same. All three of them fall in, and Vince and Nico then die and hollow trying to find a way out, leaving Reah feeling guilty over the whole disastrous affair.

29 "A little bit ago, the party of a holy woman of Thorolund came to this land, but that holy woman seems to have been abandoned beyond the Catacombs. Her followers either ran away or died and became Hollows…. Well, either way, she's apparently alone now." - Lautrec

30 "…Ah, oh, it is you, huh? Well, actually, I got separated from M'lady… I have tried all possible means but could not find her. Where has she gone… M'lady… I swore I'd protect you with my life…" - Petrus

31 "Hm? That information? I heard it from an old man who had run away. That bastard, dared to have an air of superiority while he was the very lowly bastard! Kwah hah hah hah hah!" - Lautrec

32 "That time… when we were thrust down by a man called Patches and Vince and Nico became Hollows, I, my prayers did not do anything. I was helpless and foolish. And yet, without knowing this, I involved those two… Perhaps Petrus saw me from long ago and realized that was the case. That is probably why he abandoned me and ran away… I do not think it can be helped." - Reah

33 "Oh, forgive me. Miracles, right?… It is embarrassing, since I am distracted." - Petrus



Petrus then abandoned Reah in her time of need. She infers from his cowardice that her overseer had long realized her flaws were liable to get others killed, hence he left her to die. For sure, Petrus was clearly convinced a rescue attempt wasn't worth the risk to his person. But for Reah to think that him abandoning his responsibilities "can't be helped" gives the corrupt cleric far too much credit. Meanwhile, Petrus' actions now force him to figure out an explanation to everyone back home for how he survived while the three under his charge had perished. Even worse, were Reah to somehow escape and reveal the truth to the church and her family, Petrus' moment of cowardice would become political suicide – at minimum. These concerns are likely what is distracting him[33] when we try engaging him in dialogue post-disaster. He tries to brush it off, but it is clear that he is thinking hard on how to proceed.

That is where Lautrec comes in. Based on various dialogues, we can infer that Lautrec, Patches, Shiva, Oswald, Solaire, and Petrus have been at the Undead Burg longest and are for the most part acquainted with one another. Patches in particular is familiar with both Petrus and Lautrec, knowing that the latter is "crazy" and ready to gut anyone for humanity. If Petrus also knew about Lautrec's dubious character, then there can only be one reason to tell the knight about his dilemma: he has requested a hit. The cleric, too scared to go back and risk his own life, tries to get someone else to hazard the tomb in his stead. Since Reah is replete with humanity, there is plenty of incentive for desperate or unscrupulous Undead like Lautrec to accept. However, Lautrec ultimately passes this job onto us if we befriend him, and Petrus suddenly becomes very candid as a result.

The localization unfortunately misrepresents Petrus' explanation on where we can find Reah as a tearful recount of her slipping on the coffin leading to the pit. This obvious "lie" has caused unnecessary confusion over Petrus' motives when the Japanese script is clear. Once he learns that we are Lautrec's comrade, the cleric trusts us to kill her in the knight's stead and so explains the entire situation,[34] confident that we can guarantee Reah's silence. But if we instead choose to rescue her, he kills her himself before she can return home. Aside from his ominous comments before her death, Petrus drops her Ivory Talisman if killed after Reah is found dead in the Undead Parish, and admits to the deed in battle.

Still, there is more to this story than the cowardice of a corrupt clergyman, forsaking scruples to save his hide. It reflects on tensions and pressures within Thorolund's society. Despite the man's evident high rank within the church, Petrus is still a relatively low-ranking aristocrat compared to Reah. He is expected to ensure her safety in the church's mission, and refers to her with respect and honorifics denoting higher status. Her knowledge of Great Heal suggests that Reah is already a high-ranking member of the Way of White, and the fact that we find the White Séance Ring on the corpse of a holy woman confirms that either sex can ultimately attain the coveted role of one of Lloyd's high priests. Essentially, Reah's family status has guaranteed her a lofty position in both high society and the clergy, the two most valued elements of Thorolund culture. Petrus seems to resent this, repeatedly referencing how dependent she is on her family. It is this inferiority complex that drives the envious cleric to take advantage of the opportunity presented to him.

Petrus' final words indicate that he finds himself faultless in Reah's murder.[35] Indeed, everything he did was a panicked and desperate attempt to avoid losing everything after a moment of cowardice. In his mind, he is a victim of a rigid society that forced him to carry a naïve fool to glory and luxury at his own risk simply due to the circumstances of her birth. He may be a sham of

34 "... Oh. It is you. You are a friend of Sir Lautrec, are you? Then that shall make this quick. M'lady is in a hole in the ground which is beyond a giant's coffin you slide down in the depths of the Catacombs. Her two companions are no longer human, either. She is probably crying all by her lonesome. If it is you, it can be done easily and freely. Since a little girl with only lineage should be unable to do anything... Keh heh heh heh..." - Petrus

35 "Ugh, why... why was I... What was it that... I did..."–Petrus

36 "Simple pendant without any effect.
But if anything, warm memories are required on arduous journeys." - Pendant

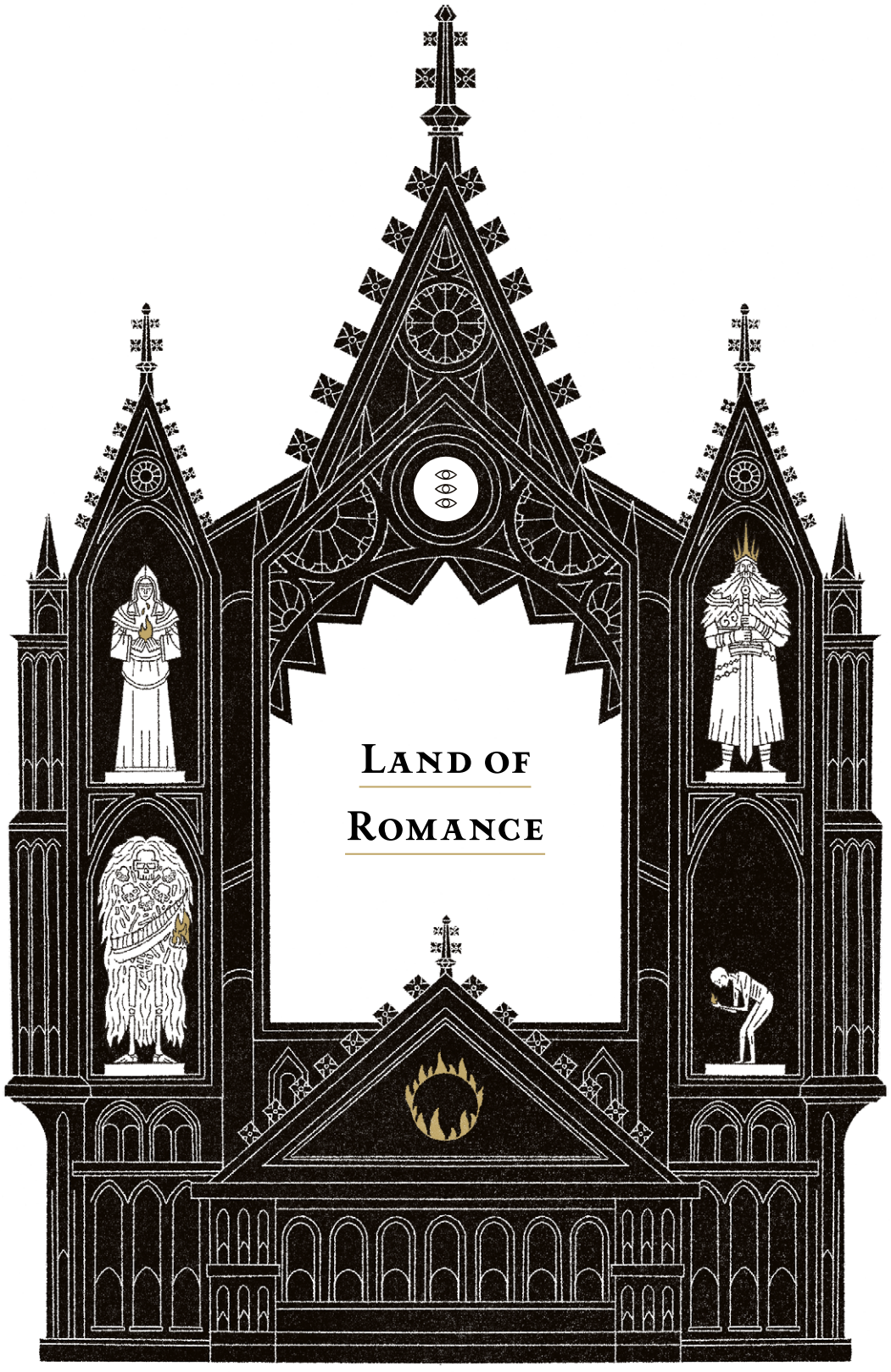
a holy man, but Petrus is a cleric knight – he has fought and killed on the church's behalf. Yet no matter how hard he works to climb the ladder, he will never reach the heights of those who started with even greater status than himself. This is apparently suffocating for someone like Petrus.

Petrus is a warrior who has lied, cheated, and stolen to get where he is. He won't become a stepping stone for another just because she won the family lottery. She never had to fight for her place, she let her so-called friends and countless others do it for her. And those friends died for her foolishness. He won't join them. He will leave her to die. He will send others to ensure she does die. He will kill her himself if she does somehow make it back. *He* has done nothing wrong! What his comments actually reveal are Petrus' own insecurities. The feeling of being noble and yet lesser than someone you view as inferior. He is a man who will gladly sit on his high horse but dismount it when inconvenient. The irony is that Reah expresses a great deal of faith in Petrus while Petrus has absolutely no faith in Reah.

In place of Reah's corpse is a pendant – a reminder of fond memories from home while on her journey[36] – but trading it in with Snuggly nets us a Souvenir of Reprisal, representing proof of vengeance upon a sinner. Reah is greatly concerned about the inherent impiety of undeath, assuming us a mad Hollow if we attack her, and questioning if she will end up in the same sorry state. But what she learned was that her greatest sin was her own weakness. By contrast, Petrus feels righteous in killing a supposed superior propped up by her lineage. Yet the truth is that he is nothing more than a hypocritical murderer. This tragedy demonstrates the immense pressure generated by Thorolund's inflexible hierarchy and the drive to succeed in a rigid caste system where social and political status decide everything. It is a country of self-serving hypocrites, loyal dogs trying to get by in a rigged game, and the privileged naïfs ignorant of the corruption that they benefit from.

Petrus' story bears parallels with Lloyd, and that may very well be intentional. Lloyd imposed this broken system in Thorolund, and it reflects on him. We see Lloyd's desire for total control, his willingness to employ and propagate corrupt behavior for his benefit, his obsession with stratified hierarchy. And with Petrus in particular, we see the same resentment of his apparent inferiority to those with higher status solely as a consequence of chance. How different would things have been had Petrus been born into Reah's family? What if Lloyd was Gwyn's father and not a mere uncle? Alas, the only question of relevance for them now is whether Lloyd too will one day share Petrus' potential fate.





For Gods and Country

Astora, or Astra (アストラ), is a portmanteau of Astraea (アストラエア) and Ostrava (オストラヴァ) from *Demon's Souls*, with references to both characters found in its culture. As the "noble face of Astora" (アストラの貴族顔) proves, there are enough aristocrats in the country for their features to become the defining racial traits.[1] These traits seem to consist of blond hair and blue eyes, as three of the four known Astorans we meet bear these features, though two hide them behind helmets; certain nobles strive to retain such golden locks according to the hair option's description. As a blueblood with the same traits, Astraea was also a holy woman of the predominant faith in the *Demon's Souls* setting, hence the major influence of the Way of White upon Astora.

Andre is your typical blacksmith and a resident of Astora who has seen one of the church's embers. While this was "only once" according to his Japanese dialogue, it does imply that the church has a presence in the country. We see this again with Astoran knights. In European history, the code of chivalry expected knights to be faithful servants of God, so selecting the knight background grants us higher faith stat than all the other starter classes save for the deprived and the thief – the latter only because we would have a "guilty conscience"[2] over our past crimes and thus fear divine retribution. The knight and cleric are also the only classes to have the Joy gesture replaced with Prayer while already starting off as covenant members. In other words, knights are typically men of faith, and this is especially true for those of Astora. Their straight swords are blessed with divine power which requires faith to wield,[3] and such blades require gods to bless them, meaning close ties between church and state.

The description for the knight class indicates that we would be a "low-ranking" knight[4] versus the elite or "high-ranking" knights described by various Astoran equipment such as the Dragon Crest Shield. This shield bears the image of a fire-breathing dragon and is imbued with "magic power" to defend against fire, which is not described as a blessing like the magic in their straight swords. This implies that Astora has ties with sorcerers as well, which may explain the blue hue of that shield and the similarly fire-warding surcoat of elite knights.[5] Given that their culture worships fire, the only reason for these knights to have such defenses would be that they face the element fairly often, namely from dragons.

Since the Dragon Crest Shield bears the beast as its coat of arms, Astoran culture is clearly quite familiar with the creatures – or, at least,

1 **Noble Face of Astora**
Beautiful-looking noble face. Many in Astora.

2 **Thief**
Thief with a guilty conscience.

3 **"Straight sword of a knight of unknown name. Likely that of a high-ranking knight of Astora. Fine quality weapon applied with a potent blessing." - Astora's Straight Sword**

4 **Knight**
Low-ranking knight.

5 **"Armor of a knight of unknown name. Likely that of a high-ranking knight of Astora based on the crest of the blue surcoat which defends against fire. Even though that knight held a mission as an Undead, he fell at the Undead Institute and probably ended up becoming a Hollow." - Elite Knight Armor**



their descendants. Rendal proves that wyverns are a threat in the world of man, and who else would you send to face such dangerous beasts except your best warriors, appropriately equipped for the task? This also suggests that there remains a sizable population of the beasts to regularly defend King and country from. Perhaps it was this constant threat from such large, fearsome beasts that allowed Astora to weather the threat of the Evil Eye.

The Ring of the Evil Eye confines the "evil" spirit bearing that name, which the description notes to be a beast that once attacked Astora,[6] though the Japanese term is specifically *mamono* (魔物) used to describe demons or monsters in general. Because this term is also used to describe the titanite demons, we can infer that it is synonymous with the English "demon" (デーモン) in this context. (*Mamono* is later used to describe various demons in *DS2*.) And so, to distinguish between the two terms while maintaining clarity, I shall use "fiend" from here on. Regardless of the terminology, this fiend was large, powerful, and wicked enough to threaten an entire nation with its arrival.

This ring's gemstone appears to be a black eye with an unsettling slit pupil, implying that it is the creature's actual eye or at least a manifestation of it. (*DS2* suggests that it even squirms occasionally.) Moreover, its ominous aura and black color scheme evokes the Dark. While the Japanese description makes no mention of Evil Eye being a "dark" fiend like the localization suggests, the fact that the ring absorbs HP from fallen foes – leeching life energy untethered from the body – makes the connection likely. This implies the fiend to be a creation of the Abyss, perhaps by the hands of ancient man during or even before friction with the gods arose. But whether its spawning was deliberate or accidental, the fiend was still evidently defeated and its soul eventually sealed in the ring (multiple rings as *DS2* later confirms). This encounter may have been what inspired the country to have such a fervent devotion to the gods in the first place, mistaking circumstance for providence – much like how Astraea's pure luck was misconstrued. Regardless, Astora can no doubt fend for itself, and has produced a successful culture of heroism.

One of these heroes is the Undead prince Ricard. We encounter the rather famous,[7] not "infamous", prince in Sen's Fortress wearing Astora's elite knight set – an obvious reference to Ostrava. Both characters are travelling princes who have donned the armor of a knight, and both their armor sets were central to their respective game's cover and promotion. In Ricard's case, however, he tours the land out of necessity,

6 **"Ring confining the evil spirit of the Evil Eye, a fiend said to have attacked Astora once.**
The Evil Eye's magic power still subsists and absorbs HP when defeating enemies." - Ring of the Evil Eye

7 **"Rapier decorated with elaborate ornaments. Weapon of the famous Undead prince Ricard.**
The story of the prince Ricard is one of the noble wandering tales, and he, who was born to royalty, wandered various lands by a quirk of fate and ultimately became Undead, embarked on a journey to the North, and was finished." - Ricard's Rapier

not personal interest. His story is described as a "monomyth" in the English description, but this vastly oversimplifies his tale, reducing it to Joseph Campbell's basic hero's journey template; the original script actually names a sub-category coined by the Japanese scholar Eiji Ōtsuka: *kishiyuriyuuritan* (貴種流離譚). This term describes tales of an often young, highborn warrior wandering a foreign country by himself.

The basic structure of this "noble wandering tale" sees a protagonist of high status cast out from his homeland due to disadvantageous circumstances – often an ominous prophecy or circumstances surrounding his birth – threatening his life or livelihood. Once cast out, the hero is saved by someone of much lower status, possibly even an animal, and grows up to learn of his lineage. He goes on to travel distant lands, refining himself through the challenges along the way and proving his virtue. The hero ultimately earns praise and accolades at the end of his long journey. If the protagonist lacked a just nature at the outset of his journey, he will often have to redeem himself for past wrongs. Examples of this hypothesized type of monomyth include Greek, Roman, and Japanese stories such as the tales of Oedipus or Genji and the myths of Remus and Romulus or Susanoo.

Let us consider our Undead prince. Ricard was born into royalty but has "wandered various lands by a quirk of fate". The rapier he wields bears elaborate ornamentations, but he wears the standard armor of a high-ranking knight. Perhaps he was cast out of his royal line and forced to grow up as a lesser noble or even a commoner, with his sword acting as the sole indicator of his lineage. He became a knight and rose through the ranks by merit, eventually embarking on a journey where, through valor and virtue, he might reclaim his birthright. Given the characteristic features beneath his helmet, Ricard likely is Astoran royalty. His "quirk of fate" may have been a power struggle within the family, forcing him to be cast out or hidden away. And when he was discovered not only to be alive but hidden in plain sight as a knight serving the regime, he was banished and thus aimlessly wandered nations.

Ricard ultimately died during his exile and, perhaps by yet one more quirk of fate, ended up Undead. Since he then makes a trip to the north and takes on Sen's Fortress, he was at least vaguely aware of the Undead mission, potentially dating his lifetime to around a century ago. The rapier's localized description claims that he disappears up north, while the Japanese text uses the equally vague "finished" – whether finishing a journey or meeting one's end. He attacks us without obvious cause or reason at Sen's Fortress, but he isn't visibly Hollow beneath his helmet. However, we are also explicitly told that the warrior in the Undead Burg watchtower has Hollowed when he also

appears human beneath the helm. Given that neither head can be seen in normal gameplay without somehow clipping through their helmets, FromSoftware had no incentive to ensure their appearance matched their clearly Hollowed behaviour. Ricard's legend ultimately ended in tragedy.

Aside from this aristocratic hero, we get a few other peeks at Astora's culture. The binoculars are actually dubbed a "telescope" made for *both* eyes as the Japanese description explains.[8] Apparently, the very idea of binoculars is so novel that the name hasn't even been coined yet; it being described as "unusually" advanced and fashioned by a renowned craftsman of Astora adds to this impression. Ostrava, too, acquired a telescope from his exploration of the unusually advanced regions south of his homeland, but the reference is also indicative of Astora's impressive strides in technology. Astoran ingenuity can be seen in Andre's willingness to experiment with any ember we bring him, so long as it doesn't require some sort of specialized training. In short, Astorans are innovative as well as pious.

8 "Telescope for both eyes made of brass. Greatly looks at faraway scenery.
Unusually advanced tool, made by the hands of a renowned craftsman of Astora. What it can do is simple, but there are various ways to use it, and its value greatly changes based on the possessor." - Binoculars

Walk with Purpose

We only know the name of Oscar, knight of Astora, thanks to cut dialogue. Perhaps the name was another reference to Ostrava, but the similarities largely end there. Based on his facial features, profession, and an opaque reference to his family, Oscar is Astoran nobility who became a ranking knight. After he died, presumably in the line of duty, and turned Undead, the knight heard the story handed down in his family, which he narrates to us when first leaving the Northern Undead Asylum. The localization pretties up his speech as if it were some archaic prophecy, but he in fact just plainly elucidates the details: Undead have a "sign" of a mission, and so those whom the sign has appeared on are to go to Lordran from the prison. The implication may be that the country where the Undead institute sits is Astora or one of its neighbors. Still, the fact we are locked up in this facility regardless of background leaves the truth open to the imagination.

The past century has seen Undead of various nations take on the mission, even entire armies. Oscar's family most likely hands down just one variation of the story. Regardless, to fulfill this legend, the knight has been sent to the institute and staged a sort of breakout for what sane Undead remain. He drops a Hollowed corpse carrying the key from a hole in the ceiling of our cell. We were apparently the only Undead he could find who hadn't gone completely mad, as he drops the key – complete with former owner – in our cell rather

than keep hold of it for further use. Freeing us demonstrates an unspoken humility in Oscar. He recognizes that any Undead can fulfill the legend's requirements and nobly chooses to help as many as possible, increasing the likelihood of the mission's success while lowering his own chances of reaping the glory. Of course, *Dark Souls* lets no good deed go unpunished.

After providing us the key, Oscar is attacked and fatally wounded – we find him lying among rubble, barely conscious, light pouring in from the hole in the ceiling that he implicitly fell from. This wasn't just a freak accident, since the Asylum Demon jumps down from the roof when we first approach the exit. It is no coincidence that this prison warden was up there when one of its escaped prisoners had been traversing the area only minutes prior, especially when said prisoner holds the key to the exit in the event that we kill the demon during our very first encounter. Unfortunately for Oscar, the Asylum Demon bashed him through the roof, ending his story before it could really begin. Still, he dies with hope after entrusting what he knows to us so that we can carry on the mission, showing us his Astoran nobility as both a pious believer and honorable warrior.

Based on his cut dialogue, Oscar was originally intended to survive his internment at the asylum and act as our foil. After we ring the Bells of Awakening, Oscar could receive the honor of becoming Frampt's champion in our stead.[9] Additional cut dialogue also confirms that either Kaathe or Frampt would have personally opened up Sen's Fortress[10] for us depending on who we side with, with Oscar siding with the other to inevitably oppose us at the finale.[11] While siding with Frampt is in line with his original mission, his temptation by Kaathe[12] would have been foreshadowed by dialogue in which he expresses happiness for us but wishes that he too had a mission to fulfill,[13] hinting at a deep insecurity. As someone from a country of honor and heroism, to have no purpose to life would weigh heavily on him – and Kaathe would provide him that purpose.

Oscar's malaise in the cut storyline reflects a problem for the Undead as a whole. Most characters have a "mission" of their own that presents a pathway to metaphorical salvation. Those who don't begin to hollow as they fall into despair. Oscar *has* to have a purpose to his existence, even if it means betraying everything that he once believed. Without that fulfillment, forget being a hero, he is not even human. This problem may be exacerbated by the culture he grew up in, but it is most definitely not unique to him. At least in the finished game, Oscar dies believing that his undeath has significance, passing the torch onto the one who would be the hero in his stead.



9 "I wanted to thank you who rung the Bells of Awakening. I received Elder Frampt's mission. I will be all right now. You concentrate on your motive, and let us both accomplish our own missions, okay?" - Oscar

10 "Is that all right? Then, I shall open Sen's Old Castle, the path which leads to Anor Londo." - Frampt

11 "... I knew it, it is you... somehow, I had a feeling it would be... I will kill you in accordance with the mission... fool who obeys Dark-stroker Kaathe... King of Dark..." - Oscar

12 "... I have been waiting..... slave of the gods, deceived by Frampt..... I will kill you..... and become the true King of Dark..." - Oscar

13 "You rang the Bells of Awakening and received Elder Frampt's mission, right? How wonderful. I have expectations of you. I too want to encounter a mission like you." - Oscar

The Grey Saint

Whereas Oscar provides insight into Astoran chivalry and heroism, Anastacia says much about its piety. Way of White holy women vary in rank within the church, so it is possible that she isn't a member of the nobility. At the same time, she shares the same blond hair and blue-eyes common to Astoran nobles, so her lack of explicit noble ties might just be a sign of humility. Whether or not she had a privileged upbringing, Anastacia has suffered heavily in her adult life. As a Fire Keeper, she bears the scars of countless humanity wriggling beneath her skin. Her entire uniform has been dirtied in bonfire ashes,[14] which indicates that she has kept to this duty for quite a while. She has also had her tongue ripped out to, according to the Crestfallen Warrior, avoid saying a god's name in vain. Finally, her legs have been maimed and bloodied her dress.

Some suggest that this violence is a sign of religious fundamentalism in remote, backwater regions of her country, but the evidence is lacking. The Crestfallen Warrior claims her missing tongue is the work of her village in English dialogue, but the Japanese script at most implies it to be her homeland. Without evidence that the woman comes from a remote village, we are left with only her occupation, which indicates that her tongue was cut out under the auspices of her local church. Moreover, it is supposedly an act of piety. Why? Gods' names are typically invoked when one is angry or pained enough to disregard civil and moral conduct. Given the agony of humanity wriggling within her, her fellow Astorans likely tore out her tongue so that she wouldn't inadvertently disrespect the gods as she suffered.

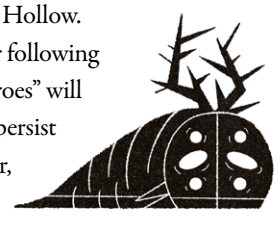
Astora clearly takes religion seriously, helping the church provide Fire Keepers for the Undead mission. Despite how cruel these measures may seem, Anastacia herself is dismayed if we resurrect her, apologizing for her "dirty" voice[15] and reluctant to speak with it[16] – an expression of her piousness. Like Reah, Anastacia is a holy woman taught that undeath is a sin. To reconcile their intrinsically unholy being with their undeniable devotion to the gods, they dedicate themselves entirely to fulfilling missions for the church as a kind of penance. Anastacia makes a point of thanking us for being the firelinker, believing that it will end the curse and allow her to die a human.[17] The dread of becoming a mindless Hollow that grips all Undead grasps her even tighter, since she believes that her very being – including her voice – goes against the gods.

Thus, Anastacia endures losing her tongue and the pain of humanity coursing beneath her skin to help the curse be lifted. Perhaps she even volunteered to lose her tongue in the first place, for fear of cursing the gods in her agony. (This would explain why we don't encounter another mute Fire Keeper anywhere in the series.) It could have also served as a form of self-flagellation. If she is an unholy monster by virtue of existing, then any harm brought upon her is deserved. It wouldn't be the last time that she went to such extreme measures.

Anastacia's legs have been mutilated, crippling her so that she "wouldn't run away" according to her skirt's description.[18] We know that she wasn't crippled from the start of her duties because she uses her legs to kneel in prayer during the opening cinematic; her clothes are the same ash grey in the sequence, while her surroundings suggest that she is praying in the graveyard behind Firelink Shrine. She has therefore already spent a fair amount of time as a Fire Keeper perfectly mobile. Her mutilation and imprisonment in the ruined cell at the shrine must be a relatively recent occurrence. Since we don't meet anyone associated with Anastacia, we can presume that she alone takes care of the shrine. Live humans are also quite the rarity in Lordran, making it unlikely anyone from her homeland travels to the far north to visit her. Lastly, the description of the holy woman's soul suggests that she imprisoned herself.[19] In short, Anastacia's missing legs are entirely self-inflicted.

Her skirt is bloodstained because she did the deed herself, a messy act that would inevitably leave splatters. She continues wearing her long-dirty clothes, so they must be her only attire. This act of self-harm guarantees that she can't escape from the cell that she has imprisoned herself in. Perhaps the suffering of being a Fire Keeper was becoming too much to bear, or perhaps she began losing hope after who knows how long preserving a bonfire without a hero, awaiting her inevitable hollowing. When faced with the thought of opposing the gods like that, she doubled down, making it impossible to renege on her duty no matter her personal feelings. She ensured that she will either fulfill her role as a Fire Keeper, or become an unholy monster trapped in a cell. This is the extent of her dedication to her gods-given mission. For penance and salvation, she is willing to endure any suffering.

Anastacia gently grasping at an ember in prayer in the cinematic is a telling reflection of what the world of man's plight means to the church. Fire is going out, and Undead appear in the resulting "night" everywhere. In this time of uncertainty, she grasps at what little fire remains to preserve it. The body she kneels before is an Undead, perhaps soon to be Hollow. Her gently reaching out to the body with the ember following her prayer conveys her hope that these "Undead heroes" will themselves keep the fire, maintain their sanity, and persist to save mankind. To do this, they need a Fire Keeper, and so she serves. Such is the power of belief.



14 "Clothes of the Fire Keeper of Firelink Shrine.
It was probably the white hood of a holy woman originally, but it is dirtied light in the ashes of the bonfire and now beyond recognition." - Dingy Hood

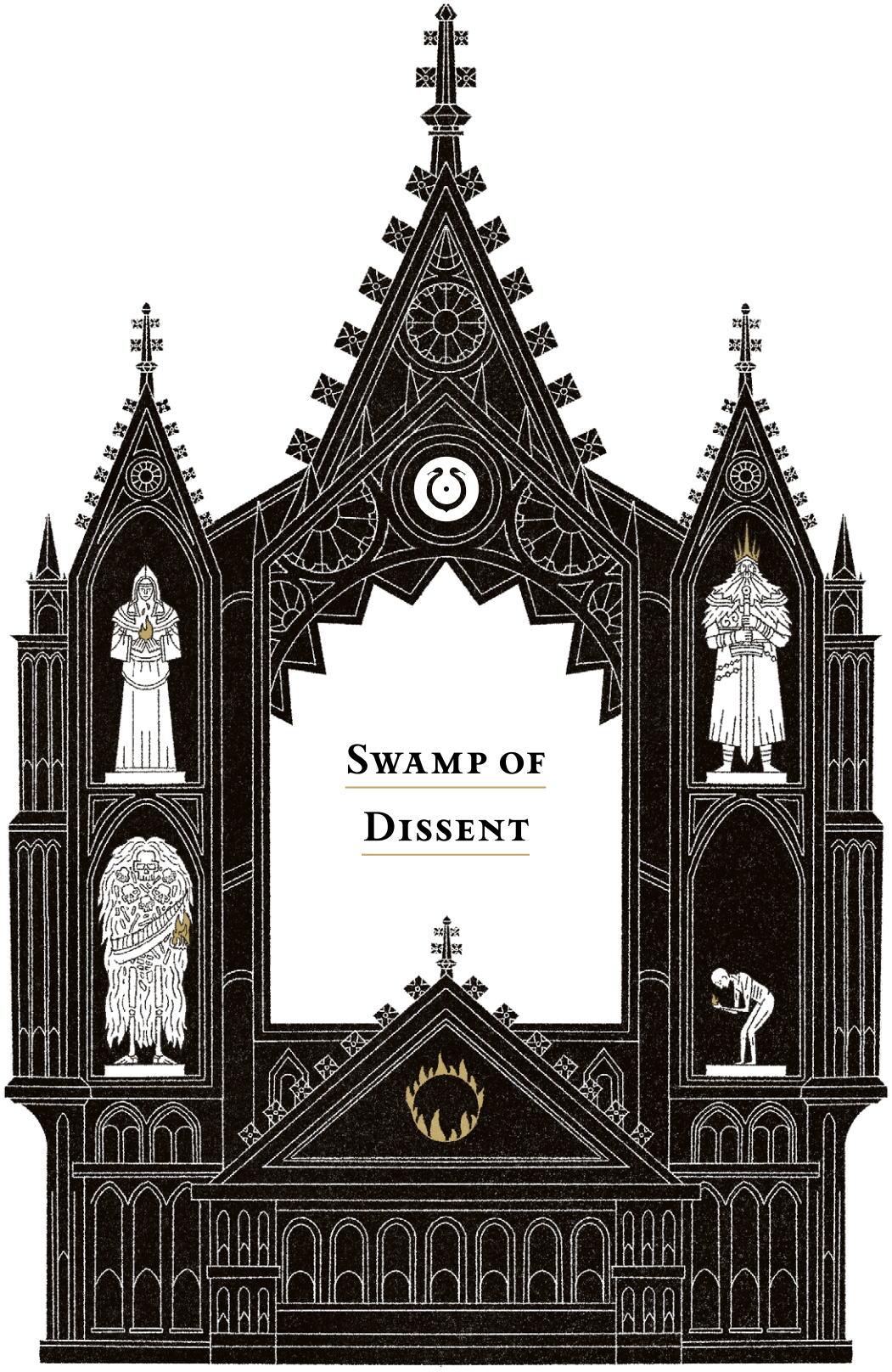
15 "... T-Thank you, very much... I am Anastacia of Astora. Thanks to you, I can continue being responsible for the bonfire... And... Hearing my dirty voice, please forgive me." - Anstacia

16 "... Forgive me... I am dirty, I should not be vocal... So, please..... stop..... talking already. Please." - Anastacia

17 "... I heard from Mr. Frampt... You have been conferred to link the fire... Thank you, very much... With this, the Undead curse will disappear, and I can die as a person... I can't do anything, but... I shall dedicate my all to you... Please, save us all..... Please." - Anastacia

18 "Clothes of the Fire Keeper of Firelink Shrine.
It was probably the white skirt of a holy woman originally, but maybe something was cut off so that she wouldn't run away, as it is stained thick with blood and now beyond recognition." - Blood-Stained Skirt

19 "Soul of the ash-colored holy woman, Fire Keeper of Firelink Shrine.
The soul of a Fire Keeper is a vessel for humanity, and this doesn't change in their bodies. There are countless humanity wriggling under the entirety of their skin, so their form becomes a most disgusting thing.
Even though she became prisoner of a dark cell, perhaps it was of her own initiative?" - Fire Keeper Soul



No Man's Land

The Great Swamp is less a formal nation so much as a loose community of many like-minded individuals. We learn little about its system of governance, and the bog doesn't have much contact with the wider world of man. Its pyromancers wear tattered but sturdy clothes[1] designed to weather the threats of the rugged marshlands,[2] be they fire, poison, or the sharp branches that they inevitably tread upon. As Laurentius describes it, the swamplands are a vibrant ecosystem filled with nature, which is likely why the standard weapon for the pyromancer class is a hand ax that one would use to chop trees or similarly thick foliage.

By all accounts, it is not the most ideal location for civilization, but many humans call it home out of necessity. According to the pyromancer set, many of its denizens were "driven out of the world". Civilization won't accept them, and so these exiles must adapt to live in this remote corner of human habitation.

While the localization calls the relevant face option the Eerie Great Swamp, it is more accurately the "different appearance of the Great Swamp" (大沼の異相), an *atypical* face in other words. The literal term "different form" (異形) can be read as either "atypical" (*ikei*) or "grotesque" (*igyou*), and this double meaning is especially relevant given the next line in the description: "Prejudice gives birth to heresy, and heresy travels to the Great Swamp."[3] These exiles were condemned by mainstream society as odd, subhuman, dangerous, or even evil. This irrational bias drives out people whose offense is as simple as merely looking unnatural, but pyromancers welcome them. While this suggests that not everyone who moves to the Great Swamps is a pyromancer, it also highlights that pyromancers and those they recruit are heretics by nature, perceived no different for their atypical traits than the explicitly grotesque chaos demons.

Road to Heresy

Pyromancy has spread far and wide in the world of man, but it is not often questioned how that is even possible. The gods sealed Izalith off from the larger world. Why has their culture persisted, even thrived, in a land so far away from home? The answer is Salaman. Quelana recalls taking the "youngster" as an apprentice over two hundred years ago.[4] The man

1 "Tattered cloth hood worn by pyromancers of the Great Swamp. Looks tattered but is surprisingly solid.
Because many of them are driven out of the world and live in remote areas, their garments are strong against threats of nature like fire and poison." - Tattered Cloth Hood

2 "Thick leather boots. The boots of a pyromancer who walks rugged grasslands and marshlands are very durable, so stepping on the likes of a sharp branch won't enter the sole." - Heavy Boots

3 Different Appearance of the Great Swamp
Atypical face differing from others. Prejudice gives birth to heresy, and heresy travels to the Great Swamp.

4 "Long ago, I accepted only one other person than yourself as an apprentice. Even though I say that, it is a story of over 200 years ago... He was not a very smart man, about the same as you. In your guys' world, he is called something like Pyromancy King Zalaman, I believe. That youngster really became something..." - Quelana

was specifically aiming to learn the witch's pyromancy. This is remarkable for two reasons. For one, he probably wasn't Undead. There was no Undead Burg and thereby Blighttown at the time, and Salaman eventually freely returned to the world of man, where he became well-renowned. However, it is equally unlikely that Salaman knew about the nomadic Quelana's location in what has become the Poison Swamp – she had fled her home and entered self-imposed exile. Thus, Salaman most likely intended to learn from the witches in Izalith itself, and merely happened to find Quelana in the ravine before finishing the dangerous trek to the demon realm.

Even then, Salaman's discovery of the witch was fortuitous. Quelana doesn't spawn for us unless we have upgraded our Pyromancy Flame ten times. And when she does, she expresses surprise that a human like us can see her,[5] deeming us worthy to train in her pyromancy due to our evident "talent". This ties her absence to pyromancy-related invisibility, meaning that Salaman too had the gift to see past this magic.

Considering his knowledge about the lost city's location and its creators, it is possible that Salaman had learned about pyromancy from surviving texts and used that wisdom to develop his talents. We can choose the Old Witch's Ring as a starting gift, so at least a few elements of Izalithian culture must have escaped the city's ruin, most likely exchanged prior to the divine conflict. But pyromancy flames are derived from a master's flame, so Salaman eventually needed proper training to become a real pyromancer.

But what is the spell that Quelana uses to actually hide her form from most beings? Most of Quelana's pyromancies are described as "primal" in reference to their nature as some of the original fire arts, but Undead Rapport is uniquely described as "special" instead.[6] This Undead "charm" (魅了) spell works on the basis of being captivated by fire, allowing us to mesmerize Undead with fire and manipulate them to act as our ally. However, unlike charm spells in most fantasy settings, this spell explicitly affects any gender, meaning that it wasn't designed to charm the opposite sex; the concept doesn't even limit it to Undead. (Indeed, the spell returns in *DS3* as "Rapport" and affects a variety of non-Undead enemies.) It seems that Quelana created such charm magic to obscure her presence from others. She uses fire to distract us and thereby block her being out of our perception, so she can live in her solitude. Eingyi implies that she is considered a rumor in Blighttown precisely because there are so few confirmed sightings.[7]

However, because Salaman and a scant few in Blighttown have "talent", they are not distracted by fire and see the witch just fine. The foundational principle of pyromancy is to not be wholly captivated by fire, so Quelana has no qualms training humans unaffected by her "special" spell. While

5 "Oh… an Undead who can see my form? Interesting… I am Craana of Izalith. It has been long since someone, with the body of man, could see my form… You're talented. Do you too aim for my pyromancies? Like that Zalaman." - Quelana

6 "Special pyromancy taught by Craana of Izalith. Charms Undead and temporarily makes them an ally.

Life is captivated by fire, and such an art is probably another aspect of pyromancy. It can be used regardless of gender." - Undead Rapport

7 "Do you know about 'Wandering Craana'? It is said that there is a nonhuman witch somewhere in the Poison Swamp. No one has seen her for certain, it is a foolish rumor, but…" - Eingyi

the witch describes Salaman as not very smart, she says the same about us, in what is apparently a character tic. In the Japanese script, Quelana constantly demeans us as her "stupid apprentice"[8] regardless of our actual skill with pyromancy and will only stop after we slay the Bed of Chaos,[9] fulfilling her dearest request. This cold treatment at the outset only to warm up to us as we develop a closer relationship is known as *tsundere*, a common personality type in Japanese media, and suggests that her harsh language is part of a front, not an indication of Salaman's intelligence.

After finishing his pyromancy training, Salaman returns to the world of man and spreads the art. In an IGN interview from 2012, Miyazaki says that Salaman "has an important role, along with the witches of Izalith, in the story of pyromancy rather than in the story of *Dark Souls*". A role in pyromancy's history comparable to its actual founders? The man is known by several titles, including the Master Pyromancer or "Pyromancy King" (呪術王). In other words, his skills were worthy of a ruler.



The Great Swamp is the homeland, either by adoption or by birth, of most pyromancers. The residents have their own face option akin to the races of other countries, as if united by their distance from common beauty standards – almost as if a Great Swamp resident is recognized by ugliness. It is decently organized, having driven out Eingyi for heresy. And its population rivals a nation state since Laurentius doesn't recognize us even if we have the pyromancer background.[10] Such a large tribe must have a founder, someone to first rally people there and create at least a basic form of self-governance. A "Pyromancy King" like Salaman fits the mold.

Salaman studied Quelana's primal pyromancies in distant Lordran before earning his impressive title among humans. He took on multiple students,[11] established the pyromancy culture of the Great Swamp, and even earned the alias of "Great Fireball" shared with a spell we learn from Quelana.[12] Everything indicates that this is a man who not only mastered pyromancy, but propagated it – even the witch is impressed at what her "stupid" apprentice became. This is the "key role" that Miyazaki implies he played alongside the witches.

8 "Don't become a Hollow, stupid apprentice. You'll make the time I spent on you wasted." - Quelana

9 "You… it's been done properly. Thank you. I am truly glad to have met you. I can't possibly call you a stupid apprentice now…" - Quelana

10 "… Sorry. You're a pyromancer too, that was obvious." - Laurentius

11 "Art of the pyromancer Carmina who took in the power of fire and activated the power within. Reduces damage from fire due to intense sweating.

Carmina, who presented a new way of doing things for pyromancers, was called Pyromancy King Zalaman's greatest apprentice." - Flash Sweat

12 "Pyromancy that serves as the peak of the 'Fireball' class. Throws a giant fireball.

It has also become another name for Pyromancy King Zalaman; you will be able to understand even his teachings saying that pyromancy is the yearning for fire if you touch this great pyromancy." - Great Fireball

The mother and daughters first founded the school of magic, but Salaman spread it beyond Izalith's borders. The earliest pyromancy we can find outside Izalith is Black Flame in Oolacile, roughly 200-300 years ago. Thus, we can conclude that the pyromancer who invented Black Flame in Oolacile's Abyss[13] lived during the same era as Salaman. Similarly, while the localization for Power Within claims it to have been hidden for "eons", the original text only refers to an unspecified length of time.[14]

Pyromancy's recent spread into the world of man wouldn't change its unpopularity. By this point in history, Izalith has been isolated by the gods that most human societies have worshipped for centuries. Laurentius implies that being a pyromancer earns you no less disdain than being Undead,[15] and indeed, the Crestfallen Warrior refers to him as a "filthy pyromancer" in the Japanese script.[16] This prejudice doesn't stem from magic, since sorcery doesn't share such a stigma, so the reason must be specific to pyromancers' practices and beliefs. Whereas the gods and their worshippers perceive fire as sacrosanct, pyromancy teaches its followers to fear yet control flame. No wonder that these fire casters were condemned as heretics akin to Dark-worshipping heathens. They would be seen as primitive, dangerous. And to some extent, this was correct.

Fire Orb explodes upon contact, inflicting fire damage on whatever is nearby and thereby making it a symbol of pyromancers.[17] The pyromancy philosophy may caution against recklessly handling fire like its founders had, but the rest of the god-fearing world sees only the founders' mistakes and the threat that pyromancers pose. Because Salaman was himself trained in marshland, he likely chose to settle in the Great Swamp with his pupils and others to practice their heresy – its remote location and harsh environment prevented most from pursuing the heretics, creating a haven for those hoping to learn the art or practice its spiritual element in peace. Eventually, the swamp became a place any outcast reviled for their differences could travel to and find acceptance in. Some pyromancers do exist outside the Great Swamp,[18] but the tattered set implies that this is only because they are too far away to safely reach the marshland.

We can only find two spells belonging to these remote pyromancers, both acquired in the Painted World of Ariamis. One of these pyromancies is Acid Surge, showing that at least some outlanders broke with the Great Swamp's tendencies. The other, Fire Surge, is used by Shiva's shadow spy, implying that the far East is one of these remote lands where pyromancy spread to – perhaps even discovered independent of Izalith. However, we obtain the spell text by killing a passive Engorged Zombie, an Undead whose face clotted with toxic blood and bloated to gargantuan

13 "Pyromancy that a pyromancer who had gone astray in Oolacile discovered in the Dark of the Abyss. Generates a large black flame in hand.
The black flame is very heavy and accompanied by physical damage. Ordinary shields and the like will probably be repelled away." - Black Flame

14 "Art of the pyromancer Carmina who took in the power of fire and activated the power within. Temporarily boosts physical strength and endurance but decreases HP.
The excessive power eats away at the life power of the mother body. For that reason, that power was hidden all this time." - Power Within

15 "Oh, I see... A shame... But, can't be helped... I'm a heretic, I know that. Even though I became Undead, that doesn't change. But, it is a shame that I can't help you..." - Laurentius

16 "Come to think of it, what happened to that guy? There was a filthy pyromancer that was gabbing on about things I don't know the meaning of like a founder of pyromancy or whatever..." - Crestfallen Warrior

17 "Pyromancy more enhanced than 'Fireball' Throws a fire orb.
The burning fire orb explodes upon landing and also inflicts fire damage around it. That appearance is also said to be the symbol of the pyromancers who manipulate fire." - Fire Orb

18 "Pyromancy not known in the Great Swamp. Spurts a flame from the palm of the hand.
Pyromancy is not always naturally of the Great Swamp. It is said that there exists pyromancers whose names are unknown in various lands. This pyromancy too is probably the art of such a mancer." - Fire Surge

proportions as a consequence. These "blood-congested Hollows" (鬱血亡者) come in two variants: a torch-wielder and a fireball-shooter. While the latter's flame deals magic damage, its origin from the hand rather than a visible catalyst suggests that they too are using pyromancy.

It seems some pyromancers, unable to reach the safety of the Great Swamp, were arrested and imprisoned within the painting – paralleling the Way of White's earlier efforts to erase or hide other heathen elements. This would have disproportionately affected pyromancers on the border or beyond the church's reach, caught in the net as they emigrated into the known world along with their peculiar pyromancies. These imprisoned pyromancers evidently chose the winning side during the prison break, and now patrol the facility as its new guards.



Culture Apart

Having inherited the teachings of Izalith, Great Swamp pyromancers held largely to the same core beliefs as the ruined civilization while developing their own ethos. Because pyromancy is the art of the primal life that is Chaos, pyromancers try to be in nature as much as possible, finding their spiritual center by immersing themselves in the natural world – another reason their home is a vibrant marshland. We can see evidence of this in their attire: the tattered cloth set includes two necklaces of small stones (and *DS3* adds twigs and feathers to the ensemble). These practices imbue the culture with a primitive aspect incompatible with "civilization",[19] thereby arousing the ill will of urbanites; fitting, since "primitive" (原初的) literally means to be "primal-like". Regardless, this so-called uncivilized lifestyle demonstrates pyromancers' dedication to holding fire in their hands.



As Laurentius' wise old mentor put it, their captivation with fire is intrinsic to life having been born in the dark at the beginning of creation. Only those with truly strong longing can even hold a fraction of that fascinating power in their hand. They don't perform ancestor worship as the localization may mislead, but perceive their pursuit of fire as aiming for the root of life through life's basest instinct. It is this desire to be close to fire both spiritually and rationally that they inherited from the witches of Izalith, which spooks most god-fearing men. Lordran isn't a land that "respects" pyromancy, as the localization of Laurentius' dialogue misrepresents. In truth, the land holds a "special meaning" *to* pyromancers since it is home to the founders of their arts and philosophy – the witches who are still worshipped as gods in the Great Swamp. Laurentius speaks of these medials reverently. (*DS3* reveals that the witches' tutelage of humans has become a fairy tale told to every pyromancer.)

Despite being labeled as heretics, pyromancers revere fire no less than followers of the Anor Londo pantheon. The only differences are their approach to flame and choice of deities. This is why Laurentius

19 "Pyromancy is said to have a certain kind of primitive aspect to it. At any rate, there are times when it is incompatible with civilization-like things. That's why, usually, pyromancers are the hated. Well, I'm a misanthrope, so it works out just fine. Even becoming Undead didn't change anything. Hahahaha!" - Laurentius

was overjoyed with ending up Undead. He already suffered social stigma as a pyromancer, and dislikes people as a consequence, so being driven north to Lordran where his people's divine teachers reside was a dream come true. The man had hoped to experience the original pyromancies like Salaman, by making the same trek toward the lost city. Admittedly, his enthusiasm is tempered by getting captured while traversing the Depths en-route to Blighttown and almost being eaten alive, but we can rekindle his excitement by showing that we possess chaos or Quelana's flames and sharing where we learned them.[20] Unfortunately for Laurentius, he fails this second attempt too, and hollows in the Poison Swamp. Even so, his dedication reflects the lengths pyromancers will go to for the sake of satiating their longing.

This brings us to the next major element of pyromancer culture: the continuation of one's pyromancer lineage. Because the art can only be spread through sharing one's pyromancy flame, these shamans tend to fall into a master-student relationship. This is much more interpersonal than learning magic like sorcery or miracles, which are talents usually cultivated individually. Laurentius describes the flames as actually being a part of the caster's body,[21] and they can indeed be conjured at will as if stored within our physical vessels. The student must nurture a fragment of the master's flame to improve their own arts' raw power, a process reflected in us upgrading the flame with our teacher via souls. In the Great Swamp at least, this takes on an additional layer of personal respect. You are handling a piece of your master, meaning how you treat the flame directly correlates to how much you care about them. This unique aspect to their culture doesn't carry over to the teaching itself, though.

Pyromancers absent a teacher are required to memorize the spells explained in writings, similar to sorcery, alongside their lifelong nurturing of their flame catalyst. While these flames and their owners are considered the master's own flesh and blood, the spells they may learn are not all afforded the same respect. Combustion is a basic spell that "pyromancers learn first" according to its Japanese description. Yet oddly enough, we don't possess this basic spell if we select a pyromancer background. Such an omission is probably an oversight (one that *DS3* ultimately rectifies by making Combustion a built-in skill for the pyromancy flame itself), but it nonetheless reflects the way pyromancers neglect the spell for being too simple despite its capacity to generate strong flames in the more advanced form of Great Combustion.[22]

In other words, there is an elitism within pyromancy, where spells which lack complexity are seen as inferior even if they can produce

20 "... I see. I knew it, I see! Thank you for telling me. I too am a pyromancer, though not much of one. I'll find her with my own power. I'm indebted to you again." - Laurentius

21 "A pyromancy flame is part of a pyromancer's body. Everyone carefully raises this and raise their own arts. So the fire that was given to you is also a part of me. Please take the upmost care of it." - Laurentius

22 "Pyromancy more enhanced than 'Combustion'. Generates a strong, large flame in hand.
The power of the flame itself is quite large, but it is often neglected by pyromancers for being too simple a pyromancy." - Great Combustion

roughly equal power. Rather than see the utility of a pyromancy and judge it on the actual merits, pyromancers scoff at those who haven't, or can't, learn the more advanced arts. This reflects a darker side to Laurentius' fascination with the primal pyromancies. The man is so focused on the flash and flavor of the legendary witches and Chaos that he neglects the basics taught by a teacher who he clearly respects, and we see the result of his delusions of grandeur. This narrow view of the art isn't just limited to spells either, and in fact seems to be intrinsic to the whole philosophy.

Salaman, originally Zalaman (ザラマン), is an obvious reference to the English "salamander" (サラマンダー), an animal heavily associated with fire in mythology and alchemy. Laurentius, meanwhile, derives from Italian to mean "shining light". The name Carmina resembles the English carmine, a bright-red color, while Eingyi was originally Enjii (エンジー) in reference to the Japanese *enji* (臙脂), meaning dark red. The names for each and every one of these Great Swamp residents highlights the culture's single-minded obsession with flame. Despite their status as pariahs within the world of man, there remains an orthodoxy for conjurers to conform to.

But in the end, a name is only a name, and Eingyi broke with orthodoxy, taking a particular interest in developing spells related to poisons instead of the traditional fire magic,[23] offending his community. Eingyi's crime was simply branching out to other elements of nature resulting from fire's Disparity, using flame as a catalyst but not the primary expression for his spells. But pyromancy's more religious adherents considered this insulting to fire itself. Toxic Mist reveals that he was driven out of the swamp for his arts and became known as a heretic.[24] Poison Mist elaborates that this was before he became Undead, making his banishment distinct from Laurentius' more understandable exile.

After being driven out of the Great Swamp, Eingyi turned Undead and headed for Lordran. The corpse of a pyromancer carrying one of his spells indicates that he took on at least one disciple, but there is no mention of anyone besides him being exiled for his heresy, so he probably recruited this acolyte after arriving in Lordran. He may have become ill at the Undead Burg before once again being exiled, but his pyromancies suggest otherwise. Toxic Mist's description uses the spell as an *example* of his heresy, implying that it wasn't the specific cause of his exile. Rather, it was probably the weaker Poison Mist that led to this so-called heretic being chased out.

Because of his continued interest in poison-based pyromancy, Eingyi likely went to Blighttown of his own volition. Where better to find poisons to study for his magic than a noxious bog filled with stagnant waste and grime? And by the time he found his "deadly poison" to use

23 **"Unique art of the pyromancer Enjii, who was known as a heretic even at the Great Swamp. Generates a poison fog.**
Enjii, who has now become Undead and been burdened with eggs, apparently serves a grotesque young lady with an unintelligible language." - Poison Mist

24 **"Unique art of the pyromancer Enjii, who was known as a heretic even at the Great Swamp. Generates a deadly poison fog.**
If you look at that pyromancy which differs from the pursuit of fire, you will be able to understand the reason that Enjii was driven out of the Great Swamp." - Toxic Mist

as the basis for Toxic Mist, he became afflicted himself and was forced to remain. He mentions no longer needing to keep Egg Vermifuges[25] – acorns growing in Darkroot Garden where they are eaten by the tree-climbing "twin-head lizards" (双頭トカゲ) – meaning that he *used* to need them for protection from the Poison Swamp's parasites. This explains why he is aware of the chestnut's sour taste despite being a devoted bearer of the Fair Lady's eggs. (*DS3* reaffirms that Eingyi found his deadly poison *and* the Fair Lady in Lordran, the Great Swamp only inheriting Poison Mist.)

Eingyi isn't the only one familiar with taboos of conjury. Carmina was Salaman's greatest pupil and invented a unique branch of pyromancy by developing a means to take in fire and then activate its power from within the body. Both Flash Sweat and Iron Flesh[26] have effects unrelated to fire, the former stimulating body fluids and the latter temporarily transforming the body into iron. But because these effects are derived from a flame that is then inserted within the caster's being, they are still technically part of the pursuit of fire and thus not condemned like Eingyi's spells.

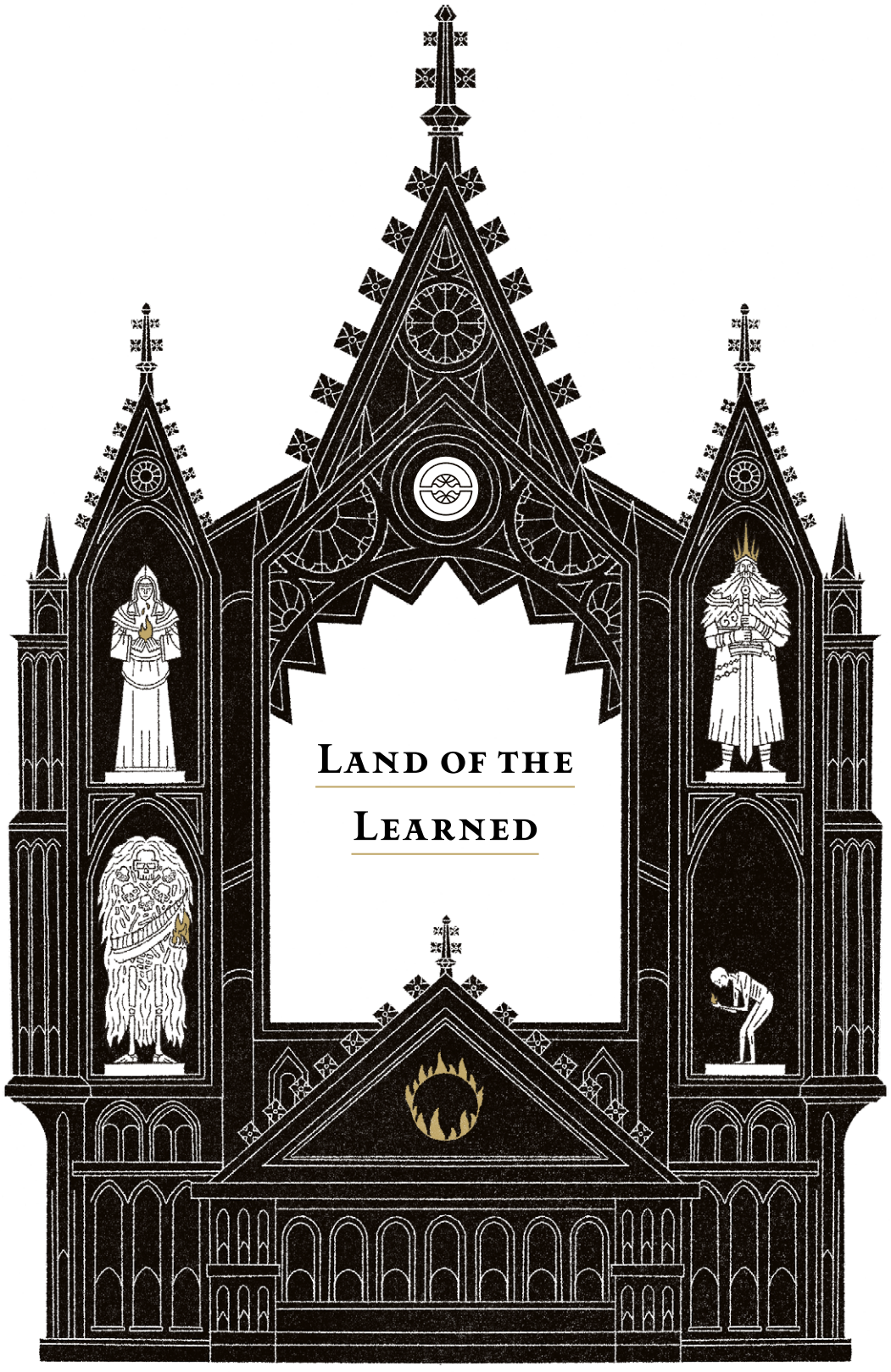
However, a third spell, Power Within, was kept "hidden" despite deriving from the same concept. Differentiating it from her other two spells which internalize power, the spell is actually "Great Power Within" (内なる大力) and provides immense strength in exchange for the fire slowly eating away at the soul. Basically, the spell generates a flame that we lack the capacity to control, thereby consuming us for short-term power. This is the exact scenario that the Izalith witches warned humans about: a pyromancer who casts this spell has lost their fear of fire – hence the pyromancy has been kept hidden all this time (a point highlighted by the spell's description in *DS3*). The fact we find instructions to perform it in Blighttown suggests the ban may have come after Carmina's death, or that she passed on the spell to apprentices who kept disseminating it in secret.

But despite their yearning for flame, most pyromancers still heed the warning issued by their gods. And, although heretics, they seem to generally support the continuation of the Age of Fire like most other humans and share a similar disdain for the Dark – Black Flame originates from a pyromancer who "went astray" in Oolacile (and *DS3* later confirms that Dark pyromancies are also taboo in the Great Swamp). Primitive yet cultured, heretical yet strict with their own orthodoxies, obsessed with flame yet wary of it, this society is in some ways more complex, nuanced, and intriguing than any of the more traditional nations that *Dark Souls* presents.



25 **"Oh!... You... You're the same as us... Your sincerity is well understood. But, well... all the same, your head looks severe... If you don't mind, you should use this. Since I don't need it anymore." - Eingyi**

26 **"Art of the pyromancer Carmina who took in the power of fire and activated the power within. Changes whole body to iron and increases defense power and resistances.**
Since its weight is extreme and movements become slow, choosing where to use it is required." - Iron Flesh



School of Wizardry

Despite sorcery's long history, Vinheim, or at least its iconic academy, has only existed within the last few centuries, founded specifically after the fall of Oolacile. No one describes Vinheim as "old" like some other nations, and the only sorcerers that definitively predate Oolacile's destruction are the sealers of New Londo, Seath's servants, Gwyndolin, the witches of Izalith, and the demon firesages. Of those, three are tied to Anor Londo and inherited their abilities from Seath either directly or through his mistress, while the other two are trained in flame sorcery native to Izalith and not taught at the academy. This suggests that Vinheim and its school of sorcerers didn't emerge until after both Anor Londo and Izalith were isolated from the world of man, a thousand years ago. Without access to the original teachers, mankind was forced to tutor itself on the magical arts.

Then there is Dusk's unfamiliarity with "modern" sorcery, despite Seath's brand of magic well predating both her and her country. Likewise, the Dragon School is plain ignorant of Oolacilian magics – odd, considering elements of Oolacile's ancient culture survive into the present era as common items for purchase. If the academy had existed alongside the lost kingdom, then Vinheim sorcerers would have exchanged knowledge with their Oolacilian counterparts. Instead, Dusk's ignorance indicates that she lived in a time when no one widely practiced Seath's branch of soul sorcery in the world of man. Indeed, Oolacile's sudden collapse may have even prompted the academy's foundation. The loss of Oolacile's rich culture, including sorceries, might have motivated some inquisitive minds to begin collecting and studying magical records to preserve the art.

We can confirm the timeframe of the Dragon School's foundation via the age of Big Hat Logan. His robes are described as a now-unused "prototype" academy uniform from "long ago" in their Japanese description,[1] marking him as one of the school's earliest graduates – one who never bothered to replace his uniform as decades passed and fashion changed. We know that old Logan lived over a hundred years ago thanks to Rickert,[2] meaning that the sage must have enrolled at the academy sometime during the preceding century. It is therefore likely that the Dragon School was established about two hundred years ago following the destruction of Oolacile. Logan is credited as instrumental to sorcery's progress,[3] but he and the academy possess only third-hand knowledge of the Duke's Archives and are

1 **"Robe of 'Big Hat' Logan. It looks like the Dragon Academy robe of long before, but it is worn-out and the prototype is no longer known.**

Because it is the clothing of the indifferent Logan, or rather, because it is troublesome to take off, he has probably worn it all this time." - Sage Robe

2 **"Apparently, he was an interesting old man, but… well, that's a story of over 100 years ago. Interested in the strange, are you?" - Rickert**

3 **"Have you already spoken with Master? Master is a great person. Sorcery's progress without him is unthinkable." - Griggs**

nowhere near as advanced in the art as Seath himself. In other words, the sage was only instrumental to the *academy's* progress with sorcery.

Though the school is called the "dragon academy" (竜の学院), there is nothing to suggest that dragons are directly involved. Nonetheless, the archdragons have become a revered symbol for the school, appearing as an emblem on various academy rings.[4] To be clear, this reverence is for the dragons' abilities, not their name or appearance. In the *Design Works* interview, Miyazaki states that Logan wants to become closer to an archdragon while contrasting his motives from the Path of the Dragon covenant. The latter hope to achieve immortality and actually become dragons while Logan wants to still retain his pride as a human. Although both shed their human equipment to be closer to their subject of worship, Logan's nudity mirrors Seath specifically. The archdragon power that Logan desires and ultimately attains is Seath's crystal sorcery, as White Dragon Breath states. Its same description likens the paledrake to a god, and Logan is undoubtedly his worshipper.

In short, Seath is the reason that the Dragon School reveres the archdragons; for, through him, archdragons are technically the first sorcerers. The race seems to have received credit for the individual's accomplishment – assuming that they haven't simply failed to discover how to depict said individual. Seath pioneered the rational study of magic, thereby inspiring the dragon academy's own pursuits of sorcery. And so, the primeval race symbolizes the institution, as a show of respect for the art's lineage. Indeed, the school's study of sorcery descends from Seath's school of thought in particular.

Home to a formal place of learning, preservation, and development of the magic arts, Vinheim has become the premiere nation of magic. While the exact criteria for enrollment isn't disclosed, students from seemingly any background are admitted so long as they have the aptitude to learn magic through rational analysis. And although most of the face options in character creation are associated with a specific country, there is no "racial" option for Vinheim. Instead, the student face is associated strictly with the Dragon School and suggests that the school generally attracts intelligent people. This may mean that it teaches people from all countries, and not just Vinheim natives, but of greater note is the fact that many "ridicule" this appearance.[5] The reason is likely because "student" in this case is *shosei* (書生), which doubles to mean "houseboy". Japanese students who couldn't afford food and lodging in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries were forced to live in another's home and perform housework while they studied. Thus, having the face of a "student" is essentially to look like a glorified housekeeper.

In other words, many scholars at the Dragon School can't afford to attend, and many of them move into homes in Vinheim to work as domestic

4 **"Special ring given to especially excellent sorcerers at Vinheim's Dragon Academy.**
Its sign is made in the shape of the unperishing archdragon, and the Roaring Dragonsign Ring boosts the might of sorceries." - Bellowing Dragoncrest Ring

5 **Student Face of the Dragon Academy**
Thin face with intelligent contours. But many ridicule a "student face".

servants while they study – becoming the subject to mockery as a result. This also confirms that admittance isn't limited to nobility, though the school no doubt attracts many such persons of affluence by virtue of their being able to shoulder the costs. People from all walks of life can theoretically study sorcery, which allows more people to learn magic than previously made possible by the Way of White, Oolacile, or the Great Swamp – Vinheim is presumably easily accessed too, since it is never once referenced as "remote". Furthermore, the school has divided the curriculum into several specializations depending on the motives and talents of the individual student.

Most scholars study to become sorcerers, of course, and are formally recognized as one after learning to cast Great Soul Arrow,[6] a relatively simple spell. After graduating, many of them continue to study sorcery as researchers like Logan; some probably even become teachers at the academy. Unlike the art of miracles or pyromancy, prospective sorcerers learn to approach magic purely as a science, prompting them to push its limits in inventive ways. For instance, Logan developed Homing Soulmass as part of his research into life's natural attraction to itself, resulting in a spell unlike any in the standard curriculum.

Other scholars become sorcery smiths and swordsmen, and these are the students who cemented the Vinheim government's reliance on the school's continued operation. A cut item description for Rickert's unique attire reaffirms that the smiths and sorcerers are "sibling pupils" (兄弟弟子),[7] learning parallel to one another despite their differing curriculums. Rickert can teach us only two spells, neither of which is unique or difficult to cast. Likewise, neither spell is the one required for sorcerers to graduate, reflecting a difference in standards. According to Rickert, the artisans of Vinheim aren't interested in understanding magic like the school's scholars. They simply accept its existence and focus on learning the practical application for their craft:[8] magically forging weapons with equally magical embers. That his generalization extends to "all" Vinheim craftsmen indicates that studying there was a basic requirement for being a local blacksmith. This is further supported by him dismissing embers that he isn't familiar with as "rustic",[9] suggesting they would only be tolerable to a blacksmith living out in the sticks. It seems that Vinheim is an extremely urbanized country, forging magical equipment as standard.

Based on Rickert's language and tone, the mage smiths take great pride in their specialty, viewing themselves as superior to these other, less educated smiths living in the countryside. Ironic, since his language and tone hints at a certain elitism among sorcerors about the smiths themselves. When dismissing the need to understand magic as the



6 **"Sorcery superior to 'Soul Arrow'. Fires a mightier soul arrow.**
Only after learning this sorcery is one deemed to be a full-fledged sorcerer at Vinheim's Dragon Academy." - Great Soul Arrow

7 **"Hat of formal sorcery smiths who learned at Vinheim's Dragon Academy. Sorcery smiths are sibling pupils of sorcerers and magically forge weapons with magic source flames." - Mage Smith Hat**

8 **"Sorcery? I don't know anything about it. It's something we accept and make into our craft. Vinheim craftsmen all do just that. Rationalizing it is at them scholars' discretion." - Rickert**

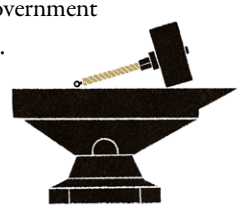
9 **"Hey, you. That's a source flame, isn't it? But, regrettable. Such rustic source flames aren't used in Vinheim. A blacksmith of the sticks can probably tolerate such a thing though." - Rickert**

scholars' preference, Rickert calls them "uppity" in English whereas the Japanese script uses a pluralizing suffix for someone beneath the speaker's status. Unlike scholars, sorcery smiths don't require the same degree of reasoning to perform their craft, and thus can be belittled as stupid or crude. This earns the sorcerers disdain from the equally proud smiths, sparking animosity between these sibling disciples.

However, if Rickert's boasts are to be believed, the smiths are indeed an essential and valued part of Vinheim culture, making them a cornerstone in the Dragon School's relationship with the government. Aside from forging magical equipment, the academy also developed weapon enhancements that entice many swordsmen to learn sorcery and "sustain" the strength of Vinheim's warriors.[10] In short, the Dragon School gives Vinheim a competitive edge against other countries militarily, thereby making the academy essential to the nation's sovereignty and economic well-being. Vinheim's culture thrives on sorcery, and so requires the academy to continue researching and developing stronger and more efficient arts exclusively for its benefit.

This creates a delicate balance. It would be a disaster if the academy kept its advancements to itself or, worse, shared them with other nations, but this also gives the school leverage over a government which wants to monopolize it.

Thus far, Vinheim has allowed the Dragon School to dominate its society, and the academy employs agents to ensure that policy doesn't change. The black sorcerer set mentions a secret faction of academy sorcerers dedicated to covert operations. These spies can manipulate sound and avoid revealing themselves to others,[11] making them the perfect assassins. Indeed, according to the Hush spell, the Dragon School is the effective ruler of Vinheim, not its conventional government, and thus the academy having such a dark side is "a matter of course".[12] Spy networks are a staple to any institution seeking information or political influence, so it is only natural for the academy to develop its own network to maintain power. If the school doesn't approve of the policies of the current regime, its agents will silently step in to fix the problem. Even presuming that Vinheim is a typical monarchy, it is the Dragon School that holds the real power there, a shadow government with a network of sorcerer agents as its enforcers.



Griggs is one of these spooks. Aside from wearing their black uniform, he also owns, but doesn't sell, the Slumbering Dragoncrest Ring. All other dragoncrest rings are given to

10 "Sorcery for sorcerers who have studied swordsmanship. Magically enhances right-hand weapon.
This sorcery and 'Magic Shield' sustains the strength of Vinheim's magic swordsmen, and many warriors even learn sorcery just for the sake of these." - Magic Weapon

11 "Hat of sorcerers of the underbelly who exist in secret at Vinheim's Dragon Academy.
They manipulate sound sorceries as spies and never show themselves." - Black Sorcerer Hat

12 "Sorcerery of sorcerers of the underbelly who exist in secret at Vinheim's Dragon Academy. Erases all sound made by the caster.
The Dragon Academy is the real ruler of Vinheim and its dark side is rather a matter of course." - Hush

particularly excellent sorcerers, but this ring is given specifically to the spies.[13] Why keep it unless to not betray your active affiliation? He does wield a mail breaker, a weapon designed to efficiently pierce through armor; ideal for assassinations – we even find ours in a room where one of Undead Burg's assassin-like thieves ambushes us.

Grigg's repertoire of spells, on the other hand, indicate that he has become a full-fledged sorcerer and learned well from the academy. Two of the sorceries he is willing to teach – Aural Decoy and Fall Control – involve the manipulation of sound; the former has wide applications and is popular with pranksters,[14] while the latter silences only the act of falling. Yet Griggs won't share Hush, which silences all noise and is explicitly an art of these secret agents. Why keep it unless to not betray your group's closest secrets? He also doesn't use spells that require more than 15 intelligence – odd for an allegedly dedicated sorcerer learning under the great Big Hat Logan.

Perhaps Griggs trained to be an agent while undertaking the standard curriculum, or perhaps he somehow enrolled into a clandestine class. Considering the difficulty prospective students faced in even affording to live on their own in Vinheim, he might have taken on the dirty work simply to pay for his studies – it *is* a school, not a charity. Regardless of his reasons, Griggs is without a doubt one of the school's spies. But despite his gratitude toward us for freeing him from confinement, he makes no mention of his secret profession.

Holy War

Vinheim may not have always been heavily urban – the name was likely taken from Vynheim, a fishing settlement in the *Fighting Fantasy* series with the same Japanese spelling. But regardless of what the country once was, it is now defined solely by the academy. Its population, its economy, its government, its armies; all of it relies on sorcery. And it seems, at one point, this brought the school and the country into war with the Way of White.[15]

Magic Barrier is described in the Japanese text as a generalized version of Great Magic Barrier developed specifically to meet "circumstances" faced by the Way of White. Like Great Heal and its excerpt, Havel's high-level miracle was simplified so the widest possible demographic could benefit from its effect, though it became proportionally weaker in the process. The only "circumstance" necessitating the miracle

13 "Ring that sorcerers of the underbelly who exist in secret at Vinheim's Dragon Academy wear.
Its sign is made in the shape of the unperishing archdragon, and the Quietly Sleeping Dragonsign Ring completely erases sound made by the wearer." - Slumbering Dragoncrest Ring

14 "Sorcery playfully used by some sorcerers. Makes a sound at a distant place and attracts enemy attention.
It is not a thing that official sorcerers learn, but an effect which manipulates sound has wide applications. It demonstrates great effect depending on the user." - Aural Decoy

15 "Thing which generalized a miracle imparted to 'Rock-like' Havel to meet the Way of White's circumstances. Covers the whole body in a membrane of magic protection.
This membrane greatly boosts defense to the magic attribute. Gives means to answer magic to simple warriors like a priest of Havel by all means has." - Magic Barrier

be made available to the common warrior is large-scale war against sorcerers. (*DS3*'s iteration of the miracle makes this implication explicit.) So, what magic casters could the church have been at war with?

It cannot have been Seath and his followers, as they are relatively few in number and for the most part concentrated around the archives, not in the world of man. Pyromancers and Dark heathens are outlier groups and tiny minorities among mankind. Moreover, they are connected to arts that don't deal exclusively magic damage, making Havel's miracle pointless. This leaves Vinheim, a country that outfits its knights in magical armaments, trains a great number of sorcerers, and pioneers research into new spells and magic technologies. Further evidence of Vinheim's involvement in the conflict is the school's traditional curriculum – the basic and most frequent spells taught are offensive by nature. It is possible that the theoretical edification and the practical usages just so happen to coincide, but Dusk's comments not only explicitly label the Dragon School's sorcery as more serious than its Oolacilian counterpart, but also implicitly more aggressive. If Oolacile's magic reflects a peaceful and relaxed history, then the reverse is true for Vinheim.

There are several possible motives behind the Way of White's war on Vinheim. First, they likely feared that the existence of an influential reason-based school of magic would threaten their faith-based institution, and lead to their followers diminishing. Griggs makes several subtle references to impiety emerging from the study of sorcery, a perspective sure to alarm Lloyd and Thorolund. The very notion of there being no gods or mysteries is antithetical to religion, and Griggs says that Logan in particular champions this "heretical methodology".[16] As the Way of White has proven with Dark heathens and pyromancers, it doesn't tolerate heresy and is swift to stamp it out wherever it appears.

Consider, too, the historical context of the Dragon School's founding: the gods had suffered the loss of Oolacile to dark sorcery, and now another sorcerous nation crops up within decades of the tragedy. Of *course* Lloyd would have been paranoid about the possibility of history repeating, and unwilling to let the slightest sign of a threat go unattended.

Moreover, it was called the Dragon Academy! There was no hiding the school's blatant veneration for the ancient beasts that the gods once hunted to nigh extinction; such borderline worship of age-old enemies may even be considered heresy in itself. During this same period, Seath betrays Anor Londo to fully commit to his horrifying experiments, which would only further stoke fears of Vinheim following the white dragon's path as well as his school of thought. If the Dragon School follows traitors and teaches

16 **"Have you personally experienced Master's sorceries? Magnificent, aren't they! There are no gods, no mysteries in the world. There is truth, and only knowledge reveals it… Master pushed sorcery to there because of that sort of heretical methodology." - Griggs**

heresy, then it is the church's duty to eradicate it. A preemptive strike, early in the academy's history would be the most opportune time to act.

Logan supports this hypothesis. The first-generation sorcerer possesses spells expected of an academy graduate, but also knows Magic Weapon and Magic Shield – odd for a man largely portrayed as a tireless researcher who avoids or ignores people in order to focus solely on sorcery. Why would a lifelong academic learn magical enhancements for combat? This cannot be a reaction to his undeath, as he doesn't wield any weapons or shields to use them on. Soul Spear confirms this. It is Logan's most iconic spell, a weapon that pierces through enemy defenses, symbolizing his strength in a fight and frequently appearing in legends of him.[17] In other words, he used it in battle and proved so successful that stories continue to be told for years after his undeath, stories known by warriors from various different nations. A conflict between clerics and sorcerers is the only possible event that fits both the scenario and the timing.



The stated comparison to Gwyn's lightning reinforces the connection. We only ever see Gwyn's iconic miracle used to war with dragons, implying that Soul Spear saw use in a similar conflict. The comparison also likens Logan to a god, an implicitly heretical comparison that could be believably made in a conflict where religion is involved, either by the believers subject to the sorcery, or the skeptics seeking propaganda. Even if the war was nominally fought by nations, not institutions, then this war between Vinheim and Thorolund was still about the superiority of reason or faith. The church saw the Dragon School's sorcery as dangerous heresy and wanted it eliminated, and the school in turn likely viewed the church as a constraint on the pursuit of progress and chose to defend itself. Both sides dug in their heels, and bloodshed erupted as a result.

Ultimately, this conflict must have ended relatively quickly. Both countries still exist and continue to perpetuate their individual arts, and the Way of White doesn't presently condemn sorcery as heresy. This is most apparent by how pyromancers remain persecuted for their heresy while Big Hat Logan is praised and admired by non-sorcerers of various lands and eras. Griggs likewise bears no apparent animosity towards the Way of White delegation at Firelink Shrine, at one point even sympathizing with Reah's mission.[18] And despite Magic

17 **"Personal sorcery of 'Big Hat' Logan. Fires a piercing soul spear.**

An exemplary sorcery that symbolizes Logan's strength in battle and frequently appears even in legends of him. Its might is compared to King Gwyn's lightning." - Soul Spear

18 **"Come to think of it, have you seen them too? Just now, three young clergymen arrived. They appear to be acquaintances of Sir Petrus. They head into the Catacombs in search of 'Fueled Fire' or something like that. I understand that it is an art to raise bonfires, apparently… but the poor thing; to think, a graveyard for a still young noble's daughter. It is a cruel mission, indeed, isn't it…?" - Griggs**

Barrier's creation for widespread use by cleric warriors, no present-day knight of the church whom we encounter knows it. The only clergy who does is Reah, but she is extremely devout to the point of even knowing abstruse miracles.

Both parties likely agreed to a ceasefire which left the sorcerers to study in peace so long as they don't interfere with the church's proselytization, confine their studies to Vinheim, and disavow heretical aspects of their teachings. This explains the apparent lack of sorcerers in the wider world of man. Even if the church struggled against the academy's sorcerers, it maintains its fighting force and continues to combat the threat of undeath without issue. Therefore, it is unlikely that it suffered serious losses or lacked leverage in negotiations.

Griggs does imply that Logan is looked down upon by man for his heretical methodology,[19] which is to be expected when the world of man as a whole is very religious. More surprisingly, the controversy surrounding Logan indicates that his methods aren't held in a favourable light by his peers. If this is the case, then Lloyd in fact succeeded in what would have been his strategic objective in going to war. Even if he failed to erase the Dragon School, Vinheim was cowed into conceding the most concerning aspects of its ethos, thereby distancing itself from heresy. The clergy had turned the country away from embracing a potential path to darkness and reaffirmed its dominance over the known world.

With the conflict resolved, however, the academy could continue attracting and training scholars while Logan kept to his research as a pariah. And even after the peace agreement, school staff still held an intense interest in Seath and his works. We learn that Great Magic Weapon and Shield are taught to Vinheim swordsmen entrusted with a mission,[20] and we find the spells on a corpse in the Anor Londo gallery and in a chest at the Duke's Archives, two areas connected to Seath. We also acquire the Large Magic Ember from a chest in the same tower where we first encounter Seath, near a corpse with the soul of a great hero – an impressive warrior brought the magical flame to Seath's chamber before dying there.

The academy has apparently been attempting to make contact with Seath, or at least to recover his research for itself. This dangerous journey to find Seath's fabled archives would be a special mission worthy of only the best magical swordsmen, with the best magical armaments. The fact that the soul of the hero belongs to a Hollow further suggests that this was akin to the Way of White's Undead mission. All of these attempts have failed though, either because the mission bearers can't reach the archives or because they are killed or captured once they find their way inside, where their sorcery texts are left to rot or stored as more research material for the paledrake. Nonetheless, they show us that Logan wasn't the first to think about acquiring Seath's trove of knowledge.

19 "He is a hero. There are many who deprecate him, but I think he is one, and history too will recognize it." - Griggs

20 "Sorcery superior to 'Magic Weapon'. Greatly magically enhances right-hand weapon.
It is taught only to magic swordsmen who were entrusted with a mission even at Vinheim's Dragon Academy in order to give great might to every weapon." - Great Magic Weapon

Big Hats Cast Big Shadows

Rickert calls Logan a *gaiseki*, meaning that he is related to a king. Considering his lifelong association with the Dragon School, this may specifically refer to Vinheim royalty – and relate to the academy's political maneuvering. A famous sage whose work has done so much for the school, and thus Vinheim, would be an ideal candidate to strengthen public ties between the royal government and the shadow government, after all. Alternatively, perhaps Logan was simply able to attend classes and research as he pleased thanks to his royal credentials, and pocketbook.

Logan never mentions anything about his personal or familial life, however, and his connections don't match his decorum. His emblematic hat serves to block out any distractions,[21] and he still wears his original uniform because changing out of it is too much of a hassle. It is clear that Logan's primary concern in life was maximizing his study of sorcery and minimizing his interactions with others,[22] and both Rickert and Griggs allude to him being an antisocial eccentric. The Logan we meet is warm and charitable, but this is qualified with him being indebted to us or speaking about *his* favorite topic.

Despite his difficult personality, Logan's research is still critical to the advancement of sorcery in the world of man. Griggs himself laughs this off, saying it is *because* he is so unreasonable that the sage has made such progress.[23] The agent is *not* amused that Logan goes "risking life and limb" as the localization purports, just lightheartedly acknowledging that the sage is a troubling man to deal with. And he can afford to be. Soul Spear and Homing Soulmass demonstrate the breadth of his studies – the former refines the concept of soul arrow to its zenith, the latter builds upon fundamental principles defining the soul. For sorcerers thirsty for knowledge, suffering the man's challenging temperament would be far from an insurmountable cost, and Rickert alludes to tales of his eccentricities being recounted in at least the Dragon School to this day.

Whether it was old age or something decidedly less natural that killed Logan, he turned Undead and was banished from home, eventually ending up in the Undead Burg like Rickert and the rest. This didn't hamper the sage's inquisitive mind though. In fact, he views it as an opportunity to finally aim for the god's library, and ultimately acquire the works of the scaleless archdragon.[24] Thus, he took on the Undead mission and challenged Sen's Fortress. However, as the Crestfallen Merchant confirms, he failed its trial, resulting in his unconscious body being dragged into a cage and forgotten by Seath's



21 "Huge hat that completely conceals the face which has become the nickname of the great sorcerer Logan.
It is for Logan, who is known as a misanthrope, to eliminate gazes and noise and concentrate on thinking. Doesn't hide special magic power or what have you." - Big Hat

22 "Knowledge is given priority above all else, and he doesn't show interest in anything else." - Griggs

23 "Even though it is because he is without any concern for others and unreasonable. Honestly, he is a troubling man. Hahahaha!" - Griggs

24 "Even being cursed, becoming an Undead, and coming to this land was surely his longtime dream... It is regrettable, but it isn't something I can imitate." - Griggs

snake-men. If we free him, he eventually makes a second attempt, this time without his research materials on-hand, and it fails much like the first. Still, the serpents remember to lock him up in the archives' VIP cell second time around.

If freed once again, Logan pores over Seath's research. With Crystal Magic Weapon as a proof of concept, the sage then uses his newfound knowledge of crystallization to strengthen his original spells. Eventually, he achieves "enlightenment" as Seath's fanatic, finally succeeding in recreating one of his god's spells – albeit without its petrification function. This is all too fitting considering that Freke – another sorcerer sage associated with enlightenment through the research of magic – was the first to be named "Wiseman Logan" (賢者ロガーン) in *Demon's Souls*, albeit only internally.

However, Logan pays a price for his achievements, becoming consumed by the same "deep-seated delusions" that afflict Seath. First, he murmurs to himself constantly, losing awareness of his surroundings. Then, he strips himself naked en route to his epiphany, and turns a sorcery staff found among the books into an instrument for his new religion. If we visit him in the tower where Seath previously resided, he attempts to kill us, furious that we have stolen his focus from his research. Should the attempt succeed, *he* will be the one dragging us back to our cell in the prison tower.

We have come full circle. Logan has gone from the shadow of Seath to his successor. Whatever well-meaning and rational mind that once existed within him is gone – instead, the sorcerer who proudly dismissed gods and divine mysteries has lost himself in his forebear's irrational faith in reason. Logan admits that he cannot bring himself to hate Seath even if the latter's knowledge *was* the result of unhealthy delusions.[25] Once he accepted that, everything was justifiable.

In fairness to the sage, he got exactly what he wanted from Seath, the quintessence of sorcery. No doubt that the Dragon School would be envious of Logan's success. Perhaps the academy in Vinheim kept tabs on the sage for this very possibility.

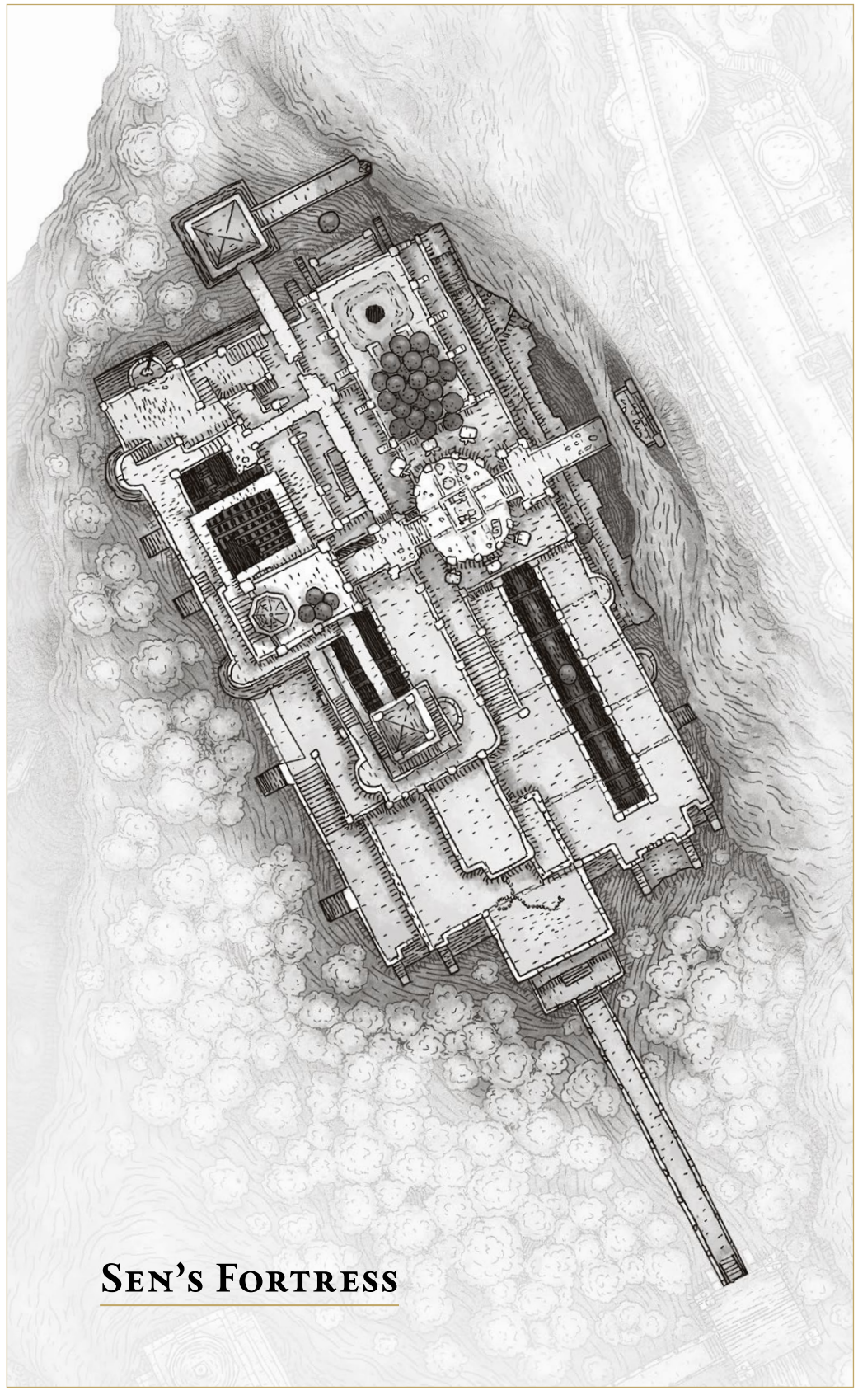
Griggs claims to be Logan's apprentice and a lifelong student of sorcery, who became Undead and left with Logan. But, after arriving, Logan leaves him behind to take on Sen's Fortress alone with only a note explaining his intentions.[26] This account sounds reasonable, but everything surrounding Griggs throws doubt on his story. The Crestfallen Warrior confirms that Griggs mentioned pursuing Logan, but never once calls him his apprentice in the Japanese script.[27] Nor does Logan ever bring up an apprentice, and only trains us to repay a life debt. All we know for certain about Griggs is that he is one of Vinheim's secret agents, a profession which encourages deception. If we are to trust Griggs' words, they need to be independently verifiable – and they are not. In fact, they are incongruous with his actions.

25 **"But, the book collection of these archives is truly magnificent. The accumulation of superior wisdom and a sincere spirit of inquiry, crystallized as knowledge. It certainly might be the result of Seath's deep-seated delusions... but even so, I'm quite happy for it, value it even. Progress sometimes wants sacrifice. I for one idolize that white dragon and can bear him no ill will..." - Logan**

26 **"Oh, the story about the note Logan left? It just said that he would aim for Anor Londo from Sen's Old Castle. Since it is said that the Gods' Archives is in Anor Londo, his aim is probably there." - Griggs**

27 **"Come to think of it, what happened to him? There was a sorcery-bastard who said he's chasing after Big Hat or something... but he headed for the Undead Town and never returned. A fool, no? It's different when it's the Big Hat, but what can the likes of us do...? At any rate, he's sure to have become a Hollow somewhere..." - Crestfallen Warrior**





Sen's Fortress

The Crestfallen Warrior witnessed Griggs head to the Undead Burg in pursuit of Logan, but we find him in the lower stratum, far away from Sen's Fortress. He wasn't just trapped in the storage room, but locked in, a fact that he is aware of since he specifically requests that we open the door with a key in his Japanese dialogue.[28] We obtain this key from the Undead merchant, who implies that he has looted his wares from the town in the wake of the recent chaos.[29] None of this explains who locked the spy in the room and why, or why he decided to go in the complete opposite direction of Sen's Fortress where Logan's note supposedly directed him. He can't have been attempting to reach Blighttown's Bell of Awakening, because he will head straight for the fortress once we have exhausted his teachings even if we haven't rung both bells and opened the gates at the time – spies have their ways, it would seem.

The contents of the storage room raise more suspicions. Look among the barrels filling the chamber and, lo and behold, we find a corpse stuffed in the one at the very back. The corpse has the standard sorcerer set and staff, indicating an average academy student. It could be a coincidence – we retrieve the black sorcerer set that Griggs wears from a corpse located in the same room where we can find his Hollow in Sen's Fortress. But consider the corpse, concealed in the far corner of the storage room, behind several other barrels. Someone was *trying* to hide it.

All of Griggs' knowledge about Logan's actions and intentions come from a note supposedly left for him – mentioned only *by* him. And while this agent of Vinheim speaks much of Logan's character and reputation, nothing he says indicates personal knowledge; Rickert is also quite familiar with the famed sage whom he has never met. The Crestfallen Warrior is actually surprised to see Logan in the flesh, implying that he never saw Big Hat with Griggs before we rescue him.[30]

So, we can't confirm that Logan ever had an apprentice, or that he actually knew Griggs in any capacity before both return to Firelink Shrine. Neither can we confirm that the two both happened to die and turn Undead around the same time despite their notable age gap. What we *can* confirm is that an Undead Vinheim agent came by the shrine in pursuit of Logan, went into a storage room in a shady part of town where someone locked him in with a dead academy student who has been haphazardly hidden.



Was there ever an actual apprentice of Big Hat? If there was, did this student share his information with Griggs, either willingly or under duress? Lower Undead Burg is the seedy underbelly of the castle town,

28 "Someone! Get me out of here! Someone's there, isn't there! Save me! Open it with the key!... Damn... There isn't anyone, is there? How did such a thing..." - Griggs

29 "Eh? My wares? Of course they're stolen goods, you going to complain or something? At best, once you go mad, I'll make effective use of your remains." - Itinerant Merchant

30 "Hey, did you see him? Dear me, it is the real 'Big Hat'. The legendary sorcerer. Honestly, what's going on here? Nothing but great heroes. Someone as great as me really is out of place, and uncomfortable..... Hahahahaha!" - Crestfallen Warrior

filled with thieves. Not a very appropriate place for your typical academy student, but well-suited for a covert agent specialized in gathering information while hiding in the shadows. It is also the perfect place to deal with inconvenient obstructions to one's plans. Perhaps a still sane resident caught Griggs in the act and hurriedly locked the murderer in with his victim, forcing him to cry out for help when no one ultimately returned.



Despite the damning circumstances, there is little reason to doubt Griggs' sincerity or motives. His characterization is fairly consistent. He is grateful to be freed and offers to teach sorcery as a reward.[31] He heaps praise upon Logan while admonishing himself as both a sorcerer and a person. And he loyally stays behind to teach us everything he can even after Logan leaves again, fully expecting that he will meet his end once he finally does go after the old sage. None of this indicates that the Griggs we meet is a façade. But we know academy agents never reveal themselves, and are part of the academy's dark side, well-paid for their ability to spy and potentially assassinate. The agent mentions that he has a very important mission after we free him. Perhaps the academy expected Logan would succeed where others had failed, and tasked Griggs with shadowing his journey to the archives. This would explain why they seem to reach the shrine at entirely different times, why Griggs knows none of Logan's spells, and why he didn't head straight for Logan from the start; he didn't know where to find him.

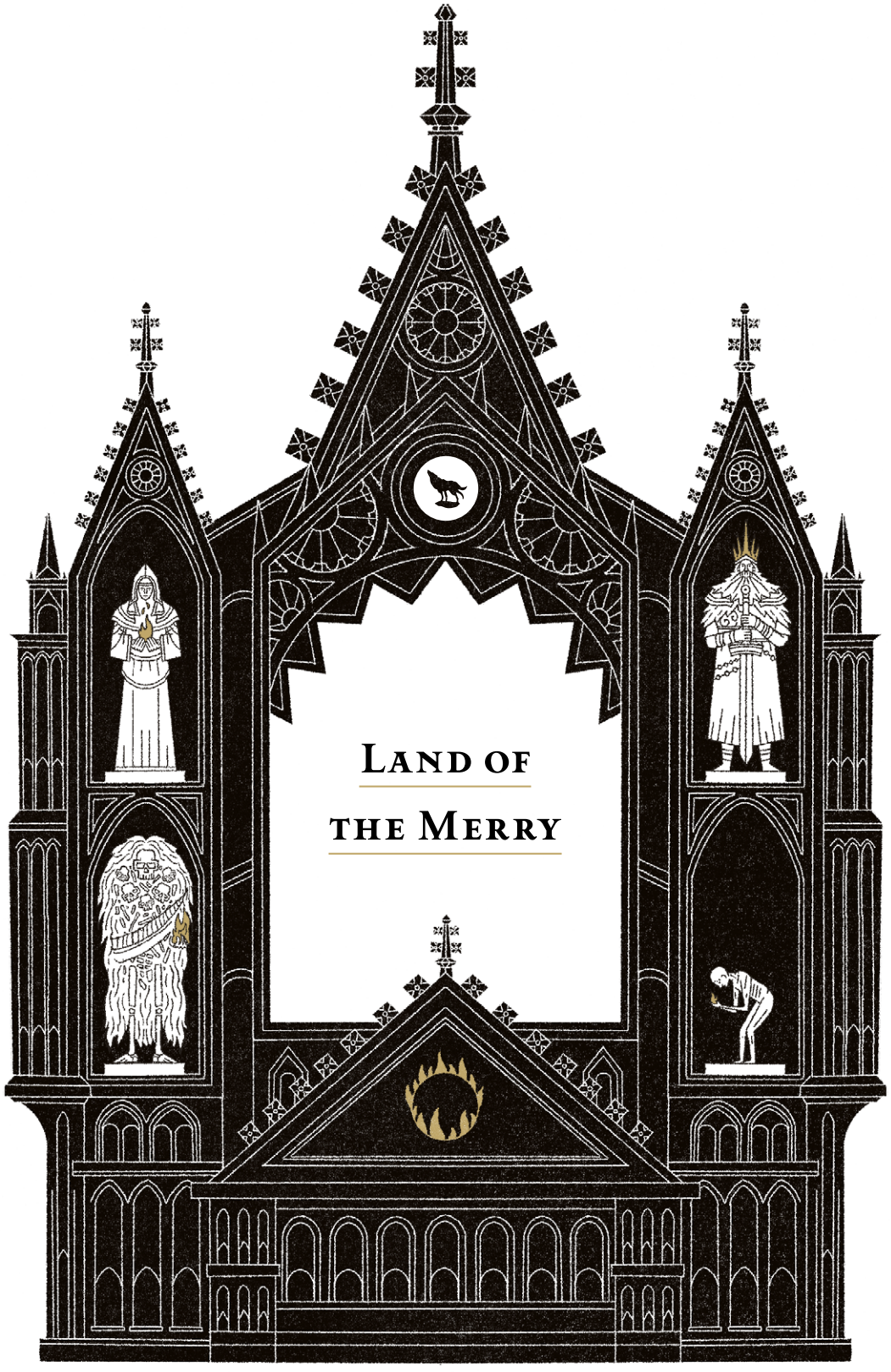
Even if Undead and threatened with exile, that isn't the only reason that Griggs took the job. The man is genuinely passionate about sorcery and insecure about his inferiority, readily admitting his continued pursuit of the perfectly capable sage is his own conceit.[32] This mission was a great opportunity for a sorcerer otherwise doomed to never learn great sorcery, after all. Young hopeful minds come to Vinheim, seeing a bright future in learning the arcane. Yet the agents become little more than the catspaws of their rich masters – Fall Control indicates that these agents sell themselves for work at a high price,[33] so their loyalties are either mercenary or a hefty chunk of the school's budget. Either way, they are forced to specialize their craft at the expense of proper schooling. Griggs is shady, but only because it is his job to be. The man himself has a much purer motive, but the Hollow left in Sen's Fortress proves that he was never equipped to survive outside the world of spycraft and assassination. If Logan shadows Seath, then Griggs shadows Logan, albeit one that lacks the ability to tread their path.

31 "Oh, it is you. If it is about me, I am all right. I am taking a short rest and plan to return to the ritual place. I have my sorcery, too. I won't blunder next time. I also have an important mission." - Griggs

32 "I am not concerned for Elder Logan. This land is dangerous, but even then, master's sorceries stand out. He is a true hero... That is why thinking I will chase after master is, at the end of the day, simply my pride." - Griggs

33 "Sorcery of sorcerers of the underbelly who exist in secret at Vinheim's Dragon Academy. Reduces fall damage and suppresses fall sound.

Because this sorcery and 'Soundless' exist, Vinheim spies do business at a high price." - Fall Control



Jolly Old Time

Catarina is aptly described as the country of alcohol and celebration, with a populace generally known for looking cheerful. It appears to draw heavily on Germanic cultures, judging by its citizens' names and the fact one of them wields a zweihänder. The country's love of drink embodies the stereotypical image of jolly Germans in the beer hall. Catarina, or Katarina, means "pure", and Catarinans are certainly a simple and straightforward sort. Besides having a jovial disposition, the nation is much like Astora. Both countries have a strong emphasis on the pride and honor of knighthood and fealty to God and country. This is best exemplified by Siegmeyer and his possession of the Speckled Stoneplate Ring – an item that defends the wearer against magic, lightning, and fire equally,[1] reflecting a mundane neutrality in Catarina unlike some of its regional neighbors. However, Catarina has plenty of cultural quirks of its own.

Catarinan armor is ingeniously designed to ward off physical attacks with its convex curved surface, but foreign nations ridicule its knights for looking like walking onions;[2] those nations include Astora if Andre's jokes at Siegmeyer's expense[3] are any indication. Part of this eccentric aesthetic seems to be due in part to their relative isolation from the more conventional nations. Emit Force – a miracle derived from Wrath of the Gods and seemingly known only in Catarina – is only handed down in "remote regions" and thus not known to the Way of White, whose knights typically use the more widely-known derivative Force. Catarinans created *a* Force fired directly in front of them, which complements their straightforward nature (as *DS3*'s iteration of the spell later acknowledges) while also demonstrating a religious split between the jolly state and the Way of White orthodoxy in Thorolund, Astora, and others. In short, Catarina and its culture both developed on the frontier, without much contact with the church-dominated mainstream societies.

The regional sun worship has taken root in Catarina as well, deep roots at that. There is a reason that its citizens have a "cheerful face" (陽気顔) and an equally sunny disposition.[4] Cheerful, or *youki* (陽気), is literally a positive mood. *You* (陽) refers to the dualistic concept of yang with all of its connotations: brightness, clarity, visibility, the heavens, the sun, day, vigorousness, masculinity, positivity, and dynamism. Their jubilant attitude is intrinsically linked to these concepts.

At the same time, Catarinan religion differs subtly from the Way of White. Siegmeyer is the only character to speak Gwyn's name openly, in a reverential fashion, besides Solaire. The church under Lloyd avoids invoking

1 "The square stone widely known as the mark of a knight grants the power to face various difficulties.
The extremely rare speckle-colored stone ring slightly boosts the equipper's defense power to the magic, fire, and lightning attributes, all of them." - Speckled Stoneplate Ring

2 "Uniquely-shaped helmet of Catarina knights.
Foreign countries ridicule it as an onion-like, and it earns the indignation of the honorable Catarina knights, but the convex curved surface made with high-level skill is highly effective in warding off physical attacks." - Catarina Helm

3 "However, most can't enter the old castle itself. Such as that Sir Onion. Uwa ha ha!" - Andre

4 Cheerful Face of Catarina
Cheerful-looking face. The image of Catarina, country of alcohol and rejoicing.

the name of the Great Lord despite his central role in the faith, whereas Siegmeyer openly ponders if repeatedly crossing paths with us is Gwyn's will – framing the god as manipulator of human destiny like so many real-world deities. That Gwyn remains central to Catarina's faith, despite Lloyd's efforts, is all thanks to its relative isolation. In fact, since "remote region" is also used in reference to Oolacile while Sieglinde manages the trek to Lordran all on her own, Catarina might well neighbor the land of the gods. Indeed, the grey hair option common to Catarinans confirms country is also "northern" in its description; bordering Lordran is almost certainty. In that case, Anor Londo has probably been the country's sole guidepost for much of its history, with the Way of White unwilling or able to commit the manpower needed to change that; it is simply too far from the rest of the world of man.

Perhaps this isolation also shaped the vigorously defensive Catarinan approach to warfare. The Pierce Shield features a spearhead, allowing Catarinan knights to aggressively push back against the enemy.[5] Likewise, the unusual, not rare, Blue Tearstone Ring activates a mysterious power when the wearer's life is in imminent danger, boosting defense.[6] Siegmeyer wearing such a ring reveals what Catarinan warriors value: guard before the counterattack.

It might be this stalwart approach to battle that makes Catarina so enthusiastic about war. Siegmeyer praises our "sturdy spirit" (豪気) if we slay the many Silver Knights besieging him,[7] and the "Sieg" in both his and his daughter's names means victory. This is a culture defined by standing tall and strong in the face of adversity, and ultimately prevailing – a culture of heroism not unlike the one seen in Astora. Of course, this may simply be a byproduct of Catarinan cheerfulness; where one is expected to make merry in a drunken stupor when the battle is over. If that is the case, then perhaps Catarinans see victory, not war, as the thing to be celebrated. In that light, it is only natural that mocking their appearance is taken as an insult to their knightly honor. How they look is irrelevant to honorable knights of Catarina. What ultimately matters is that they go home to celebrate once the winning is done.

A Venture in Tragedy

Siegmeyer is the perfect example of a cruel joke. He is a proud and honorable knight, but also a slightly plump and bumbling do-nothing.[8] He thinks himself a great planner,[9] yet in practice is just overly cautious. He dreams of adventure and heroism, but accomplishes almost none of it on his own merit. When we first encounter him, he hopes to challenge Sen's Fortress

5 "Shield for attacking with a large protrusion in the center that some of the Catarina knights are said to use.
Can also be used as a weapon of the piercing attribute." - Pierce Shield

6 "The unusual gem known as a tearstone displays special power in response to the smell of death.
The blue tearstone of Catarina responds to the equipper's crisis and temporarily boosts their defense power." - Blue Tearstone Ring

7 "Oh, ohh! What is it? It can't be, you.... Defeated those guys!? What a sturdy spirit..." - Siegmeyer

8 "Actually, I'm having another little difficulty... Um, iron balls roll out of..... Look, I've gotten fat somehow or other, right? I can't surpass their rolling... That's why I'm sitting here, pondering. Maybe it'll happen again somehow or other, right? Gahahahaha!" - Siegmeyer

9 "Oh, it is you! It seems we're in the same predicament. Running away from the Silver Knights, right? What, nothing to be ashamed of. Because it is the same for me; recklessness is a fool's deed. Now I'll think of a good plan. We'll cooperate and do something, won't we!" - Siegmeyer

and explore the country of the gods, but stops to nap upon hitting a literal wall at the main gate.[10] Once we open said gate and continue on to the fortress, he is again stumped by the traps before him, leaving us to actually overcome them while he merely follows in our wake. And after reaching Anor Londo, Siegmeyer will successfully break into the royal manor like us, only to be cornered by the Silver Knights stationed in his vicinity. Once again, he merely stands by and thinks over the plight while we dispatch the problem ourselves. Having gone as far up as physically feasible, Siegmeyer then proceeds to head down to Izalith. And even then, he is forced to rely on our poison moss to overcome Blighttown's noxious swamp.

At every juncture, Siegmeyer displays a curious dichotomy. He is both the typical Catarinan, taking obstacles in stride and pursuing the thrill of adventure, and the atypical Catarinan, languishing in contemplation and inaction. It is we who employ the brave and straightforward solution characteristic of Catarina and the "hero's experience" which Siegmeyer longs for.[11] And because he lacks this critical trait, the knight never lives up to his name. At most, he kills a few snake-men at Sen's Fortress. Is this just who he is, or is it the result of some trauma? We never find out how Siegmeyer became Undead, but death in combat due to recklessness may explain his extreme caution. Still, he may have always been this indecisive. This is at least not lost on him either, as the knight does eventually ask us to confirm that we have been helping him at every step of the way, and rewards us for our continued assistance.

Siegmeyer is aware of his own uselessness,[12] and the fact likely weighs on him in spite of his continued optimism and cordial relations with us. This culminates in a major crossroads at the core of Izalith. If we become trapped in the palace sewers littered with Chaos Eaters, Siegmeyer our only companion, he will finally live up to his heritage and come to a decisive decision: *he* will distract the demons while we make for the exit. Between the demons and the poisonous waters, this is guaranteed suicide, but insists that he put his life on the line to repay his debts to us. Until we arrive, he once again stands around merely contemplating the problem, but our presence inspires him to drop the pointless planning and act. If we instead decide to kill the demons ourselves and save him from certain death, he will again be grateful, though not without a hint of disappointment in his exhausted voice. For this proud knight, being denied a heroic death is another, silent, blow.



As if to further mock his inability, fate would have it that Siegmeyer's daughter has also

10 "Oh, ohh! Forgive me. I was absorbed in thought. I am Siegmeyer of Catarina. Actually, I'm having a little difficulty. The gate there won't open no matter what. I've been waiting all this time now but... it is not doing anything. That's why I'm sitting here, pondering. It is worrying! Gahahahaha!" - Siegmeyer

11 "I'll be heading below very soon. There's nothing to aim for above. What, exploration's a hero's experience. I'm prepared." - Siegmeyer

12 "I'm always thanking you. I can't do anything..." - Siegmeyer



come to Lordran. Despite not being cursed,[13] she has traveled from nearby Catarina in search of her Undead father. Although the woman is captured by one of Seath's Crystal Golems and needs us to save her,[14] Siegmeyer admits that her unnecessary journey to the land of the gods was no small feat in cut dialogue. The woman implies that she wasn't even entirely certain that her father came to Lordran before confirming his whereabouts from us first,[15] making the trek all the more outrageous.

And yet, she makes the journey and eventually succeeds in finding her beloved father. In that respect, Sieglinde proves to be a far more exemplary knight of Catarina than Siegmeyer could ever hope to be. She even wearily laments her father causing us trouble, as if she has gone through the whole rigmarole before. As for Siegmeyer, he

13 "Oh, it is you… Actually, I met my daughter a little while ago… She imparted my wife's will… Even though she's not an Undead, to do that… Sigh… Did I raise her wrong…?" - Siegmeyer

14 "… Did you rescue me? Thank you so much. I am Sieglinde of Catarina. Somehow, I was captured in that crystal before I knew it…It was surprisingly comfortable, but I couldn't move and was troubled. I must thank you." - Sieglinde

laments her bout of adventure, questioning if he raised her wrong in his Japanese dialogue. The knight probably imagined his little girl would grow up to be a humble maiden who would marry a good man and live a quiet life, not turn into a heavy-armored bruiser like him.

Despite their mutual disappointment in one another, they are still no less affectionate. Each calls out to the other in their dying breaths, and Sieglinde insists that running off an adventure is one of her father's charms.[16] And ultimately, Sieglinde went on this journey to tell her father of her mother's last will. The fact that his wife had a testament for him on her deathbed suggests that she still loved Siegmeyer despite his unholy curse, and probably wanted him to know that along with her untimely fate. If there is anything else to this exchange, we aren't privy to it. Siegmeyer's actions from that point onward remain unchanged regardless of whether he reunites with his daughter and hears his wife's final words.

After surviving Izalith, Siegmeyer decides to go on one *last* adventure. Given his suicidal choice during the last one, this rightly rings alarm bells. The knight even proclaims that he has "no regrets"[17] once he has compensated us for our last bit of charity in cut dialogue, clearly expecting this to be the end one way or the other. Sieglinde doesn't pick up on the implication, however, and thinks that it is just another one of his flights of fancy. She also casually mentions killing him should he lose heart and Hollow.[18] The localization has her ominously state that she would be killing him "again", but the reality is that she will kill him "as many times as it takes", a phrase invoked against us if we provoke the knightess and die by her hand.[19] In other words, she is reassuring us that if we hollow, she will be sure to slay it as many times as it takes, a reasonable sentiment given the potential resilience of the Undead.

And it is because of her dedication that Sieglinde suffers perhaps the most heartbreaking tragedy. Siegmeyer descends into Ash Lake and ends up falling to either the local fauna or the weight of his own insecurities. Sieglinde, apparently noticing that he has been gone too long, chases after him again, only to arrive and find his Hollow on the beaches. True to her word, she suppresses the empty shell, and it is very telling that she first refers to it as her father before correcting herself about "this Hollow" in front of her.[20] The lifeless body lying, pathetic, on the sand isn't Siegmeyer. He died on his adventure, in many ways a sorry excuse for a knight of Catarina, chasing an ideal he could never truly epitomize.

But what about the embodiment of Catarinan heroism, forced to watch her father try and fail to live up to said ideal? Sieglinde claims that she will return home after this, but her cries of sorrow tell us that there is no joy or celebration to be head when the knight finally gets back. She is victorious, alone.

15 "I see! Good, I knew my father came to this country." - Sieglinde

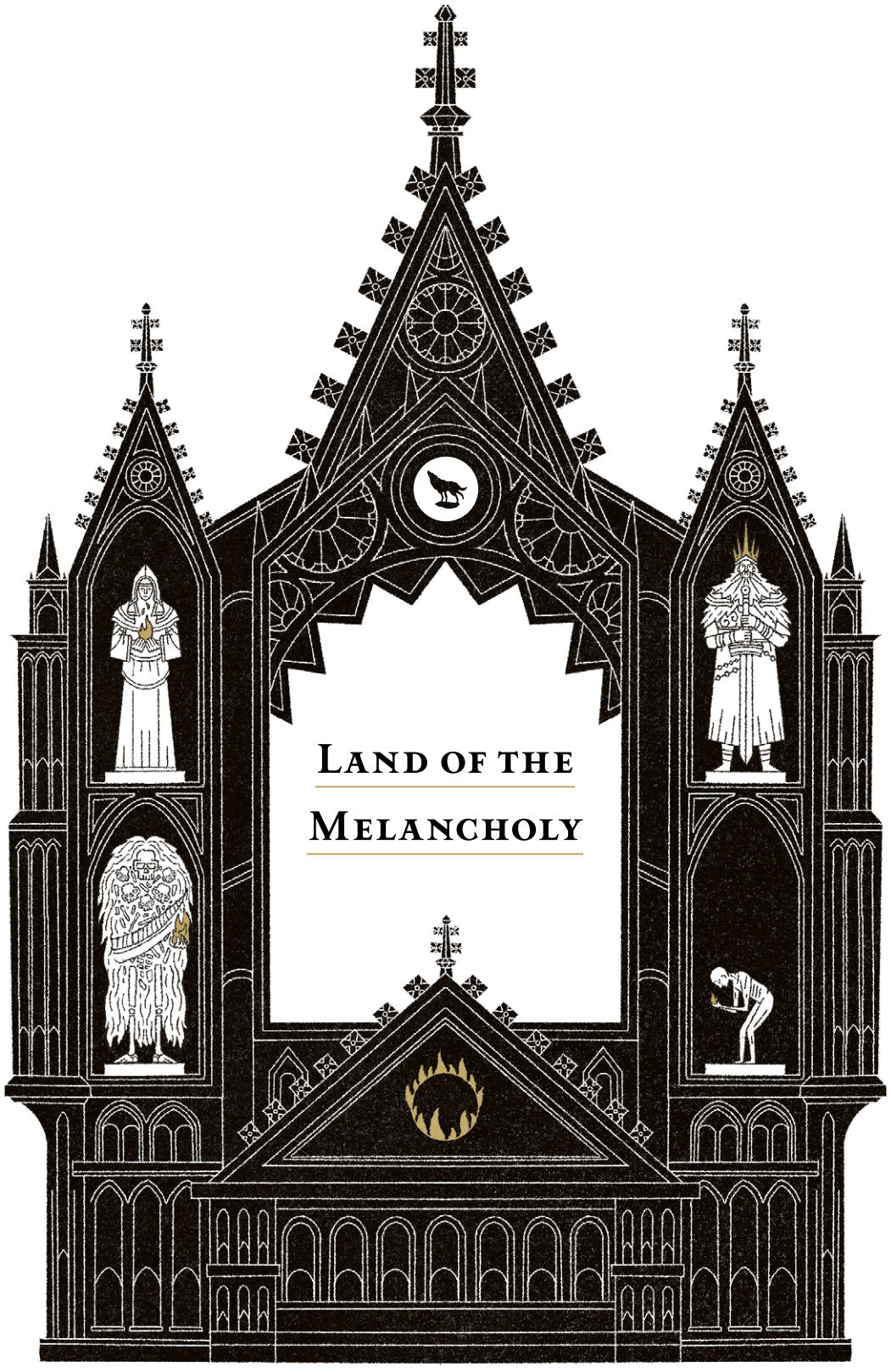
16 "My father? He said he will head for his final exploration. It is fine. That's Father; even Undead, typical Father… Sort of pleasant." - Sieglinde

17 "Ah, good. With that, I have no regrets. I shall go on my final exploration…" - Siegmeyer

18 "Because if Father loses heart, I'll be able to kill him, as many times as it takes." - Sieglinde

19 "Don't worry. I'll kill you, as many times as it takes." - Sieglinde

20 "Father… this Hollow… won't move anymore. He won't trouble anyone. With this, it is over at last… I'll return to Catarina. You've been of aid with various things. I can't be of sufficient help now, but please take it. We don't need it anymore. Ah, Father… Father…" - Sieglinde



A Shade Apart

Carim is the most ominous of countries. The face of its people is characterized as "gloomy",[1] or *inki* (陰気). *In* (陰) itself has connotations of shadow, darkness, hiddenness, the earth, the moon, night, frailty, femininity, negativity, and melancholy. Carim is the yin to Catarina's yang, which is perfectly encapsulated by the Red Tearstone Ring native to Carim boosting attack[2] instead of defense like Catarina's Blue Tearstone Ring. By that same notion, Carim's culture is more aggressive, violent, and overall darker.

This nastiness is demonstrated best by weaponry. Carim designed the sniper crossbow to safely fire at targets unaware,[3] a stark contrast to the upfront directness and chivalric zeal of Catarinan warfare. That said, we do encounter a Balder sniper using the crossbow at Sen's Fortress, so such underhanded tactics aren't limited to Carim's people alone. Even so, the Parrying Dagger is still the preferred secondary weapon of Carim knights, who are denoted by their aggressive, *shieldless* fighting style.[4] This is by no means a defensive, reactive society.

While Carim's gloominess must be deep-seated – humorously associated with the dark blue hair option – the disposition is "mainly" faulted on the bad rumors surrounding their Earl. This lord's name is Arstor, original name Alster (アルスター), and he has had a huge influence on his nation's weaponry. The shotel, in typical Carim fashion, curves over shields to slip straight through to the enemy, and is one of Arstor's many inventions.[5] Carim knights have apparently enthusiastically adopted this deadly weapon, given that Lautrec wields two of them.

While the Earl's creation of the shotel alone doesn't necessarily hint at sinister proclivities, in the context of his homeland and other inventions, it most certainly belies any morality to his creativity. The purging stone is another of his creations – a secret treasure derived from a person to remove curses. This is troubling for two reasons. The first is that he must be sacrificing human lives on a massive scale in order to produce the stones; Oswald alone has five in his possession – and a later game update allowed the female Undead merchant to sell an infinite supply, albeit for gameplay balancing. The second reason is that the mass production of purging stones implies that he was likely dabbling with just as many curses. Arstor's "bite" rings, too, have bad rumors surrounding their creation.[6] The Cursebite Ring in particular uses a purging stone as its gem, implying a similar sacrifice of life for the creation of other bite rings' resistance to bleeding and poison.

A penchant for human sacrifice, experiments with curses, and the creation of tools to also resist poisons and bleeding; Arstor certainly seems to be an ambitious but cruel man willing to stoop to any depths to satisfy his morbid

1 **Gloomy Face of Carim**
Gloomy-looking face. Mainly because of the bad rumors of Carim's earl.

2 **"The unusual gem known as a tearstone displays special power in response to the smell of death.**
The red tearstone of Carim responds to the equipper's crisis and temporarily boosts their attack power." - Red Tearstone Ring

3 **"Large, long-distance crossbow that snipers of Carim use. Often combined with sniper bolts.**
However, is is unusual for a crossbow. It requires proficient dexterity to use." - Sniper Crossbow

4 **"Dagger specialized in parrying. Equipping it in the left hand has become standard.**
It is known to be a favorite of knights of Carim, and a shieldless style is also a symbol of them." - Parrying Dagger

5 **"Curved sword that possesses a large curve blade.**
It is one of the works of the Carim earl Alster, and high dexterity is required for using it, but it can slip through a shield's defenses and cause damage." - Shotel

6 **"One of the unique 'Bite Rings' that is said to have been made by the Carim lord Alster.**
There are bad rumors about their method of manufacture, but they are undeniably effective, and the Bloodbite Ring boosts the equipper's bleeding resistance." - Bloodbite Ring

curiosity, perhaps even delighting in the suffering he causes. No wonder he is blamed for all of Carim's gloom. But why is the Earl so fixated on curses? Curses are by nature ominous, due to their close connection to the souls as well as occasional ties to the Dark. Similarly, bleeding and poison have been exhibited by certain expressions of the Dark. In that case, the Earl must be experimenting in the hopes of understanding this heretical power.

Indeed, he has already sent an expedition to that end.

We find many items from Carim in the New Londo ruins, specifically in those areas still above water while the seal is in effect – which dispels the notion that Carim had any significant presence in New Londo before it fell to ruin, as does the fact that one of these items above water is the Cursebite Ring created by the still living Earl. Among the items is a parrying dagger, implying that Carim's knights made the expedition – likely commissioned by a rich, noble patron. Earl Arstor fits the criteria. Further supporting this, Snuggly provides one of the Earl's purging stones in exchange for a cracked eye orb. Whether their goal was to retrieve anything of value to research, investigate what exactly happened there, or simply free the Darkwraiths and learn from them directly, their presence indicates Earl Astor's interest in a country remembered for its fall to the Dark.

The expedition initially attempted to enter the New Londo ruins through the front door. We find a Red Tearstone Ring off a corpse lying in the Valley of Drakes, where one of the main gates could have been opened from the outside had the gods not foreseen that possibility and preemptively removed the lever. Take the wyverns guarding the ravine into consideration, and the expedition evidently tried and quickly abandoned this approach in favor of entering through the back door. Cut content reveals that the gate between the New Londo prison and Firelink Shrine was planned to be locked similar to the other prison entrance leading to Blighttown, but the path is already open by the time we arrive – a change likely motivated by the Carim expedition preceding us. No one returned to relock the gate since they all seemingly died over the course of their exploration.

Most of the corpses belonging to expedition members are trapped, with ghosts hiding in the walls ready to strike once we reach them. This continues as far as the local church, so the expedition made it relatively far in exploring the area. Nonetheless, if their intention was to break the seal, they were out of luck. Ingward mentions having the occasional visitor, but he is still alive and well with the key to the seal. Either freeing the Darkwraiths wasn't the expedition's purpose, or they failed to even find Ingward or the key before the ghosts haunting the ruined halls overwhelmed them.

The Earl is unlikely to have gained much from this foray, though it tells us plenty about him. Arstor's behavior is consistent with attitudes exhibited by those at New Londo and Oolacile during their falls, from



increased indulgence of darker impulses to experimentation with taboo magic. Carim's Earl is without a doubt studying the Dark, and what's more, his fascination with heresy has been spurred on by Velka.

Conspiracy or Theory?

The Goddess of Sin's strong association with the Dark and use of sacrificial rites to create her death-defying rings are very much aligned with Arstor's practices; the strongest of these rings even negate curses, much like his purging stones. We know that Velka has a definite presence in Carim since Oswald, her priest, hails from there. The pardoner even sells a few of the Earl's bite rings, suggesting *some* connection between them. Is it really an accident that the Earl sent an expedition to a nation that the goddess was once patron to, or researched the same topics that the witch had once studied? Perhaps Carim's ominous culture as a whole can be attributed to Velka – the country is a stark contrast to the sunny and sun-worshipping Catarina, which may hold deeper implications to its leaders' allegiances if not its people's beliefs.

Velka and her followers have settled in a country where she apparently holds a greater influence than Lloyd or the Way of White. Carim is never indicated to be old like Balder or Zena, and Velka was likely among the gods who abandoned Anor Londo to live in the world of man, only her independent nature led her to live apart from the others. Much like Lloyd in Thorolund, it is possible that the goddess personally founded Carim to serve as her base of operations in the world of man, making it less than two centuries old. Alternatively, Velka's long-term influence over the nation has gradually transformed it into something unrecognizable, hence why the shady look of Carim natives has become the subject of bad rumors only recently. Whatever the case, this isn't an act of open rebellion against the other gods. Oswald considers us a "friend" if we are part of a covenant and will downplay our failure to be a "religious person" due to the gods' magnanimity. Velka and her priests still align themselves with her kin despite their physical separation.

Her presence in Carim hasn't affected her duties. As Oswald relates, Velka's cult still holds dominion over sin.[7] If we don't confess and pay an indulgence to her priests, they will forward our crimes to the Blades of the Darkmoon to enact the gods' punishment.[8] Otherwise, our sins will be kept off the books so that we can continue to live free of fear. Admittedly, this isn't how sin works in terms of game mechanics, as only sins gained in PvE by attacking friendly NPCs can be absolved by Oswald, returning hostile NPCs to their previously friendly state as if we never provoked them. By contrast, sins gained by killing other players

7 **"Shall you confess for a pardon? Or accuse?... In all cases, sin is my domain." - Oswald**

8 **"Note that priests of the Goddess of Sin Velka sell. When killed by an invader from another world, makes an accusation of that invader's sin.**

The person accused remains on the Sinner Record and will one day fall to the Blades of the Darkmoon." - Indictment

remain until a Darkmoon invader defeats us, likely to preserve the balancing of the overall PvP experience. Nevertheless, the implication that pardoners like Oswald have a tangible impact on who Gwyndolin's servants punish remains.

By and large, the system predating the gods' departure has remained intact and Velka continues to serve as a cog in the machine. She even appears to go beyond her normal duties to assist with the firelinking. The creature that ferries us to and from the Undead Asylum happens to be a crow. A bird strongly associated with Velka and living where she was once worshipped carries Undead to the land where they need to fulfill the gods' prophecy – far too convenient to be a coincidence. However, Velka's public cooperation with her fellow gods doesn't excuse her other actions. Gwyn's tribe may be able to forgive *her* heresy as their resident Dark expert, but they have consistently condemned humans exploring those same taboos, no matter the circumstances or intentions. Likewise, Velka surely knows what the Earl has been doing in her country of residence. Carim is slipping to its darker nature, and the local goddess of Anor Londo has done nothing to stop it. Indeed, there has been somewhat of a pattern with places Velka has left her mark in.

Carim might be inching toward darkness, but New Londo was the original nation that fell prey to the Dark under the Goddess of Sin's proverbial watch. Of course, the witch could cite extenuating circumstances. Velka may have been a subject of worship for New Londo, but the Four Kings were its ultimate governors and they were swayed to villainy by Kaathe, not her. There is no evidence that Velka is directly at fault, which is presumably why she has suffered no apparent penalties.

But even before New Londo, another nation had rebelled against the sun haven. Deep in Izalith's city center is a corpse carrying one of Velka's rings of sacrifice, indicating the bearer to be one of her followers; an acolyte was present in the palace temple when Silver Knights came and slaughtered every human on sight. But why would the Goddess of Sin keep a presence in an enemy country? Certainly, before relations soured, fraternizing with fellow witches would be justified in their shared pursuit of knowledge. Velka's servant may have even been visiting the chaos capital for diplomacy or trade – perhaps from New Londo. But how convenient that this outreach transpired just before Izalith got the idea to break away from Gwyn. Did someone subtly plant the idea in the Lord's head?

Velka has been portrayed as an intelligent, influential, and enigmatic figure, so if she *were* to commit treason, she wouldn't leave evidence directly linking her to it. She or her worshippers just so happen to *be* there whenever these events transpire. The evidence is circumstantial, making this line of conjecture a borderline conspiracy theory. But indulge the conspiracy, and what we find is more than suspicious.

Velka has no stake in the Age of Fire. Her magic portfolio is already diversified with arts of every age and kind, including those that the gods have tried to suppress. And given her profound knowledge, the goddess must recognize that the natural order is fire fading and Dark filling the void it leaves. At best, she must feel indifferent toward the Age of Fire. Her only motivation to perpetuate it would be solidarity with her clan – and she has already demonstrated an independent streak.

Oswald only reveals himself to us after we ring the Bell of Awakening at the Undead Parish, waiting at the bottom of the bell tower. While his spawn placement was likely chosen to prevent hostile NPCs from attacking the player while attempting to receive absolution, it also partitions Velka's priest from every other non-hostile character we meet. Why hide in such an isolated location when most others, including sinners, generally gather at major hubs like Firelink Shrine? There is a certain air of secrecy in visiting the pardoner to repent for our sins, an intimate privacy where we can discuss and absolve them away from watchful eyes. This in itself isn't particularly ominous, but Oswald's actual dialogue paints a much bleaker picture. Despite his delight in us devoting ourselves to the gods and maintaining human form as Undead, he takes equal joy in performing his duties, almost as if encouraging us to commit sins for him to later forgive.

For example, when we have sinned, he praises us for "thinking profoundly" on our transgression[9] – with the inherent wordplay of both reflecting on ours and contemplating committing them. His other comments are far less subtle. Oswald readily notes that we would get along with Petrus due to us both being deeply sinful people, which implies that he has pardoned the cleric's sins so often that the sincerity of Petrus' contrition should be in doubt. Of course, the priest claims that no sin is unforgivable,[10] which sidesteps the question of whether or not they *should* be forgiven from insincerity. Add the chaplain's sinister laughter to the end of each comment, and he seems to absolutely revel in sin. This comes to a head when Oswald sarcastically praises how good a person we are for purchasing indictments,[11] which can theoretically mark anyone for death under the guise of retribution. Oswald's biggest claim is that sin is an indispensable part of being human, an acknowledgment that "immorality", as the gods label it, is inherent to the Dark of our humanity.

In essence, Oswald is a man well aware of the truth behind human nature and glad to see it indulged as much as any Dark worshipper. He doesn't view sin as something to be renounced, but as something to be recognized, declared, and ultimately accepted. This is perfectly in line with the system that he oversees. Oswald hears the sins of the guilty or accused and adds them to the record unless they pay an alternative to death. It doesn't matter if the sinner is truly remorseful, making this so-called "punishment" functionally identical

9 "Hello, you as well, huh? Thinking profoundly on sin is such a good thing." - Oswald

10 "If you intrude on sin, come again. There are no sins that cannot be forgiven… Keh heh heh heh…" - Oswald

11 "To think you need 'accusation notes'… you too are a very 'good person', aren't you… Uhehehehehe…" - Oswald

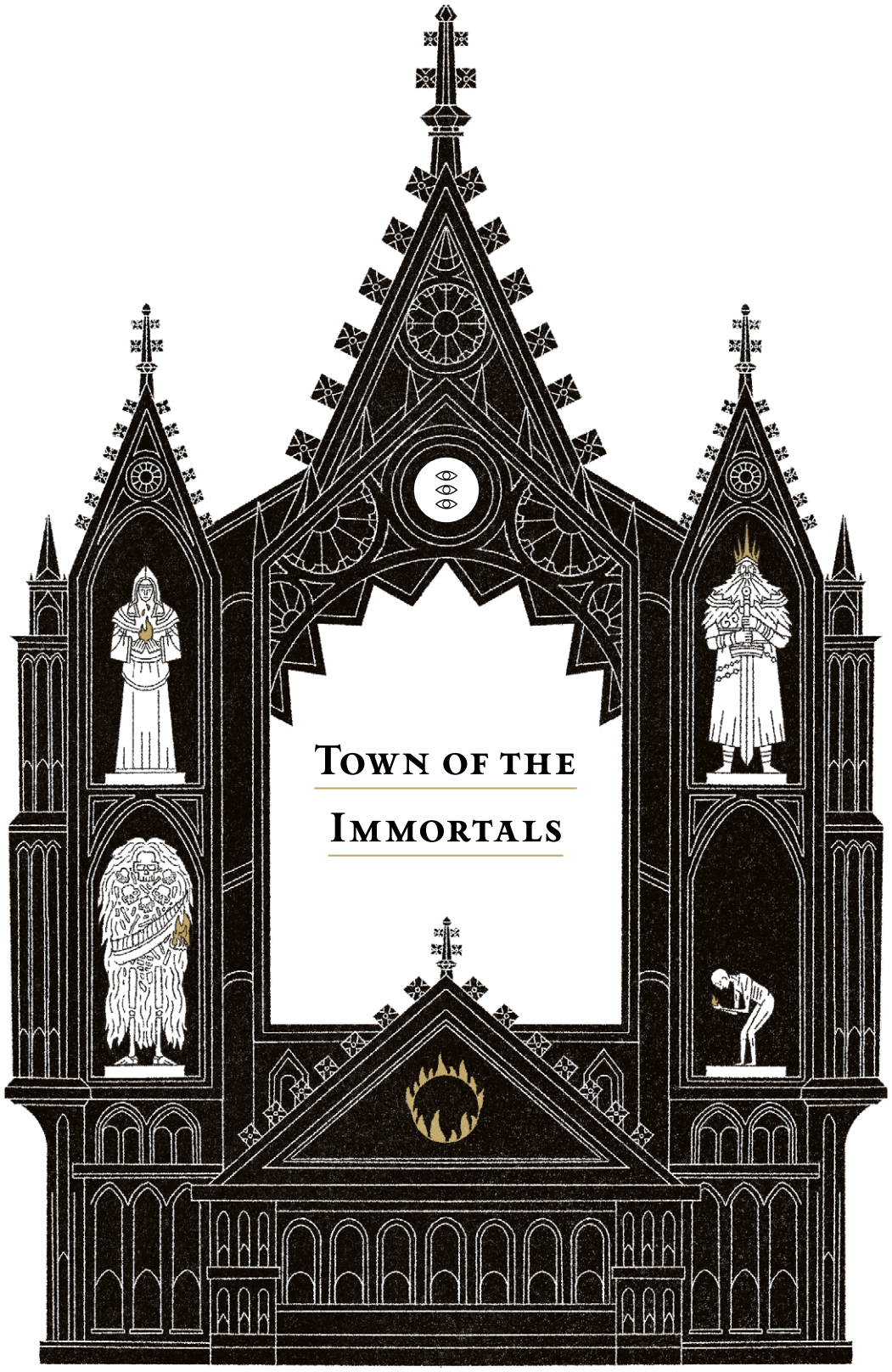


to a bribe. But it is Velka who decided that this payment was an appropriate punishment for sins. It is Velka who designed this flawed system that permits Oswald to prevent countless sinners from facing punishment for their repeated transgressions against the gods' will. It is Velka who Oswald worships and serves, she who he learns and receives equipment from, who he acts on behalf of as a pardoner. It is all her.

In short, Velka's best interests don't necessarily align with those of her fellow deities. They *may* not need her, but she *definitely* doesn't need them. Yet while the witch god is dangerous to her clan, her cult is no army. She would likely lose in any open confrontation with the gods, as so many before her already have. And so, her only recourse has been to play the system, and make use of her immense influence to push her interests just short of the point of no return. She *has* suffered Anor Londo's wrath once before – prohibited from having a normal, happy future with the man and daughter she loved and saddled with a karmic title and duty. Did the goddess feel confined, humiliated, helpless, bitter, enraged? Any one of these sentiments could have an influence.

In all likelihood, Velka's help in maintaining the Age of Fire is merely a façade so that she can covertly undermine it. She subtly nudged Izalith into opposing Gwyn, conspired with Kaathe to target New Londo without alerting the gods until it was too late, and continues to collude with the world serpents to this day. Of course Velka's servant bringing us to Firelink Shrine aids the Undead mission. But the shrine is also a part of New Londo. Perhaps one Undead will instead, by some curiosity, be led deeper into the ruins, acquire the key, break the seal confining the Abyss, and slay the Four Kings without any sanction by Frampt, giving Kaathe proof that he has found his Dark Lord. If such events were to transpire, good. If not, then nothing lost for nothing gained. Either way, no one can blame it on Velka! Patience is a virtue, and the goddess seems to be in it for the long con.

If true, then Carim serves as the most obvious sign of Velka's darker intentions. Perhaps the general populace is largely no different from that of its neighbors, good, god-fearing men and women trying their best to eke out an everyday existence. But those lives have undoubtedly been influenced by the Goddess of Sin, whose claws have sunk deep into the local priests and lords, mirroring Lloyd's grip over Thorolund. Perhaps this belies another deep-seated rivalry between the gods and nations of orthodoxy and heresy. But regardless of what political machinations are occurring amongst the gods, Kaathe has certainly found a powerful ally in Velka, all due to a personal grudge against Gwyn and his ilk. It *was* the gods who made it her duty to define sin and mete out retribution, after all. One can say that she is simply doing her job.



Town of the Immortals

Church of the State

Although the Undead Burg takes up around one-third of our journey, it takes only a glance to see that we only get to explore a small fraction of this gargantuan metropolis. The entire city is laid out across the mountainous incline leading up to Anor Londo, with layers of "districts" that in themselves could be considered townships in their own right. The city is easily the biggest construction project that Anor Londo has ever undertaken, perhaps with the intention that it would be a more permanent settlement than previous Undead hotspots.

Administration of such a massive city is no easy task. While we fail to find any obvious state buildings or officials within the Burg, the Undead Parish sits at the top of the metropolis, literally and likely figuratively. Befitting its name as the "Undead Parish Below the Castle" (城下不死教区), it connects directly to Anor Londo via Sen's Fortress, giving it ready access to decrees from the gods. It also controls access to both Firelink Shrine and a Bell of Awakening, granting the Parish most of the responsibility for facilitating the Undead mission.

Its significance is made clear by the dense military population surrounding the Parish. Most of the Undead we encounter in the Burg and Parish proper are uniformed soldiers unaffiliated with any established country. These soldiers come in both light and heavy infantry varieties, the latter of which bear a unique unidentified heraldry on their shields. All of this suggests that they are part of the Burg's regular army, and this regular army is positioned to prevent us from approaching the Parish no matter our point of approach. The church is clearly the most important building in the entire Undead Burg, at least to its troops. Even factoring in its religious significance, there is no denying that it functions as more than just a house of worship.

The church's first floor is lined with the pews and effigies expected of it, but the second is arranged with tables and chairs indicative of areas for socializing or negotiating. On top of that, there are storage barrels laid against the walls, implying an exchange and movement of goods in and maybe out of the building. This upper floor cannot be a recreation room for the clergy, because we find that role fulfilled in an adjoining building, which houses enough long tables and seating for a decent-sized workforce to partake in eating, drinking, and socializing. The parish's layout was evidently designed with both defense and administration in mind, on top of normal ecclesiastical facilities. Most notable is the prison cell found at the back of the church, implying it even functioned as a jailhouse.[1] The church is the seat of power here, and that is why the Burg's army stationed so many troops around it.

1 **"Key with unknown purpose. Looking at it, it is probably a key to a simple prison?" - Mystery Key**

Anor Londo established the city specifically for the Undead mission and even set up the parish as the staging ground for one of the trials. This is the most likely reason why a pair of Burg soldiers guard one of the gates at the Undead Asylum despite its distance from the city. Anor Londo trusted the city to sustain the early stages of the mission by itself, freeing Frampt to sleep beneath Firelink Shrine until both Bells of Awakening were rung and take over *after* the church had weeded out the rabble. Its only service beyond this seems to have been facilitating challengers of Sen's Fortress. Balder and Berenike knights who managed to escape the literal deathtrap apparently joined up as additional protection for the parish rather than risk going back to die and hollow like their comrades.

Since these trials' end goal is meeting Gwynevere in Anor Londo, the parish was designed to emphasize the goddess. A statue celebrating her birth is the first thing we see after crossing the bridge into the parish district – a centerpiece to the fountain. By contrast, the shrine to the firstborn is partitioned off to the side, where it could be easily ignored by pilgrims passing through on their way to the church.

Once one enters said church, an identical statue is flanked by imagery of all nature glorifying the newborn goddess of good harvest and grace, preceded by lines of helmed women armed with firelit staves. This iconography both highlights her universal appeal and specific importance to the firelinking mission many Undead would have come there to embark upon. This neutral imagery favors no single sect of worshipper, though Anastacia's presence at Firelink Shrine below and the Undead merchant selling Lloyd's talisman indicate that the facilities were primarily staffed by members of the Way of White.

Despite being a government building, it is no less a church. The courtyard connecting the parish to the old church, and thereby Sen's Fortress, used to house a scenic pond, though damage has led to most of the water draining out into the black forest. This would have added an air of reverence and tranquility for anyone traversing to and from these historic ruins of the divine. Likewise, the parish still provided memorial services. Laid upon the altar before Gywnevere's statue rests the soul-bearing corpse of a Fire Keeper, someone whose passing would almost certainly be felt by the residents there. The parish was a place that Undead came to for guidance, both in temporal and religious matters. Not all Undead, of course, as the shrine to the firstborn indicates, but that a disgraced god has a shrine at all speaks to the town's tolerance of the different faiths in its melting pot – even if all but the Way of White were sidelined.



The same cannot be said for the different social castes.

Stratified Society

The Burg itself is built like a castle. Every district is walled off with defensive emplacements and towers installed from every angle. Whether this was done in case heretical forces attempted to assault the latest trial ground or simply to keep out criminal gangs, the defenses complement the army regulars enforcing order within the city. The soldiers station themselves at major choke points already designed to their advantage. We encounter our first Armored Tusk at one such chokepoint, so it appears that they captured, trained, and outfitted local giant boars to serve as their shock troops.

The private residences we can explore across the bridge from the parish are filled with daily necessities and luxuries: from cups, eating utensils, books, furniture, and decorations, to the doors themselves – sturdy and impossible to force open as one would want for security. And yet, some of these doors share a single key.[2] The standardized lock may be for the convenience of law enforcement, making it easy to break into or quarantine homes in case of criminals or hollowing, the latter being a concern unique to Undead society.

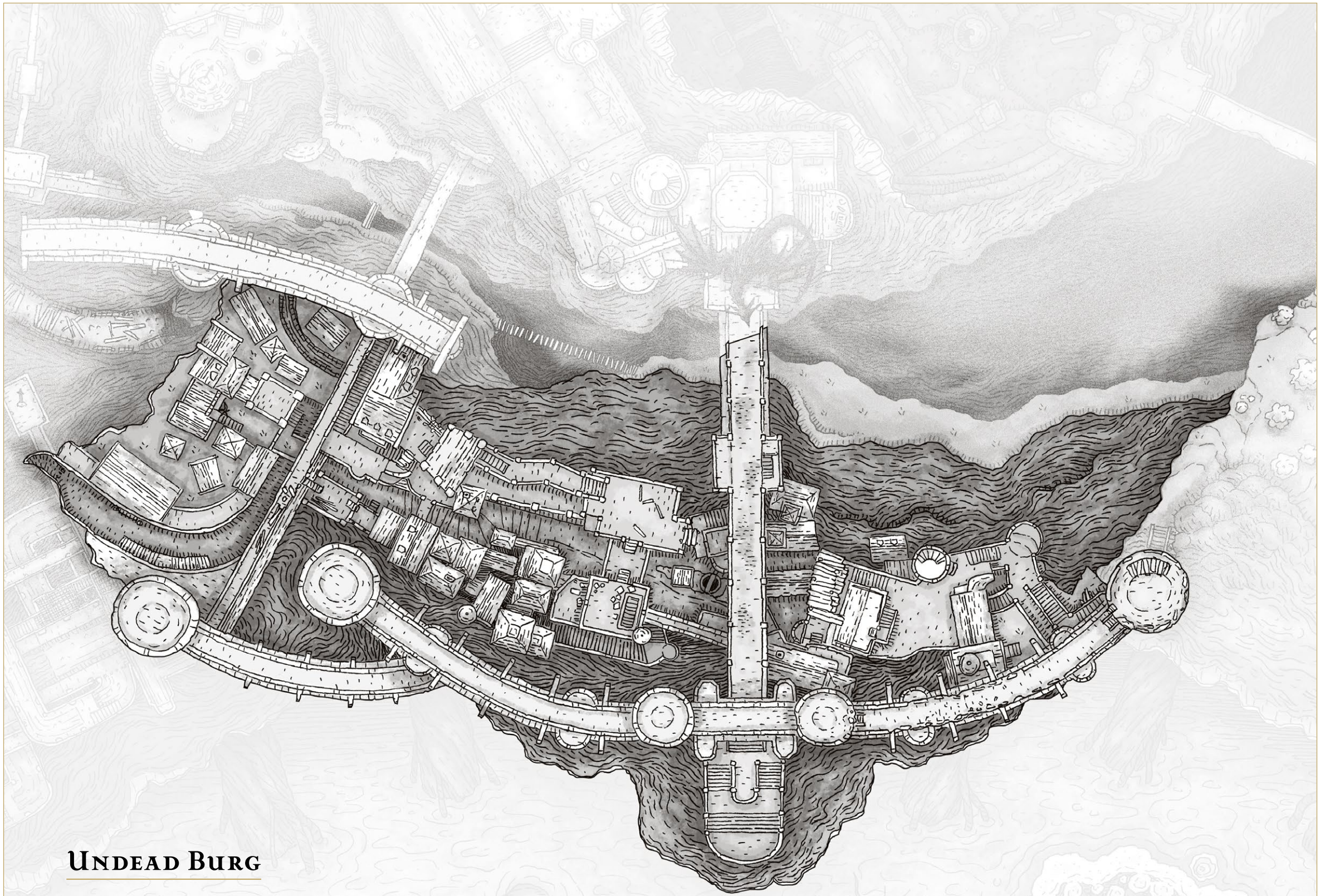
There was a thriving economy in town that supported a decent middle-class livelihood, but both Undead merchants are meager citizens at best. Aside from dressing in rags, the male's wares are stolen goods picked off the remains of Hollows, and they are both described as "beggars" in the game's code. Basically, their presence around this well-off district had been to plead for souls and hope someone took pity, forcing both to turn peddler after the Burg fell into disarray. It hasn't helped. Both have hollowed to the point that other Hollows ignore them, and they show signs of slipping sanity. The merchant woman happily hides in an aqueduct,[3] selling the moss growing there, while the man speaks to and regularly pets a beast supposedly curled up in an empty wooden bucket beside him. Though he treats "Yulia" like a longtime pet dog,[4] she is clearly not actually there. The man also wields an uchigatana but may have simply pilfered it from an actual easterner.

Both beggars probably originate from a poorer part of town. Below the affluent quarter is the "Undead town lower stratum" (不死街下層), which we can only access from an unassuming gate leading down a winding staircase. This district is shabby and confining, with overcrowded homes and narrow streets. The only analogous areas in upper Undead Burg are the streets also located below the main housing elevation, confirming that this layout is in fact by design. The lower classes and impoverished were stuffed into lower quarters that were built to maximize occupancy rather than for comfort or luxury like the homes above.

2 **"Key for a citizen's home in the Undead Town Below the Castle. It is of very simple make but sturdy and cannot be forcibly opened.**
It is apparently the standard key of this land, for whatever reason. It seems to be inserted in several citizens' homes."
- Residence Key

3 **"This is a magnificent place, isn't it? It's got water, moss, whole lot of dampness, and iron bars. I like this place. Not one good thing's happened to me since way back. Now that I've become Undead, I'm the happiest." - Itinerant Merchant Woman**

4 **"Ah this one? Beautiful, right? Name's Yulia. We've been together a long time now. This girl's in love with me..." - Itinerant Merchant**



Undead Burg

Unsurprisingly, this disparity between the rich and poor led to the lower stratum becoming a hotbed for crime, packed with thieves and stray dogs barely getting by on the scraps they pilfer; one such stray may even be Yulia. This was the shady end of town that no one of reputable character would be caught dead in, and the description for the Basement Key acknowledges how dangerous the district is because of its residents. Nevertheless, the town goes lower.

The Depths are the Burg's "lowest stratum" (最下層). Accessed from the lower stratum, this labyrinth is technically the town's sewer system,[5] where the Undead residents dispose of their waste. It is fitting, then, that it is also where those banished from the town gather – making its residents the refuse of society, lowborn outcasts forced to form their own society in the damp, filthy corridors that never see the light of day.[6] We even see the doors and windows to their dwellings in the early sewage chambers. The Spider Shield used by mountain bandits[7] can be found in the Valley of Drakes, implying that bands of Undead thieves live in the rocky vale surrounding the castle town – and yet we can find another in the Depths, meaning that it too is home to such scoundrels. The fact that these criminals aren't simply killed, but instead dumped in the Depths like trash, hints at concern regarding the practicality of suppressing Hollows; as in the world of man, it takes only a single Hollow for a minor incident to snowball into total catastrophe.

As for the nature of the exiles' crimes, the key to the Depths' sewage chamber describes its residents as having been even more greedy than the average human,[8] which is reinforced by one corpse down there possessing the Ring of the Evil Eye. In all likelihood, many of these exiles were just needy and desperate, unable to simply wait on handouts. But even if they weren't depraved degenerates from the start, that is what they have become. Burly cooks wearing tattered sacks on their heads and armed with massive butcher knives hunt down their fellow man to later chop up, cook, and eat – despite this appearance, the description for their sacks indicate them to be women,[9] which Miyazaki reaffirms on a Game no Shokutaku episode. Torch-bearing Hollows wait in a mess hall, standing around the same dining tables found in the Parish canteen as they hungrily await their meal being prepared by a cook one level down. Another cook patrols an adjoining hallway leading to a storage room where we find Laurentius trapped in one of the many barrels. The pyromancer reveals that these chef women had captured him in preparation for a later meal.[10] Leftover bones are ultimately sent down the kitchen chute to the sewer proper, and there are many.

It is no surprise that not even the criminals of the lower stratum want to live alongside cannibals who might try to eat them. So where do the denizens of the Depths find their victims when not culling their own? Maneater Mildred invades us in the Poison Swamp, implying that the Depths' residents hunt other Undead in areas outside the Burg. Curiously, Mildred leaves a summoning sign

5 "Key for the door leading to the Lowest Stratum from the Lower Stratum of the Undead Town Below the Castle. The Lowest Stratum, which gathers those exiled from the Undead Town, seems to be a maze half-sunk in sewage that is damp and doesn't receive the light of day or the like." - Key to Depths

6 "Ah, If you go down this side, you'll be linked to the Undead Town's Lowest Stratum. A place where only unclean and filthy, lowborn lot stay." - Itinerant Merchant Woman

7 "Shield that barbaric thieves of mountains use.
A black spider is greatly depicted on it in a unique shape, and it has resistance to poison." - Spider Shield

8 "Key for the sewage room of the Lowest Stratum.
Those who are profoundly greedy are everywhere. Those who became Undead and were exiled to the Lowest Stratum more so. It is probably part of man's nature." - Sewer Chamber Key

9 "Bloodstained, tattered patchwork bag that an Undead man-eating woman living in the Lowest Stratum wore.
Two holes for eyes casually opened. Surprisingly soft and comfortable to wear, but the meaning in choosing it as armor is especially thin." - Sack

at the entrance to Quelaag's boss room if we defeat her invading spirit. We cannot force her to aid us with the chaos witch, so her decision to extend a hand is purely her own. There must be some benefit to Quelaag's death for Mildred, whether it be that the demon's recent actions have complicated her ability to hunt new victims, or simply because the witch has infringed on the cannibal's territory. Defeating the maneater proved to Mildred that we might be able to slay the demon, prompting her to offer assistance.

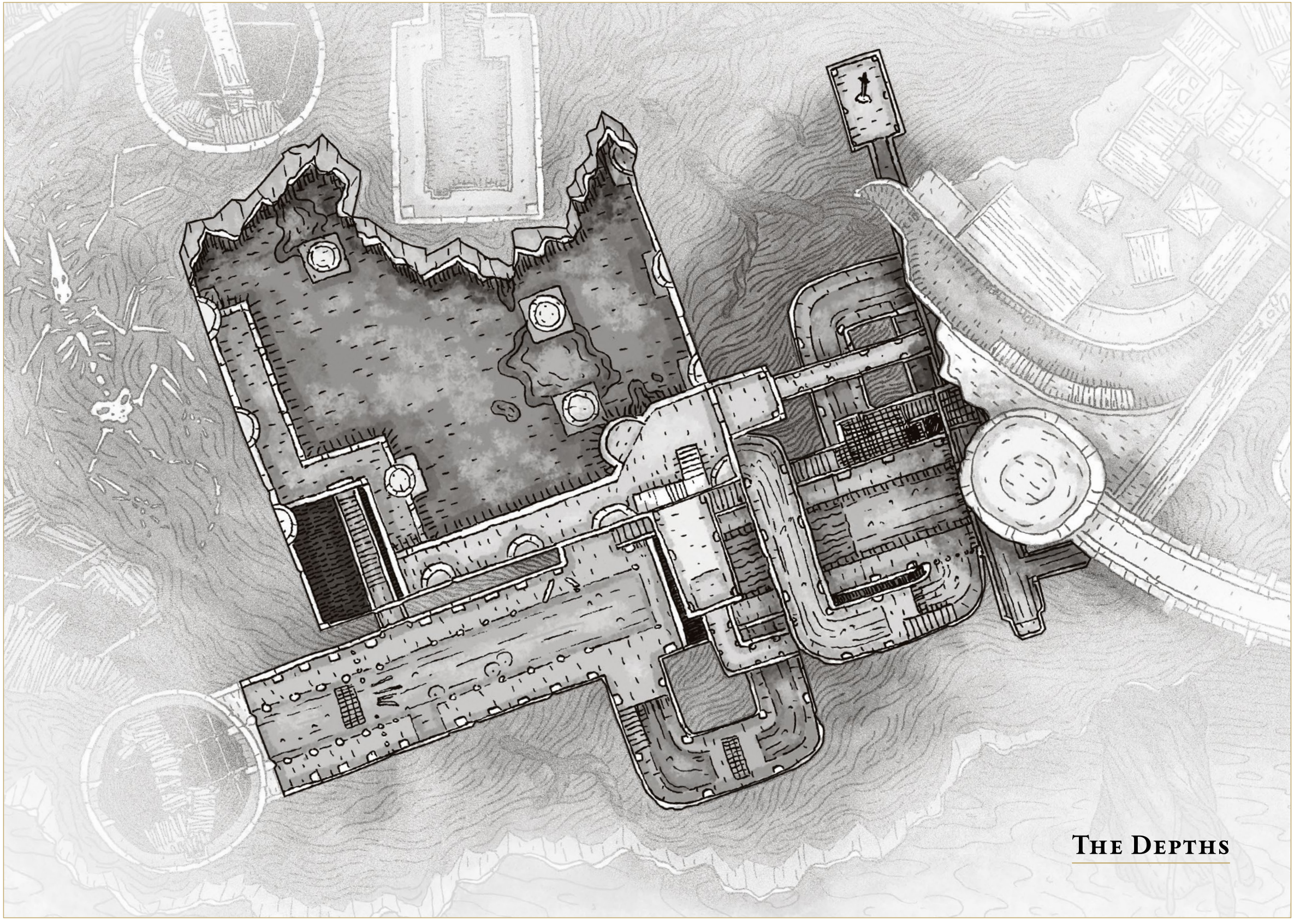
Still, there is no obvious reason why Mildred would have a red eye orb in her possession, cracked or otherwise. But this loose end may be explained by the context of her creation. Miyazaki admits in the Game no Shokutaku podcast that she was merely added "on impulse", late in development, as a tribute to a surprising swamp invader who used the same equipment during the beta – presumably roleplaying the cannibal woman wandering the Valley of Defilement's swamp as a black phantom in *Demon's Souls*. In other words, she is a "cameo" with minimal relevance to recent events. Nonetheless, her existence shows that the cannibal women weren't just waiting in their damp home for passing visitors to eat.

The only other major insight into the filthy lives of the Depths' residents is their struggle with the Gaping Dragon. In the past century, this "voracious dragon" (貪食ドラゴン) took up residence in the sewers, and made the area we fight it in its nest. Pools of its gastric acid are splattered around the room, indicating that the area has been serving as its dwelling for some time now. And based on the armored corpses in this boss room and the crossbow and bolts on the levels overlooking it, the local residents have also taken notice and tried fending it off. But since it drops the slobber-covered Blighttown Key,[11] it is clear that the beast has only gobbled up those who tried. This has led most to just ignore it – Nakamura alludes to its dwelling being a harsh place that people don't approach in the *Design Works* interview, leaving the beast with only corpses and dirty feces to satiate its ravenous appetite. However, none of this explains how the Gaping Dragon came to reside in the Depths to begin with.

A chest carrying a dragon scale rests in one of the sewer drains letting out all of the Undead Burg's waste from the Depths, contaminating the swamp at the bottom of the ravine which otherwise collects clean water, as Kalameet's boss room in the past demonstrates. There are two notable qualities to this sewer drain. One is that the iron bars preventing us from entering the main chamber have been broken down from the outside, indicating that someone or something forced their way in. Second, is that the chest is inside this chamber. This is an odd place to hide such a valuable object, so it is more likely to have been found there and subsequently stored on the spot. It seems that the ravenous archdragon forced its way into the drain in search of food, following the trail of discarded scraps dumped into the valley back to its source.

10 "... Oh, you..... I'm begging you, please help me..... Otherwise, that woman will..... that woman will eat me..... So, I'm begging you..... I'm begging you..." - Laurentius

11 "Key for the door leading to the Diseased Village from the Undead Town Lowest Stratum that the Voracious Dragon swallowed. It is covered with a little slobber but all right. The Diseased Village is, as the name suggests, a village of the plagued, and not even the residents of the extremely filthy Lowest Stratum will approach it. They made a sturdy door and shut it tight." - Blighttown Key


The Depths

The subsequent climb up the drain resulted in at least one of its stone scales breaking off. Since the dragon we face is so much larger than the broken bars, it was probably still young at the time. After settling in this harsh environment, it feasted and grew until it became the monstrosity we meet.

Considering that its alligator-like form is so well suited for watery terrain, the dragon's original habitat was likely Ash Lake, where it adapted to hunt freshwater prey. Perhaps it climbed up to the swamp through The Great Hollow – the "hollow of a great tree" (大樹のうつろ) that has seemingly withered while wallowing in the recent Poison Swamp, opening a path straight to the Lower World; the sprouts of new archtrees growing at the hollowed-out tree's base in Ash Lake reinforce the implication. After climbing this new path to the poisoned valley, it found a new home where it could become the apex predator – its tail weapon is dubbed the "dragon king", after all. This scenario also explains the presence of the basilisks in Ash Lake, the Great Hollow, and the Depths, as all of these are at or near watery environments that seem to be these lizards' preferred habitat.

Valley of Disease

One would think that there could be nothing beneath the *lowest* stratum of the Undead Burg, but lo and behold, Blighttown exists. According to the Crestfallen Warrior, the "Diseased Village" (病み村) is a place where ill Undead gather.[12] Making their home in the shadow of Undead Burg, they have built their community out of makeshift wooden platforms and paths barely holding together the repurposed materials. Wheels from carts, planks from boxes – the town is literally made from the discarded trash of the town above. Its residents have built into every crevice or broken hole in the Burg's stonework to avoid having to live in the swampy excrement that the sewers drain out. So, why live so close to them in the first place? Certainly, not by choice. The Blighttown Key notes that not even the Depths' filthy residents approach the town and have even gone so far as to build a sturdy metal door to quarantine the ill citizens. As Eingyi relates, they are both Undead and diseased; not even banished criminals accept them.

And so, we see the true bottom tier of the hierarchy. No matter who you are, once you become afflicted with an illness, you are no different from the Burg's excrement. And since they are already ill, they are forced to live in this deadly Poison Swamp where all the grime and diseases are allowed to fester. The corpse of a Fire Keeper imprisoned in the dog pit indicates that they were given the opportunity to maintain their human form, but they otherwise live

12 **"For the other bell, you should head below that Undead Town… Although, beyond the Undead Town is the Diseased Village where the plagued gather." - Crestfallen Warrior**



harsh lives in an unforgiving environment. The only native animals are bugs and leeches, leaving little to eat. Many of the residents attempt to devour us, some even using a half-eaten human carcass as a weapon. These "starved Hollows" (餓えた亡者) have resorted to cannibalizing one another, and so their internal name is appropriately "ghoul" (グール), an evil spirit which feeds on the dead. The residents' only protection from these threats are wooden clubs and darts mired in the same deadly substances. Life in Blighttown is perdition by another name, and the blighted are in need of salvation.

Nonetheless, the village is a sovereign entity and defends itself from outside threats. Entrance to New Londo from the Valley of Drakes can only be achieved via a key[13] found in a Blighttown chest at the end of a cave passage leading to that New Londo entrance. This gate was apparently locked due to the ghosts wandering the ruins and legends of them sealing the Dark, and life in Blighttown is hard enough without the forces of the dead and Dark haunting them.

The reason that Blighttown even has the key is probably Yulva. Like Ingward, she was a healer and later sealer of New Londo who eventually abandoned her duty to stand watch. The English description for her Remedy spell suggests that she took her healing arts "back" to Blighttown as if to imply that she is from there, but the Japanese text makes no such implication[14] – the village didn't *exist* until centuries after the sealing.

All the same, the healer apparently noticed the village of diseased Undead building up just beyond New Londo's borders and took pity on its residents. Considering that Ingward acts as if he hasn't seen sunlight since the sealing took place,[15] even learning about the village indicates that Yulva had a certain restlessness regarding her duty. The three had confined themselves within their ruined home for centuries in the name of atonement, but the seal faced no apparent threats during that time, and the only company they had to pass it were each other and vengeful ghosts. Such a tedious and unproductive station must have filled her with discontent, and the opportunity to return to being a healer who helped the frail and ill would no doubt appeal to her conscience. And so, she gave up her duty as a bystander and worked to relieve some of Blighttown's suffering. A noble cause, but we find her corpse next to a chest storing Remedy's instructions in an obscure corner of town.

Blighttown is littered with corpses, many of which carry equipment indicating them to be easterners. While likely a reference to Shiva eventually visiting the area, it also implies a disproportionate population of Undead from the far East living in this diseased village. Perhaps the foreigners have less immunity to western illnesses and are thereby more likely to end up in Blighttown. But this doesn't explain their deaths, especially when fellow residents are eating the bodies. In short, Yulva and others were probably killed by the surviving villagers who have changed their allegiance to Quelaag and her sister. Evidently, not everyone was willing to abandon the Anor Londo pantheon, so the village's complete conversion to Chaos wasn't a peaceful transition.

13 **"Key to the iron bars that separate the New Londo ruins and the Valley of Wyverns.**
For the New Londo ruins that the cursed ghosts wander, because of that danger and the legend saying it sealed the Dark, were blocked so that they would be inaccessible to anyone." - Key to New Londo Ruins

14 **"Sorcery of the red-clothed Yulva, once one of the sealers of New Londo. Decreases bleeding and every poison accumulation and also removes every current poison status.**
One of New Londo's unique healing sorceries. Perhaps she abandoned her sealing duty for the sake of exercising her healing arts in Blightown?" - Remedy

15 **"I am getting a little nostalgic for the sun..." - Ingward**

Zealous Mayhem

Izalith pushing out its borders into Blighttown was an omen for things to come. Around the same time, an outbreak of Hollows befell the Burg. As the number of Hollows swelled, various homes or even districts were locked up, boarded up, or blocked with debris as a means to contain the growing epidemic. The dire situation was then made worse by the emergence of different threats. The male Undead merchant notes the "recent" danger of a Taurus and Capra Demon as well as a giant wyvern. The Burg troops attempted to quell this threat, since soldiers are found stationed both along the bridge the wyvern regularly blasts with fire, and the defense tower opposite the Taurus Demon. But they failed and ultimately hollowed for their efforts. Based on the level of overgrowth found throughout the city, these problems began some time ago, though the pyres present in both the lower stratum and the parish indicate that the struggle has been ongoing until shortly before our arrival.

Demons and dragons may have broken the Burg, but the settlement's problems were much more severe than a random outbreak. Entire portions of the city's stonework have been broken, far beyond the work of your standard Hollow, and some have even seen similar wooden repairs as the boarded-up areas. For instance, a section of staircase that leads up to the bridge connecting the parish to the city has been destroyed near the top, and a wooden platform and retractable iron ladder installed to fix the tiny gap. If this was sabotage committed by the still sane residents in some attempt to cut off the Hollows, why renovate it during an ongoing conflict? The repair shows a desire to keep areas connected. However, it wasn't just a mob of mad Undead enacting a zombie apocalypse on the Burg. The destruction to walls, bridges, statues, and more has been caused by another, more dangerous foe.

The Burg regulars have set up defenses against arrows, as well as grenadier emplacements atop homes. Based on the leftover stone and timber behind them, a great deal of work went into defending these major chokepoints. In fact, the soldiers are consistently set up to defend against an external threat coming toward the parish, not Hollows that presumably could emerge from virtually anywhere in town. Some regulars are even outside the aqueduct beyond the city walls. These defenses aren't built for a disorderly mob of Hollows, armed with nothing save for broken swords, but an organized force, and one that they wanted

to keep from overtaking the church. Furthermore, look at the corpses burned by the Burg army at the Parish and one sees a mishmash of equipment. The Burg was fighting an irregular militia, and tensions were high given that one citizen's private chest holds a collection of firebombs. Worse still, this army came from within.

At the first major choke point in the Burg, a corpse behind a locked door carries a wooden shield decorated with the image of a white dragon.[16] We know of only one white dragon, which means there were fighters revering Seath within the city. The shield is otherwise only seen on one of Lautrec's companions. The man is equipped with a pike traditionally wielded by groups of soldiers, and hard leather armor associated with the warrior background – less expensive than the chainmail or steel worn by the Burg's military. Therefore, the man was probably one of these militant Seath worshippers. These Undead irregulars weren't paid a stipend like conscripted soldiers and so outfitted themselves in light, inexpensive equipment that was easy to make and provided moderate defense.

And who do we see presiding over the Undead Parish? No priest of Lloyd, Gwyn, or Gwynevere, but an evangelist of Seath. While the channeler's position overlooking the spot where Reah might eventually pray foreshadows her potential abduction and subsequent imprisonment at the Duke's Archives, notice his immediate surroundings. The evangelist isn't surrounded by soldiers or knights, but raggedy common folk who attack on his behalf and who he will readily drive into a frenzy. This holy sorcerer isn't just looking for research specimens, he is leading a congregation. The channeler has taken over the church and is converting the local Hollows to his faith. What's more, he does so alongside the Balder and Berenike knights and Burg regulars defending the parish. The Burg's fall to ruin wasn't happenstance; it was civil war.

Seath has subverted the latest iteration of the firelinking mission to his advantage. His influence is already seen in the Oolacilian ruins and Sen's Fortress, so why not the city directing passage to these areas? After successfully taking over the fortress to collect his specimens, Seath's evangelists headed to the Burg – perhaps under the guise of being envoys from Anor Londo – and directed heroes pursuing the Undead mission to Sen's Fortress to supply Seath with research material. We can assume that Seath's messengers had the trust of the government, since Seath has been able to experiment on parts of the army. We find two more Armored Tusks along the path to the Duke's Archives, and unlike the first, these armored boars cannot be backstabbed due to their more heavily armored rears – something which might appeal to heavy armor sorcerers. It seems unlikely that Seath's servants were able to successfully collect the Burg's best war beasts without any apparent resistance unless they had the consent of the Burg's governing body.

Besides that, there is the current occupant of the church jail. The key to Lautrec's cell is found on a corpse in the break room building, implying that he

16 **"Vertically long wooden shield. The figure of a white dragon is depicted on it. It is light compared to metal shields but has low physical cut rate and defensive ability." - Wooden Shield**

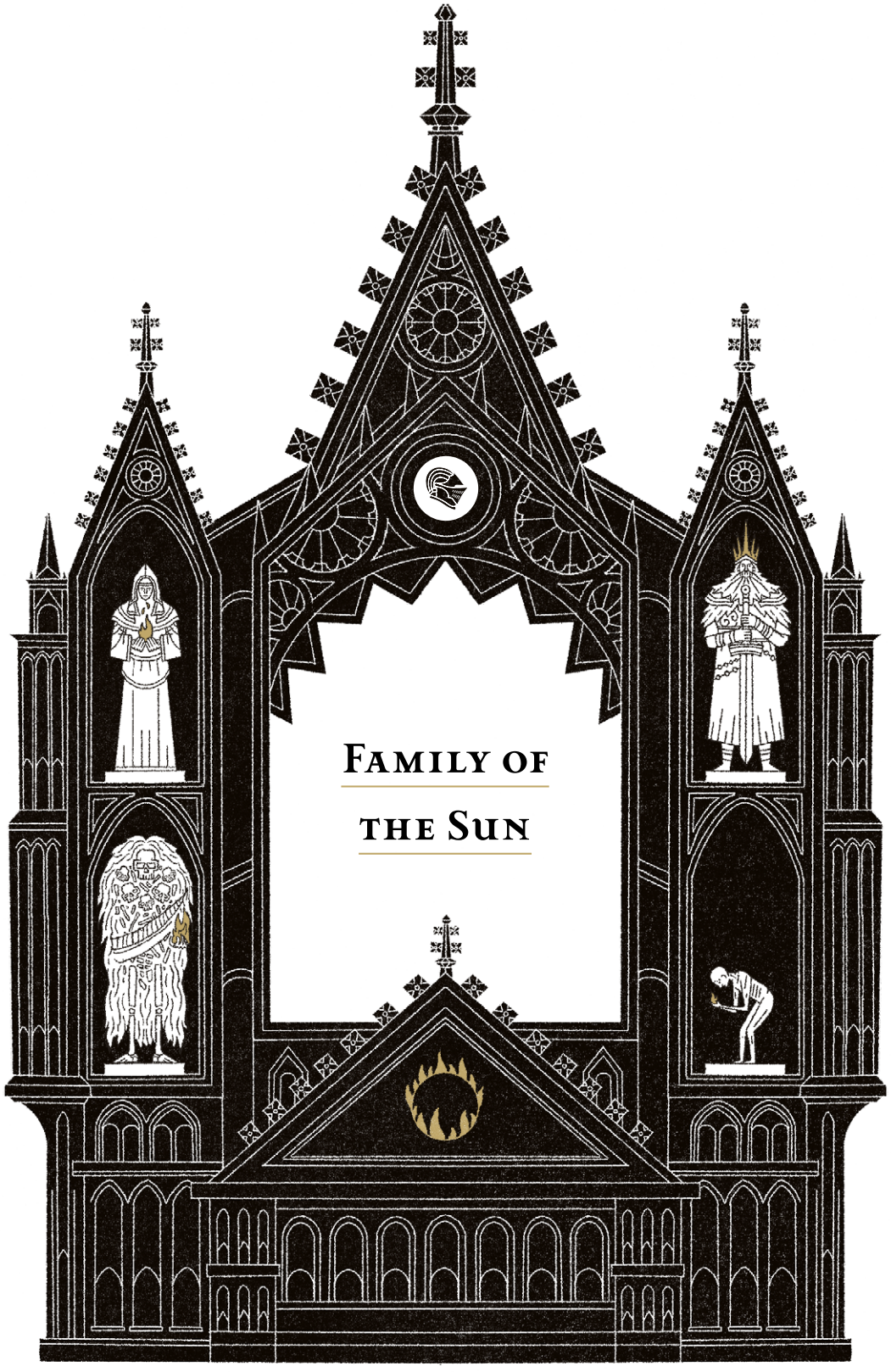
17 **"Oh, you made it. Been a while since there was someone new." - Crestfallen Warrior**

was arrested just before or early in the chaos. In this situation, there is no reason to stay the knight's execution or banishment to the Depths; unless, of course, he is in a similar situation to Logan and others at Sen's Fortress, held captive to be later brought back to the Archives – an insinuation only emphasized by the corpse stuffed in one of the parish's storage barrels at the end of a nearby hall.

We can be sure that the channelers arrived before the recent chaos, since one has successfully navigated his way to the Depths in order to investigate the Gaping Dragon. His journey through the sewers to study and perhaps collect the beast would only be possible before the Capra Demon acquires the key to the Depths in more recent times. Meanwhile, the other channeler remained at the parish and began converting residents to the worship of Seath. Whether these new converts were discovered and persecuted by the god-fearing establishment or were simply militant zealots, they eventually organized into an irregular army and went on the offensive. The Burg army resisted the rebellion, and kept them out of the parish at whatever cost, even halting the lift to Firelink Shrine and stationing soldiers at the aqueduct to prevent infiltration from below. Unfortunately, they had been infiltrated from the start.

The Burg regulars, heroic knights, and ordinary residents turned Hollow as the factions killed one another, destroying the Burg in the process. Some tried to hide, like the now Hollow soldier we find concealed behind hastily stacked furniture in one corner of town. Others fled to the church or shrines seeking sanctuary. During the havoc, the chaos demons made their incursion, and a wyvern appeared. It was too much. Seath's militant faction was more than likely exterminated, but the damage had been done. The Burg government collapsed. All that's left of its broken military are mindless guards instinctively defending their ruined home from invaders.

Another vassal state fell apart, and Anor Londo never bothered to pick up the pieces, perhaps because the den of Hollows the Burg had become made for a serviceable trial in the Undead mission. With a breakdown of command at home, soldiers at the Undead Asylum were left to hollow without contact or supplies, so Anor Londo sent two of its captured chaos demons to fill in as the prison's wardens. The piles of skeletons in the Stray Demon's boss room indicate that the two have been feasting on escapees for some time now – Snuggly even provides the Asylum Demon's hammer in exchange for the *man-eating* women's headsack. Even as new inmates are brought in, no one seems to have escaped since the demons took charge of the facility. The only way out is through the front gate, which can only be unlocked with a key that the Asylum Demon carries. Moreover, the Crestfallen Warrior notes us to be the first new arrival by giant crow in a while.[17] If nothing else, Anor Londo created a more formidable trial from the Burg's failure.



Family of the Sun

Broken Blood

While they lacked his same authority, Gwyn's immediate family enjoyed more luxury and political power than any bloodline in *Dark Souls* history, each member leaving their own indelible mark upon the world. But unlike the rest of the royal line, Gwyn's Queen has left merely a phantom impression. The only proof of the goddess' existence are her children and the statues of her made in association with them. While this doesn't necessarily mean that she has been struck from the historical record, it shows just how little of a legacy the woman has in her own homeland. Anor Londo feels particularly devoid of her presence, with us coming across neither items nor art related to her even in the royal manor. Ironically, it is this bizarre void that makes her stand out all the more.

She was surely absent during the time of the royal capital's decline, else the Queen's presence would have impacted the courtly drama at the time. But why was she absent? The most obvious explanation would be that she died during the height of the kingdom's prosperity, leaving little physical evidence behind. In that case, she isn't unaccounted for, she simply rests among the gods buried with Nito.

But this begs the question of what killed Gwyn's wife. Perhaps she fought and died in the dragon hunts, but there is no evidence that she was a combatant like her husband and son; in the medials' patriarchal society, this royal childbearer is more likely to have served in a support role. Therefore, the Queen most likely died during the peacetime thereafter. But how?

The only other event we know of which might have occurred during this timeframe was the branding of the greedy. These clansmen's enslavement as security chests is an especially cruel and unusual punishment, implying a particularly heinous crime. We know of at least nine gods who were branded in this manner (later games implicate more), raising the possibility that their crime was also shared – a joint venture, or conspiracy. The only beings with possessions worth stealing in Anor Londo were their fellow gods, but Lordran doesn't use coins for currency, only souls. The power of souls frequently stir humans' greed, so why wouldn't this be true for deities? Especially since, in Lordran, souls represent more than raw magical power, they are a symbol of wealth and authority.

Perhaps these kinsmen wanted the power that the royalty hoarded for themselves, and staged a coup d'etat to claim it. If their avarice really did rise to the level of treason, then their severe and karmic



punishment suddenly seems justified; all the more if the King's beloved wife had been assassinated in the plot. And if conspiracy is to blame, then that explains how the surely most affluent, well-connected, and well-protected woman in the world could have still perished. A King might be able to insulate his loved ones from accidents or disease, but not from the schemes hidden among a sea of political officials and servants. And so, Gwyn's wife may well have been another casualty of his political dealings – a tragedy that none would dare remind him of. The result is we have only their children to remember her by.

Gods of Beginning and End

Gwyn's "firstborn" – *choushi* (長子) commonly referring to the eldest son but more literally meaning eldest child – and eldest daughter Gwynevere both bear titles linking them to the sun and sunlight. Since Gwyn is regarded as the Lord of Sunlight after acquiring his Lord Soul, they were most likely born after that event. Both siblings create items imbued with a slight warmth, and possess magical affinities that can be linked to the powers of the Light Soul. However, only the prince is portrayed as a war god wielding a dragonslayer spear similar to Ornstein. This suggests that he participated in the dragon hunts and was thus probably born before the conflict. Gwynevere was married off at the hunts' conclusion, suggesting that her birth was relatively close to her brother's nativity.

Considering that the Anor Londo cathedral installed statues for both children, it is no surprise that they were born so early in its history. Gwyn had become King of one of the first kingdoms, flanked by a Queen with whom he could sire heirs. His son and daughter would have been symbols of a burgeoning new empire when their statues were carved.

Gwynevere in particular was to become loved by mankind as a symbol of good harvest and grace, bringing to mind images of nature, life, and motherhood. Miyazaki echoes the latter in the *Design Works* interview, explaining that her portrayal was intended to evoke the feeling of a small child being cared for by a large and loving woman in players. This paints her as a kind of Mother Earth-figure, which is reflected in her magic. Gwynevere's miracles are healing spells derived from her sunlight power. Soothing Sunlight (太陽の光の癒し) can alternatively be translated as



the healing or comfort of the sun's rays, bringing to mind the positive effects that sunlight can have on both physical and mental health. Moreover, Bountiful Sunlight (太陽の光の恵み) uses the same term for grace that Gwynevere represents as a goddess, and slowly restores the user's health over time, reminding us of the gradual growth and flourishing of crops. Likewise, her blessed holy water heals all ailments, and is contained within a unique flask decorated with golden flora.

As the Undead Parish's shrine to the infant Gwynevere impresses, she has become synonymous with life, nature, divine grace, and motherly love. However, the fact that the babe carries a longsword also associates her with war. While she is never portrayed as a war god akin to her brother, her covenant's healing miracles mention her widely sharing her blessings with warriors. These blessings don't refer to her magic alone: we find some of her divine blessings within a chest in Sen's Fortress – where soldiers were once stationed – and a corpse lying in the lava within Izalith's sanctum – where Gwyn's forces once battled. Even the Silver and Black Knights' shields have been bestowed her divine protection due to the "flowing canals" etched into their faces. Even if *she* never fought on the battlefield, the goddess clearly supported those who did.

Garbed in ivory cloth, and armed with magic to heal and protect others, Gwynevere very much fits her name's Welsh origin as a "white enchantress" for Anor Londo, and justifies her widespread following – though in keeping with her feminine associations, her cult consisted of holy women rather than priests. The name "Princess Guard" initially gives the impression that the covenant is supposed to be Gwynevere's bodyguards. In truth, the holy women acted as her agents in the field, healing and assisting warriors with their goddess' miracles, and the group has no mission beyond helping other covenants. The covenant doesn't protect the princess, but favored warriors on her behalf.[1] Even with her holy women no longer around, her illusion keeps to this principle,[2] though warriors like us must now learn to cast the miracles as part of the covenant for ourselves.

This couldn't contrast more strongly with the role of her brother. The firstborn is described as peerless in military might,[3] suggesting an aggressive persona befitting a born warrior. War wasn't just his duty but his passion. He likely served as a military commander due to his status as the first prince of Anor Londo, and based on his use of a cross spear in portrayals, he probably fought as part of a vanguard or cavalry force on the frontlines during the dragon hunts. The spear wasn't his only weapon, however. His ring boosts the damage output

1 **"Special miracle imparted to the holy women who serve the Princess of the Sun's Light Gwynevere. Greatly recovers HP, including the surroundings.**
Miracles of Gwynevere, who is loved by all, widely distribute their blessings to warriors but cannot be used if you aren't a covenantor." - Soothing Sunlight

2 **"From here on, Gwynevere is your guardian. If you so desire, I shall give my all to assist. May the sun's light be with you always." - Gwynevere**

3 **"Miracle imparted to those who have entered into the covenant 'Warriors of the Sun'. Throws a great lightning spear.**
Weapon of the Eldest Child of the Sun, who is known as a war god. It is said that the eldest child who inherited King Gwyn's light of the sun wasn't outshone in military might alone." - Great Lightning Spear

of miracles and is described as old, indicating that he had offensive spells in his arsenal, and did so for a very long time. The firstborn may have "inherited" the power of sunlight from his father, but this doesn't mean that the war god wielded lightning only after Gwyn's firelinking.

Gwyn and his Silver Knights both conjure sunlight spears in the cinematic, confirming that the King had already shared his miracles with others. Ornstein and other elements of his dragonslaying army are also in possession of weapons imbued with the attribute, making it highly unlikely that Gwyn's own son, a war god, wouldn't have learned the magic. "Inherit" can refer to something derived from lineage, not just bequeathed upon death or retirement. Just as Gwynevere's sunlight affinity made her a natural healer, the firstborn's parentage granted him a similarly innate sunlight affinity perfectly suited for warfare.

That isn't to say that he didn't receive his father's instruction. If we offer Gwyn's soul at the firstborn's shrine, we receive the text for Sunlight Spear, showing that he *does* possess his father's personal spells. However, he may not have acquired these until Gwyn settled on linking the fire, previously relying on lesser miracles or spells of his own creation. (A theory later confirmed in *DS3*.)

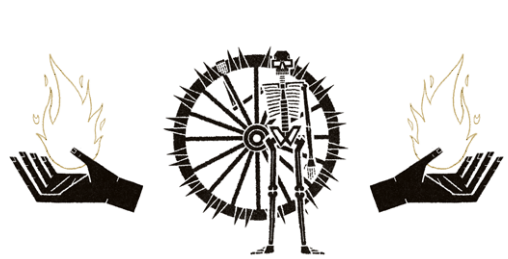
While details about the firstborn's life have been stricken from the historical record, we can still explore his and his sister's living quarters. There are two bedrooms that we can access after breaking into the royal manor. One has been decorated in green laced with gold – the color of life and nature – and hangs paintings of flora and highborn-dressed persons including Gwynevere herself on its walls. This room was clearly her personal quarters, as emphasized by the one Silver Knight chivalrously standing guard just outside the door. Whereas the other knights posted in the manor freely barge or station themselves in the actual rooms, he respects the fact that he is guarding a lady's accommodation. Meanwhile, the men and children depicted in these portraits, presumably relatives or otherwise notable members of Gwyn's court, indicate the goddess's popularity, whereas the portrait of herself suggests vanity.

If the princess was the darling of high society, her brother was her total opposite. The room across from hers is decorated in red and gold – the color of fire, bloodshed, and passion. Who fits this room better than a war god? And who is more likely to sleep across from Gwynevere than her elder brother? Unlike his sister, he kept no portrait of himself to admire – assuming it wasn't destroyed during the purge – but he *did* hang a landscape of an already aged Sen's Fortress on his wall. The fortress was originally a training ground, and if the firstborn participated

in the dragon hunts, he would have likely undergone the same training there as the Silver Knights, perhaps even stationed there at some point afterward. Whatever the case, he clearly held some sentiment for the old castle. Some believe that "Sen" is the firstborn, but it seems unlikely that a society who thoroughly expunged his name would forget their own outpost, and there is nothing characteristic of him to be found there.

Another portrait depicts one of the giant royal guards encountered in the cathedral, so the firstborn was apparently friendly with his family's protectors, perhaps even serving alongside them during his father's reign. Regardless, the room's decor reinforces the firsborn's preoccupation with martial matters. He seems unlikely to have frequented the same high-class social gatherings as his sister.

These rooms otherwise haven't been touched since the gods abandoned Anor Londo well over a century ago. One look at the layer of dirt, some broken dishes strewn about the floor, and weathered wallpaper and you can see that these quarters are a time capsule depicting the lives of their owners. It is therefore most fitting that Gwynevere doesn't keep a portrait of her husband.



The goddess seems to have retained her room even after her political marriage to Seath, who spent most of his time at the gods' Archives. Living separately raises immediate red flags – and if there had ever been a spark of romance between the newlyweds, it was no doubt squelched with Seath's affair. This strained marriage was likely a source of ire and grief for Gwynevere, as shown by her treatment towards Priscilla. In the Ariamis gallery, the painting hangs opposite a statue of Gwynevere. The statues' elevated position gives the impression of looking down upon the artwork, with the Silver Knights flanking her adding an air of intimidation to this image. A nearby chest storing a divine blessing indicates that the painting guardians received Gwynevere's approval for keeping others out and, of course, Priscilla sealed within. She clearly disapproved of Seath's philandry – and naturally wanted to ensure that his illegitimate child remained locked up far away from prying eyes.

This enmity was probably not only directed at the child, but the mother as well. Velka and Gwynevere were opposites in many ways. Where one was public and social, the other was clandestine and mysterious. Where one was an orthodox princess fulfilling her family duties, the other was an openly heretical witch indifferent to where her studies took her. For all of Gwynevere's beauty and prestige, Seath had ignored her for a woman who represented everything she was not. The tension between the two goddesses must have been palpable. As if to highlight their dynamic, the chest in Sen's Fortress storing divine blessings is juxtaposed with a chest carrying Velka's ring of sacrifice. Were they cooperating, or competing? Were the two friends, or rivals? If the former, it adds an air of betrayal to the witch's behavior.

Yet Seath's affair would, in time, have a much more dramatic impact on the royal family. For there is still one more child to be born from the Lord of Sunlight.

Birth of a Dark Sun

Gwyndolin is God of the Darkmoon, not god of the *Dark Sun* like the localization for his soul claims. Dark Sun is instead a formal title like "Princess of Sunlight", hence Gwyndolin's Darkmoon power is described as being *of* the Dark Sun; in other words, himself. In fact, the original title is "sun of the shadows" (陰の太陽). As noted previously, *in* (陰) embodies the dualistic concept of yin, which certainly applies to the secretive, gloomy, feminine, and frail-bodied Darkmoon sorcerer. Likewise, the name Gwyndolin, or Guindolyn, derives from the Welsh Gwendolyn meaning "white ring" – believed to refer to the moon and potentially a moon goddess – and is used by the wife of the sorcerer Merlin from Arthurian legend. Everything about him embodies the moon, for better and worse.

Ironically for a moon, Gwyndolin has spent his life eclipsed by suns. Most of the royal family are associated with warmth and sunlight, but not Gwyndolin. Crown of the Dark Sun suggests that its shape expresses his desire to be a sun like his father and siblings, but the crown is imbued with the power of the Darkmoon and enhances magic,[4] unescapable proof that he is in fact a Dark Sun. It also claims to require tremendous faith, but there is no actual faith requirement to wear the crown. Assuming this isn't an oversight, this detail underscores Gwyndolin's fervent

4 "Crown of the Sun of the Shadows Gwyndolin who protects the abandoned Anor Londo.
The god's crown requires tremendous faith but is tinged with the power of Darkmoon magic and enhances all magic. Does its sun shape manifest his desires?" - Crown of the Dark Sun

devotion to his father despite only ever acting as his shadow. Indeed, while he wields a sorcery staff, it is a holy stave that scales with faith, not reason.

There is an unmistakable sense of duality with this deity. He was a perverse mix of two sides of a spectrum, and an inadequate embodiment of both – a flawed nature which ultimately manifested in Gwyndolin's behavior.

For example, the Darkmoon deity speaks in particularly archaic language. No other character in the entire game speaks in such an antiquated dialect in the Japanese script, including the god's own illusion of his elder sister. It might fit our idea of a god to speak with an air of a distant age, but Gwyndolin is the only one in Anor Londo society who does so. In other words, he *wants* to sound more god-like despite already being one of the old gods. The fact that his "sister" doesn't do the same suggests the affectation is not simply for humans' sake, either. It must be a habit he developed among his fellow deities. Why would a child of the Lord of Sunlight be reduced to trying so hard? Why would there be such a jarring gap between his lineage and his nature?

The Darkmoon Blade Covenant Ring makes a point of Gwyndolin being "aware of his ugly and weak form",[5] but there is only one overtly grotesque trait about him: his serpent legs. Many dismiss this detail as another of the god's illusions, but why would an Anor Londo god, Gwyn's son no less, create illusory snake legs for intimidation? In addition, concept art also depicts Gwyndolin with these legs even in a private setting. Snakes represent failed-to-be dragons, which would imply that the god is in some way related to Gwyn's old enemies. Simply put, Gwyndolin is aware of these "ugly" legs because they are proof of his lineage, and thus a mark of shame.

The Tin Darkmoon Catalyst describes Gwyndolin as a moon sorcerer despite being a *legitimate* god as Gwyn's youngest child.[6] Other items just note the medial's relation to Gwyn, so a statement about his legitimacy as a god should be redundant. The fact that Gwyndolin's godhood needed to be affirmed at all, and linked to his lineage, implies that he wouldn't be considered a deity if he wasn't Gwyn's son, and in turn, tacitly suggests that his mother was neither a medial nor favored by them. In short, Gwyndolin is an illegitimate child, explaining both his unique relation to dragons and his apparent shame over it.



Most gods are only associated with miracles, yet Gwyndolin wields both miracles and sorcery, specifically moon sorcery. At the same time, he shares his boss battle theme music with the

5 "Ring given to those who entered into the covenant 'Blades of the Darkmoon'. Responds to the summons of the Sun of the Shadows Gwyndolin.
Gwyndolin, who is aware of his ugly and weak form, creates an illusion of his older sister Gwynevere and protects the abandoned Anor Londo. The one who breaks that lie is nothing less than an enemy of the gods." - Darkmoon Blade Covenant Ring

6 "Sacred staff born from the soul of the Sun of the Shadows Gwyndolin, God of the Darkmoon who protects the abandoned Anor Londo.
The sacred staff of Gwyndolin, who was also a moon sorcerer despite being a full-fledged god as the youngest child of King Gwyn, enhances sorcery via faith, not intelligence." - Tin Darkmoon Catalyst

moonlight butterfly. Who created the butterfly and has a potent affinity for the moon's power? And from whom, therefore, does Gwyndolin's shameful connection to dragons arise? The answer, of course, is Seath.

But Gwyn is without a shadow of a doubt the god's father, so any relation to Seath must come from his mother. And there is only one possible candidate: Seath's daughter, Priscilla. This is the other source of Gwyndolin's shame: his grandfather sired an illegitimate crossbreed, and then his father sired him with that product of infidelity.

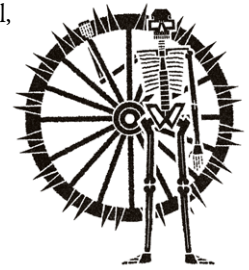
If a medial and a dragon create a half-dragon, what would a medial and a half-dragon create? A quarter-dragon, perhaps? Gwyndolin's repulsive appearance is simply diluted genes failing to even manifest true dragon features after not one but two generations of breeding with medials, the latest of whom bore a strong sunlight affinity. (*DS3* later reaffirms the relation through Yorshka, Gwyndolin's younger, half-dragon sister.)

As previously established, Darkmoon light is "vengeance" representing the consequence of fire fading and shrouding rock in Dark until the moon is but a crescent. This light's power is thus close to the Dark in nature (and *DS3* confirms that Gwyndolin's talisman is compatible with Dark magic). The Dark Sun's father bore an affinity for sunlight, while his mother had an affinity derived from both moonlight and the Dark. The combination of sunlight and dark-moonlight conceived Gwyndolin, a quarter-dragon medial with a strong grasp over the powers of Darkmoon light.

This makes Gwyndolin a god of vengeance, who uses that power to bring consequence to sinners, albeit as an agent of the gods rather than the forces of Dark; truly, he is a walking contradiction, but such was his birth. Indeed, the only reason that this hybrid is accepted as a god at all, unlike his mother, is because of his immediate relation to the king of the gods. He lacks a statue beside that of his father and two siblings in Anor Londo's cathedral because he was born long after them, to a different woman than Gwyn's wife. The reason he is so strict with others in showing reverence to the gods, and with himself in meting out the will of his father is obvious – he feels that he has the most to prove while being the least fit to lead, at least openly. So instead he becomes a Dark Sun, helping from his family's shadow where he cannot detract from their brilliance.[7]

Why did Gwyn sire another child so long after his previous children, and not with his wife? Priscilla was led to Ariamis while she was still a young girl, meaning that Gwyndolin was most likely born in the painting world, during the period of relative peace after the dragon hunts and before the First Flame waned. However, there is no evidence that he has spent a significant amount of time within the painting in a long while, if at all.

7 **"O adherent of the Sun of the Shadows. Admirable that thou hast reached this place and heard my voice. Thou, become my covenantor and serve as a blade that hunts the gods' enemies. If thou art prepared to become a shadow of my father Gwyn and elder sister Gwynevere and serve as a blade that hunts the gods' enemies, I shalt protect thee, and give the power of the Sun of the Shadows, the Darkmoon, as thine aid." - Gwyndolin**



Notably, Gwyndolin was explicitly raised as a girl, but there is no reason for Priscilla to do this. He continues to dress like a woman – notable bust size and all – even at Anor Londo, making this far more likely to have been Gwyn's decision. The painting world is ultimately a prison, and even a bastard prince is still a prince. Gwyndolin was raised in the realm of the gods.

Still, nothing suggests that an actual romance blossomed between the god king and crossbreed convict, and Priscilla's willful isolation from the outside world indicates that she doesn't care to see her son or his father ever again. Darker implications spring to mind, perhaps tied to the absence of Gwyn's wife. For regardless of how she died, Gwyn likely suffered the same grief afflicting any husband whose spouse left him all too soon. (*DS2* further hints at this emotional episode with Blinding Bolt, an art that the sun god created out of such wrath or grief only to ultimately seal away.)

Why her? When did it all go wrong? What could I have done? Who do I blame? Why can't things go back to how they were? How can I live without embracing her ever again? For an egotistical man like Gwyn, such severe stress over losing a loved one could have been his most humanizing moment. Instead, it ended up being among his most monstrous.

Simply put, Priscilla was used as the King's outlet, an unwilling companion to direct all these passions toward – filtered through one kind of passion in particular. Crossbreed or no, she was an abhorred abomination condemned to eternal solitude in an equally isolated dimension. She was easy to dehumanize and easier still to victimize, and all without harming a single one of his subjects in the process. The half-dragon certainly had the means to defend herself, so if Gwyn proceeded regardless, then he likely did so while she was relatively young, unable to properly resist an adult man but sexually mature. It would only take one instance, and who cares about taking out your frustrations on a monster? It is under *these* circumstances that Gwyndolin was likely conceived – is it any wonder why Velka might want to destroy everything that his father held dear?

Although the King does take responsibility for the bastard he sired, that choice has less to do with regret over his actions so much as recognizing that the child bears his royal blood. And even then, this simply passes on the burden from parent to child. Gwyndolin grew up mired in his own self-loathing, and likely the loathing of others too. Some believe that the prince's existence was hidden from the public, even his father, but this is preposterous. To begin with, he was raised as a daughter – an unnecessary choice if the prince was hidden from public view, and one which required someone in authority to make it.

Moreover, Gwyndolin is accepted as a proper god – a position of status denied to Priscilla – which requires his existence to be public knowledge. Gwyndolin was recognized as part of divine society solely because he came from Gwyn's loins, but he was recognized nonetheless. More evidence for Gwyndolin's role in public life can be seen the giant blacksmith forging *his* moonlight arrows, Oolacile erecting *his* statues, and Gwyn tasking his *sons* with guiding humans. Finally, the stock menu graphic used for miracles is a page of scripture that portrays Gwyndolin standing just behind his father while the monarch presents himself, Lord Soul in-hand, before lines of Silver Knights under Anor Londo's sunlit sky. (Later games reuse the depiction, reaffirming the validity of its contents.)

That isn't to claim that everything about Gwyndolin was public knowledge, but his neglect clearly wasn't as severe as some propose. It is true that we find no room for the god when we explore the royal manor. Concept art portrays him using the furniture in Gwyn's tomb, and a purple and gold cloth decorates the floor outside the chamber, mirroring the respective red or green and gold color schemes found in his siblings' rooms. This certainly confirms that the god currently resides there, but the crypt only dates back to Gwyn's firelinking and doesn't account for the many years before that. Since we break into the manor by navigating the exterior architecture instead of the front door, we never explore the whole building. Gwyndolin likely did have his own personal quarters there, we just don't get to see them.

Of course, while Gwyndolin was afforded the same luxuries as any of his half-siblings, his treatment differed in one key respect: he was to be a princess. "Gwyndolyn" is ultimately a derivative of Gwendolen, a female given name. This ties the decision to raise him as another daughter to his very birth, and even his extremely thin silk garments[8] are designed like a dress worn by a delicate woman. This mandated feminization was based on the "moon power" the medial possessed, but there is no intrinsic link between his particular magical affinity and this perverse decision, and more broadly no strict association between the moon and femininity. Indeed, the character most connected to beauty, womanhood, and motherliness is his elder sister, the Princess of *Sunlight*. There is no precedent for raising a boy like this, so why did Gwyn force it upon him? Because his lastborn doesn't just have any moon affinity, but a *Darkmoon* affinity.

Gwyndolin was second-in-line to the throne after the firstborn by virtue of Gwyn's other children before him being daughters. He was also the bastard child of an unwanted half-dragon carrying powers of darkness. The idea that the future king of Anor Londo could be a sorcerer with powers leaning Dark wouldn't sit well with its divine citizens, and it clearly didn't sit well

8 **"Robe of the Sun of the Shadows Gwyndolin who protects the abandoned Anor Londo.**

The garments of he who was raised as a girl because of his moon power are extremely thin clothes of magic power, and physical defense power can't really be expected." - Moonlight Robe

with Gwyn. But, always the masterful politician, the sun god responded with a perfect solution. By simply treating his lastborn as a daughter rather than a son, the King cleanly sidestepped unnecessary outrage over his unexpected progeny while also downplaying the fact that Dark was now part of the royal family. And thus, the babe was dubbed "Gwyndolin", which also translates to "fair bow" in Celtic, saddling the prince with a feminine ideal that he would have to live up to for the rest of his life. Fair indeed, for if the boy is living proof of impropriety and scandal, then an image of dainty innocence might cover up the stain.



Miyazaki confirms their intent to imbue Gwyndolin and his covenant with a feminine aura in the *Design Works* interview. The brass set worn by the Darkmoon Knightess was originally planned for a pagan knight, intended to uniquely embody the moon and secret ceremonies in contrast to the mainstream sun worship implicit to the other starting classes. Because of this, the brass set also came to embody femininity, and Nakamura admits to both intentionally and unintentionally imbuing the armor with such traits when designing it. This style of beauty naturally extended to both Gwyndolin and the Darkmoon faith as a whole, resulting in this entire moon religion having an air of secrecy and womanliness. All of these influences can be seen in Gwyndolin's name, title, and even appearance.

Born with a beautiful face, dressed in delicate fashion, and blessed with an androgynous voice, the "princess" found success. Players commonly mistake the demure god for a woman upon the first encounter. The only direct confirmation that he is male comes from item descriptions, and those that use explicitly male pronouns in the Japanese script can only be acquired *after* we kill him. In other words, we are supposed to assume that Gwyndolin is a woman, for that is how his public image has been perceived by gods and humans alike, and his true sex is intended to be a reveal, albeit one lost in the localization for those attentive to item descriptions. The only ones who know the truth are those who raised him or are otherwise intimately familiar with him – the royal family and the closest members of the court, like Kaathe.

Due to his moon affinity, Gwyndolin grew up learning sorcery, perhaps directly from Seath if his teleportation spell's resemblance to the channeler's

spell is any indication, though he also learned the principles behind miracles if not the arts themselves. He also mastered a golden bow imbued with his magic, most effective at firing his signature moonlight arrows[9] imbued with the same power – a weapon choice which recalls Gwyndolin's welsh name and shows his dedication to meeting the standards it set for him. Like most other gods at Anor Londo, he gained a human following, though the ring worn by his priests asserts that these adherents are very few in number; he isn't a prominent deity. This makes sense since followers of the pantheon as a whole were dedicated to the sun – few would revere the moon.

In summary, Gwyndolin's childhood, while burdened by constraints, was not without its share of privileges, and Gwyn trusted his lastborn enough to have the young god assist him. Nonetheless, the prince's self-consciousness about his lineage and mandated cross-gender acting precludes any notion that theirs was a healthy relationship.

As for his mother, his obvious shame likely kept them apart, despite her prison being just a short walk from the royal manor. Even so, the god seems to have kept some lingering connections to the crossbreed. The painting guardians have long since turned Undead and drink Estus as a byproduct. Gwyndolin cannot be ignorant of their continued existence since his servant keeps the local bonfire. As shadow king of Anor Londo, he could easily put down these Undead; instead he supports them and likely directs their continued responsibilities. Considering the guardians' veneration of Priscilla, it wouldn't be odd for them to also have profound respect for her son. (Later games reinforce the notion that priests and convenantors weren't his only followers.) Of course, the painting guardians also keep his mother imprisoned – their relationship is complex to say the least.

The absence of a mother figure in his day-to-day life may have thereby played a role in his relationship with his eldest sister. Gwyndolin references Gwynevere alongside their father in apparent love and reverence for the goddess – although he only calls her "Godmother" in English dialogue. Miyazaki states that Gwynevere's great size was intended to imbue the goddess with a motherly aura in the *Design Works* interview, and previously stated that this theme of large women was the motive behind Priscilla's similarly large size in the Game no Shokutaku podcast. Thus, it is possible that Gwyndolin looked to his sister as a maternal figure in the absence of his real mother, further complicating his already messy familial relationships.



Gwynevere was also a popular goddess with a radiant aura of femininity – an aspirational ideal

for Gwyndolin, given the expectations placed on him by his father. His admiration for his sister is exemplified by his priest's tomb in the Catacombs. Despite being a servant of Gwyndolin, the coffin is interred before a statue of the Queen with the infant Gwynevere, perhaps indicating a hope for his sister to watch over him and his worshippers.

Whether the affection was mutual is another story entirely, however. Gwyndolin may have been her younger brother, but he was also the son of the lovechild she quite clearly detested. With a father forcing him to act like a woman, a mother bringing him shame by relation, and an older sister serving as both a role model and a maternal figure that potentially despises him, it is no wonder that Gwyndolin has such a solemn demeanor.

Twilight Anon

Before abdicating his throne to become Lord of Cinder, Gwyn gave his children a final role to play in his schemes, binding his sons to shepherd humans in his absence. The firstborn succeeded the departed King and likely used his following to this end. One floor below his room, a Silver Knight guards a chest containing medals engraved with his symbol. These medallions are rewards for the Warriors of Sunlight, implying that his "warriors of the sun" (太陽の戦士) covenant existed in some form even before his expulsion from the pantheon. The medals serve as proof of honor, so his followers were likely knights and soldiers seeking either recognition in combat, or the lightning miracles that the war god provided to the strong and faithful. Like Gwynevere's guard, their primary duty would be to protect warriors, only more as comrades-in-arms than support.[10] Perhaps the covenant itself originated from comraderie with his knights during the dragon hunts, but this was now how the king exemplified Anor Londo's continued might to the world of man.

Naturally, the firstborn not only replaced Gwyn's temporal role, but his religious one as well. He was now the king of the gods and so would naturally take Gwyn's place as chief of the pantheon, the new Allfather for the Way of White to worship. This god might be Lloyd in the present era, but this can be attributed to the firstborn's later expulsion. It is simply not viable for Lloyd to supplant Gwyn's position in the pantheon so long as his grand nephew holds power. Snuggly providing the church's white titanite in exchange for the firstborn's covenant medals further hints at the two parties' one-time connection. If his covenant is any indication, the new king tried emulating his father's example of inspiring piety through both comradery and intimidation.

9 **"Bow born from the soul of the Sun of the Shadows Gwyndolin, God of the Darkmoon who protects the abandoned Anor Londo.**
It is a golden bow tinged with the power of strong magic and demonstrates its true power when used with moonlight arrows."
- Darkmoon Bow

10 **"Oh, it is you. I'm glad you're safe… But, you've trained extensively. Strong physical strength, reverence for the gods, a heart stronger than anyone. How great. Hmm… Hmm… How about this? Why don't you become a Warrior of the Sun, like me? A knight of light who wields a blade to protect comrades in the name of the gods and the sun." - Solaire**

Gwyndolin stepped forward in a more judicial and diplomatic fashion, complementing the firstborn's bellicose personality. His role was seemingly to direct isolated human nations where the Way of White had little influence, using their local social and political institutions, as he did in Oolacile. With the Lord's Blades acting on their King's behalf, the Darkmoon deity likely wasn't too involved in actually enforcing the gods' will at this juncture.

Through the two brothers' cooperation, the gods effectively led man away from the Dark and toward linking the fire. However, despite their initial success, the firstborn's regime was soon met with failure after failure, from New Londo to Oolacile. Whether this was because the brothers' lacked their father's political guile or because Dark agents continually interfered, the sons were unable to produce a new Lord of Cinder. How fared the daughter by comparison?

Aside from continuing her existing godly duties, Gwynevere also left her mark on the Way of White. The church has some of its female clergy ranked as holy women like her own servants, and concept art shows that their unique ivory uniform and talisman take direct inspiration from her own attire. The goddess was clearly revered in the Way of White, perhaps for representing the female ideal, or perhaps for that life-giving femininity's popularity among mankind. The one acting holy woman we meet, Reah (レア), is an obvious reference to Rhea (レアー), a goddess associated with similar motherly qualities in Greek mythology.

The church's healing miracles are also suspiciously similar to Gwynevere's covenant spells in effect. Indeed, they leave the same white aureoles as the most advanced church miracles, which boost the power of lesser derivatives – even those foreign to the Way of White, like Emit Force. Perhaps the church is using abridged versions of Gwynevere's holy texts? Certainly, her covenant ring further boosts the effects of Lloyd's magical coronas.

This fits her historical support role for the gods and their followers, but it also highlights how relatively small her direct input was during this period compared to Lloyd or her brothers' hands-on management. When we meet Gwynevere in Anor Londo, she claims to have been waiting for us since Gwyn left to link the fire. Though this goddess proves to be an illusion, the real goddess' duty was nonetheless to bestow the Lordvessel to Gwyn's successor as Lord of Cinder – a largely ceremonial role which is completely dependent upon a prospective Lord of Cinder actually proving worthy to enter Anor Londo in the first place. If this was Gwynevere's actual duty, then her brothers' failures condemned her to an idle job – hardly morale-inspiring.

Compounding the goddess' troubles was her husband's declining mental state. Recall that Seath eventually began using Gwynevere's holy women for his experiments around the time that the royal government





fell into chaos due to the firstborn's expulsion. It is doubtful that Gwynevere wouldn't have realized what her husband was doing, especially since all of her human servants were involved.

However, perhaps her interest already lay elsewhere.

The Ring of the Sun Princess mentions Gwynevere marrying Flann *after* leaving Anor Londo, hinting that she had already gravitated toward the god of fire prior to her departure. Considering her broken marriage, it is no surprise that she would seek comfort in a new partner. But to have courted his country's princess, Flann must have been a regular in the court, at least during the era of firelinking.

The fire god's name derives from Celtic for "crimson", a color certainly befitting his role as God of Flame. That being said, fire lies

at the heart of Anor Londo's light magic and is otherwise chiefly associated with Izalith's witches. So how did he earn such a title? Perhaps he was charged with monitoring the First Flame and reporting its status to the royalty so they understood their timetable for finding Gwyn's successor. This duty would have allowed romance with the Princess of Sunlight to bloom, and what could be more romantic than saving a princess from a loveless marriage? For Gwynevere, Flann may have been her one comfort from increasingly suffocating royal duties.

Meanwhile, in the wake of his regime's many failures, the firstborn lost his legal and societal status as a god for his "foolishness" and left in apparent exile. Before his departure, the medial laid the story for Sunlight Blade on Gwyn's casket[11] – likely alongside his ring, given that a corpse holds the now dirty Ring of the Sun's Firstborn just outside the entrance to Gwyn's tomb. The firstborn wouldn't have had time to perform these deliberate, symbolic actions if he was forcibly driven out of the country. He willingly cooperated with his banishment, departing on his own terms.

The gods then proceeded to expunge him from the records[12] in an apparent attempt to erase his existence from memory. After all, in a world with no afterlife, one's only form of immortality is the legacy that they leave behind. In practice, the gods were only successful in removing him from all relevant records in both the world of man and Anor Londo, presumably focusing on any accounts mentioning his name if not featuring him outright. Some history does survive: obscure, undiscovered, or written after the purge. This includes the miracles given to the Warriors of Sunlight, which presumably heavily feature the gods whose lightning they derive from the tale. (A notion *DS3* later confirms.)

As the Way of White realigned itself around Lloyd, the Warriors of Sunlight diverged into a cult faith that still worships the firstborn as a deity, illustrated by Solaire claiming to be an adherent of the "God of the Sun" and not the Lord of Sunlight, or Gwyn, as the English dialogue misleads. Despite this split, the covenant isn't facing any overt persecution like pyromancers or followers of the Dark; Solaire is merely seen as an oddball for his bizarre personal mission, amicable evocation of Gwyn's name, and loud proclamations of zealous faith. There has been a certain tolerance for these heretics who still worship a medial cast out of the official pantheon. The firstborn's cult are no mere idol worshippers either, as the firstborn is "still" watching over the warriors and providing them the covenant's rewards for their fealty. His name must be omitted from the miracle tests, however – else it would have easily leaked out into wider society.

The empty pedestal in Anor Londo's cathedral suggests that his statue was removed following his expulsion. But after the Undead Burg was constructed, the firstborn's followers were still permitted to build a public shrine featuring his image. Likewise, Solaire hails from Astora, an area where Lloyd's church

11 "Miracle that the Eldest Child of the Sun's Light once swung. Enhances right-hand weapon with the power of the sun's light.
The power of the sun's light is, in other words, lightning, and it will manifest great might, especially against dragonkin.
That, which was presented to the empty casket of the Great King, was the parting words of he whose godhood was expelled, perhaps?"
- Sunlight Blade

12 "Medal engraved with the holy symbol of the sun. Most important proof of honor tinged with slight warmth that is awarded to anyone who summoned a Warrior of the Sun and accomplished an objective.
The owner of the symbol, the Eldest Child of the Sun's Light, has long had his godhood expelled along with all records of him, but is still watching over the warriors as a war god." - Sunlight Medal

has a concerted presence. If the gods went to all that effort to erase him from history, and succeeded in keeping his name from being passed down throughout the ensuing century or so, how is the faith able to still openly exist?

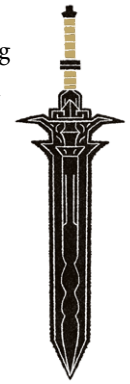
Perhaps the faith *was* cracked down upon and has only resurged in more recent times, in numbers so sparse that no concerted effort has been made to wipe it out completely. Or perhaps this heresy is simply more tolerable to the church. The warriors who pay reverence to the war god aren't interested in converting the whole of mankind to their religion as far as we see, and the faith is otherwise consistent with the general values championed by the Way of White and other sun-worshipping faiths. Compared to other such heresies that have still survived, the firstborn's worshippers may just be a low priority. Likewise, if the only records of Gwyn's eldest come from the covenant and don't even mention his name, then perhaps the exiled god still having worshippers was perfectly tolerable.

But what was the firstborn's offense, the "foolishness" that led to the coup against him? The miracle left on the empty casket in the Darkmoon tomb may give us an indication. This act was allegedly the fallen king's "parting words" to his father. He inherited the sunlight from Gwyn, so leaving it there could symbolize his inadequacy at carrying on that legacy. But the spell makes a point of equivocating sunlight to lightning, and thereby its strength against dragonkin. With this added context, we can derive another message: "I won't be needing this anymore." Was the foolishness this dragonslaying war god exhibited a refusal to continue slaying dragons? This isn't the only time that he and dragons are juxtaposed.

The wyvern in the Undead Burg is a recent arrival. This "flying dragon" is named Hellkite in the same way as "black dragon" Kalameet and "white dragon" Seath. Hellkite is not its species but its name, elevating its intelligence and individuality above other wyverns we encounter. And it is an appropriate name for a fire-breathing flying lizard that harasses us whenever we try crossing the bridge connecting the Undead Burg to the Parish. Indeed, the extensive scorch marks and sheer number of corpses on the bridge suggest that it has aggressively pushed back against anyone trying to cross it, specifically to the building at the other side. Its behavior reinforces this. Despite its protective stance, Hellkite will give up pursuit and fly off once we actually enter the building.

The building itself is divided into two chambers: the fountain featuring the parish statue of Gwynevere, and the Sunlight Altar. The latter is packed with nonviolent Hollows who pray, laze about, or stew in their own insanity. Considering their location, they are most likely worshippers of the firstborn who fled to his shrine during the recent fighting and eventually fell to madness. If Hellkite was protecting the

shrine, then it would have to give up. Any further attempt to stop us would risk damaging the altar or harming the worshippers seeking refuge there. The dragon doesn't pursue us to the actual church with the same icon, so it can't be trying to protect the fountain statue.



If the firstborn had befriended dragons, then it is reasonable that dragonkin like Hellkite would help protect his shrines either at his request or of their own initiative. (An alliance ultimately confirmed in *DS3*.) Perhaps Hellkite's recent presence on the bridge is a reaction to the shrine's destruction or the desperate pleas from the firstborn's distressed and hollowing worshippers.

However, there may be some nuance to this seeming betrayal of his kin. Despite everything that transpired, the firstborn *continues* to watch over warriors as a war god and reward their honorable service, and there is no evidence of dragon worship in their faith. Neither are there any penalties for slaying dragons while serving as an adherent of the Warriors of Sunlight; Solaire is even willing to help us slay the Gaping Dragon. Combined with the implicitly peaceful nature of the firstborn's departure, his association with dragons alone does not seem indicative of actually betraying Anor Londo's interests; this is a man whose room hangs not one but two paintings of the city they all call home. But what if he took this association a step further?

The power of the archdragons is used by human worshippers to become archdragons themselves. What if the firstborn, faced with the oncoming Age of Dark and the failure of his father's firelinking plan, had a similar motive in mind? Rather than stop the clock with a futile attempt to prevent the First Flame from going out, they could turn it back to the domination of the archdragons. If all the gods underwent draconification, the Age would be irrelevant; they would no longer be mortal creatures of fire but immortal beings of stone. If this was the firstborn's plan, it would have been social suicide, viewed by all medials as a betrayal of their heritage and culture. Fire had always been their source of power and pride, the reason for their civilization's success. And their king would ask them to throw it away and lower themselves to the level of the beasts they hunted to continue their dominion? Such an insult to Anor Londo's honor and traditions would certainly be worthy of a deposed King leaving his kingdom in disgrace.

How did Gwyndolin respond to his brother's foolish actions, whatever they were? The Darkmoon Blade miracle may be a telling sign. Miracles are stories of the gods, so the fact that this one manifests Gwyndolin's power of "vengeance" which scales with the number of sinners punished is curious.[13] Is this miracle a story of Gwyndolin desiring revenge on someone in particular? If so, who? Its description mirrors that of Sunlight Blade, perhaps hinting at the younger brother's response to the firstborn's

13 **"Miracle imparted to covenantors of Gwyndolin, youngest child of King Gwyn and God of the Darkmoon. Enhances right-hand weapon with the power of the Darkmoon's light.**

The power of the Darkmoon's light is, in other words, vengeance, and the more excellent the avenger, the more its might increases." - Darkmoon Blade

foolish actions. The two had long cooperated in fulfilling their father's last will, but the elder brother then abandoned the plan and left, creating a power vacuum that forced the younger brother to carry on alone in their deserted home. One can understand if Gwyndolin loathed his sibling for these developments, enough for a story of it to manifest his feelings as a miracle.

Regardless of his personal feelings, the absence of the firstborn's statue at the cathedral conveys the Darkmoon deity's compliance to his half-brother's expulsion – though he does keep Sunlight Blade's text in a chest in front of the casket that it was left upon, this could be purely out of respect for their father's sunlight powers.

When even your family can't abide by your decisions, what hope do you have of convincing the aristocrats in your court or your subjects at large? That being the case, there is a certain humility in the firstborn's apparently peaceful acceptance of societal rejection while continuing his divine duties. Perhaps the medial still hopes for the day that his subjects come around to his way of thinking, and recognize him as king of the gods again. And then maybe they can all rule the next age as mighty dragons.

Undercover Flight

The resulting power vacuum allowed Lloyd to insert himself as the new head of the pantheon while remaining in the world of man. While Gwynevere can't make a strong claim to the title of Allfather or the throne by virtue of being a woman, Gwyndolin can. Unlike his half-brother, Gwyndolin is still a proper god and thus has a far stronger claim than a collateral relative like Lloyd. (Indeed, Gwyndolin later replaces Lloyd as Allfather in *DS3*.) But up until now, Gwyndolin has been widely believed to be a princess, and thus has even less standing than his elder sister. Add in the controversy over his lineage and his inferiority complex regarding it, and the Darkmoon deity wasn't likely to step forward and assert himself as Gwyn's last legitimate son at the time. So instead, their granduncle took over, and the gods left in droves to join him in the world of man. This ostensibly left Gwynevere as the acting regent of a country without a king, though she is little more than Gwyndolin's illusion.

When the gods left, so did Gwynevere. On top of the political chaos following her brother's disgrace, she was also dealing with a loveless marriage and a pointless ceremonial duty – both burdens bestowed on her by her father. So, with stress levels likely approaching critical mass, she collected human coins and hid them within mimics, planning to

abandon her duties and elope with her future husband. This still raises the question of where the happy couple eloped to, and what they have been doing since. Ideally, it would be where the pantheon is still respected and there is solid leadership. The Way of White and Lloyd would provide this quite nicely.

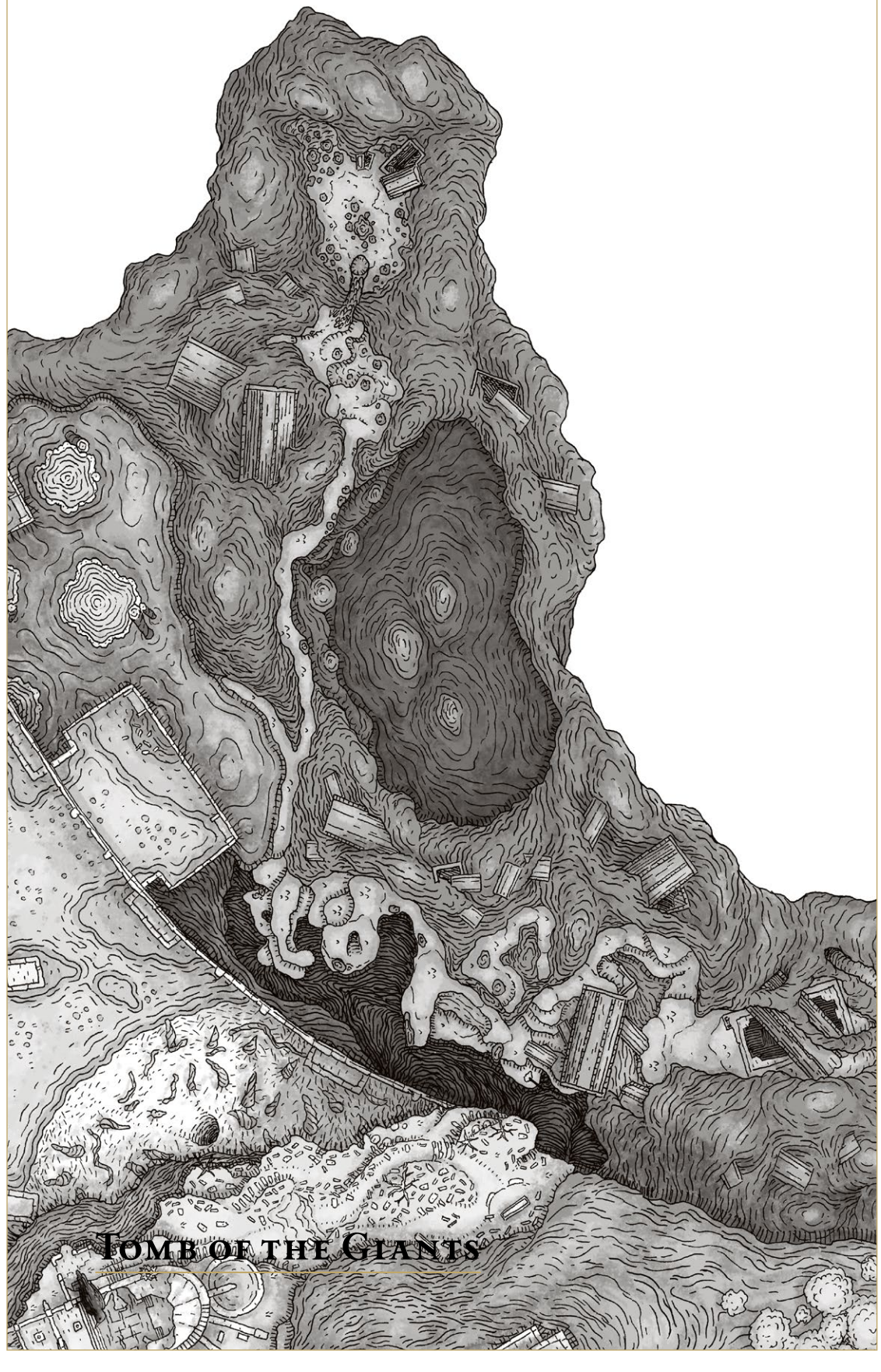
Since Lloyd had firmly established himself as the new chief god and cemented his hold over the church and its many human followers, Gwynevere could take refuge with him at Thorolund and live a quiet life in peace with a new family. For evidence, look to the aristocratic Rhea and the cleric-robbing Patches selling us divine blessings. The goddess is providing her holy waters for influential church members, which would require her to be in relatively close proximity absent her holy women. Moreover, Reah will pray to the Undead Parish statue of the goddess, and her contributions to the church cannot be confirmed prior to her flight from home. Even in the *Design Works* interview, Miyazaki defines the church as the "faith of King Gwyn's close relatives" – explicitly plural. There is no one else with both a heavy influence upon the Way of White and closely relation to Gwyn except Gwynevere.

The final stage of Gwynevere's exodus was requesting that Gwyndolin conjure an illusion to make it seem like she had never left. Why else would royal guards remain protecting a fake unless they were unaware that their real charge was gone? The illusion doubles as a proxy for the Undead mission, which would quickly be undermined if Gwynevere's presence in the world of man was widely known. The Darkmoon Séance Ring does mention Gwyndolin being the "only" god left in English, but the Japanese description only says that he is "one of" the old gods who remained.[14] In other words, no item is supposed to reveal this fact until we have already reached Anor Londo. And the only reason for Gwyndolin to use this illusion is that he knows that the wider world of man is similarly unaware of her exodus. True to another translation of her name, she became a "holy ghost".

In her absence, Gwyndolin assumes control of his sister's covenant, duties over the Lordvessel, and the day-to-day affairs at Anor Londo via the illusion. There are several reasons why he would do this. First, he holds his elder sister in tremendously high regard, and would therefore be eager to please. He also quite likely felt personal pressure to comply, for if the goddess left publicly, he would have to step out of the shadows and be the city's representative. Considering how self-conscious he is, it would be easier for him to rule through the guise of another, making the illusion convenient for both siblings. But perhaps the biggest reason that he agreed is that he thinks it will be a temporary measure. Item descriptions repeatedly point out that the god protects the abandoned capital. Why stay and protect a city abandoned by its residents? Because of his overwhelming faith in his father's design.

14 "Ring given to priests of Gwyndolin, God of the Darkmoon and youngest child of Gwyn. Has effect that increases memory slots for magic.

The Sun of the Shadows Gwyndolin is one of the old gods who remained in Anor Londo and his believers are very few." - Darkmoon Seance Ring



Gwyndolin truly believes in his father's scheme to keep the Age of Fire alive even when everyone else has evidently lost hope. He preserves the city because he is convinced that the gods will return once they find a new Lord of Cinder. With that mindset, the responsibility lay with Gwydolin to produce results from the Undead mission, not the goddess abandoning her royal duties. And if any human tries to reveal that lie, they will become an enemy of the gods, and will be silenced, as the Darkmoon Blade Covenant Ring notes.

Many assume that Anor Londo's sun is part of the illusion since it disappears after we "kill" Gwynevere, but the sunlight fades well after we dispel the phantom, casting doubt on it being part of the same spell. It also can't be dispelled by Gwyndolin since the same event plays out even if we kill him beforehand. The sunset upon Gwynevere's death is genuine, and there are two reasons for the coincidence. First, FromSoftware needed to create a separate instance of Anor Londo so that those who break the lie could be hunted down by Darkmoon Blades. This instance has to be distinct from the version of Anor Londo most explore, and a moonlit night fits the image of the covenant. The second reason is simply timing.

Dark Souls wasn't designed with a proper day/night cycle, instead FromSoftware uses lighting to set the mood of each area and convey the passage of time. We visit most other areas before Anor Londo during morning or midday, indicating that radiant orange sky means the sun is setting as we arrive at the royal capital. The transition to night acknowledges the passage of time since our arrival, and symbolizes our pulling back the curtain on Gwyndolin's deception. It is only appropriate for Anor Londo's "night" to see our end, a double meaning both the prince[15] and his servants[16] seem cognizant of. The fact that this sunset perfectly coincides with the "death" of Gwynevere's illusion is an artistic flourish.

Some believe that Gwyndolin is instead trying to "hide" the fact that the sun has disappeared as an apparent result of the gods leaving Anor Londo, but this idea is fallacious. Firstly, why would Gwyndolin be trying to hide it? Even if we assume that it signifies the gods' departure, the fact the city has been abandoned would already be public knowledge, and immediately apparent to the average visitor; the Darkmoon Knightess doesn't even try to hide its abandoned state. Secondly, why would the sun disappear with the gods? There is no logical premise to this assumption, especially when Anor Londo is the only area affected. And thirdly, why would Gwyndolin tie this illusion to that of Gwynevere? There is no reason to let his sun live or die based on whether someone happens to kill his fake sister.

When the gods did leave, Gwyndolin moved into Gwyn's ceremonial tomb. The chest carrying Sunlight Blade hints that he took up residence only after the firstborn had already left. If he lived there beforehand, he wouldn't have

15 **"O one who put a blade to the form of a god, my name is Gwyndolin. Thy impiety shall never be forgiven. Meet thine end in the night of Anor Londo." - Gwyndolin**

16 **"Slowly repent. For what you saw in the night of the Darkmoon." - Darkmoon Knightess**

17 **"Halt! Thenceforth, the tomb of Great King Gwyn lies beyond this point. No matter who it be, defiling it shall not be forgiven. If thou art a proper adherent of the Sun of the Shadows with no intention of impiety, hear the voice of mineself, Gwyndolin, and kneel there." - Gwyndolin**

allowed his brother to leave the miracle to begin with. Indeed, the illusory wall hiding the tomb can only be broken with one of the rings given to Gwyndolin's priests. If he had already cast the barrier, then his brother probably couldn't have even entered the chamber without force. The firstborn's transgression may even be partially at fault for the move. The god is extremely cross with anyone "defiling" the tomb with their presence.[17] Since Gwyn's dishonored firstborn dared to visit their father's grave, his lastborn might have wanted to keep out other unworthy visitors from disgracing the Great Lord's crypt.

Laid atop the casket are white flowers – carnations or hydrangeas. The color white symbolizes innocence and purity, but hydrangeas in particular represent heartfelt sincerity, making them common gifts of gratitude. Using the tomb as his personal chamber may have originally been a means to feel closer to his father and double as both a reminder of his duty and source of comfort in his loneliness. Gwyndolin failed to contest Lloyd's claim to lead the gods, and allowed his father's kingdom to become a hollow husk of its former state. With the gods' departure, Anor Londo was empty save for its knights, giant slaves, and other servants. Those missing include his family, two of whom disgraced their royal lineage while the rest are dead or imprisoned. Gwyndolin is the last of Gwyn's line who can rule Anor Londo, and yet he feels the least qualified to do so, hiding behind the image of a sister who he could only hope to be.

A New Blade

With total control of what remained of the royal government, Gwyndolin established the Blades of the Darkmoon to replace the Lord's Blades, since the latter group of assassin knights in service to the gods likely disbanded in the wake of their king vacating the throne. Without a king or his royal assassins ensuring Anor Londo's influence over the world of man, it makes sense for Gwyndolin to form a new order of knights to fill in the gap. And since he is the only god actually left, this order need only be loyal to him and not an official monarch.

This personal loyalty would have its uses, allowing Gwyndolin to entrust the knights with preserving the illusion that Gwynevere remains in Anor Londo. The only issue is finding worthy warriors to recruit as these new knights. A notable detail about these assassins is that they are comprised entirely of Undead. We can only meet three members: a Berenike knight, a Balder knight, and the Darkmoon Knightess. Of these three, two can be definitively traced to groups that attempted to overcome Sen's Fortress. This leaves roughly a hundred-year gap between the last known Lord's Blade confirmed active and the earliest

known knights joining the Darkmoon Blades, which fits perfectly within the window in which the gods abandoned Anor Londo. We can thus conclude that Gwyndolin begins recruiting Undead who conquer the trials of Sen's Fortress but fail to breach the royal manor and hear his illusion's revelation. These warriors stumble upon the Darkmoon deity and decide to devote themselves to him rather than continue the Undead mission.

One of these warriors is the Darkmoon Knightess. The woman wields a parrying dagger in her off-hand like Lautrec and Oswald while also wielding an estoc designed for piercing through armored knights in her right hand, indicating that she was previously a knight of Carim. However, she turned Undead, managed to reach Anor Londo, and encountered Gwyndolin. From there, she joined the Blades of the Darkmoon and became a Fire Keeper tasked with providing respite for those who overcome the fortress and directing them to their next objective. Because a Fire Keeper's humanity deforms her body, Gwyndolin gifted the knightess a set of brass armor, in part, to hide the scars.[18] He apparently keeps these in stock, as there is an empty chest in Gwyn's tomb opposite another carrying the same armor. Considering Anor Londo's traditional value of bronze, he likely had the sets forged for particularly ranking or important members of the covenant.

In the *Design Works* interview, Miyazaki blames the cultural divergence between the mainstream followers of the gods in the world of man and the secret ceremonial faith revering Gwyndolin and the moon squarely on the latter's secrecy. Since the faith is based in an abandoned city isolated from the outside world and acts largely from the shadows, it has had no outside influences upon its development, resulting in an almost pagan culture distinct from the sun-worshipping faiths. The result was a religion that is secretive and distinctly feminine in its aesthetic, deriving from Gwyndolin projecting his ideals upon his followers and his worshippers in turn trying to imitate him. Darkmoon knights are required to have an incredibly strong faith to even cast their god's miracles,[19] so the devotion to Gwyndolin's particular expectations exceeds the typical fervor of the sun-worshipping faiths. Perhaps, then, Gwyndolin gifting his Fire Keeper brass armor designed to have a womanly aura was just another way of maintaining his ideals. Being a Fire Keeper scarred her, so feminine armor would restore her maidenly beauty.



Despite their loyalty, it is not clear if Gwyndolin's followers even know that he is a man. The knightess refers to him as "Master Gwyndolin" in English, but she is respectfully addressing him with the gender neutral *sama* (様) in the Japanese script. Ultimately, his private matters aren't their concern – only their duty.

18 "Armor of the Darkmoon Knightess, Fire Keeper of Anor Londo.

Having become Undead, she encountered the Sun of the Shadows Gwyndolin at the mausoleum at the spiral bottom, became a blade of the Darkmoon, and accepted the fire keeping responsibility.

This armor was given to her at that time. In other words, it is to help her hunt sinners as a blade of the Darkmoon as well as hide fire-keeping's hideous form." - Brass Armor

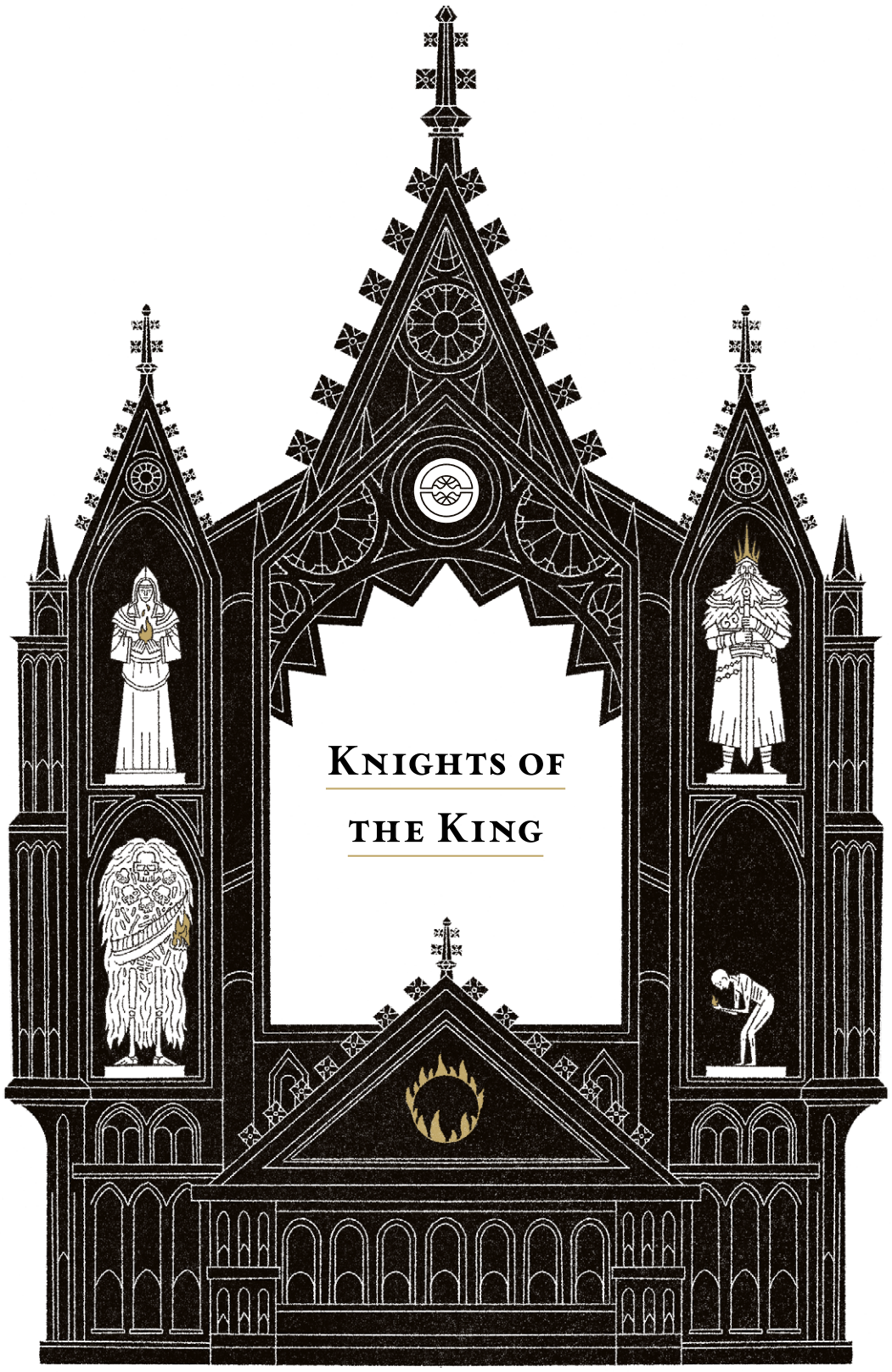
19 "Catalyst to perform miracles of the gods. That which is given to knights of the Blades of the Darkmoon, covenantors of the Sun of the Shadows Gwyndolin, demands pious faith in the user but possesses extremely high might scaling." - Darkmoon Talisman

The Blades of the Darkmoon's eternal mission is to hunt sinners via blue eye orbs and bring back their ears as proof. Considering red eye orbs' connection to the Abyss, the covenant may have manufactured theirs through a similar process – perhaps collecting red eye orbs from captured or defeated Darkwraiths and later converting them to blue orbs with Gwyndolin's Darkmoon power. Gwyndolin also provides his knights with a ring akin to his sister's covenant ring – its ability for the prince to summon us to Anor Londo suggests that it is specifically for emergencies, such as when an impious Undead "kills" the Princess of Sunlight.

All the same, Gwyn's agents of vengeance don't act entirely independently. With the government a hollow shell and the Way of White beyond royal control, Gwyndolin relies on Velka to find sinners and remind mankind why they never dishonor the gods. His covenant only hunts those listed in her Book of the Guilty, which requires both gods' active cooperation. Given that Velka is Gwyndolin's grandmother through Priscilla, the close cooperation is no surprise, and their relationship may even predate his covenant.

Gwyndolin either hasn't noticed the recent breakout at Ariamis prison, or willfully permits the residents to govern themselves – residents that just happen to include his grandmother's devotees as well as his crossbeed mother. The links don't end there. The Darkmoon Knightess seemingly originates from Carim – a land currently presided over by the goddess of sin – and never once suggests that she came to Anor Londo intending to fulfill the Undead mission. How convenient that when Gwyndolin needed a Fire Keeper to provide a rest spot between major trials that a qualified Undead woman happened to arrive – unless, of course, Velka sent her there for expressly that purpose; the goddess already helps ferry Undead into this firelinking system via the giant crow, after all. But given her grandson's fervent dedication to his father, any close relationship that they shared was likely based upon manipulation and deceit on the witch's part.

With Velka's cooperation, Gwyndolin and his Darkmoon Blades are able to fill the hole left by the Lord's Blades. And with the help of Frampt, Gwyndolin has been able to kickstart another attempt to create a new Lord of Cinder. Even without his elder brother and sister, the Darkmoon deity has executed his father's will admirably. He has proven that he has the capacity to rule, he just needs the confidence. Without it, Gwyndolin settles for reigning from the shadows, allowing his dear sister to enjoy the limelight with an unblemished reputation. The firstborn shows no signs of interfering with his younger brother's efforts, and Lloyd is, at least, providing minimal assistance to advance the gods' overall goal. Divine society is in a fragile state at best, but Gwyn's family has indeed held it together.



Knights of the Cornered

Dragonslayer Ornstein, Hawkeye Gough, Lord's Blade Ciaran, and Artorias the Abysswalker; the so-called Four Knights of Gwyn were each knighted by their lord for their distinguished service to Anor Londo and apparently served the King's will on a more personal level than the average knight. Since the name is only invoked in item descriptions, "Four Knights" is seemingly a retroactive term, derived from the legends of these individuals singled out by the king of the gods. Indeed, they are a fluidly-defined group. Ornstein is only "considered" to be their leader,[1] which implies that they didn't have an official captain. Likewise, Executioner Smough was considered for their ranks, so their number wasn't set in stone. Finally, there were maybe only two knights active during the dawn of the Age of Fire and the dragon hunts.

Though this detail was lost in the localization, Gough once led a battalian of greatbow-wielding dragonslayers,[2] presumably Silver Knights. This indicates that the giant was already a knight before the dragon hunts, or knighted sometime during them. If giants could be elevated to the position of the royal guards, then it is perfectly feasible for an especially accomplished slave to be honored with knighthood. His armor is of the same make and similar aesthetic to that of the Silver Knights,[3] and his distinguished efforts on the battlefield further rewarded him with a medal from his lord and a specialized helmet – designed to help him snipe the flying beasts that they fought; this is especially impressive considering that his personal bow appears to be crafted from bone while his arrows are stone-tipped and wrapped in bark[4] likely taken from archtrees.

In contrast, Ornstein wields a cross spear used to pierce stone scales, not cut boulders in half as the localization erroneously declares.[5] Since the weapon is designed for piercing archdragons' scaly stone hide from up close, Ornstein probably fought within the vanguard while Gwyn, Gough, and other knights rained steel arrows and lightning javelins upon the beasts from behind. We see this idea reflected in Ornstein's thrusting attacks and the Leo Ring he wears, which boosts the damage of counter attacks with thrust weapons like spears. This frontline role wasn't without a great deal of risk, and unlike Gough, Ornstein is presumably a medial, making his position at the front, typically reserved for fodder, even more notable. The fact that the knight accepted the role and was so successful despite

1 "Armor of 'Dragon-hunter' Ornstein who protects the church in the abandoned Anor Londo.
Ornstein is considered the leader of the Four Knights, and his golden lion armor is tinged with the power of lightning. If facing the power of lightning, it will be especially reliable."
- Ornstein's Armor

2 "Dragon-hunter greatbow used by 'Hawkeye' Gough, one of the Four Knights of King Gwyn. Specialized weapon of Gough from when he was in the field.
It is larger than even the greatbows used by his dragon-hunting unit. Requires inhuman physical strength to use."
- Gough's Greatbow

3 "Gauntlets of 'Hawkeye' Gough, one of the Four Knights of King Gwyn.
Item of honor awarded in conferring knightly decorations. Their raw material is close to that of the Silver Knights."
- Gough's Gauntlets

4 "Dragon-hunter great arrow that was used by 'Hawkeye' Gough, one of the Four Knights of King Gwyn. For greatbows exclusively.
The stone arrowhead, the tree bark tightly wrapped around, it is all done by Gough's own hand."
- Gough's Great Arrow

5 "Special ring that was given to the Four Knights of Gwyn. The lion ring is a thing of 'Dragon-hunter' Ornstein.
Has effect that boosts offensive weapon counters with thrusting weapons, and it is said that his cross-spear even pierced rock scales."
- Leo Ring

the danger is a testament to both his courage and skill, fitting for one whose Hebrew-derived name originally means "mountain of strength".

Gwyn's firstborn also appears to have wielded a cross spear, so the two likely fought side-by-side on the frontlines. With such a prominent position on the battlefield, close to both the enemy and Anor Londo's prince, it is no wonder that Ornstein was noticed and honored by Gwyn.

Ornstein's status as the presumptive leader of the Four Knights probably means that he was the first of the group to stand out in such a manner. His preeminence is also shown by the fact that he is the only member to wield lightning. The Dragonslayer Spear forged from the knight's soul doesn't require any faith to wield, but its lightning damage does scale with belief. This implies that Ornstein held strong faith in his king not out of necessity, but legitimate trust, and was thus able to draw out the immense power of Gwyn's sunlight. All in all, Ornstein epitomizes chivalry and was rightly recognized for it, becoming a literal golden boy.

By contrast, neither Ciaran nor Artorias bear any titles or wear any memorabilia in connection to the dragon hunts, and so may not have even been alive until well into the Age of Fire, lending credence to the idea that the name "Four Knights" has been retroactively applied. The group isn't so much an official organization as it is a loose denominator for knights uniquely distinguished by Gwyn during his reign – an honor seemingly accompanied by fashioning them a ring emblazoned with an animal symbol. Ciaran's crest features a hornet, a quick and poisonous bug befitting her fighting style. Gough's crest features a hawk, a sharp-eyed bird reflecting his sniping prowess. Artorias' crest features a wolf, a loyal yet solitary creature befitting his general demeanor. And Ornstein's features a lion, the king of the beasts, well-suited to the group's apparent leader. Together, they were the Four Knights of King Gwyn and were apparently all well acquainted with one another due to this relation.

While they were each heroes in some respect and may have occasionally worked with one another , there doesn't appear to be any special duty that they had all shared. In fact, Ornstein and Gough's actions during the ensuing peace and prosperity in the wake of the dragon hunts are vaguely defined. The latter continues to wear his armor and war trophies despite the set indicating that he hasn't been on the battlefield in a while, meaning that the giant may have become part of some security detail. The same could be true for Ornstein due to his close connection to the royals and latest task



protecting "Gwynevere". Artorias has no known accomplishments before combatting the Abyss, and Ciaran is already part of a different group. Their collective title was honorary, with each member just continuing to fulfill whatever duty their king required of them individually. And once Gwyn linked the fire, it is impossible for the Four Knights of King Gwyn to gain new members; they can only continue serving the royal family.

The Hawk's Darkness

When we meet Gough, he is both retired and blind.[6] While the latter is due to Oolacilian abuse, his retirement predated Manus and the Abyss, since he apparently left his ring – the symbol of his status as one of the Four Knights – with the giant blacksmith upon leaving Anor Londo. In other words, he was already living out retirement in Oolacile before being caught up in its fall to the Dark. Although possibly due in part to advanced age – having been alive since the early Age of Fire – he likely gave up duty to king and country for other reasons.

Gough reminisces heavily on the past, particularly dragonslaying. He romanticizes the knights' hunts and looks back on even the negative emotions resulting from them with nostalgia. He clearly considers this conflict to be the high point of his life. But now, archdragons are nigh extinct, Gwyn is gone, and the First Flame is facing inevitable end.[7] His best days are behind him. One need only look at the memorabilia he still wears to see that the giant misses risking his life shooting down the greatest beasts to ever fly through the skies. As he himself admits, a good hound is pointless if there are no hares for it to hunt, and he readily relinquishes his prized bow to a proven hero more in need of it.[8] The giant's life has been at a standstill ever since he fulfilled his original duty, leaving him with a sense of aimlessness for the untold centuries.

Gough's makes his wood carvings for the express purpose of achieving *satori* (悟り) – enlightenment through understanding one's own nature by an act and repeatedly experiencing that insight through continuous practice of the act. He only took up the pastime after retiring, since he expresses desire to share his newfound pleasure with his blacksmith friend, who he hasn't seen since leaving Anor Londo. The wooden heads crafted from archtree lumber[9] that he presumably collected himself have piled up beside him and are found throughout Oolacile, demonstrating his passion and dedication to the art. It seems that Gough

6 **"Oh, a visitor's unusual. Perchance, are you the human who freed Artorias? In that case, I must thank you for protecting my old friend's honor. My gratitude to you… But I'm unable to see anymore and in retirement. Unfortunately, I can be of no use to you." - Gough**

7 **"However, eventually fire goes out and only darkness remains. Even whatever sort of hero you are cannot stop it…" - Gough**

8 **"Oh, this greatbow, huh? I certainly don't need it in the dragonless present day. I don't know about wielding it with the body of man… but I shall entrust it to you. If it'll help your honor, even slightly…" - Gough**

9 **"Person's face of an archtree that the captive Gough keeps carving. He transferred an emotion into it little by little, approaching enlightenment.**
The person's face utters a voice upon stimulation, its contents differing depending on the emotion transferred.
… This person's face seems to say 'Hello'. It looks like a friendly face if you are convinced of it." - Hello Carving

moved to Oolacile to quietly self-reflect and then resolve his identity crisis. The land has both an atmosphere of serenity and deep ties to Anor Londo, making it the perfect way to escape the gods' politics, while keeping the giant nearby should his skills ever be called upon.

Of course, Gough doesn't get to walk a peaceful road to enlightenment. He learns of what transpired between Kaathe and Oolacile, and is tortured, blinded, and imprisoned to prevent him from sharing that knowledge with Anor Londo. It is very likely that this "cell" – an outbuilding connected to the local arena – was Gough's original residence when he first came to the country. There is no reason for the Oolacilians abusing the knight to provide him his weapon and woodcarving tools and materials, so he is more likely to have been locked away with them. His imprisoners likely counted on his blinding to prevent him from escaping the open tower, and, at any rate, the whole building may have been sealed with magic just like the entrance.



Gough ignores Oolacile's descent into anarchy and continues with his woodcarving even in imprisonment. A large amount of sawdust disperses off of him as he stands up, indicating that he has been working without a break for a long time – an assessment reinforced by the sheer number of woodcarvings piled up nearby. And while he claims that he can't help us in his current state, the giant is able to snipe down distant Kalameet based on sound alone.

Gough lacks not just the sight, but the motivation to stop Manus. His life has lost its reason to be, and even though he insists that he loves his new hobby of woodcarving, hearing him reminisce about dragon-hunting – or seeing him show off his prowess one last time – reveals that the hobby hasn't truly filled the void in his heart. After learning of Kalameet's demise, Gough's initial excitement is quickly soured by the realization that the beasts he hunted are now truly gone.[10] The giant may still be alive in the present era, but if so, his life would be meaningless. Much like how it was for his dearly-missed prey, the world that Gough knew and loved had inevitably changed. Unlike his prey, the giant had the chance to die quietly, in obscurity.

The Hornet's Sting

Ciaran was part of both the Four Knights and the Lord's Blades, the king's elite band of female assassins.[11] The Silver and Black Knights all appear to be male (with few exceptions as *The Ringed City* later reveals), and women in Anor Londo seem to mainly serve in non-combat roles. But considering Ciaran's dual status and her assassin group's similarity with the Blades of the Darkmoon, being a Lord's Blade was probably considered a different kind of knighthood. Unlike typical knights, these assassins' fighting style consists of skulking in the shadows[12] and distracting targets with a flashy blade so that the poisoned dagger in their other hand goes unnoticed[13] – the pair Ciaran wields earning the appropriate names of "Golden Afterglow" (黄金の残光) and "Dark Silver Afterdeath" (暗銀の残滅) respectively. Such deception and underhanded tactics may not sit well with chivalric ideals, but fealty to their lord would supersede all.

The Lord's Blades are "subjects of fear" in oral tradition, indicating that their killings occurred and have passed down by word-of-mouth in the world of man. Ciaran also has Lloyd's talismans in her possession, indicating that her targets included Undead. In other words, humans were the assassins' primary targets, whether they be irreverent sinners or unholy monsters. Ciaran's uniform features multiple instances of an eye on various parts of the outfit. With her typical targets in mind, the message is obvious: the gods are always watching. Indeed, the Undead merchant woman echoes such a sentiment, for even before the advent of undeath, this group of assassin knights were inspiring fear in mankind to secure the gods' influence over them.

Ciaran distinguished herself in slaying the King's enemies with her daggers. While the localization for the Hornet Ring only mentions her using one blade, this is another case of Japanese ambiguity with plurals. And since the oral traditions also indicate that her unique weapons were common to all Lord's Blades, there is no doubt she too was known for using both in her assassinations. She continues to retain the title of Lord's Blade even after joining the ranks of the Four Knights, which might mean that she served as the assassin group's leader or possibly even founder. The name Ciaran itself means "little dark one" in Celtic, befitting a relatively small assassin striking from the shadows, so it is feasible for them to have first formed after her own rise to prominence as an assassin.

Ciaran is human-sized but implies that she is not human. Smaller medials like the Daughters of Chaos do exist, but the vast majority are

10 **"But... still... he'll now never fly through the skies again..." - Gough**

11 **"Robe of 'King's Blade' Ciaran, one of the Four Knights of King Gwyn.**
Equipment that is common to all the 'King's Blades'. Slipping into the dark but leaving only a golden afterimage behind, fear of the women fuels the oral traditions." - Lord's Blade Robe

12 **"Golden curved sword used by 'King's Blade' Ciaran, one of the Four Knights of King Gwyn.**
Since her sword technique is more like dancing, it draws an ominous golden afterimage in the darkness." - Gold Tracer

13 **"Dark silver dagger used by 'King's Blade' Ciaran, one of the Four Knights of King Gwyn.**
Its blade is prepared with a terribly deadly poison, so if the dance-like golden afterimage steals the target's gaze, it will certainly slay them in its shadow." - Dark Silver Tracer



larger than humans, and Ciaran also lacks the weakness to the occult present with most other examples of the gods' race. However, this last point lacks context: no enemy added in the *Artorias of the Abyss* DLC has a weakness to any special effects regardless of their relation to the gods, the Abyss, or chaos demons – likely an oversight by the developers – so Ciaran's race isn't obvious simply by looking at the game's code.

Nonetheless, it is notable that Ciaran specifically wanted a plain porcelain mask as a reward for her knighthood,[14] not armor. Certainly, receiving the otherwise unremarkable mask from Gwyn made it a knightly decoration of honor, but was the intention to hide something remarkable behind it?

Ciaran's attire shows no skin, leaving her ivory locks of hair as the only hint to what lies beneath. Some believe these to be simple ornamentation because they are part of her equippable armor set, but FromSoftware frequently retains equippable armor's appearance from elsewhere, regardless of realism. For example, the eyeholes of Gough's helmet are still blocked by resin when we wear it, but this doesn't impede our vision. Since Ciaran's set also doubles as her entire outward appearance in-game, it would have required extra resources to develop another version of the helm, without hair, for players. If this ivory hair is indeed her own, then it is a trait unseen amongst the rest of her tribe – though this doesn't exclude her from being a medial. Some believe Ciaran to be a cyclops due to the eye imagery in her uniform, but this is actually part of her hood and shared with all Lord's Blades. Her mask possesses two eye holes regardless, making the idea unlikely.

Ciaran expresses blatant disdain for mankind, as if we sin by simply existing.[15] Such disrespect greatly contrasts Gough, who is polite and welcoming despite his recent abuse by humans. It also contrasts Artorias, who acts equally unprejudiced in cut dialogue. That isn't to say they don't hold similar beliefs – Gough's immediate reaction when made hostile[16] implies that we are reaffirming his preconceived negative perception of humans. Ciaran may simply be more blatant and blunt in her prejudice compared to her comrades, which makes sense for someone who kills sinful humans for a living. In other words, the assassin has the superior arrogance expected of a medial, and her decision to cover her face likely just signifies her humility and willingness to become a shadowy blade of the King with no identity of its own rather than an armored juggernaut on the frontlines with songs of praise.

14 "Mask of 'King's Blade' Ciaran, one of the Four Knights of King Gwyn.
The eye hood is common to all 'King's Blades', but she especially wanted the plain, white porcelain mask. It was awarded in conferring knighthood and is accompanied by her own ivory hair." - Porcelain Mask

15 "... You, a human, huh...?... Well, that's acceptable. This is a funeral for my friend. Forgive me, but could you leave me alone for a little...?" - Ciaran

16 "A human really is that sort, huh? Since you're my friend's benefactor, it is regrettable but no helping it. I guess you'll end here for everyone's sake!" - Gough

While the Japanese subtitles[17] omit her "dear" Artorias death rattle, Gough's cut dialogue references her strong attachment to the Abysswalker,[18] and her behavior following his death betrays her grief. When we refuse to give her the soul of Artorias, she pauses, as if considering her options before commenting that Artorias wouldn't want his soul taken by force.[19] The fact that she even considers doing so reveals how fragile her knightly etiquette really is when personal feelings are at stake; the fact that she later gives her weapons away to apparently retire solidifies the notion. Her duties as a knight, at least during this era without Gwyn, come second to her grief.

Perhaps it was these feelings for the man that encouraged her to pursue him. We don't cross paths with Ciaran until after defeating Artorias, implying that she only arrived in Oolacile once her beloved had already been slain. Perhaps she even arrives in her official capacity. Artorias was dispatched to combat the Abyss in Oolacile but didn't return, which would naturally unnerve Anor Londo when the threat was practically at their doorstep. In that case, Ciaran would be sent to provide back up and assassinate the humans responsible for the Dark's spread. By the time she arrives, however, she finds his corrupted corpse lying in the ruins and loses the will to continue her duty. She creates a small memorial out of the rubble, using local flowers and his plume. If we give her his soul, she then leaves to grieve "for a long time".[20] If she is still alive in the present era, she has clearly abandoned Anor Londo.

Some infer the female corpse with the Hornet Ring behind Artorias' grave to be Ciaran, implying that she committed suicide by her beloved's side. That may well have been the original intention. The Hornet Ring explicitly describes Ciaran as a woman in Japanese, so it is easy to believe that the woman carrying the ring is supposed to be her – but this conjecture assumes that the player doesn't kill Ciaran in the past. In other words, if this corpse was initially placed to hint at Ciaran's affection for Artorias, the later addition of the DLC muddied that interpretation.

Ciaran benefits from her ring's effects in battle, but we can loot neither hers nor Artorias' ring after slaying them. Therefore, these articles were likely left behind with their bodies. If we kill the knight during our sojourn into the past, then the corpse in the present either doesn't belong to Ciaran or has been dragged from her original place of death. It is far more likely that the ring was retrieved by a non-specific party and eventually ended up with the woman at the gravesite – perhaps another Lord's Blade aware of Ciraran's feelings.

17 "Uggh, how did... To think a human..." - Ciaran

18 "Come to think of it, if you felled Artorias, you should beware of Ciaran the lass. She... likely harbored special feelings for Artorias... The pitiful girl." - Gough

19 "I see..... No, forgive me. Compulsion isn't what Artorias would want either..."--Ciaran

20 "... You, that's... Isn't that the soul of the man who fell here?... I was a friend of that man. So I want to mourn him for a long time, with that soul. How about it? Would you not hand it over?" - Ciaran

The Wolf's Lie

Artorias is strongly associated with wolves, so much so that his friendship with Sif may predate him joining the Four Knights. Sif is a Nordic goddess associated with *Beowulf*, but the boss doesn't award twin humanity upon defeat, so we can presume the grey wolf male. He is at least two centuries old, given the passage of time between events in Oolacile and our journey through Lordran, so *Dark Souls* wolves' lives evidently far exceed the human lifespan. Sif's soul notes that he inherited the knight's holy sword,[21] but the wolf already wields one while the corrupted Artorias is wielding his. Indeed, one cannot inherit a sword that they are not trained to wield. Perhaps they even trained each other, Artorias learning the tactics of a wolf and Sif learning swordplay. This frames Sif's "inheritance" as of a similar nature to that of Gwyn's firstborn. But the most obvious sign of Artorias' training is the manner in which Sif wields the blade.

Sif points his sword to the left side, and her basic attack swings from left to right. This is the opposite of most bosses, who swing their blades from right to left. The one commonality these bosses have is that they are all predominantly right-handed. The only exceptions to this pattern are bosses that use their right-to-left swing to add extra power or range, such as Quelaag. This suggests that Sif studied his technique from a predominantly left-handed swordsman.

During his boss battle, Artorias wields the blade in his right hand while his injured left arm dangles limp. Though he is no slouch in this state, the right isn't his sword arm since the knight also owns a shield, which claims that Artorias had already been grievously wounded when he left it with Sif.[22] Since it is unlikely for one's shield arm to be rendered inoperable while wielding said shield, this would make his shield arm his right and his sword arm his left. After losing his dominant arm, Artorias gave the shield to Sif and used his non-dominant arm to continue fighting.

Some instead cite the game's cover art as their evidence, claiming that the left-handed swordsman and his gear match Artorias. However, there are far too many obvious differences between the two figures. Although the cover art may not be portraying anyone specific, Sif's fighting style and the information concerning his greatshield leaves no room to doubt that Artorias was predominantly left-handed. (*DS2* reaffirms the implication.)

Regardless of when they met, Artorias and Sif end up becoming siblings of the blade, with Sif assisting his medial sword instructor in his knightly duties. Eventually, the two met and befriended Alvina, the mysterious, fog-wielding white cat whose name fittingly means both "wise

21 "Soul of the ash-colored great wolf Sif who has served 'Abysswalker' knight Artorias and protected his grave.
Special beings possess special souls. Use the soul of Sif who inherited the knight's holy sword to acquire a vast amount of souls or create a unique weapon."
- Soul of Sif

22 "Greatshield of steel that was used by Artorias, knight of King Gwyn who was consumed by an Abyss.
Gravely injured and starting to be afflicted by the Abyss, he used this shield as provisions for a barrier to protect Sif, who was his friend. Because of this, the shield was damaged and became physically brittle but on the other hand possessed a high defense effect against magic and the like." - Cleansing Greatshield

friend" and "magical being". The cat treats the Forest Hunters covenant like a family[23] and acts vehemently spiteful if we betray it[24] – an intense sense of loyalty which led her to create the covenant in the first place.[25] Her band of thieves exist to keep people from disturbing Artorias' grave, and she will even defame his heroic reputation to ward off trespassers.

That Alvina managed to befriend the knight and his canine companion so quickly is even more interesting given they have very few friends to begin with. The two shared a "lone wolf" mentality despite demonstrating a great deal of compassion for others and each other. For example, Sif spends the rest of her life after Artorias' death aggressively protecting his grave from visitors. And if we save the wolf in the past before attempting the boss battle in the present, her body language in the pre-fight cutscene changes to suggest surprise, disappointment, misery, and reluctance to face us.

Artorias, meanwhile, is often referenced as noble and courageous, which lives up to his name's Arthurian connection. Ciaran implies that this courtesy even extended to humans, and cut dialogue shows his respect for us and deep guilt over his failure to stop the Abyss.[26] However, Artorias' altruism and Sif's narrow-minded loyalty aren't necessarily a contradiction. The two wolves likely cared for "everyone", but their fear of burdening others left them marooned in their heroism and ultimately without others' support when they needed it most – leaving Sif lost without his partner. Perhaps Ciaran's feelings were unrequited not due to lack of effort on her part, but because Artorias never let her get close to begin with.

Outside of his role in Oolacile, we only know Artorias for hunting Darkwraiths in the aftermath of New Londo's fall, and his holy sword deals great harm to the Dark's servants.[27] He can't have hunted the corrupt knights within New Londo, since doing so would have negated the need for flooding the city. But recall that the Darkwraiths raiding the world of man, like Kirk, had escaped the sealing. This leaves many homeless Dark knights wandering the earth, wreaking death and destruction in their wake. A skilled warrior was needed to safely hunt down these remnants. Anor Londo entrusted the duty to Artorias, known for his unfaltering will and peerless skill with a greatsword.[28]

The royal government also equipped him with specialized arms and treasures to deal with the Dark in its various forms. This includes giving the Silver Pendant – an Anor Londo treasure used to deal with Dark magic – to the knight so that he could combat the Abyss. The Japanese description also confirms it to be engraved with his crest,[29]



23 "... But, there is just one law. The party is a family. Betrayal is absolutely not permitted. Remember just that." - Alvina

24 "Ah, it is you... You betrayed the family, so can prepare yourself. From here on, you will be attacked by comrades. You won't have peace of mind for all eternity...You betrayed the family... There is no mercy..." - Alvina

25 "Oh, you are interesting. I like it. I'm Alvina of the Black Forest. I'm the head of a hunting party that hunts intruders who defile the grave from this forest." - Alvina

26 "... Commendable, strong human..... If the essence of you all isn't just Dark..... please... do hold back, the Abyss... koff... Ah, sorry, you guys... Sif..... In the end, I couldn't do anything..." - Artorias

27 "Greatsword born from the soul of the ash-colored great wolf Sif, 'Abysswalker' Knight Artorias' gravekeeper.
Artorias was a Darkwraith hunter, and his sword also demonstrates great might against servants of the Dark." - Greatsword of Artorias

28 "Special ring that was given to the Four Knights of King Gwyn. The Wolf Ring is a thing of 'Abysswalker' Artorias.
It is said that Artorias never faltered due to his strong will and was surely peerless if swinging a greatsword." - Wolf Ring

29 "Silver pendant engraved with the crest of Artorias.
It is one of the old treasures of Anor Londo and was specifically given to him to challenge an Abyss.
Use to have the effect to ward off the Dark of the Abyss, particularly the magic kind." - Silver Pendant



making it unlikely that it was handed over in an emergency, to deal with a specific Abyss. One doesn't have a coat of arms carved into silverwork as the Dark encroaches on the country at your homeland's border, after all. This pendant must have been given early on in his career, to a knight entrusted with a standing duty to hunt the Dark: if the Darkwraiths ever used Dark magic, Artorias would be ready for it.

Another event which must take place early on in these Dark hunts is the knight's contract with a fiend of the Abyss.

The covenant Artorias made with this fiend[30] – I assume *a* fiend because the Japanese text isn't explicitly plural – allowed him to traverse the Abyss without being consumed by its Dark while also cursing his blade. This cursed sword bears key differences in its hilt and blade from both the holy sword used to hunt Darkwraiths and its Abyss-corrupted counterpart, meaning that the cursed sword was a distinct blade fashioned after he forged the contract. Events in Oolacile leave no time to make the covenant and reequip himself in such a manner, suggesting that the knight forged this covenant earlier in his career, in the hopes of safely traversing any potential Abyss that the Darkwraiths created. The fiend was kind enough to oblige and fashioned the ring representing their pact.

Sif was apparently present when the sword was cursed. The wolf's soul is used to craft three of his master's items – both greatswords and the uncorrupted shield. Boss souls allow us to forge weapons which manifest the souls' properties or direct experiences, usually their weapons of choice in life. Sif's soul cannot create the Abyss Greatsword because it was with its owner "until the end" and subsequently consumed with him[31] while he was trapped within his protective barrier. Likewise, the wolf is largely comatose while the Cleansing Greatshield's divine power protects him, and ultimately leaves it behind for us to collect once he is safe. And yet, Sif's soul *can* be used to craft Artorias' cursed greatsword, implying that the wolf has had critical first-hand experience with the blade before the knight abandoned it for the holy sword that he wields replicas of. In short, he must have witnessed the actual cursing of the original holy sword.

Artorias and Sif were together when his sword was cursed, just as they were when they met Alvina. The peculiar cat has "been in this land" since the beginning of the Age of Fire, which encompasses a broad period. And while the Japanese script doesn't necessarily imply that she was "born" there,[32] where she comes from, her age, and the reason behind her presence in the black forest are all open questions. We meet several cats with a

30 **"Ring of proof the knight Artorias once contracted with a fiend of the Abyss.**
The equipper will be able to walk an Abyss just like Artorias." - Covenant of Artorias

31 **"Greatsword born from the soul of Artorias, knight of King Gwyn who was consumed by an Abyss.**
This sword was with its owner until the end and was thus consumed by the Dark, so has ended up becoming an abyss weapon which increases its might according to the user's humanity." - Abyss Greatsword

32 **"Ring given to those who have entered into the covenant 'Forest Hunters'. Responds to the summons of White Cat Alvina.**
It is said that the round white cat who uses human speech has been in this land since the beginning of the Age of Fire and, after meeting the knight Artorias and the great wolf Sif, became one of their few friends." - Cat Covenant Ring

similar appearance to Alvina, but they are a different color and lack her ability to speak. In fact, it is rather unusual for a cat to be able to speak at all. Even if intelligent, most animals are still intelligible, like Sif. Yet Alvina possesses both words and wits. On top of this, she can dissipate her physical form into a fog at will, and this power doubles as a mode of teleportation.

This friendship seems rather disconnected for two characters whose story otherwise revolves around hunting the Dark. But if Alvina was a fiend of the Abyss, then the fact that Artorias forms a covenant with such a creature makes sense. What Dark monster does a medial form a pact with other than a trusted friend? We are told that Alvina has been around since the early Age of Fire because it implies that Artorias could have met her well before he began hunting the Dark, and thereby come to her for help when tasked with annihilating its threats. Alvina fashions magic rings for her covenant like the fiend did for Artorias' contract. Most rings have square or oval gems at their center, but both of these rings are embedded with an orb-like jewel. The only other exception is the Ring of the Evil Eye, derived from another fiend with seemingly Dark powers.

More evidence that Alvina is this fiend can be seen in the way she leads us through the Chasm of the Abyss straight to Sif. The wolf is hidden behind an illusionary wall, so the cat must have either joined the pair in their excursion or had been watching from the sidelines when Sif was obscured. Either way, she seems comfortable traversing the Abyss, loitering around long enough to guide someone like us to her friend. There would be nothing odd about a monster from the Abyss being able to freely explore it, not to mention curse others with that same freedom. Alvina employs fog, but that doesn't mean that she can't use Dark magic too. She never indicates as such, but why would she? It would only earn her antipathy from most, and she has already lost one friend to the Dark. Moreover, her use of primal fog is intended to obscure reality, making it the perfect power for an ancient creature of the Dark. (Indeed, *The Ringed City* later introduces similar speaking abyssal creatures who never employ Dark magic.)

Finally, Alvina's presence in the area since the early Age of Fire overlaps with Oolacile's early history. We have already established Oolacile as initially a land of dark sorcery, making it feasible for its sorcerers to have created abyssal fiends during this period. The monster cats' residency in the black forest surrounding Oolacile makes sense if they were a product of the country dabbling in the Dark. It would also explain why Alvina and her fellow cheshire-grinning cats have above-average magic resistance compared to other animals, a trait

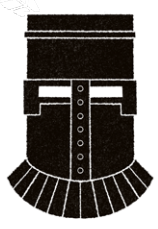
common to beings aligned with the Dark. Due to Oolacile's close ties with Anor Londo throughout the ensuing centuries, there were plenty of opportunities for Alvina to cross paths with Artorias and Sif even after the nation had forgotten its Dark heritage.

With all of this help, Artorias was theoretically prepared to deal with anything the Dark threw at him. The scattered Darkwraiths in the world of man were probably easy for him to hunt, and the fact that the cloak bearing his crest is "famous" implies that many humans witnessed his feats[33]. But it is unlikely that the knight had ever actually faced an Abyss. Elizabeth expresses concern that he will eventually be devoured, implying that he wasn't known to have prevailed against one prior to the fall of Oolacile. And considering that the mushroom is partially responsible for his Abysswalking legend, she is probably familiar with his exploits.

The legend of Artorias claims that Darkwraiths caused the Abyss in Oolacile and that the knight survived the events. This can be inferred from Ingward,[34] who – thanks to self-imposed isolation – mistakenly believes Artorias to have both walked an Abyss and still be alive. This is blatantly untrue, and Alvina lampshades the dubious nature of this narrative, though her Japanese dialogue never claims that his ability to traverse the Abyss itself is a lie as the localization does.[35] This is notable since Sif's location within the Chasm *does* indicate that Artorias traversed the Dark. He merely failed to hunt its source.

There is no evidence that the Darkwraiths had any involvement in Oolacile's downfall, so why have they been credited with causing its destruction? To cover up the proof of the very Dark heritage that Kaathe wanted Oolacile to uncover in the first place. Anor Londo isn't going to let humans realize what the gods have spent countless generations brainwashing them to forget. The Darkwraiths were the perfect scapegoat to cover up the existence of Manus and Oolacile's own involvement in the incident. In other words, what Ingward believes is the lie sold to the public.

This is likely why Alvina and Sif protect their friend's grave. There is no reason for either to indiscriminately kill every visitor on-sight. Even if some are graverobbers, the number of swords and smaller graves surrounding the knight's tombstone indicate that many more were simply warriors interested in paying respects to a hero. Indeed, their burial suggests that they have been shown respect in turn even after being mercilessly cut down. But they had to die – because if humans were to somehow



33 "Armor of 'Abysswalker' Artorias, one of the four knights of King Gwyn.
As if showing its owner's final moments, it is corrupted by the Dark of the Abyss, and its famous ultramarine cloak already looks like a tattered cloth." - Armor of Artorias

34 "Now I don't know much about it… but it is said that the knight Artorias once walked an Abyss and hunted Darkwraiths. If you can find him and borrow his power, you may be able to enter the Abyss…" - Ingward

35 "Oh, you're a new face, no? You managed to find me, did you? Well, perhaps you too heard about the grave of the knight Artorias? But, give up on it entirely. The legend of Artorias is nothing like the reality… It's just a fairy tale… If I say there's a reward, you won't defile a hero's grave for something like that. Am I right?" - Alvina





discover that the knight was actually consumed by the darkness he was sent to dispel, it would lead them to question the entire narrative and possibly investigate further. The lie must be preserved, or else everything Artorias did was for naught.

As such, the pair may also have become gravekeepers at the gods' behest. While the grave was probably erected by Oolacilian survivors, the oldest weapons left by the headstone, long since overgrown, are too large for human hands. The only beings who could wield them are giants and particularly large medials, suggesting that even Anor Londo residents have paid their respects, most likely during the burial. Meanwhile, Frampt has a warm opinion of Alvina judging by the value he places upon both of the rings rewarded as part of her covenant, so he is presumably supportive of the cat's efforts to keep humans away from the grave with her band of thieves – even if one of her tactics is downplaying Anor Londo's carefully fabricated lie as exaggeration. Regardless of divine prompting, the two beasts have protected the grave on their own terms for over two hundred years, though the fact that slaying Sif doesn't expel us from Alvina's covenant suggests that they have been working independently this whole time.

But enough about the lie, what about the truth? Artorias' failure to defeat Manus was probably not entirely due to his inexperience. Behind one of Oolacile's light-based illusory walls is a chest containing his silver pendant, implying an Oolacilian sorcerer took extra measures to hide it with light magic. This level of deception is too sophisticated for the Abyss-corrupted, mindless drones, who are unlikely to even get close to Artorias or Sif without being cut down. It must have happened much earlier in the city's corruption, when most everyone was still sane. Noble Artorias trusted the people of Oolacile and challenged the Abyss, unaware that they had purloined his pendant and locked it away so that he would never find it. Without this key item, the knight followed the trail from the dungeon and faced the monster within the Chasm, only to be possibly blindsided by the fact of his missing amulet when under the onslaught of dark sorcery.

Whatever the cause, the knight was grievously wounded and afflicted by the Dark. Trapped in enemy territory, his sword arm out of commission, and aware that he could turn on his loyal companion at any moment, Artorias took no risks. Using his shield to fuel a holy barrier,[36] the knight safeguarded his friend, who must also have been injured or otherwise incapacitated at the time to not escape on her

36 **"Shield born from the soul of the ash-colored great wolf Sif, gravekeeper of 'Abysswalker' knight Artorias.**

Has a divine protection effect in addition to a stable defense effect, so gives the power to endure every abnormality to the holder."
- Greatshield of Artorias

own. Since we acquire the Covenant of Artorias upon killing Sif in the present era, the knight likely also provided the wolf with the ring at this time. He certainly no longer needed protection from the Abyss. This explains why Sif still keeps the ring, a memento bequeathed to him by a dying friend. Afterward, Artorias erected an illusory wall to hide Sif from the spirits skulking in the shadows and dragged himself as far away as possible while he was still sane, sword in the only working hand he had.

Broken and slowly losing his mind, the knight managed to trudge his way back to the city alone. When we find Artorias, he seems exhausted even as he keeps slaying Dark kin. This, along with cut dialogue, suggests that the knight still clung to his duty even as the Abyss clawed at his mind. Despite knowing his inevitable fate, the medial nonetheless tried to exterminate as much of the corruption as possible. He leaps down upon a bloathead gawking up at him from the upper levels of the arena, specifically from the same direction as Gough's cell – which explains why Hawkeye is already aware of his friend's fall and why the corruption has mainly spread only to the tower's upper levels, unlike the rest of the town where the corruption is mostly limited to the lower levels.



Cut dialogue shows that the knight was originally intended to desperately try and shoo us away before he is consumed, echoing his protective behavior towards Sif. Then, after defeating him, he would applaud our strength and entrust us with stopping the Abyss. Although the cut English dialogue suggests that he would then hallucinate Sif, he is actually just rhetorically apologizing to Sif and other absent loved ones for his incompetence.

Artorias was strong-willed and held out despite his hopeless situation, but when the knight looks upon us, the Dark flares up around him and drives him into a wild frenzy just as he is about to address us. He was successfully slaying a city full of monsters, only to finally be driven over the edge by the one human he finds, the very beings he tried so hard to protect. The Dark of humanity's will is envy, or maybe love, and it is that love for others which breaks the unbendable.

The Lion's Companion

With all the other members of Gwyn's Four Knights either dead or retired, Ornstein is the last to remain in Anor Londo, eventually tasked with guarding the cathedral alongside Smough. The two make for quite an odd pair. Smough not only wields a far cruder armament than Ornstein, but also has a much larger height and frame, suggesting that he is a giant.

Aside from his comparable size,[37] Smough's armor reflects the silhouettes of the giant guards, with their disproportionately smaller heads for their wide frame, which contrasts the silhouettes of the medials with their human shape. That said, concept art implies that Smough's armor, like Catarinan armor, doesn't reflect the wearer's actual physique. Even the small helmet is misleading, as its "face" is situated just above the actual eye holes. Still, Smough definitely reflects his armor's sumo wrestler-like design in his name, which transliterates to "Sumou" (スモウ), and the inhuman strength required to wear it mirrors the giant guards' equipment. And unlike Ornstein, Smough is unaffected by occult weapons, designed for hunting the medials of Anor Londo. This indifference to Dark magic is shared with other giants, with the exception of Anor Londo's palace guards, whose fire and lightning-resistant arms and armor are likely forged with the same holy element as the Silver and Black Knights' blessed equipment.

Being a giant would also explain Smough's occupation. The medieval executioner was considered a necessary but dishonorable vocation. Essentially sanctioned murderers, active executioners were even commonly denied Communion in Christendom. It is unlikely that Smough would be given such an abhorred role if he was a medial, especially one of the gods.

In fact, it is unlikely that he executed any gods. As seen with the mimics, the gods avoided killing their own as capital punishment. Moreover, his method of execution, crushing bodies with a hammer, is far less honorable than the beheading by the sword favored by medieval societies. Therefore, Smough was probably only tasked with executing criminal humans, fellow giants, and *maybe* the occasional medial who wasn't somehow related to the divine. Anor Londo had plenty of humans and giants living within its walls as divine servants, and they are far more likely to be killed for anything considered to disgrace their masters.

One would expect this to be a grueling career path, but Smough apparently took it in stride. Affixed with a "cruel" smile and constantly laughing,[38] he enjoyed pulverizing the flesh and bone of his victims and making it into his nourishment, which can be interpreted as either him figuratively feeding on others' suffering or literally devouring their remains.

37 **"Helmet of 'Executioner' Smough who protects the church in the abandoned Anor Londo.**

It has extraordinarily high defense power and can be equipped by the body of man, but frankly it seems overall impossible."

38 **"Soul of 'Executioner' Smough who protects the church in the abandoned Anor Londo.**

Special beings possess special souls. Use the soul of the executioner who was affixed with a cruel smile to acquire a vast amount of souls or create a unique weapon." - Soul of Smough

In either scenario, this behavior would be seen as grotesque by any decent person, god or man. The Japanese term "flesh and bone" (骨肉) is also the equivalent to the English idiom "flesh and blood", which adds a possible implication that he killed his victims' families too. Clearly, Smough is a sadist, gleefully using a blunt instrument to ensure the condemned suffered a painful and most dishonorable demise. Miyazaki highlights this in the *Design Works* interview, recounting that Smough was originally designed as one of the Four Knights but ultimately made to serve a more "heretical" role that didn't befit one – all because Miyazaki especially loved the design. Much like Velka, Smough contrasting with the rest of Anor Londo is entirely intentional.

It is no surprise that such an unsettling individual was never promoted to one of Gwyn's Four Knights, but the fact that Smough was even considered for the honor says much about him. The group is comprised of strong and distinguished warriors, meaning that the executioner must be a comparable fighter who performed well in his duties. And though he enjoyed his job, Smough may have still been actively seeking that knighthood. Knights garner far more respect for slaying others than executioners do, after all. But whereas Ornstein is by all accounts chivalrous, loyal, and dignified, Smough is a bloodthirsty murderer with no care for honor or comradery.

This comes to a head during the branching point of their boss battle. When Smough is killed, Ornstein treats his corpse with dignity as he absorbs his soul. But when Ornstein falls, Smough doesn't hesitate to crudely pulverize his fallen comrade before taking his power. Closer inspection reveals the fallen Dragonslayer still subtly moving his fingers, implying that he is still alive. Smough sees his chance and takes it.

It seems strange that such an unprincipled opportunist would even be placed on guard duty alongside the knight to begin with. The only reason for the executioner to be picked over another warrior is that the other famed knights are dead, occupied, or missing. In short, the giant was only chosen after Ornstein was the last of the Four Knights to remain in a royal capital already abandoned by the gods.

The princess that they protect is an illusion, making the pair's guard duty a pointless task on its face. Yet their presence in the cathedral serves as another obstacle for Undead attempting to retrieve the Lordvessel, which is probably the underlying intention. Much like the Undead Parish gargoyles and the Iron Golem, Ornstein and Smough have been set up as a trial for creating Gwyn's successor as Lord of Cinder. This fact must elude at least Smough,

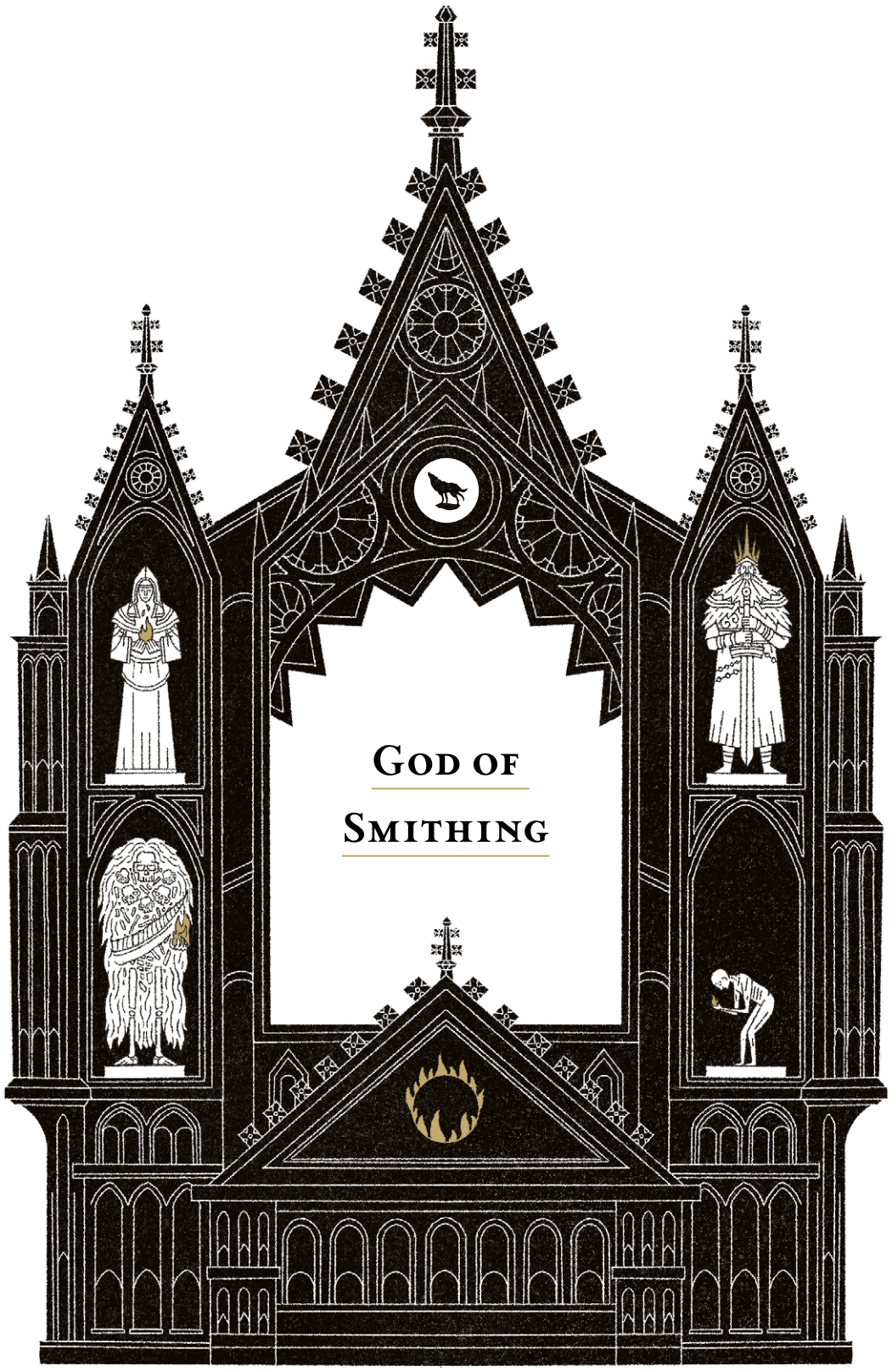


who doesn't seem chivalrous enough to willingly sacrifice himself as a speed bump on someone else's journey. He was probably never told the true nature of his guard duty or their charge; perhaps he was even incentivized to take up this post. The one event of note concerning him is his lost chance at knighthood. But now Gwyn is gone and many of the great knights are dead.

It may be impossible to join the ranks of the Four Knights, but the promise of knighthood and the prestigious role guarding royalty would surely entice Smough. The "Executioner" in his boss name is written like an honorary title, just as how Ornstein is called "Dragonslayer" despite the dragon hunts having long since ended. In other words, Smough may no longer serve as executioner in his official capacity. Indeed, executioners don't usually commission full body armor. Moreover, there is a statue of Smough erected along the walls of Anor Londo opposite a similar sculpture of Ornstein. It is unlikely that a mere executioner would be honored with an effigy at all, much less one equalizing him with the leader of the Great King's most prestigious knights – though its location near the despised Duke's Archives might be a subtle slight. Either way, it suggests that Smough was eventually knighted after all. (*DS3* confirms the notion.)

Since Gwyndolin is the one currently ruling Anor Londo from the shadows, he is the one likely responsible for Ornstein and Smough's duty, maybe through his illusory sister. The Darkmoon god has either no interest in Smough's background or sees the duty as a way to eliminate the sadistic executioner while advancing the gods' plan. With the realm of the gods abandoned and Anor Londo shut off from the world of man for centuries, there is little need for an executioner. Ornstein, on the other hand, was placed in a difficult position, expected to serve side-by-side with someone who couldn't be less of an equal in honor and loyalty. It is a testament to his moral fiber that the knight not only tolerated Smough, but even showed him respect in death.

Perhaps this willingness to show basic courtesy to someone like Smough is why Frampt devalues Ornstein's soul while assigning only average value to his weapon and ring. However, this could also hint at something more. The character is internally named "Griffith", the leader of a band of mercenaries who ultimately betrays his comrades in *Berserk*. This name may simply be a reference to Ornstein's leadership of the Four Knights, but it might likewise imply that he somehow betrayed them, maybe even Anor Londo as a whole. If he did, it isn't obvious how. Yet Frampt's disposition leaves a lingering air of suspicion around Ornstein (which later games would ultimately justify). Of course, maybe it shouldn't come as a surprise if Gwyn's oh-so-honorable knights turn out to be as duplicitous as their lord.



Titan Among Gods

Considering the prominence of titanite in Lordran, it is only fitting to cover its creator, Anor Londo's blacksmith god. Blacksmiths were critical to ancient, classical, and medieval societies since they alone could forge the essential and luxury items of everyday life, such as arms and armor, tools, jewelry, household wares and more. This was especially important in economically flourishing societies because many of these items would be commissioned by the nobility who had the wealth to patronize the smith. The fact that a practitioner of a trade, albeit a skilled one, was counted amongst Anor Londo's divine aristocracy demonstrates the profession's value and prestige.

Indeed, this blacksmith was probably elevated to godhood by the royalty, who keep their own smithy in a building adjoining the cathedral, which itself is adjoined to the royal manor. In fact, considering the relative youth of its current blacksmith, this smithy was probably originally the deity's workshop; the giant, his apprentice. Clearly, Gwyn and his kin held the blacksmith god and his craft in high regard.

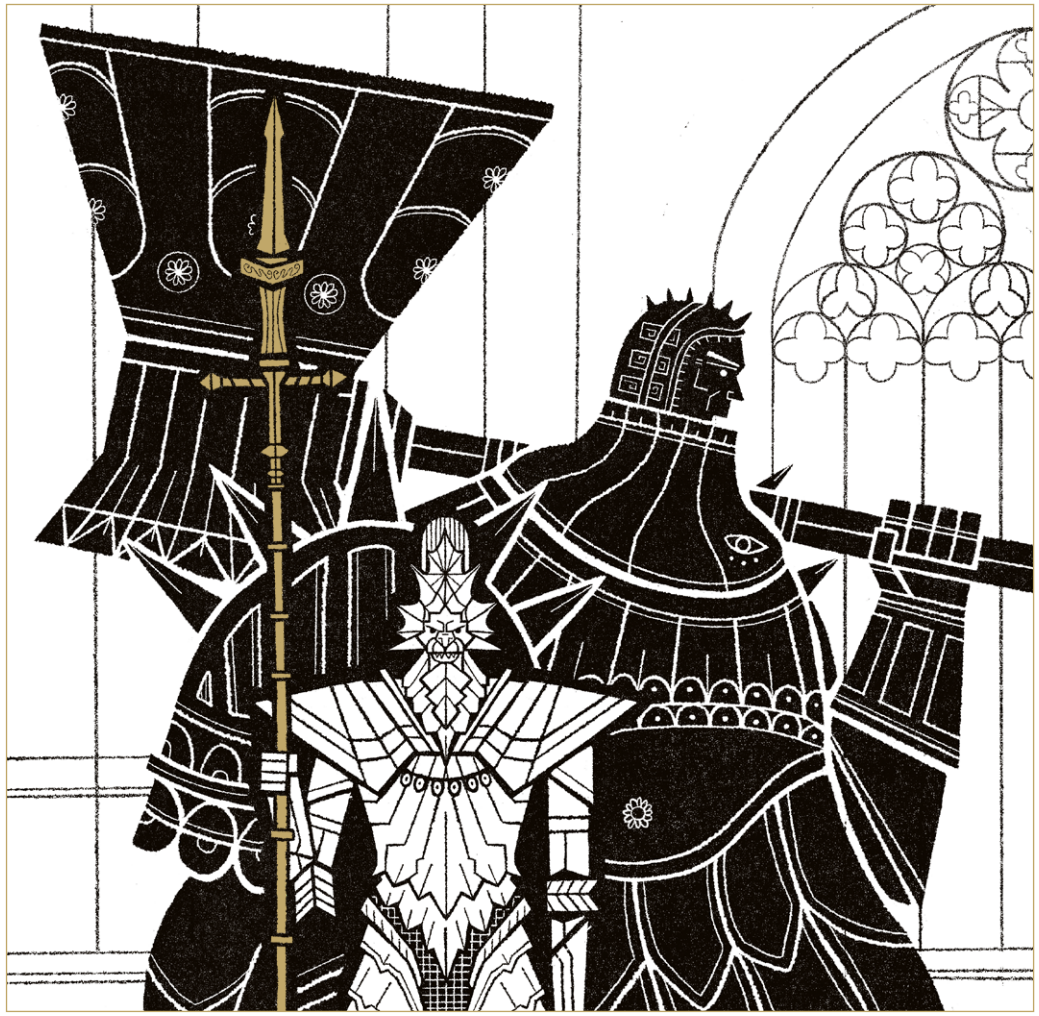
Anor Londo went through bronze and iron ages where metalworking was essential to the development of their society. It is because of smithing that the medials had weapons and armor for their armies, hinges and handles for their doors, and frames for their windows. Compared to the kingdoms of Nito or Izalith, which rely more on stone or woodwork, the gods of Anor Londo can thank smithing for their success almost as much as Gwyn's Light Soul. Enter the blacksmith deity, the figure presumably spearheading advancement of the art in Anor Londo and perhaps even smithing's pioneer.

By working with fire, the blacksmith god created many metal marvels which heavily contributed to Anor Londo's development, albeit without the flash and pomp of the knights of legend. He can certainly be credited, at least in part, for not just bronze and iron, but also Anor Londo's unique white iron as well as its various metal mechanisms, including the Iron Golem shell. We imagine most of the gods' experimentation with the power of fire through the lens of magic, but fire is no less critical in more mundane domains. What else can the medial who first discovered and mastered the process of shaping and enhancing metal via flame be described as, except a god? And this doesn't even factor in his creation of titanite.

Titanite presumably exists in every piece of equipment forged for the medials, or at least those of particular rank and prestige.[1] These rocks were employed in reinforcing arms and armor to increase their durability and effectiveness in battle – the ones that we use mostly being mere fragments of

1 **"Bond stone original for reinforcing weapons. Regarded as something the gods possess in legend. Enhances standard weapons up to +15 and enhances crystal or lightning weapons up to +5.**

An original is a relic of the nameless blacksmith god and a thing for forging select god weapons. A weapon forged with this would probably be purported to rival the few weapons of legend." - Titanite Slab



2 **"Bond stone fragment that enhances weapons. It is extremely commonplace. Enhances standard weapons up to +5.**

Bond stone fragments are said to be flakes that came off from an original possessed by the gods, and it enhances weapons by etching them into said weapons." - Titanite Shard

much larger original stones.[2] As to how these "bond stones" (楔石) function, demon titanite affirms that titanite demons possess "bond" power,[3] and the titanite catch pole explicitly ties this magic power back to the slabs which the demons arose from.[4] This unique bond power, like most other divine powers, probably originated from Gwyn's Light Soul. Despite the weapon only dealing generic magic damage, titanite demons use the catch poles to conjure lightning, so the bonding magic imbued into the stones probably derives from sunlight. Like the rest of the gods, the blacksmith deity relied on his king's power to create his works.

Titanite strengthens equipment by magically bonding to the existing metal, leather, or wood – holding it together to a degree impossible with ordinary minerals. The resulting weapons are sharper and slower to dull

as well, and the armor more difficult to pierce and resistant to wear. This is exemplified best by raw weapons. *Sosei* (粗製) means to be produced in a crude manner, and these "raw" arms are manufactured with high-quality but ordinary forging embers to greatly increase the amount of titanite that can be molded into the material. The result is raw weapons having a significantly higher density of titanite which in turn significantly increases their hardness, sharpness, and thus raw physical power. The principle behind this effect is straightforward: the more bonding magic in the equipment, the stronger the bonds holding it together.

The question, then, is how does this bonding power derive from sunlight and by extension, fire? Light holds dominion over time, and by extension space, but this ability to bind things together isn't unprecedented. For instance, Undead bonfires are all imperceptibly tied to one another in a network, and forging embers bind elemental power to base equipment. The latter would clearly be important to the blacksmith god – someone whose fascination with fire was especially focused on the flame's effects on minerals, metal in particular.

But, the First Flame's binding power runs deeper than that. The First Flame merely existing bound reality by dynamics, creating an interconnected system of actions and reactions. In other words, this bonding magic is the invisible principle to how the universe relates to itself in all aspects. The best example of this is the fading of the First Flame, which affects the powers of all flame, light, and heat derived directly from it. The blacksmith god was therefore able to isolate this bonding power from the power of the First Flame's light present in Gwyn's Lord Soul.

Yet titanite relies on one other element to function: rock. The bond stone's resilience is a property shared with the hardy power of existence. And it seems that the blacksmith chose to apply the power of bonding to rock specifically in order to enhance its existing properties as well as infuse them into whatever equipment he reinforced. The runes engraved in titanite slabs are presumably part of the process of imbuing these stones with this bond magic.

There have been attempts to translate these runes into something coherent and insightful, with some merit to the methodology employed. The runes come from real-life Old Norse alphabet, much of which can be identified as part of its oldest form, though a few may be taken from the later forms of this "futhark" script. Each rune holds individual meaning both as a hieroglyph and in symbology. Through this, we can compare the meanings of the runes to the in-game menu graphics used for various titanite items.

For example, the menu graphics of standard titanite fragments are etched with *eihaz* (ᛇ), a rune that symbolizes strength and stability. This is the basic function of titanite, so this choice of rune seems fitting. This continues with green titanite using *yr* (ᛉ), which symbolizes protection or connection with a

3 **"Special bond stone snatched from a bond demon, a faceless stone fiend. Enhances weapons born from special souls up to +5.**

After the nameless blacksmith god died, fiends were born from some of the originals. They are still tinged with the power of bonding and wander the land of Lordran." - Demon Titanite

4 **"Weapon of a bond demon, a faceless stone fiend born from the bond originals.**

Is it a vestige of the original's magic power? It is one of the weapons tinged with the power of magic from the start, and an attack where you greatly leap forward and lung down from above is characteristic of it." - Titanite Catch Pole

higher power. This is relevant since green titanite only comes in the form of large shards and is explicitly tinged with "unique" power even among the standard bond stones. Green titanite upgrades magic, fire, and holy weapons during their initial stages before they move on to requiring titanite of the appropriate element. In other words, it is a transitional piece that helps build up weapons to the point that they *can* strengthen their element with their proper stones. This seems to be because green titanite contains power shared by all other elements. We can feed Frampt titanite which he will chew up into smaller pieces for us; a slab provides chunks, chunks provide large shards, and large shards provide small shards. Red, white, or blue chunks provide large green shards, affirming the unique power of green to be the link between titanite and elements.

The pattern continues for the elements themselves. The blue titanite graphic uses *laguz* (ᛚ) in reference to the ocean and thereby the unknown, fitting perfectly with the esoteric mysteries prompting sorcerers to study magic. By comparison, white titanite's use of *ansuz* (ᚨ) referencing the Aesir or divinity in general, is much more straightforward, as is red titanite using the rune for fire (ᚲ). Twinkling titanite uses a rune which is either the elder futhark *naudiz* (ᚾ) or the younger futhark version of *jera (*ᛅ or ᚼ), which means plenty, in reverse. In either case, it means "need" or scarcity since reversing runes was a form of denoting opposites. This works since twinkling titanite has been imbued with particularly strong power, making it unusual and rare even among titanite. All of this seems intentional, but the same cannot be said for the actual slabs.

The graphic for the slabs features three lines of runes. By translating each individual rune, one can string together the basic history of the gods and their fear of the Dark, or so the theory goes. This seems reasonable on the surface but requires some creative interpretation. For starters, there is no way to determine if a given pictogram is a noun, verb, or adjective beyond guesswork. Also, the theory assumes that the runes are to be read with the standard English syntax of subject > verb > object, but Japanese syntax is subject > object > verb. Considering that we are dealing with a script foreign to both languages, how are we to determine which the developers had in mind? And why are most of the runes seen on the various titanite fragments unused on the slab they come from? Why assume characters like *isaz* (ᛁ) meaning "ice" translate to in-game concepts like the Dark? There are so many variables at play that any attempt to translate the script into something coherent is unconvincing. It is one thing to pair a single rune with an item to correlate the character's meaning to said item. It is another to then attempt to write whole sentences with them.



Despite the god creating titanite in the form of large slabs, we mostly find the material in shards or chunks. The simplest explanation for this is that these pieces are leftovers – unused portions of slab, similar to wood chippings. Indeed, Snuggly provides titanite chunks in exchange for "rubbish". The gods had little use for these smaller offcuts of titanite, and so they have scattered to the wind, ending up in every corner of Lordran.

But what might have been useless to gods is substantial to their worshippers, hence these fragments have been carried and sold by humans as rare commodities, used to enhance weapons in greater and greater quantities until the point where a slab is needed. Yet the slabs are mere legends to mankind as a whole, meaning that few have ever seen titanite in its original form. And even the offcuts are limited to the region immediately surrounding Anor Londo, the refuse of the blacksmith deity's work sprinkling the surrounding lands like lint turned out of one's pocket. However, the way this refuse is sought over and prized only emphasizes the importance of his contributions to medial society.

Gone and Passed

Demon Titanite reveals that the blacksmith deity has died, and with his passing arose titanite demons from the slabs. We can infer that this occurred while Anor Londo was still populated due to the many chests containing demon titanite all around the city, implying that a great number of these demons were killed and the unique titanite they left behind subsequently collected and stored on the spot. Two additional pieces are found in a chest by the firstborn's bedside in the royal manor, further narrowing the blacksmith's time of death to before Anor Londo's last king leaves the city in disgrace. Being a god of war, he would naturally help put down the sudden surge of monsters infesting the city.

Not all the titanite demons were killed, as some seem to have been captured and later repurposed as pit beasts in Sen's Fortress, additional hazards for the Undead trial. Even so, one Silver Knight merely monitoring another demon as it loiters around the royal manor says much about these circumstances. That this demon has effectively been left caged in a now unused room implies that it emerged after the gods had abandoned the city, when it could be safely left and ignored, and this in turn suggests that the titanite slabs didn't spawn their demons all at once; rather, it indicates a *period* following the blacksmith god's death where the slabs produced them.

This particular demon didn't spawn in just any room either. This chamber closest to the cathedral is lined with rows of seats and an altar at the far end,

indicating a sort of chapel. The altar itself is flanked by two smaller tables and chairs, each accompanied by a banner on the wall behind them. One banner's primary color is green while the other is red, matching the color schemes for Gwynevere and the firstborn's private quarters respectively; these were their seats. The demon likely arose from a slab left on the altar, representing the blacksmith god as part of a wake – Japanese wakes often include portraits of the deceased in a similar manner, and a blacksmith is unlikely to have commissioned a portrait. God or no, he is more likely to receive a smaller ceremony in the manor's chapel than the large church reserved for royalty. These circumstances suggest that the blacksmith deity was still being actively mourned when the firstborn and later other gods departed Anor Londo.

This places the god's death not too long *before* the firstborn left and places this one titanite demon's birth not too long *after* the other gods left. This raises the question of what triggers an individual slab's transformation, especially since some never transformed at all – we can acquire a fair number without any fear of a demon bursting out. Only certain slabs became dangerous in the relatively immediate aftermath of the blacksmith god's death, enough to cause a crisis, but not every single one. Why?

Although described as "demons" the same as the creatures of Chaos, the two don't appear to bear any relation. Titanite demons are "bond demons" (楔のデーモン) and never once classified as "chaos demons"(混沌のデーモン), Furthermore, titanite demons are referred to as fiends, as are two Dark-related creatures which are never associated with the English "demon" to begin with. This puts the entire relevance of the terminology into question. No one aligned with Izalith ever refers to the life born from Chaos as demonic, suggesting it to be a label used by outsiders. And the only thing that all of these so-called "demons" and "fiends" have in common is that they can all be vaguely defined as monsters of unnatural origin. And so, while "demon" is typically shorthand for chaos demon, the term is neither exclusive to them nor very meaningful in itself.

Since neither "demon" or "fiend" are useful terms, the only potential clues to the titanite demon's nature is its appearance. Its body is solid stone like the slab it originated from, and takes the form of a man. However, this man is missing a leg as well as a head, with several unique symbols etched into the neck, symbols which can be found on demon titanite but bear no resemblance to Nordic runes. The demon's lack of a face is especially notable given its weapon of choice. The catch pole has been used in Japan in one form or another for centuries, primarily as a tool for detaining criminals by placing the pronged head around the felon's neck.





This detail is emphasized by the creature itself. The length of its tail and spinal column form another catchpole, with its prongs jutting out of the monsters shoulder blades in place of its head. This makes the creature as a whole look like a giant catch pole with a victim who has just been beheaded for resisting arrest.

So, is it merely coincidence that these monsters convey an image of death after capture? Or does their appearance hint at their creation in the first place?

The "demon titanite" left behind upon their deaths is unique, in that it upgrades all weapons and shields created with boss souls except for unupgradable catalysts and the Dragon Bone Fist, which requires dragon scales. The only other weapons it reinforces are the gravelord sword and demon spear, weapons imbued with the power of Lord Souls. Put simply, demon titanite upgrades weapons born from *special* souls, implying that this affinity arises because the demons themselves arose from slabs transformed by the power of a soul.

Since the demons have a will of their own, this makes sense. In order for inanimate rock to become an animate monster, it must possess a soul similar to golems or gargoyles, and the demons do yield souls upon their demise. The only question then is whether these slabs gained souls and thus transformed, or already retained souls but spawned a will.

When combined, these two ideas of death after capture and birth via souls suggest the blacksmith deity's death involved foul play – it is hard to imagine natural causes when the eldest known god, Lloyd, is still kicking. Few of the elite medials have died since they fashioned themselves gods, and yet this blacksmith did in their supposedly secure capital. Since the demons spawned at random times, their creation is unlikely to have been intentional. Snuggly provides demon titanite in exchange for a dung pie, so it is seemingly the titanite equivalent to a waste product. And so, either the demons' creation was accidental, or it was an unforeseen consequence of his murder.

Strong emotions resulting from death can affect the body or items connected to the individual, so the blacksmith's circumstances likely passed onto some of his titanite. Perhaps the stones are imbued with pieces of the blacksmith god's own soul, pieces which may remain bonded to that soul even after being infused in rock. If so, then it isn't unfeasible for the blacksmith's death to reverberate to some of his titanite slabs, his grudge from that time eventually transforming that rock into a monstrous creature – fiends which embody his grim fate. The god died in captivity, but whose?

Because the deity is honored by the royal family after death, it is unlikely to have been the local authorities. Another party is responsible, one who operates in Anor Londo but has the resources to capture a god: Seath. The paledrake has studied titanite and bonding as part of his research, creating twinkling titanite from chunks of the original imbued with the special energies

of sorcery and crystal. The two gods likely share a history, considering that the giant blacksmith is already familiar with working Seath's arts. In short, Seath is the only party with the motive and ability to imprison the blacksmith god, who either died resisting capture or later in his custody. The fact that Snuggly provides demon titanite in exchange for Seath's prism stones reinforces a connection.

This would be around the time that Seath abducted his wife's holy women and transformed the gods' library into a prison, shortly before the gods abandoned the divine kingdom, less than two hundred years ago. Seath had the library tower hastily renovated to serve as a prison, implying that he intended to capture more than just a handful of holy women for his experiments, but it was during this same period that the dragon's madness would be uncovered, prompting Anor Londo to quarantine the Duke's Archives. Between this incident, the sudden surge of titanite demons, and the firstborn being deposed after calling to align with *archdragons*, one might argue that all of the chaos that befell the divine kingdom was thanks to Seath in one form or another.

Stench of Nostalgia

Two major questions concerning the blacksmith god remain: who is he, and why is he a "nameless" deity? Every god individually mentioned in-game, no matter how minor, is referenced by name, except for him and Gwyn's disgraced firstborn. And yet, just like Gwyn's son, the blacksmith god's name has apparently been lost to the world of man despite legends about him persisting to this day. How can humans not know the name of such a prominent deity? In the firstborn's case, his name was purged from the record. But the blacksmith is still considered a god and was highly respected by humans and medials alike. Why would accounts referencing him be destroyed?

Gwyn's eldest son likely shared a close relationship with the blacksmith before his death. He is a god of war and so relied on the god of smithing to forge and maintain his weapons and armor. Moreover, he kept pieces of titanite retrieved from the demons that he slayed after the blacksmith's death by his bedside, a deeply personal gesture – as if holding onto a memento of a dear friend. And, if the only records of the blacksmith, at least by name, were in texts recounting the war god's life, then the smithing god's name would naturally be lost when the firstborn was erased from history. After all, the blacksmith would only be a supporting character in the tales of heroic kings and knights; his identity surviving a blanket purge of the historical record would be incidental, especially after

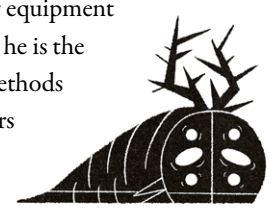
death. This leaves titanite as the only proof to his existence, and his only relevance in legends about the stones is the fact that he created them.

Yet there's one strong candidate for the blacksmith god's true identity – Vamos, the skeleton blacksmith found in the Catacombs. Vamos' skeleton is both larger and heftier than the average human frame, a few heads taller than us at his full height. This makes him almost the same size as medials like Gwyn. Even more striking is his peculiar appearance, with bony tendrils in place of a beard. These are most likely ornamentations intended to replace the blacksmith's missing facial hair – like the human skeletons adorning Nito's chest – but one could argue that they are actual tentacles denoting non-human lineage. Either way, Vamos stands out from the mindless skeletal guards patrolling the underground graveyard on behalf of Pinwheel's necromancers, which suggests that his reanimation predates their relatively recent takeover of Nito's domain. Not that the skeleton concerns himself with what is going on around him, as he focuses entirely on his smithing.

According to the Hammer of Vamos, the blacksmith silently forges fire weapons in the tombs,[5] and we can see him repurposing some sarcophagi as vessels for the molten fire that he works with. It is not that he "rarely speaks" as the localization claims, just that he wishes to concentrate and gets annoyed by *any* distractions to his work.[6] He is only interested if we try to request his services,[7] and even then he only agrees on the assumption[8] that we will "leave quickly" once he has helped.[9] In his own words, he is merely a "stubborn person who knows only smithing" with nothing of value to tell warriors like us[10] about the area we are trying to survive in. This is a man who is so passionate about his craft that he is still dedicating all his time to it even after death.

If Vamos *is* the blacksmith deity, he wouldn't make a point of telling us. He has no interest in relating his life story or making sure history still remembers him – and with a workaholic master like him, it is no wonder that his giant apprentice learned how to smith but not fluently speak before his passing. That said, the skeleton twice calls himself "Vamos the Blacksmith" (鍛冶のバモス),[11] as if we should know who that is, and so may itself casually hint at his identity.

Furthermore, the fact that he is focused solely on forging *fire* weapons is telling. We have to rely on Vamos to imbue our equipment with the fire element, but the reason given is that he is the only blacksmith knowledgeable in the ancient methods required to work with the high-quality fire embers we can acquire. Both of these embers originate in Izalith, but Vamos indicates that he has never



5 **"Metal hammer of the skeleton blacksmith Vamos, who silently forges fire weapons at the bottom of the Catacombs.**
It can be used as a strike weapon, but its value is in the hands of Vamos for sure." - Hammer of Vamos

6 **"... How about you leave quickly?... You're distracting me..." - Vamos**

7 **"... Hmph, if it's not blacksmith work, don't bother." - Vamos**

8 **"If our business is done, how about you leave quickly?... You're distracting me..." - Vamos**

9 **"... What? Blacksmith work, huh? So you'll leave quickly?" - Vamos**

10 **"Honestly, you're persistent... I don't know anything, a stubborn person who knows only smithing. I'm of no use whatsoever to a warrior like you..." - Vamos**

11 **"If you'll disturb me, I'll be your opponent! Don't make light of Vamos the Blacksmith just 'cause he's bones, youngster!" - Vamos**

actually seen chaos fire[12] and only knows about it from legend,[13] disqualifying him from being a deceased Izalithian. The blacksmith also claims to have seen the Large Flame Ember in New Londo,[14] so he was alive as far back as when it and Izalith were both allied with Anor Londo and engaged in trade with each other. Likewise, he is aware of the former flooding and the latter becoming a ruined metropolis despite having been continuously working from an inescapable burial chamber isolated from world events – he even needs to break down a wall to create an exit when we drop in from a hole in the ceiling. Therefore, he must have been alive when both events happened, yet not present for either. His cavalier disappointment about the flooding likewise implies that he wasn't a New Londo citizen who experienced it firsthand.



All of this indicates that his "old bones"[15] can't be just a millennium old, for the means to work with fire embers was already ancient by that time. When we try to present Vamos with any non-fire ember, he dismisses it as a no-good "sham", lamenting that there are fewer good embers "nowadays,"[16] which implies that the old methods for working with flame embers *predate* the creation of the crystal, dark, and even divine elements. Indeed, the medials must have experimented with flame before they could manifest lightning or the holy element, and Grant only dates such magic's existence to as far back as their development of iron. Before Anor Londo wielded lightning against dragons, it must have armed its Bronze Age warriors with fire.

Therefore, Vamos' old methods date back to the beginning of civilization, though only Izalith carried on the practice until the last millennium. But Vamos isn't Izalithian, leaving Anor Londo as the only place where he could have learned these old ways to smith. This fits with his presence in a graveyard linked to the gods, and his knowledge of New Londo supports the notion that Lordran is where he was born, had lived, and was buried. Still, it is impossible for a *human* to have lived among the medials at the start of their civilization, before even the pygmy Lord found the Dark Soul, let alone one who then survived up through the destruction of both Izalith and New Londo before undeath emerged. Not so for their god of smithing,

12 "... Hm? That's..... A source flame I haven't seen..... A very interesting design... Is it the witch's flame that's in legend...?... How about it? Leave that to me, will ya? Vamos the Blacksmith won't make you regret it...." - Vamos

13 "Frankly, I'm already at my limit. Right now, I can't do more work than now. Well, if I had the witch's flame that's in legend, it'd be a different story. But still, nobody can reach the ruined capital of Izalith and all that..." - Vamos

14 "... Hm? That's..... the source flame of New Londo..... It's a good source flame... How about it? Leave that to me, will ya? I'm going to show you the essence of fire." - Vamos

15 "Yes, yes, that's good. I'll show you the work of my old bones. Koh ho ho." - Vamos

16 "Hm? That's..... a source flame, is it...? But, it's no good. I'm not interested in such a sham. Honestly, there've been fewer good source flames nowadays..." - Vamos

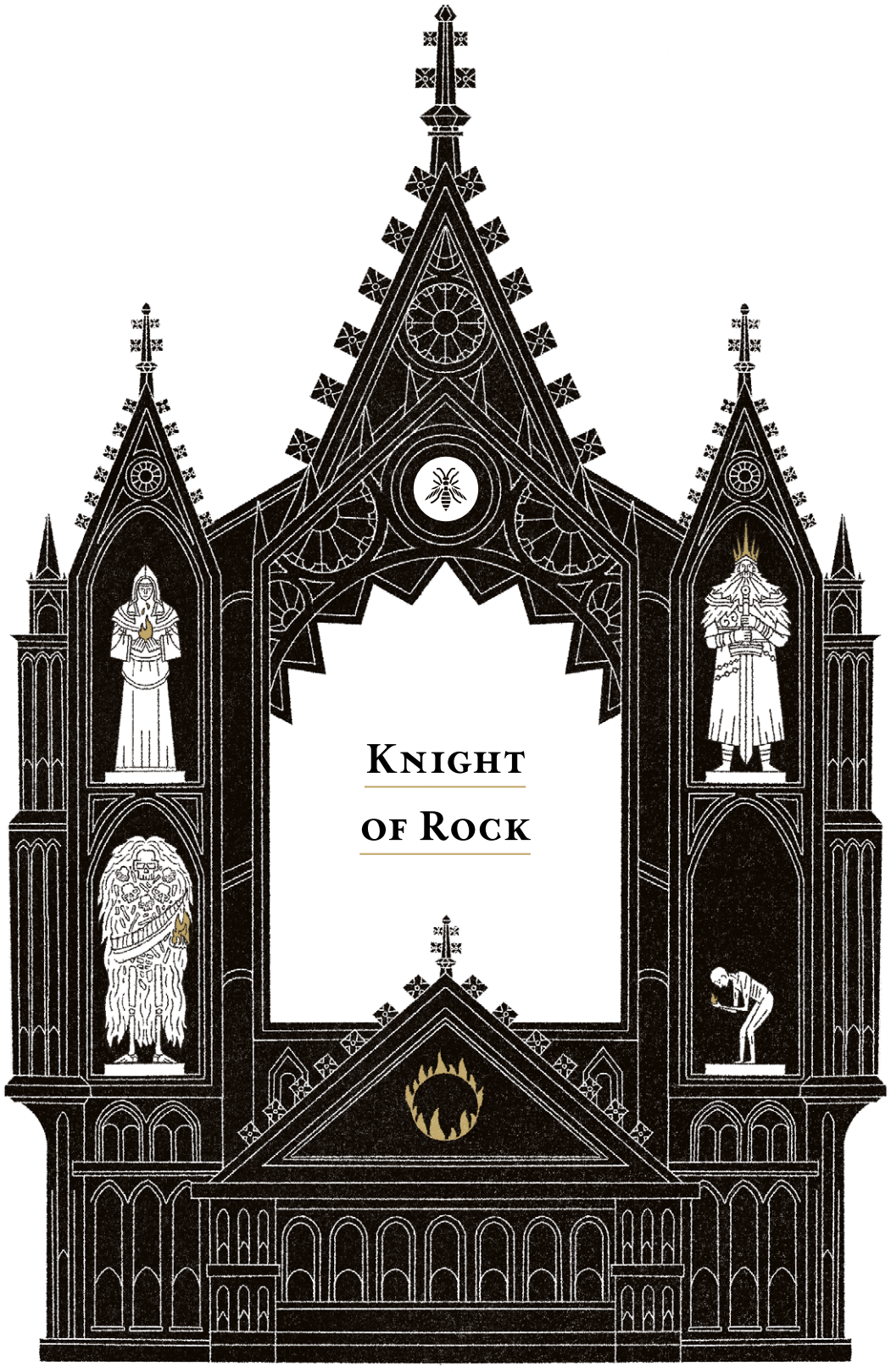
a medial who was alive until less than two centuries ago and must have known these old techniques. Vamos says that he isn't "interested" in working with divine or crystal embers, not that he *can't*. He simply considers them inferior – an old man griping that things were done better in the good ol' days.

Finally, Vamos is in possession of the royal helm, a stereotypical Viking helmet partially made of gold, which suggests a war-like background and connection to royalty. But Vamos only wields a pickaxe and hammer for mining and smithing, not battle, and speaks with a crude dialect unbefitting a royal. So, what royal family owned this helm, and why does Vamos have it? We know of dynasties from Oolacile, Anor Londo, and Izalith, only one of which has a known warrior among them with an established connection to the blacksmith god. Thus, Vamos likely received this helm from the firstborn, perhaps as a burial gift given that it has resistance to "everything"[17] – as if the creator regretted not being able to protect the blacksmith from any and all threats in life; true, it lacks resistance to curses, but the gods already specialized in removing those. The fact that Vamos keeps it when it doesn't in any way aid his beloved smithing highlights its sentimental value.

The best argument against Vamos being the unaccounted-for blacksmith god is his humility in dealing with humans. He never once distinguishes himself from man unlike others hailing from Anor Londo. However, this isn't anomalous. Quelana is also a god but never once demeans us, and only indirectly distinguishes herself when speaking about the world of man – which makes sense for a princess who regularly taught humans. Similarly, Anor Londo once welcomed human visitors for trade and worship. And if the giant blacksmith only inherited his knowledge of human crossbows bolts from a predecessor, then the one who originally struck the deal to forge them with lightning must have been the smithing god.

Vamos doesn't care that we are human because he has had a long history of dealing with them, like any other customer. He has no reason to hold racial prejudice, especially now that he is a member of the living dead. All that matters to Vamos is that we are distracting him from his work. It is true that we find him in a human graveyard and not with Nito in the gods' burial chamber, but this can be attributed to the time of death. When the blacksmith deity died, the alliance between Anor Londo and Nito had already soured. The gods had no obligation to bring his body to Nito's location, and they would have been fought tooth-and-nail every step of the way even if they wanted to. Leaving the body in the area where they dumped their human followers' corpses was probably the best option, given the circumstances. Not that Vamos seems to care. He has his tools and an eternity to use them, and that is enough.

17 "Helmet of the skeleton blacksmith of the Catacombs Vamos. Appears to be mixed with gold, so has high resistances overall.
It is considered to be a thing of old royalty, but Vamos who would have acquired knowledge of that won't stir now. Its origin is unclear." - Royal Helm



Knight of Rock

Hate and War

Havel the Rock, literally "Rock-like" Havel (「岩のような」ハベル), is described as Gwyn's comrade-in-arms, which indicates that he held a significant position in the king's army as a soldier serving directly under the god. His hammer is a holy relic derived from an archdragon's tooth while his armor and shield are carved from solid rock,[1] suggesting participation in the dragon hunts. Perhaps he was a royal guard like the escort of Silver Knights surrounding Gwyn in the opening cinematic. Havel's heavy equipment resembles knight armor, and given that he was permitted to wear and wield solid rock instead of the elegant standard Silver Knight equipment, he had likely earned Gwyn's favor by racking up achievements as a dragonslayer. (*DS3* later reinforces this notion with Havel's friend Ledo, another unconventional Silver Knight.)

Yet the only legacies we know of are his creation of Great Magic Barrier and his feud with Seath.[2] Havel must have encountered the paledrake during the conflict and faced such difficulty in dealing with the dragon's sorcery that he developed armor, weapons, and miracles specifically to resist it. Miracles are stories of the gods, so the tale for Great Magic Barrier is probably about these encounters. (A fact confirmed in *DS3*.) To have created such a lengthy tale as the basis for the miracle's great power, the two must have faced off numerous times. Regardless of whether or not the paledrake actually reciprocated the rivalry, Havel continues to be associated with magic-warding miracles and equipment – a testament to his trauma and loathing.

One can only imagine the knight's reaction to Seath defecting to Anor Londo, marrying into the royal family, and becoming a duke, all at the behest of the king whom he had fought alongside with pride.

Bearing all this in mind, Havel is likely a medial, not human as commonly assumed. He and Gwyn were comrades, and we find his equipment in the royal manor, suggesting that he continued to serve out his role as royal bodyguard. It is unimaginable for Gwyn, who is particularly afraid of the humans and their ties to the Dark, to permit a human to live so close to the royalty. Moreover, to have served in the hunts and lived in Anor Londo at its height requires Havel to have lived for centuries – unfeasible taking into account the standard human lifespan. In order to survive for so long, a human Havel would



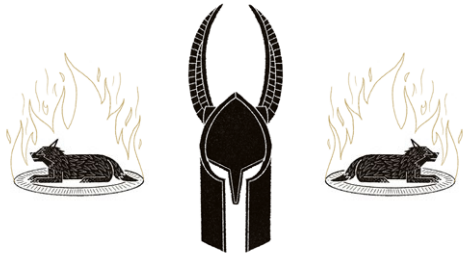
1 **"Legendary greatshield of 'Rock-like' Havel, naturally, carved from a mass of rock.**
It boasts tremendous weight and defense effect and additionally hides even the magic power of Havel. A holy relic of Havel himself that rivals the Great Dragon Tooth." - Havel's Greatshield

2 **"Miracle imparted to priests of 'Rock-like' Havel. Covers the whole body in a membrane of strong magic protection.**
Havel, who was an old comrade-in-arms of King Gwyn and an enemy of the white dragon Seath, hated magic and didn't neglect a means to answer it either." - Great Magic Barrier

need to have never been shackled by the gods, an even more unlikely act on Gwyn's part. Havel's very publicly-known existence would threaten the gods' plot if he were human. (*DS3* later makes a point of the pygmies' contributions to the dragon hunts being unrecorded.) Some humans lived and served in Anor Londo as worshippers, priests, and servants, but not Havel. In fact, he was the focus of worship.

Cult of the Rock

One of the underlying reasons that fans believe Havel to be human is because his miracles describe him as "Bishop Havel" in their English descriptions, implying a relation to the so-called "bishops" of the Way of White. However, the Japanese text never addresses him as such. As noted previously, the "bishops" are in fact priests, and the miracles' descriptions instead refer to a priest *of* Havel. In other words, Havel gained a following the same as other gods, with priests learning his magic as part of their devotion. And because these priests were the ones being taught Great Magic Barrier, the corpse carrying the miracle's text in Ash Lake is probably one of them. He is never expressly labeled a god, but neither are the witches of Izalith or Seath. The gods would never permit a human to be worshipped, but they have no reason to oppose a fellow medial who has faithfully served as a Silver Knight.



The god also has "warriors of Havel" (ハベルの戦士) who adhere to him and thus like wearing his equipment.[3] The enemy wearing the Havel set within the Undead Burg watchtower is often assumed to be Havel, but his Japanese name is simply "Warrior of Havel" like the others. He never once employs Great Magic Barrier, indicating that this "hero" is simply another one of Havel's followers, warriors who are said to never flinch, retreat, or lose;[4] someone worthy of being called a hero, yes, but not Havel himself. This rings especially true since the

3 "Ring originally belonging to 'Rock-like' Havel, known as an old comrade-in-arms of King Gwyn.
The warriors who adhere to him are said to like wearing it, and it has an effect that increases equipment weight." - Havel's Ring

4 "Armor of warriors of "Rock-like" Havel. Since it was, naturally, carved from a mass of rock, it boasts tremendous weight and defense power.
It is said that warriors of Havel who wore the rock armor never flinch, never retreat, and always crush those they call their enemy." -Havel's Armor



Warrior of Havel explicitly hollowed, a curse exclusive to humans. Moreover, the warriors wear Havel's armor despite the fact that we find an identical set in Anor Londo. In other words, we never encounter the genuine article in-game, only worshippers who either learned his miracles as priests or copied his physical equipment and fighting style as warriors. (*DS3* later introduces yet more such devotees.)

Although this cult of Havel, like the followings of other gods, most likely predates the Way of White, the two have close ties. Havel's miracle was simplified so that basically every one of the church's cleric warriors could have protection from magic during its conflict with Vinheim's Dragon School, implying that Havel or his priests willingly shared the miracle text with church hierarchy. And the

Havel warrior in the watchtower was apparently friends with the church blacksmith residing in the Oolacilian ruins.

Indeed, for Havel's warriors to be known only for unflinching victories, they have to be participating in battles, and the church has been involved in its fair share of conflicts over the last millennium. Otherwise, the only sign of the cult's beliefs is the dead priest in Ash Lake. The god took part in the dragon hunts, so it may be that the priest heard the rumors of Undead worshipping an archdragon and followed the lead – before succumbing to the local wildlife. If so, then hunting dragons might be an adherent of Havel's main calling.

Betrayal?

The location of the chests containing Havel's equipment in Anor Londo is suspect, hidden deep within a large and shadowy chamber down a flight of stairs. Moreover, these stairs are concealed behind an illusory wall in the fireplace of what otherwise appears to be a mundane logistics office filled with tables and scrolls. Evidently, the knight thought to store his battle items away from his fellows. But one chest is a mimic containing an occult club,[5] implying that Havel didn't want anyone to come across the weapon. If it was simply something that he wanted safely quarantined, Ariamis is literally down the road. Therefore, given that he makes no effort to similarly secure *his* equipment, it seems that Havel didn't want anyone to find *this* particular item in his possession.

Storing a weapon used by Dark heathens alongside his war attire indicates that he intended to harm gods. The knight was having traitorous thoughts and didn't want the royalty or their staff to realize his burgeoning sedition. Was his target a royal? If so, it can't be Seath – a scaleless dragon weak to serrated edges imbued with lightning or fire, not blunt clubs imbued with the Dark. The choice of a club itself is rather curious, too. It is a relatively weak and ineffective weapon to imbue with such power, and inefficient when facing a heavily armored opponent. It seems that Havel's target was an unarmored medial whom he sought to barbarically beat to death. This limits his victim to gods who he could approach while they were unarmored, presumably within that very manor.



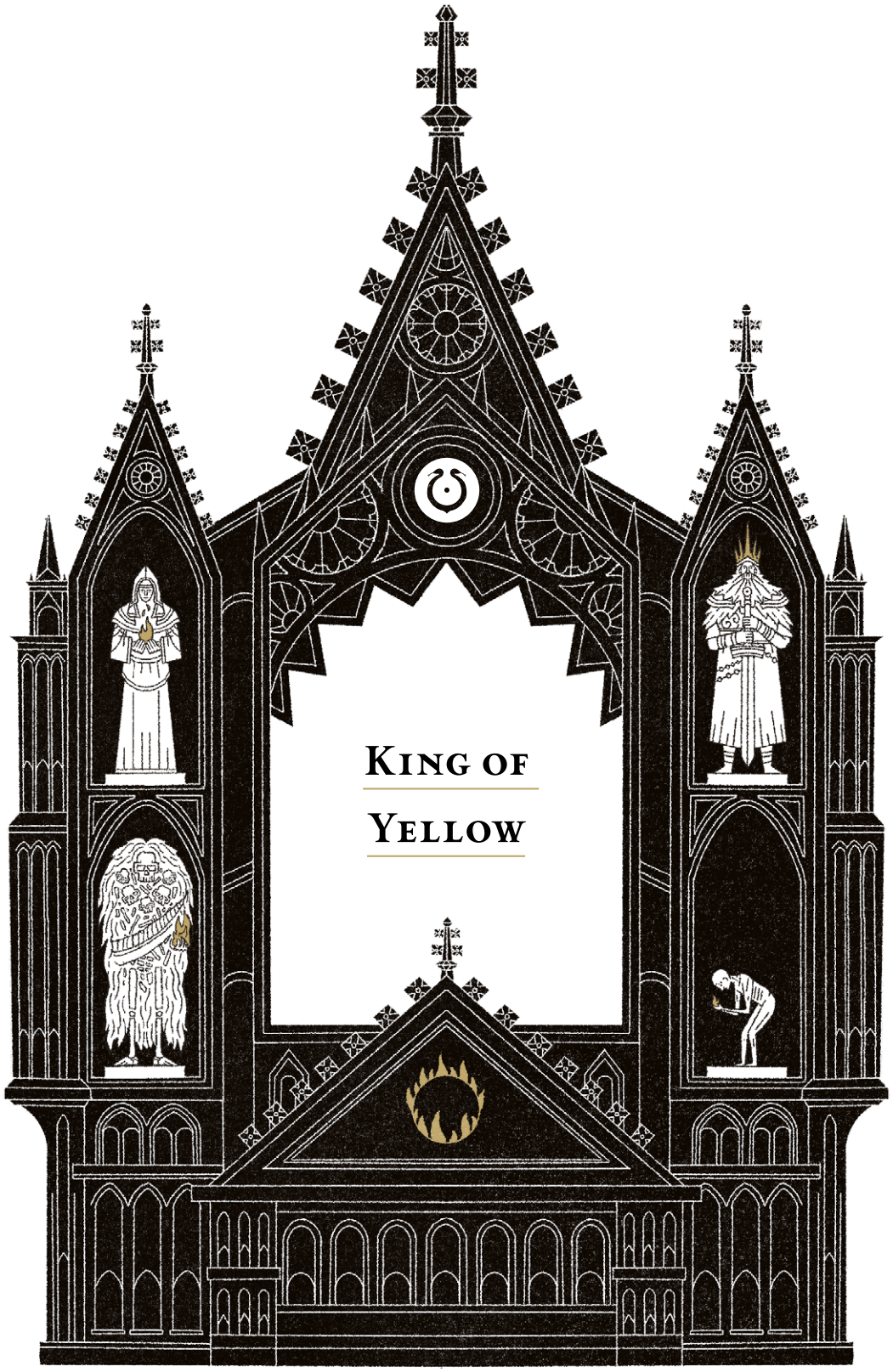
5 "Plain wooden club.
The simple strike weapon not relying on blades has few weak points and can break shield guard. Also, it requires good timing since missed swings leave huge gaps." - Club

This limits the potential victims to Gwyn, his Queen, his firstborn, Gwynevere, and Gwyndolin. If one of them was Havel's target, there must have been some incident to earn his antipathy. Given his battlefield experience, Havel must have been at least acquainted with Gwyn's dragonslaying son, perhaps even a longtime friend. And given the nature of those battles, he is unlikely to have approved of the firstborn's "foolish" decision to align with dragons. Such an act might even be taken as a betrayal of his father's legacy, leading the knight to plot against his lord. It may seem odd that a revered royal guard would employ heresy to oust heresy, but Havel's weighty and crude equipment and fighting style already break the orthodoxy of the swift and elegant Silver Knights. If any light-loving medial would resort to the Dark, it would be him.



But where did Havel acquire an occult club? Havel is neither human nor heathen, and the gods generally wouldn't allow such a "scary" tool within their borders – that is, with the exception of Velka. With her profound knowledge and occult blacksmiths in her employ, enchanting a mere piece of wood with Dark power would be more than feasible for the witch. She is the most likely source of Havel's curious club, though that doesn't necessarily mean she knew how he intended to use it. Still, considering the overwhelmingly negative reaction to the firstborn's foolishness, Havel may well have shared his plan with the goddess and earned her support for regicide – though her reasons likely differed from his.

The fact that Havel's items remain in these chests to this day suggests that his hiding place was never found and – put another way, he either succeeded, preemptively failed, or didn't follow through with the plot. Likewise, he and his followers are still in the gods' good graces, and not in open rebellion with the divine establishment. As far as we can infer, Havel left for the world of man with the other gods to assist the new Allfather, his traitorous feelings little more than a forgotten memory we can accidentally unearth. This plot was the most momentous act of Havel's entire life, and it never even transpired.



Izalith Rex

The "King Izalith" (キングイザリス) referenced in the *Design Works* interview is the internal name for the Bed of Chaos, and an obvious reference the Witch's role as a Lord. The boss was originally planned to attack while seated on its throne, hence its position before the fight, with an unused model indicating that it would only begin crawling around after being cut down at the legs – Miyazaki admits to the struggles with this more mobile iteration, resulting in the more static encounter in-game. Nonetheless, the city must have had an actual king, since Izalith was pregnant while creating the Flame of Chaos, and the most plausible candidate for this missing patriarch is Xanthous King Jeremiah, who wields chaos pyromancies, including the Chaos Fire Whip otherwise employed only by Guelana. If Jeremiah is an "exile", where else could this king be exiled from that would have granted him access to such magic?

Jeremiah's bizarre fashion choices conceal something he wishes to hide. Close inspection of the king's overlarge headpiece reveals soaked patches of blood, and concept art additionally portrays strange spikes jutting out through his clothes. Although removing the headpiece would reveal the face of an old man, this is true for every NPC with a "human" character model like ours in the main game, and as with the Hollows of Ricard and the Havel Warrior, it is unlikely that this face reflects Jeremiah's "true" appearance. Clearly, the headscarf covers not that face but a grotesque growth enveloping it, perhaps merged with Jeremiah's being. Indeed, the Xanthous Crown is the only part of his set with curse resistance, linking the growth with a power that afflicts the soul – like the parasitic nature of Chaos. In short, Jeremiah may have merged with a demon parasite akin to the one that can be planted upon our own heads. The "wall bug" (壁虫) found in Blighttown lends this further credence.

The bug's internal name is "Prince Izalith (facedown)" (プリンスイザリス（下向き）) while the man-eater shell is dubbed "Izalith Queen" (イザリスクイーン), so these names are likely a joke amongst the developers. Even so, the naming scheme alludes to a son of Izalith being consumed by a demon parasite. This allusion is reinforced by its notably high fire resistance, like that of the chaos associates in Blighttown, as well as the fact that it blocks access to Power Within, a pyromancy which emphasizes "excessive power" eating away at the life force of the body harboring it. And, in the giant sewage pipe containing the sloped drain that the bug has latched onto for food, we can acquire a whip, its notches effective against the exposed skin of chaos demons – it seems the weapon was something of a family tradition. Finally, the shape of Jeremiah's head resembles the wall bug, providing an overall "like father, like son" impression that may be the underlying intention of the codename.

Being Izalithian would also explain Jeremiah's exile. As a demon ruling over demons, who else could banish the "King of Yellow" (黄の王) except the Witch of Izalith? She is the Lord in possession of the Life Soul, revered as the demons' mother; the true king. Indeed, in *Demon's Souls*, the Old Monk also wears a yellow cloth which becomes an oversized headpiece, and was similarly exiled – in his case, by his Queen – before becoming a demon leading other demons and styling himself a king in obvious homage to the "King in Yellow" (黄衣の王) popularized by H.P. Lovecraft. Jeremiah must have fallen out of favor with his wife, but why? Considering that he is a *legendary* exile,[1] it must have been quite the event. And since his banishment must predate Izalith's war and subsequent isolation, perhaps it relates to cavorting with the enemy – namely Anor Londo.

Jeremiah's bright yellow clothes brings to mind Lautrec, whose armor symbolizes the goddess Fina. The Ring of Favor and Protection that the knight wears makes a point of Fina's "fateful beauty", which ties in nicely with her name's Celtic origin meaning "fair". We can infer that she is fickle with her affections because the ring breaks when removed, and boosts vitality, stamina, and carrying capacity while worn[2] – in other words, helps with bearing the burden of any long absence. (*DS3* makes this caprice explicit.) This fickle nature indicates that she has enthralled many while not keeping to a single lover, and her fateful allure implies often disastrous consequences for those enamored with her. Lautrec was but one man she has given her affections to, and the armor which she gifted now only affirms his devotion. We can obtain another one of Fina's rings from Snuggly, reinforcing the notion that she was free with her affections. And what does Snuggly desire in exchange? The Xanthous Crown.

Jeremiah probably had an affair with Fina, and was exiled for his infidelity. After siring his seventh daughter, the king didn't seem to have any amorous relations with his ambitious wife until she needed him for the experiment which resulted in her becoming a horrid abomination. Meanwhile, Fina was intoxicating and ready to please. She also presumably lived in Anor Londo, where she could have learned about Gwyn preparing arms and armor for an impending invasion of Izalith. In that case, the goddess might have sent word to her lover, who then relayed the information to his wife – he *does* share a name with the Biblical prophet who foresaw his own country's destruction by invaders. And when the source of his information was inevitably uncovered, the affair was revealed. This betrayal would have been a serious blow to the egotistical witch. Izanami chased her husband Izanagi out of the underworld after he saw her ugly form, and a heartbroken Izalith banished Jeremiah for spurning her without regard for his warning, dooming Izalith to a war it wasn't ready for and ensuring that her husband would be remembered in legend.

After his exile, the king was apparently captured by Anor Londo, since he invades us from within the Painted World of Ariamis. Exile or no, the xanthous king is still Izalithian royalty and thus would have been seen as a source of

1 **"Enigmatic garment of truly unknown origin that the King of Yellow Jeremiah, the legendary exile, wore.**
The crown uses fine quality cloth and is fluffy and soft, but the bright yellow is painful to the eyes and it is clearly too big." - Xanthous Crown

2 **"Ring of favor and divine protection of the goddess Fina, whose 'fateful beauty' is trumpeted.**
Has effect that increases the equipper's HP, stamina, and equipment weight, but cannot be removed once put on. Will break if forcibly removed." - Ring of Favor and Protection

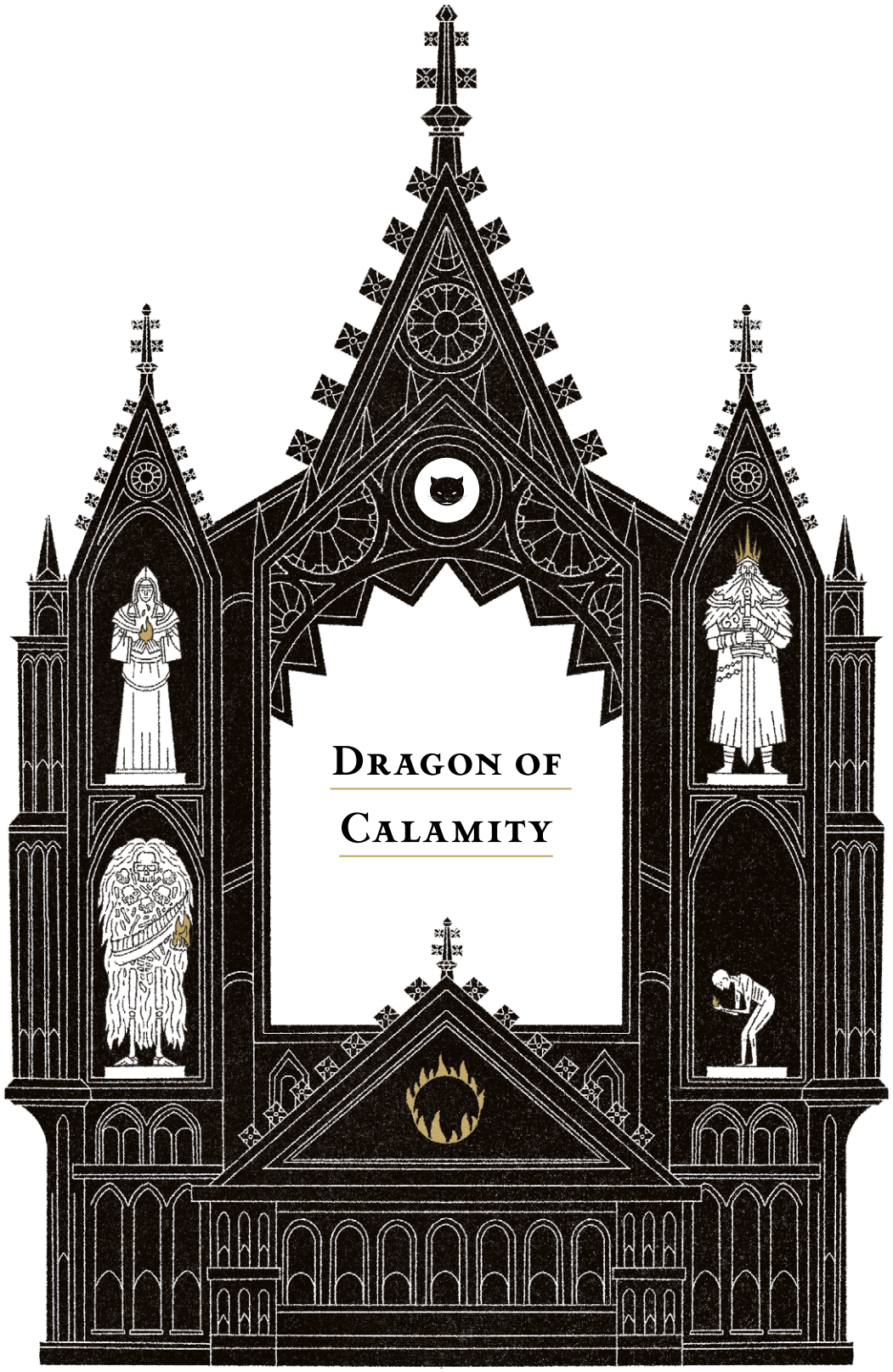
valuable intelligence, if not a bargaining chip. And so, the man was imprisoned and left to rot once the hostilities were settled. Following the breakout, the king has continued to remain in this world, collecting humanity as an invader. Like chaos weapons, the dark souls are likely used to help fuel the Chaos within him since he has been cut off from the actual Flame for such a long time.

Jeremiah certainly isn't human. Miyazaki pushes back on the notion of Quelana and Salaman being romantically involved in the Game no Shokutaku podcast on the basis that they are different species, questioning even the possibility of them reproducing. (That said, *DS3* later affirms that gods and humans *can* sire progeny together.) It is thus extremely unlikely that any medials in-game have children with human lineage, including Izalith. Combine this with Jeremiah's long lifespan, and he is probably just a small medial like his daughters.

Given that he is most likely a god, it is possible that he has gained a following in Ariamis. The blood-congested Hollows are pyromancers, and the fact that their disfigured state is exclusive to them indicates that pyromancy is the cause. Indeed, they release toxic gas when killed by anything except fire, though perhaps the flames simply cauterize the wound or otherwise dry up the noxious blood. Either way, the toxic material ultimately entered and clotted their face, which is why they unleash poison-based pyromancies from the mouth instead of the hand as with fire-based spells. We can also confirm that their condition is relatively recent due to the Hollow carrying Fire Surge, who stands in an isolated corner of the prison crying into his palms. He is dejected, and his wretched state is the only obvious indicator for what could be upsetting him. His despair suggests that the change was sudden, unexpected, and recent.

If pyromancy is responsible for their condition, then these outlanders probably experimented with a new poison-based spell. Considering how widespread the problem is, they likely all suffered the condition simultaneously, so none among them had time to adapt and avoid the horrible effects. Why would so many experiment with a spell all at once? Such behavior is more in line with collective religious rituals than research, and that may be the answer. Their heads are disfigured like that of Jeremiah, perhaps resulting from a botched attempt to imitate his demonhood.

If the blood-congested Hollows are Jeremiah's adherents, then their solidarity with Priscilla is all the more curious. If we defeat the Xanthous King's invading spirit, a corpse with his equipment spawns just before the area's exit behind Priscilla. This suggests that he is aligned with her, similar to Kirk and the Fair Lady or Leeroy and Nito. It is true that everyone in Ariamis are exiles in one form or another, but it may have been more personal for Jeremiah, who had already fallen for one beautiful, authoritative woman in his former spouse. Regardless of whether or not he is trying to court Priscilla, the yellow king – banished from a homeland now in ruins – has nowhere left to go.



Dragon of Calamity

Black Calamity

Kalameet is an archdragon born after the advent of fire, like Seath. Fittingly, he is the "black dragon" to Seath the "white dragon", and they share other parallels besides. Because of his unique black hide and use of black fire, some have suggested that Kalameet has been corrupted by the Abyss, pointing to a wildly different model of him in the game files. However, this unused model has been there since the game's launch. In the Game no Shokutaku podcast, Miyazaki confirms that no *Dark Souls* DLC was planned at first, and discusses a scrapped questline suspiciously similar to *Artorias of the Abyss*' premise. It was only after post-launch content was greenlit that FromSoftware revisited the scrapped assets for Kalameet, Chester, the chain-coiled prisoner, and the Sanctuary Guardian and finalized their stories – not coincidentally, they all end up as minor characters.

Gough is intimately familiar with the black dragon and yet never warns us of any changes in Kalameet's appearance or power. Artorias manifests explicit signs of his corruption – a swampy purple fluid leaks from his body, and he manifests a purple aura also seen with the Four Kings and their Abyssal powers. By contrast, Kalameet never shows these symptoms, and his black fire has a yellow aura matching his body. His tail weapon deals no occult damage and his eye ring has no obvious Dark connection. Kalameet either hasn't been afflicted or is at such an early stage of corruption that it is irrelevant.

Moreover, the black dragon is only ever seen outside the city proper, hovering around the Royal Wood and Valley of Drakes, suggesting that he has avoided the dangers of the Abyss plaguing Oolacile. His unique appearance and fire breath can instead be attributed to the effects of Disparity, just as with Seath.

One of these unique traits is Kalameet's orange third eye. Although the Obsidian Greatsword claims him to be one-eyed, he has two more smaller red eyes below it, either an oversight by the developers or indication that the two are vestigial similar to the basilisk's eyes of death. Whichever the reason, this one eye can use telekinesis and afflict us with some kind of curse, doubling the damage we take for a brief period. This power later manifests in the ring acquired upon the boss' death,[1] so it is core to the black dragon. Likewise, his tail weapon's mysterious power manifests as black fire instead of raw might like most other dragon weapons. And while these abilities might not result from abyssal corruption, they nonetheless demonstrate that Kalameet had an innate, loose connection to the Dark.

1 **"Ring aggregating the magic power of the orange eye of the black dragon Kalameet, who possesses the name of calamity. Doubles damage taken by the equipper.**
There is no useful effect and no meaning in equipping it. This should be quietly hidden away in secret." - Calamity Ring

Whereas Disparity granted Seath a strong affinity for moonlight and scaleless white skin, Kalameet was evidently gifted something darker in nature. The black fire imbued into his body resembles the Black Flame pyromancy, and both deal physical damage that heavily drains stamina on block. While Kalameet's flames also deal magic damage whereas the Abyss pyromancy instead deals fire damage, the implications behind their similarities remain; Kalameet wasn't afflicted by the Dark but already born with an affinity for something close to it, hence his body's natural black scales and the curse-like properties of his third eye.

Although he possesses the same relative weakness to lightning and bleeding as other archdragons, Kalameet is undoubtedly among the strongest of his brethren. Being the "last survivor", he was powerful enough



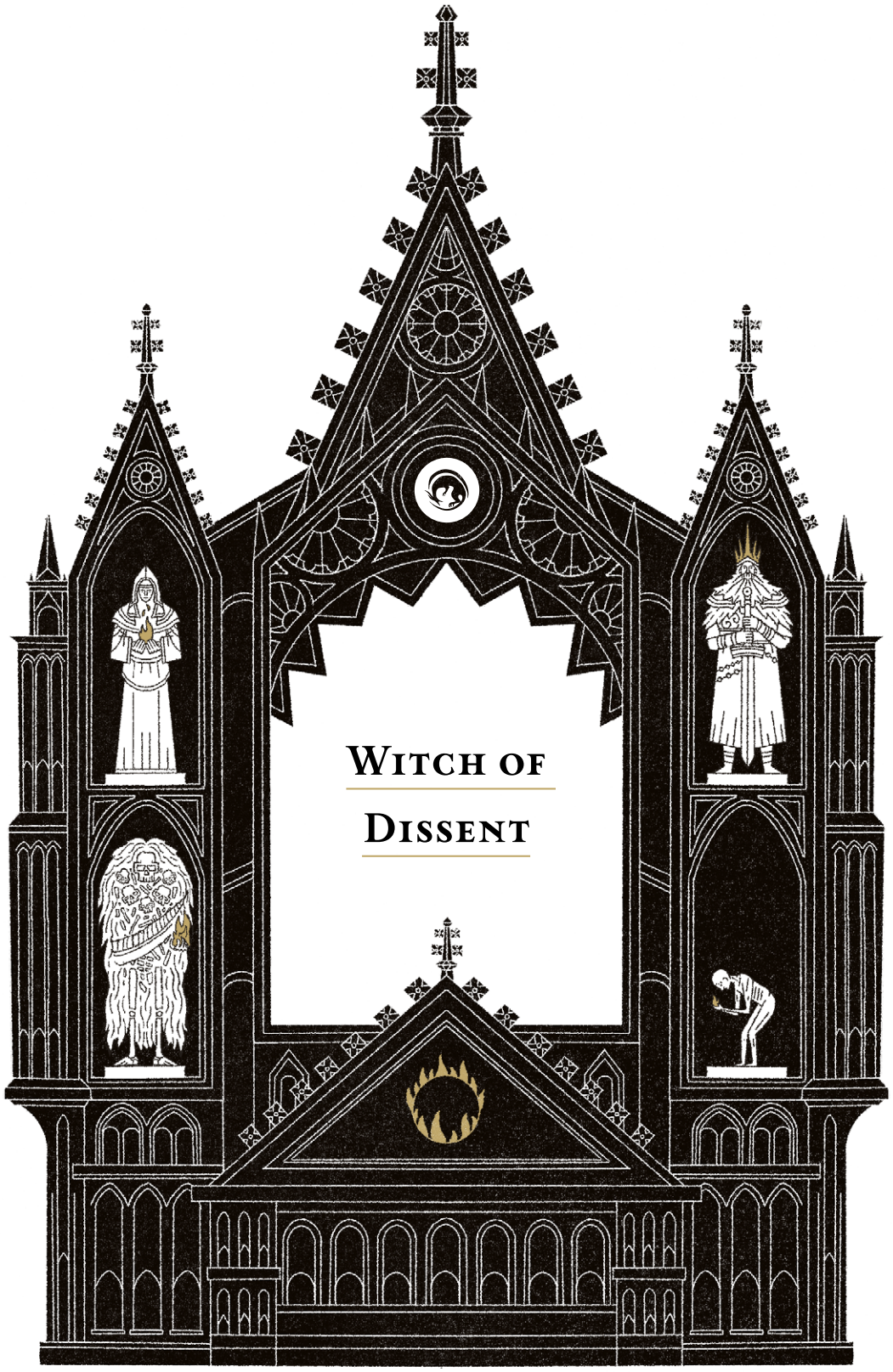
to endure both the Lords' onslaught and Seath's subsequent betrayal. His strength is so "frightening" that Gough doubts it is even possible for a meager human to slay him,[2] and Gwyn's regime simply "overlooked" Kalameet even at the height of Anor Londo's military strength – perhaps partly out of the medials' fear of the Dark. Regardless, this reputation allowed the black dragon to roam the Upper World freely, terrorizing as he pleased. The Calamity Ring claims that he possesses that name, and "calamity" (カラミティ) is indeed the obvious origin of "Kalameet" (カラミット). However, the Japanese text doubles to imply he has the *reputation* of a calamity, meaning that he causes disasters – or is drawn to them. This is certainly true in Oolacile, where the black dragon has no direct involvement in the local catastrophe, and may explain why Gough isn't in any way surprised that the archdragon is in the area.

Our first encounter with Kalameet mirrors the one with Hellkite, though the former actually notices us before flying off. From there, he simply harasses us from the air until we request Gough's aid. Despite Kalameet's infamy, the giant knight easily cripples the unaware dragon's wings, forcing him to engage us largely on the ground. The boss is no less able even with this handicap, which begs the question, why bother to remain and fight?

In the leadup to his boss room, there are a handful of dogs that attack us on sight. Unlike dogs in the base game, these "ominous dogs" (不吉犬) have a black and yellow-scaled hide like Kalameet. Moreover, the enemy's internal name references it as a "black dragon servant" (黒竜眷属), similar to how the internal names for the dogs serving the Capra Demon refer to a "machete servant" (ナタの眷属) and "machete demon" (ナタデーモン) respectively. This use of *kenzoku* indicates that the black dogs are Kalameet's servants, with a certain kindred relation similar to Dark and Gravelord servants.

Either these dogs are actually some dragonkin which Kalameet spawned, or they have undergone draconification. The dogs maintain the same stat ratios and weaknesses as standard animals, so they most likely are just strays transformed by Kalameet's power. The Path of the Dragon's transcenders take on a form mirroring the archdragon that they worship, so this likely holds true for whichever archdragon's power is responsible for the metamorphosis. Kalameet's appearance at the site of calamities may thus be to find new dragon servants. Maybe he plots to raise an army to take vengeance on the gods, but our choice to interfere can end that dream. (The existence of weapons derived from his body in *DS2* ultimately confirm his demise.)

2 **"If you are traveling around here, be wary of a black dragon. He's something beyond the hands of men, perhaps even you." - Gough**



Witch of Dissent

Heresy of a Witch

Our interactions with Beatrice are minimal. We can never meet the woman in the living flesh, only as a summoned spirit for two boss battles. The first is the moonlight butterfly loitering in the Oolacilian ruins; the second, the Four Kings in New Londo – if we called on her for the first. But why? Like Velka, Beatrice is described as a "rogue" witch in English when she is more precisely "heretical" in nature. Her equipment notes that she is one of the very few sorcerers who don't study their arts at Vinheim's Dragon School, and her sorcery staff differs from those used in Vinheim due to the "traces of old sorcery styles" seen upon it, indicating that it has been handed down through generations of practitioners.[1]



Basically, Beatrice was raised to be a witch as part of a family tradition, not formal schooling. And based on these implications, there exists an entire culture of witches outside of normal society, similar to the pyromancers. Beatrice wears a stereotypical witch's outfit – black with a pointed hat – and her background implies a coven sharing and developing their arts over the course of generations.

Witches are typically imagined as women who practice "black" magic associated with devil worship or "evil" pagan rituals. The closest equivalent in *Dark Souls* is Dark magic, which is perceived as heathen, heretical, and thus evil by mainstream human society. Indeed, Velka is a heretical witch who dabbles in Dark arts herself. Moreover, the staff which Beatrice wields is decorated with two long black feathers, a reminder of crows which are already strongly associated with Velka and thereby the Dark. This same staff has a hole near the

1 **"Staff of the heretical witch Beatrice. It differs from those of Vinheim.**
The staff itself is old, and you can also still see traces of old sorcery styles. Perhaps it has been handed down from generation to generation?"
- Beatrice's Catalyst

top of it indicating it to be hollow, and concept art of Beatrice shows that hole releasing a fiery black mist. This all but confirms the developers' intent for witches like Beatrice to employ a form of Dark magic.



Beatrice and her kin are just another example of Dark practitioners (an idea ultimately realized with witches in later games). These witches are likely viewed as heathens by mainstream society, leading them to largely live in isolated covens away from civilization. Consider where we first meet Beatrice: Oolacile's black forest. Oolacile was founded on dark sorcery, and these witches are sorcerers of the same variety. Witches are also typically depicted in woodlands thanks to their seclusion from urban society, so Beatrice's first appearance here may well indicate that these woods are her ancestral home. Consider too, the fact that Oolacilian sorcerers wield a kind of tree branch staff, much like Beatrice's catalyst. Her clan may therefore be remnants of Oolacilian culture, forced into isolation in the surrounding forests as a result of the country's transition from Dark to light.

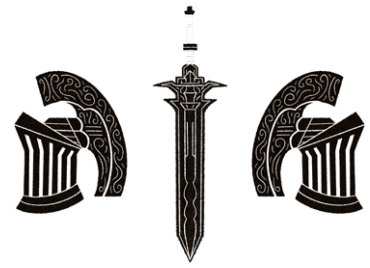
In that case, Beatrice should use dark sorcery, but she doesn't. These Dark arts wouldn't be introduced into the game until the DLC over a year later, so the witch instead employs Great Heavy Soul Arrow and Homing Soulmass. The latter is Logan's invention, but Beatrice ostensibly has no connection to Vinheim. She must have either discovered the spell independently from Logan, or derived it from a similar spell – such as the Pursuers art which Manus invented. Meanwhile, Great Heavy Soul Arrow evokes the heavy weight of the Dark, making the similarly weighty Dark Orb its closest equivalent. It is as if Beatrice applied these Dark magic concepts to soul sorcery after rejecting dark sorcery. In other words, she isn't "heretical" for being a witch, but for discarding the principles of one.

But why reject her heritage, to the point of challenging the Abyss in New Londo? She doesn't even return alive,[2] judging by the corpse that spawns with her equipment in the Valley of Drakes following the Four Kings' defeat. We can only summon her for that battle if we did the same for the moonlight butterfly boss fight, implying that the witch – presumably

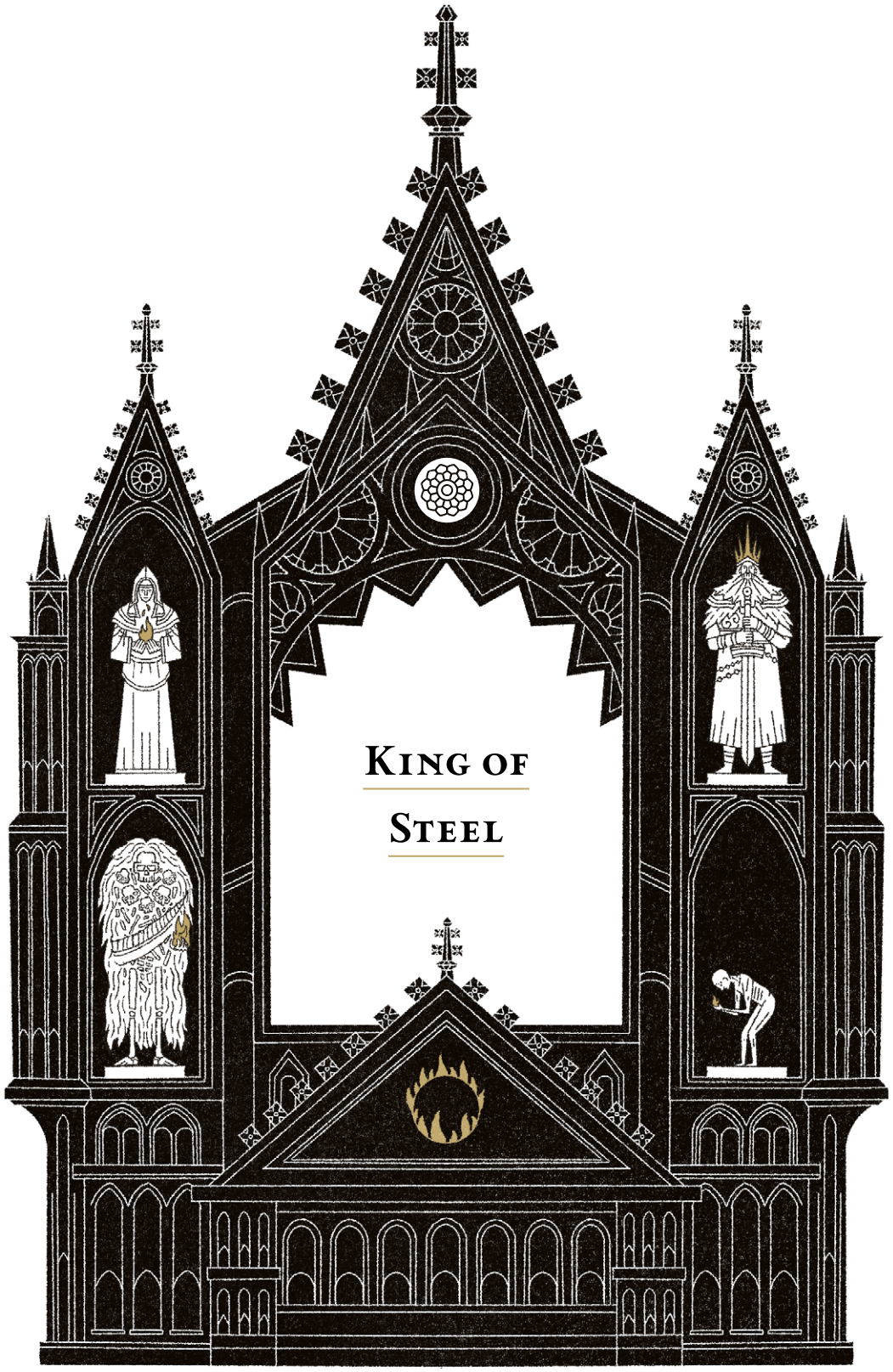
2 **"Hat of the heretical witch Beatrice.**
Among the sorcerers who use staves, very few don't study at the Dragon Academy. She who challenged the Abyss was one of them, but she was never met alive." - Witch Hat

mistrustful of outsiders – is testing the waters with her first summon sign. If we ignore it, she learns not to rely on others for help. Moreover, there exists a child version of Beatrice, complete with the same equipment along with a wand, in the game files. While an obvious callback to the design of *Berserk*'s child witch apprentice Schierke, it nonetheless suggests that the witch had inherited the old staff at an early age. Why pass the staff onto a child? Why look for help outside the coven? Why seek to squelch the Dark regardless? All of this can be explained by her clan's demise.

Although Beatrice is blond in-game, concept art depicts her with dark hair, which her child model renders as more purplish. We can sport dark purple hair ourselves, belonging to an extinct race of man according to its description. Was this ethnic group's destruction natural, or genocide? If the latter, then the "unusual" color brings to mind the dark heathens rooted out by the Way of White. In that case, Beatrice's coven might be among those wiped out.



A young woman who has lost her only friends and family to Dark hunters or the local wildlife might understandably come to despise the Dark arts themselves, for forcing them to live in such a dangerous environment. This mirrors the outlook of the *Demon's Souls* witch Yuria, who comes to reject the black arts – which she had embraced out of spite for her persecutors – after experiencing the full extent of their horrors firsthand. (*DS3* recycles this idea with Karla, another witch who loses her family and perceives her Dark arts as detestable.) Beatrice has diverged from witch orthodoxy because she doesn't believe the Dark to be worth perpetuating, instead seeking its purgation. She tests her mettle against one of Seath's creations that recently invaded her forest before going on to challenge the Abyss created by the Four Kings. And after their defeat, she dies while attempting to head back to the forest through the valley, probably to one of the prowling wyverns. If she had planned to continue her crusade against the Dark, we will never know.



King of Steel

King of Knights

Rendal, or Lendl (レンドル), is an obvious reference to King Allant – the main antagonist of *Demon's Souls,* who has the internal name "King Lendl" (レンドル王), rules a nation characterized by its knights, and is uniquely associated with wyverns. These details also hold true for Rendal, who is regarded as the "Knight King" and depicted with standard knight armor on the face of the silver coins – emphasizing him as a well-armored frontline warrior.

The Ring of Steel Protection only references "iron" in its Japanese description, but nonetheless provides the metal's "divine" protection. Rendal is famed for being seemingly impervious to physical attacks as a result, the Japanese text affirming that he was *unharmed* by a giant wyvern's talons rather than hacking it to pieces.[1] This notion is reflected in Balder's knights, who wear thick-plated iron armor, equip shields modified for stability[2] or parrying, and wield a long, hard rapier-like straight sword which helps maintain distance during swordfights.[3] The Knight King's old kingdom stressed physical defense, and he was no different. No wonder, given his successes. The man is a legend, with many anecdotes of his battles, including his triumph over a wyvern. Even with his equipment protecting him, the king must have been a worthy hero to become so popular even outside his own country.

Most of his battles were probably in service of expanding his kingdom – in *Demon's Souls*, the kingdom of Boletaria was a militaristic superpower at the height of King Allant's reign, and Balder may well have been in the same position under its Knight King. Such conquests would explain the ubiquity of his coinage and widespread tales of his exploits. But if so, then the kingdom's sheer size likely worked against it. Physical protection only goes so far when facing an epidemic of undeath within your kingdom, and a large population and territory makes the curse easy to spread and slow to respond to. Rendal and his forces were overwhelmed by the mass outbreak of Hollows, and lost both their lives and their kingdom. But, by some measure of irony, he and much of his army survived the calamity as Undead.

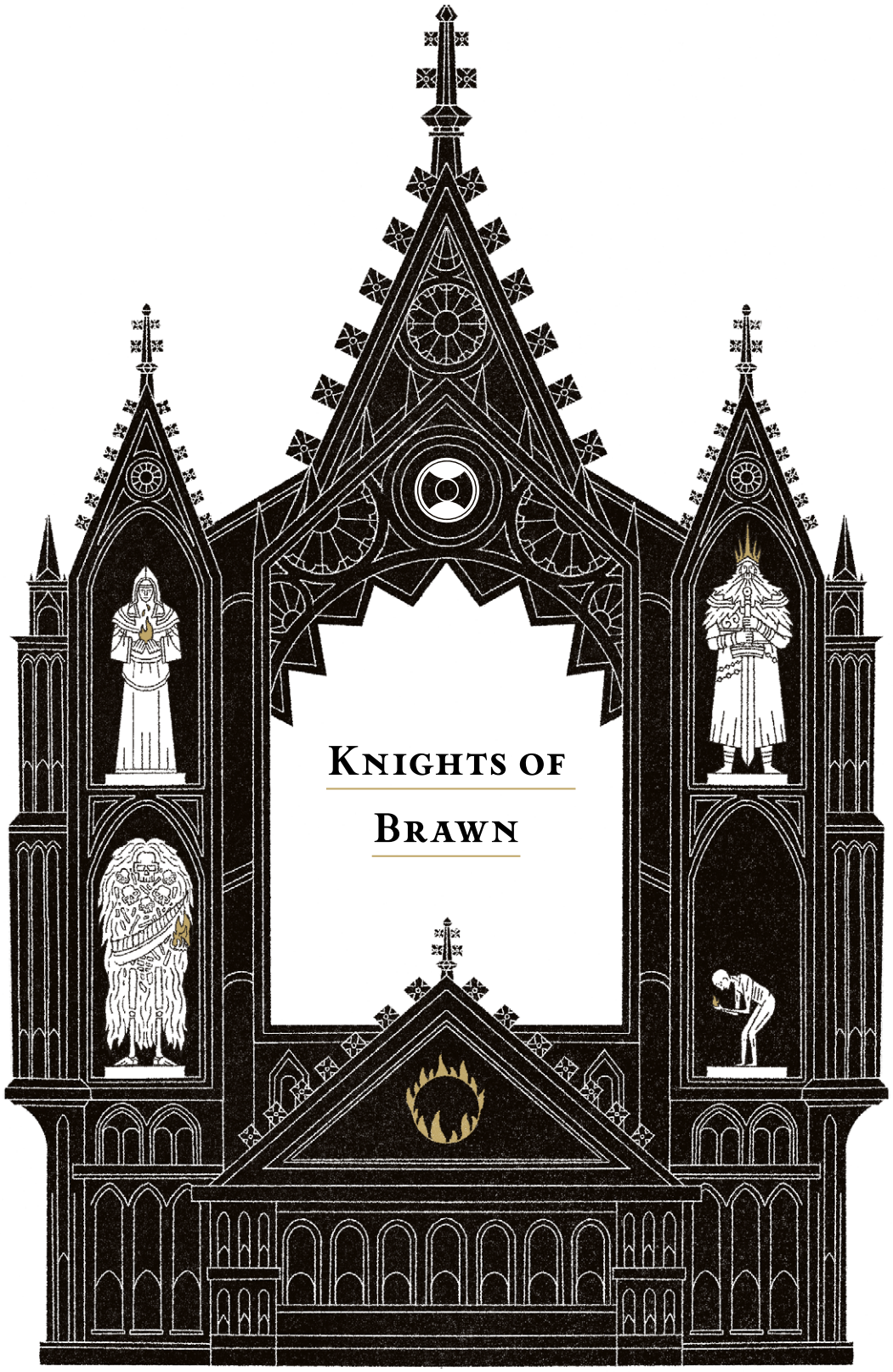
Left with nothing else, the Knight King and his remaining warriors embarked for Lordran to take on the Undead mission. And when they made it as far as Sen's Fortress, the famed hero finally suffered true defeat. His ring is stored in a chest in one of the castle chambers, guarded by the sorcerer snake-men. This suggests that he perished and had his ring collected as a souvenir or otherwise useful tool; it may even hint to his actual cause of death. Recall that the high-ranking snake-men shoot lightning and that the power of sunlight is especially useful for piercing hard material like metal. Rendal was equipped to deal with *physical* threats, not magic. We see Balder knights protect a chest containing the Flame Stoneplate Ring, implying it was among the supplies that they took with them. The Knight King was prepared to face fire, as was likely the case with the fire-breathing wyvern, but was helpless against the snake-men's magic.

And so, the Knight King died a pitiful death, his forces scattered to the winds, before one-by-one they all eventually hollowed.

1 **"Ring of the legendary Knight King Lendl. Grants the divine protection of iron and boosts the defense power to the physical attribute to the equipper.**
There are many anecdotes of Knight King Lendl. It is said that not even the talons of a giant wyvern could do him sufficient harm." - Ring of Steel Protection

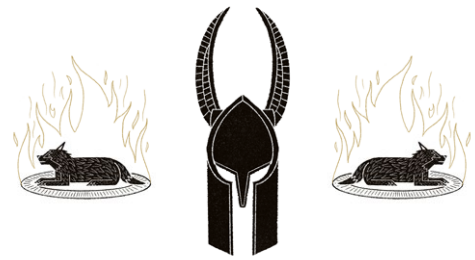
2 **"Shield that knights of the old kingdom of Balder used. Adjustments have been made to boost defensive ability.**
Balder is the home country of Knight King Lendl, but it produced many Undead at one point and was no sooner completely destroyed." - Balder Shield

3 **"Straight sword that knights of the old kingdom of Balder used. Its blade is hard as well as long, and excellent for thrusting attacks.**
Balder is the home country of Knight King Lendl, but it produced many Undead at one point and was no sooner completely destroyed." - Balder Side Sword



World's Strongest

English item descriptions range from claiming that Berenike, or "Bernice" (バーニス), is a group to just a single individual, but the Japanese text is consistent in framing them as an entire order of knights. Berenike itself refers to their country of origin since the enemy's official name is a "knight of Bernice" (バーニスの騎士) in the same vein as the "knight of Balder" (バルデルの騎士). The nation likely suffered a similar fate to Balder, as we are told that its knights spawned a significant number of Undead; *something* catastrophic occurred, and it is unlikely that they all simply fell in an ordinary battle. Berenike knights embody physical defense and brute force, wearing heavy full-body armor, and were once celebrated as being the strongest there ever was,[1] which fits their homeland's name meaning "bringer of victory" in Greek. This emphasis on physicality is best exemplified by their Hollows, which are portrayed as substantially larger and thicker than the standard mad Undead. They represent the peak of human brawn that few can hope to match.



Most notable among the order is Black Iron Tarkus, who wields similar black armor and the same large, heavy greatsword favored by the Berenike Knights.[2] Besides favoring difficult-to-wield weaponry, Tarkus also equipped a shield and armor forged from special black iron that made it both heavier and hardier[3] than the standard Berenike set, especially against fire[4] – identifying him as exceptional, even amongst the supposed strongest in the world of man. But even the strongest can fall, and the fact that so many legendary knights became Undead at once implies that he and his comrades suffered a major defeat. Thus, Tarkus and his fellows came to Lordran as Undead to fulfill the firelinking mission.

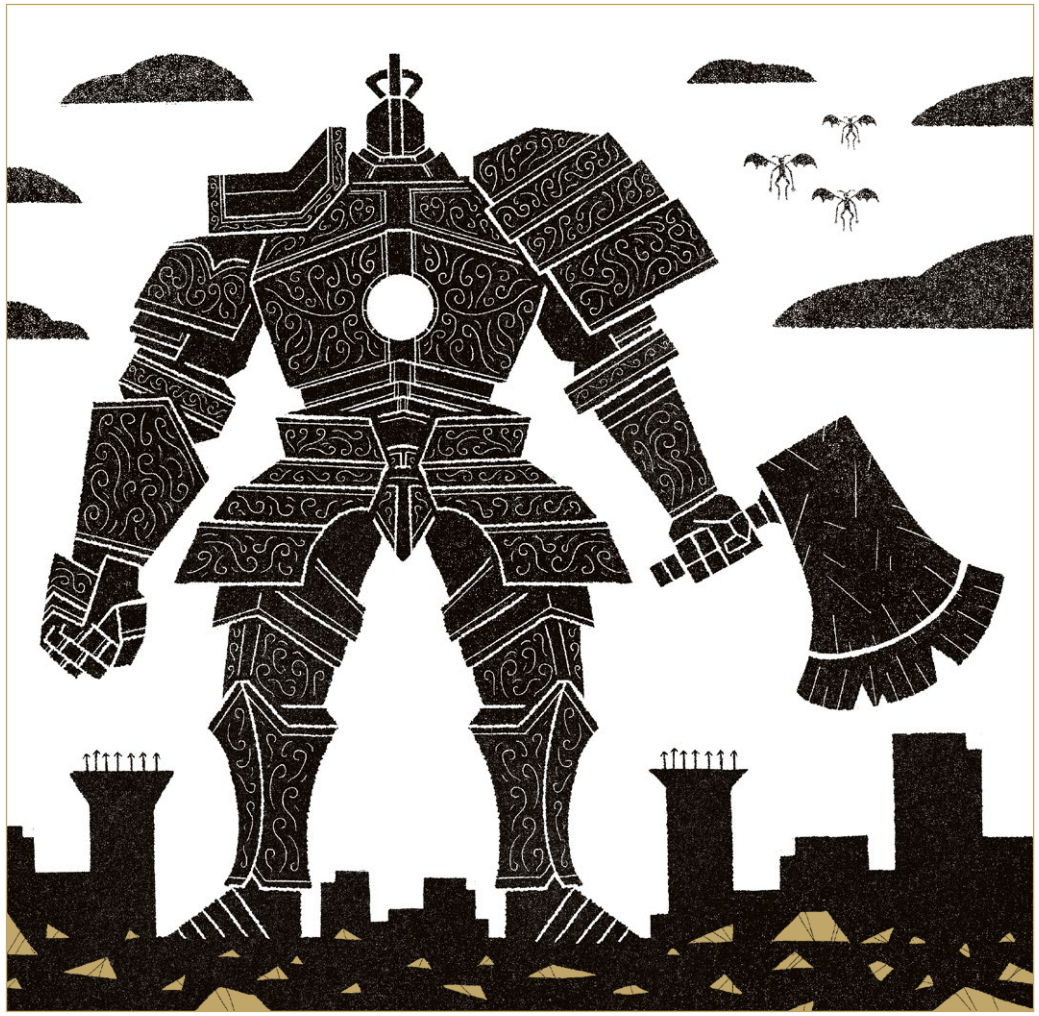
The whole of the order made it as far as Sen's Fortress before falling apart. This disastrous adventure is detailed by the Crestfallen Merchant, who wears Berenike armor and is called the "Heartbroken Bernice Knight" (心折れたバーニス騎士) in Japanese guides. While the localization

1 **"Helmet of Bernice Knights, who are known for their heavy equipment. Heavy steel armor.**
The Bernice Knights, who were once celebrated as the strongest, produced a lot of Undead and came to Lordran. But they all fell midway, became Hollows, and are threatening all Undead." - Steel Helm

2 **"Super-large straight sword, one of the ultra greatswords.**
It is a weapon that possesses tremendous weight and attack power, but there are few who can use this properly. Known as the favored sword of Tarkus of Black Iron in addition to the Bernice Knights, who are known for their heavy equipment." - Greatsword

3 **"Greatshield of Tarkus the knight, who is known for his great power.**
Made of a special black iron and heavier than a Bernice Knight's tower shield, but it is especially strong against attacks of the fire attribute. Also, its shield bash is highly effective." - Black Iron Greatshield

4 **"Helmet of Tarkus of Black Iron, who is known for his great power.**
Made of special black iron and exceedingly heavy. Other than Tarkus himself, it isn't easy to handle, but it has a high defense effect and is especially strong against attacks of the fire attribute." - Black Iron Helm



frames him as having challenged the fortress by himself, this knight actually "recklessly" challenged it along with "those mere shadows of their former selves" who were "overconfident" in their power.[5] Being the strongest chivalric order, the knights believed that they would have no issue overcoming the trials. Instead, they were overwhelmed and inevitably fractured in the confusion. This knight in particular holed himself up in a tower and fell into despair over the reality of their arrogance. He fared better than most, who we encounter as empty shells of what were proud knights.

The trial wasn't a total disaster, however. Tarkus and a few other knights made it as far as the Iron Golem – the knight even leaving a summon sign nearby to aid other would-be heroes in

5 "... Oh, what the? Who are you?... Ah, I see. An Undead. We recklessly challenged Sen's Old Castle too. I and those mere shadows of their former selves were the same. Overconfident in our power. But, you probably don't believe what I say. You want to do it? The useless struggle. Oh, I understand. That was the case. That was the case for me, too... That's why, I'll cooperate. Rejoice. I'll sell you what you need." - Crestfallen Merchant

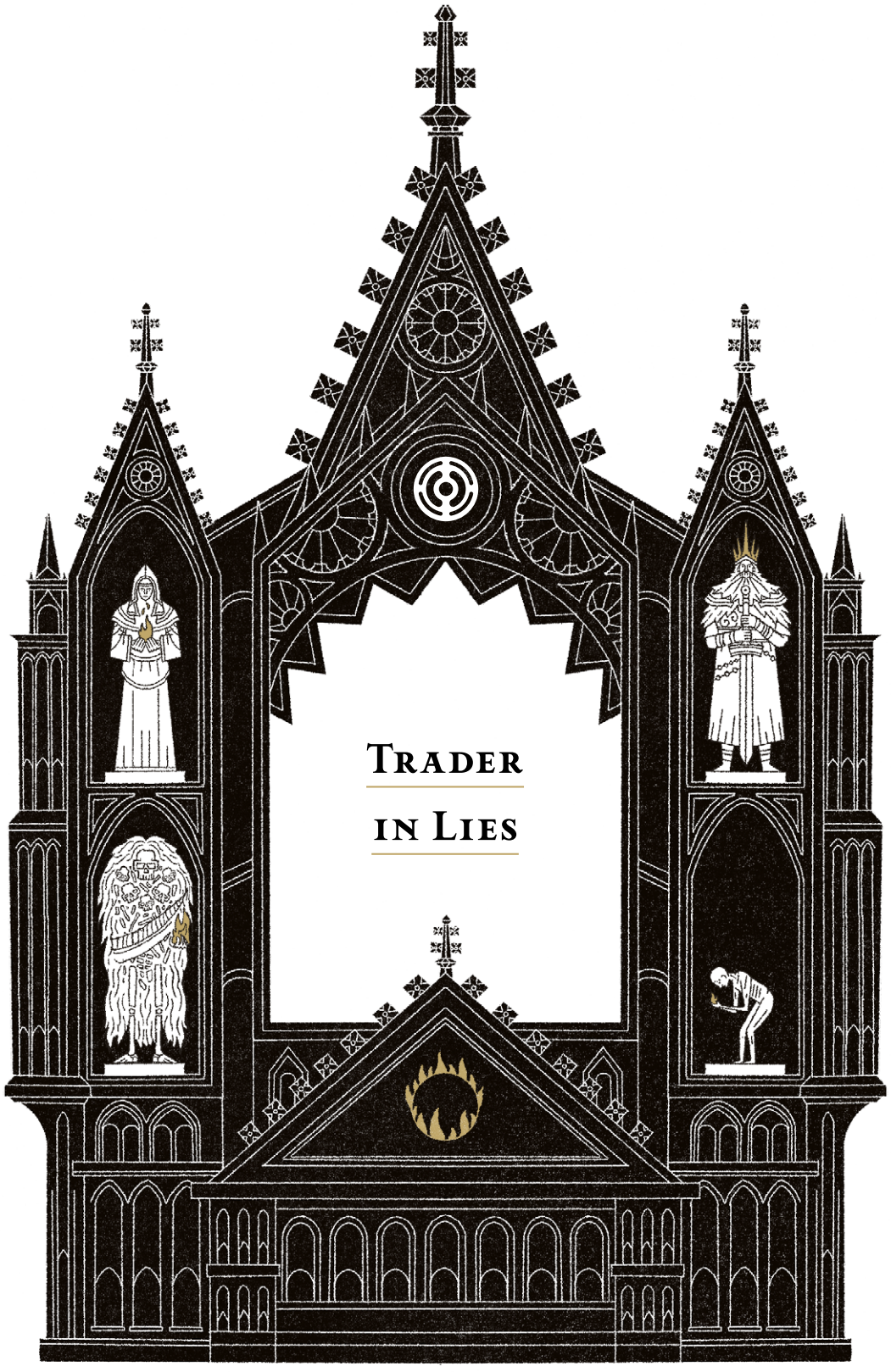
defeating the boss. His force ultimately conquered the obstacle and moved onto Anor Londo. However, given that the merchant names him alongside many others who tried and failed to reach the realm of the gods, he never returned to share news of his success.

The reason we can be sure that he and others succeeded against the golem is because we encounter Berenike knights in the royal capital, including Tarkus himself. When trying to break in, we find a balcony window for the Ariamis gallery already shattered from the outside. And after then scaling the chandelier supports and climbing down to the bottom floor, we can find a corpse in the back corner of the room – with Tarkus' armor.



Like us, Tarkus and other knights attempted to circumvent the blocked path to the city's cathedral via the gallery. But, between his heavy armor and the painting guardians, he more than likely lost his balance along the thin chandelier supports and fell to his demise. Once the painting guardians took care of what was left, they dragged his body to the corner of the room, like leftover trash to ignore. As for his companions, at least one managed to go on and eventually joined the Blades of the Darkmoon, later assisting a Balder knight in hunting us down should we dispel the illusion of Gwynevere. Another ended up in the painting world as a Hollow. Whether this was before or after the prison break, this knight ultimately aligned himself with the prisoners loyal to Priscilla, since his Hollow helps defend the direct path to the crossbreed's sanctum.

That leaves only the Crestfallen Merchant, who has since taken it upon himself to collect valuable weapons and armor from the bodies of fallen warriors in the fortress before they reawaken as Hollows, selling them to us ostensibly out of nostalgia for his own foolish confidence in overcoming the fortress. The coward hasn't escaped from the castle for up to a century, so collecting these items has only served to help preserve his sanity, by trading them for souls. It has worked for him so far, but this fate shows that even the strongest knights which mankind has to offer are no less vulnerable to the Undead curse.



Trust Not to Trust

Patches stands out as a recurring gag, the character having existed in one form or another in various FromSoftware titles – especially those developed by Miyazaki. One thing almost all iterations have in common, however, is a certain criminal element, usually of the murderous inclination, and this Patches is no different. He wears the thief set, indicative of his occupation, and is among the oldest of the Undead Burg's residents based on his dialogue; he shares personal knowledge of Petrus, Lautrec, Solaire, and Shiva with the air of a man who has seen them – or people like them – before. When we meet the thief, he is looting valuables from corpses to get by, and later gives up corpse robbing for a "serious" trade[1] – selling everything that he has looted. This inventory ranges from weapons and armors to eyes of the dead and humanity – he isn't hurting selling them to us "cheap" like he claims. The thief is quick to label others as bloodthirsty psychopaths, but he has killed and stolen his fair share.

That being said, Patches appears to mostly follow *some* standards. While he will attempt to kill us on two separate occasions, the thief is quick to apologize and play "the Devil made me" card[2] with gifts of appeasement if we aren't satisfied with just words. But, if on either occasion, we tell him that we are a clergyman, he will instead try to kill us himself once he sees that we have survived. He also stations himself at both the Catacombs and the Tomb of the Giants, where church clergy pass through on their Undead mission. Patches knows this, which is why he initially assumes that we *are* a cleric,[3] even if he doesn't really understand the nature of the mission.[4] In other words, though he will steal from anybody, he is clearly trying to target clergy, and has amassed quite a hefty collection of their weapons, armor, and items.

So why this grudge against the Way of White and its clerics? Because of their hypocrisy. Patches might be a lying, murdering thief, but he is an *honest* lying, murdering thief. He makes no claims of moral superiority, or any morals at all, and simply acts according to his best interest. It is perhaps for this reason that he goes by the name "Trusty Patches",[5] where *teppan* (鉄板) is literally "iron plate" but more colloquially means being reliable. You can always trust Patches to betray you. By contrast, high-ranking clerics like Petrus are commonly not what they seem – holier than thou moral guardians, condemning sin committed by the likes of Patches and his ilk while secretly indulging in it themselves.

And yet those hypocritical excuses of holy men would have him and his lot arrested and executed for their crimes while *they* go on pretending to be exemplars of the moral virtues. Respectfully addressing a cleric as an "unparalleled clergyman" in Japanese dialogue is sarcastic mockery,[6] aimed against all those who hunt Undead as unholy monsters while making exceptions for their own. Patches knows that we are all morally compromised, doing everything to get by; it is the churchmen who are deluded.

1 "Oh, you again, huh? Well met. But, perfect timing. I stopped with the looting business. Started a serious trade. Naturally, I'm full of treasures. If it is you, I'll give them cheap. Alright then, just take a look. It is nothing, I'm not trying to drop you in a hole." - Patches

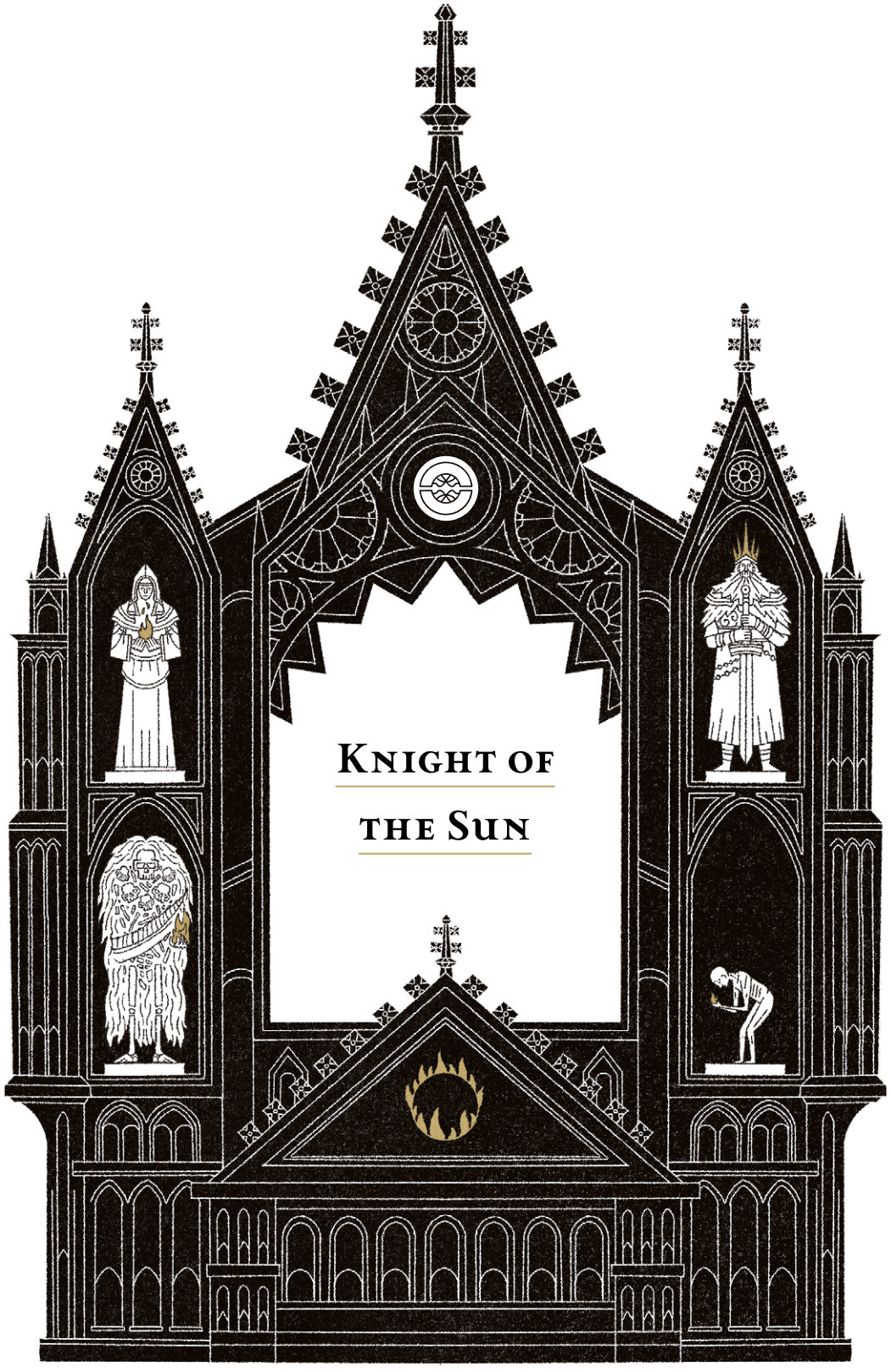
2 "...Oh, you... Well, calm down and listen to my story. I did bad. It wasn't my intention. But, I'd call it succumbing to temptation, a little...? Say, you get it, right? We're good, right? I apologize. The relationship of you and me is both driven-out Undead, isn't it!" - Patches

3 "To have business in an Undead graveyard like this, you a clergyman or something?" - Patches

4 "I see, as I thought. I don't understand you all's mission or whatever, but best of luck." - Patches

5 "Welcome to the Trusty Patches shop. As always, we won't let you lose out!" - Patches

6 "I saw it first, but... you're the unparalleled clergyman, m'lord." - Patches



Seeker of Sunlight

Despite the popularity of the theory that Solaire, or "Solar" (ソラール), is Gwyn's eldest son, the evidence for it is lacking. Firstly, the firstborn is undoubtedly a medial, like other gods, while Solaire is a human from Astora, evident by the fact that he is also Undead. Secondly, Solaire's face beneath his helmet doesn't match the visage portrayed in the Sunlight Altar. Even if we assume that the statue only vaguely resembles the war god (which is later discouraged by the Nameless King's nigh-identical portrayal in *DS3*), he undeniably wields a cross spear when a longsword is Solaire's weapon of choice. Thirdly, Solaire states that he is an adherent of the sun god, not the "Lord of Sunlight" as the English mistakenly references. He worships King Gwyn's firstborn, hence the knight's rather open affiliation with the covenant the eldest son presides over. The idea that Solaire is worshipping himself both undercuts the war god's motivations and betrays the thematic role that the character actually plays in the game's narrative.

According to Miyazaki in the Game no Shokutaku podcast, Solaire is intended to portray faith in its purest form. The knight has sincere faith despite ordinary origins, and it rewards him with immense power in return for his efforts. Exemplifying this, he has memorized the extremely long tale of Great Heal and painted the firstborn's symbol on his surcoat[1] and shield; even his talisman is just another cloth painted with this symbol tied into a knot.[2] He wears ordinary, if surprisingly well-kept, armor, lacking any divine blessing of protection.[3] The man even performs the same peculiar pose to "praise the sun" as miracle casters wearing the Ring of *Sincere* Prayer in *Demon's Souls*. In all respects, Solaire is humble and cheery, which goes against any notion that he is secretly a god indulging in narcissistic self-worship.

After turning Undead, the man journeyed to Lordran to find his own "sun" as he puts it, and he is apparently used to the bewildered and suspicious looks this sentiment garners from his peers.[4] So, what is this "sun" to Solaire, and why does he want to be it? Is it connected to why he has become such an ardent follower of the firstborn?

Prior to his undeath, Solaire may have been a knight of Astora. Trained knights like him are typically noble, the stereotype in his homeland. Indeed, Solaire has the blond hair and blue eyes typical of the country's born aristocrats. We cannot confirm where he acquired his armor since it has been severely weathered and heavily customized, but the fact that he *could* obtain it before his demise implies wealth. He often admires the sun as a wonderful father and wishes to look similarly brilliant,[5] hinting that he either was a failure as a father or has one who he is expected to live up to. His earnest faith is an expression of his fervent hope of

1 **"Armor of Solaire of Astora, Knight of the Sun. The sun holy symbol was painted big, but by himself, and has no particularly holy power.**
It seems that Solaire's excellence as a warrior is solely due to his training, so his armor is quite ordinary." - Armor of the Sun

2 **"Catalyst to perform miracles of the gods. The one of Solaire of Astora, Knight of the Sun, has had a holy symbol painted by himself. It is proof itself of his earnest faith." - Sunlight Talisman**

3 **"Helmet of Solaire of Astora, Knight of the Sun. There is no particularly special power but it is good quality armor.**
It seems that Solaire's excellence as a warrior is solely due to his training, so his armor is quite ordinary." - Iron Helm

4 **"I became Undead and came to this land where Great King Gwyn was born to search for my own sun!... You think I'm an oddball, huh? Well, so I am. Don't worry. Everyone makes the same face. Uwah ha ha hahah!" - Solaire**

5 **"Oh, you. I'll look at the sun from here for a little while. The sun is great. It is like a wonderful father. I too want to be so big and hot in appearance someday..." - Solaire**



achieving this end. This is made apparent by his view of undeath. Unlike most characters who treat their undeath as mere happenstance, Solaire thinks that there is some intention behind his revival,[6] that he turned Undead for a reason. He believes his poor fate to be providence, that his cheating death wasn't random but deliberate, a second chance at becoming what he failed to be.

However, the knight doesn't have a concrete idea on how to achieve this. He shows no particular interest in the Undead mission, instead wandering Lordran in a blind search, from the church to the Depths to Anor Londo to Izalith. He thinks meeting us is fate and so asks to cooperate, but he is otherwise on his own.[7] And as this journey continues, he slowly begins to lose heart as he fails to find his sun.[8] He has always been aware of how he is perceived, but he has now become self-conscious of it.[9] That he begins to worry over his failure

6 "Naturally, there's no reason to give up. I had even become Undead for this." - Solaire

7 "Well, I think I have a strange connection with you. In this land of only Hollows, and I meet you… So, how about it? Shouldn't you and I help each other's journeys?" - Solaire

demonstrates the specific motive behind his utter devotion. The quest seemed easy at first, because he was convinced that his faith would lead to the desired outcome. But as time drags on[10] and uncertainty takes root in his mind, he comes to question his faith, the very idea that an unseen will wants him to succeed and has been subtly paving his path.[11] Based on Patches' dialogue, the knight has been around the Undead Burg for quite a while, more than enough time for him to ruminate over the merits of his oft-mocked beliefs.

Eventually, a Sunlight Maggot can latch onto Solaire's head while he is exploring Izalith. We know this "sun bug" (太陽虫) is a parasite because we can trade its cadaver with Snuggly for the Old Witch's Ring, used to communicate with the parasite-birthing Fair Lady. The parasite takes over his mind, driving him into the mad belief that he has *become* his desired sun.

If the parasite is killed beforehand, Solaire will instead reach the Kiln of the First Flame and can help us defeat Gwyn, perhaps before linking the fire in his own timespace. This second scenario is the "happiest ending" for Solaire according to Miyazaki, dying to become the sun he so desired. In other words, the "sun" is a metaphor for purpose, something which the knight could take pride in achieving. With our help, Solaire's faith is well rewarded, becoming a sacrifice to fuel the fire worshipped by man.

Still, none of this explains what made him become a follower of the firstborn. Like the similarities between Logan and Seath, Solaire may be purposefully written to provide more insight into the character of Gwyn's son. Both come from upper class backgrounds with fathers they respect and who have great expectations for them. Perhaps Solaire felt a connection to the war god and was naturally attracted to his faith despite it being heresy. If true, then can we discern more about the firstborn from Solaire's own journey? Perhaps he too approached the challenges ahead of him with an earnest devotion, confident that he could live up to the legacy and hopes of the Great Lord Gwyn. And as the centuries of his rule went on, he too had a crisis of faith. The fall of New Londo, the spread of pyromancers, the destruction of Oolacile; what we find are a mounting list of failures during a period where fire is going out and a worthy successor to Gwyn to kindle the Flame could not be found.

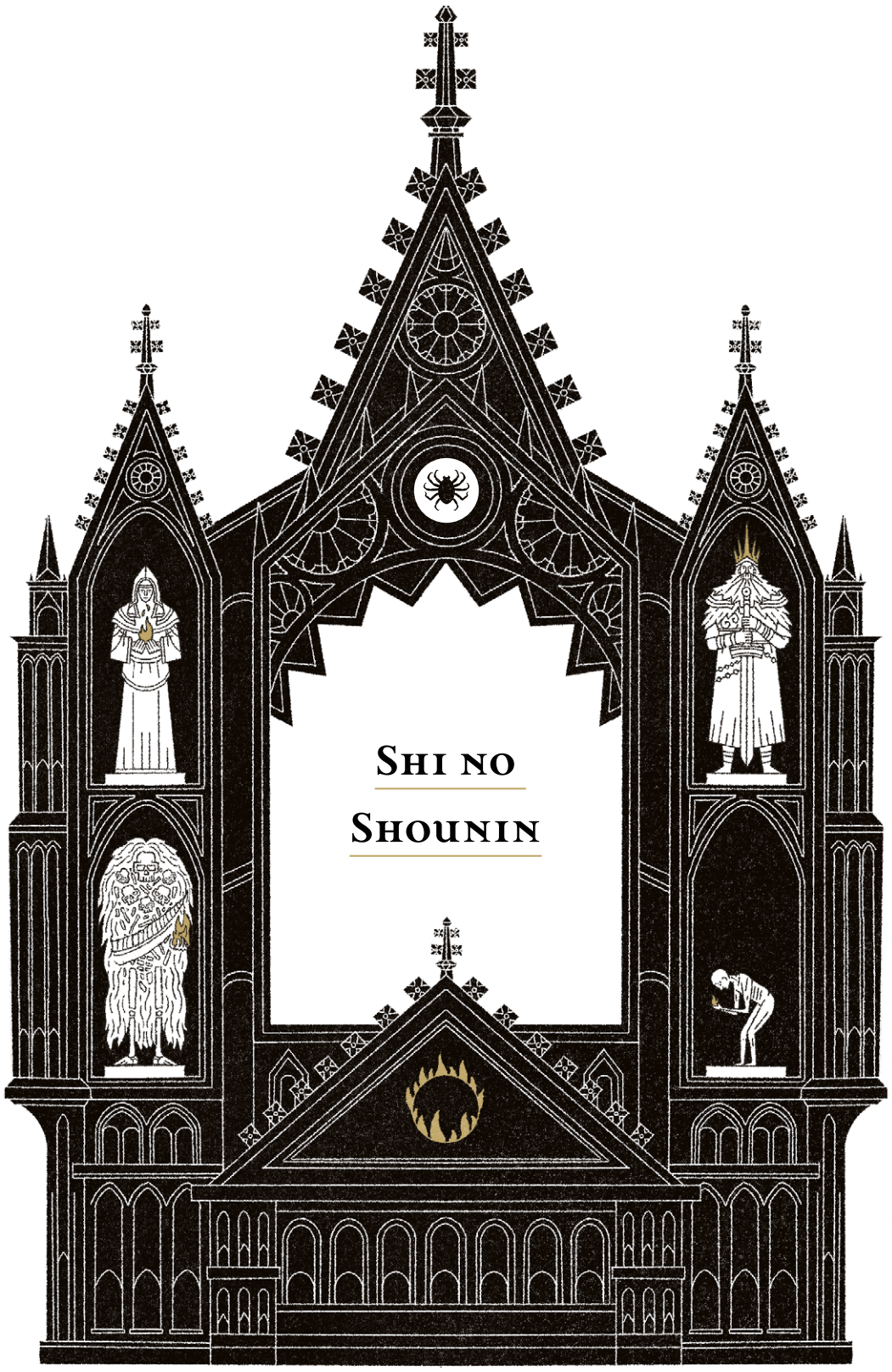
Did the firstborn question his confidence too? Did he also fear being an embarrassment to his father and country, a "laughing stock" that couldn't realize the obvious truth in front of him? The default ending for Solaire is to be taken by a false sun, desperate to cling to something for proof that his journey wasn't in vain, and die a fool. Unlike Solaire, who has us to help him avoid this fate and go on to find the worthy path, there may have been no such ally for the eldest child of the sun, who abandoned his throne to embark on his own journey. Regardless of their fates, it is this implicit kinship in their nature that explains why the only follower of the firstborn who we can actually meet reveres him so.

8 "O-Oh, you, huh? Forgive me, I was thinking a little… Nothing can be done, it hasn't gone well… I haven't found my sun in either Anor Londo or the Diseased Village in its shadow. Next, the ruined capital of Izalith or the graveyard of the King of Death… will my sun be in places like that…?" - Solaire

9 "But, I see that sun in the sky and have a thought. Aren't I actually an unbelievable fool… whose eyes can't see so that everyone laughs and jeers…? If so, it is awfully funny… Uwah ha ha!" - Solaire

10 "… Why… Why? Why, even after searching to this extent… I can't find it…" - Solaire

11 "Was it all a lie…? I, constantly, constantly, just for that… Oh, my sun… What should I do… what to do…… The sun, the way to my sun…" - Solaire



Shi no Shounin

A Warrior Cut Short

Shiva's internal name is *nobushi* (野武士), wandering samurai without a lord to serve, and this proves accurate. Originating from the far East, he wears a samurai's armor designed to withstand slashes from katana and other eastern weapons while also wielding a massive katana that functions similar to a cleaving nata. He is no different from the many Undead knights that we encounter, vagabonds without lord or country, and we can thus be certain that he too has been driven out of his homeland due to the curse, though he doesn't travel all the way to Lordran alone.

Hiding behind him with the help of a Ring of Fog is a ninja, an Eastern spy relying on his agility and resistance to poisons based on his armor. He won't respond to our attempts at conversation, and Shiva only compares him to a shadow,[1] so they may have only met in their Undead exile. Since this "shadow spy" (影の間者) turns hostile when Shiva is attacked, the shinobi seems to have sworn loyalty to the samurai, protecting his new lord as a hidden bodyguard – Undead long for a purpose, after all.

As for Shiva's purpose, he is an avid weapons collector[2] and may have even come to Lordran for that very reason. He not only has eastern blades in his possession, but also weapons from Carim, Izalith, and Oolacile. In fact, he claims to have too much and offers to sell us some of his collection. This fascination with weaponry was probably his motive for joining Alvina's Forest Hunters. When approaching him for a sale, the man notes how he was recently summoned and has a "treasure trove" to sell.[3] Clearly, he treats the duty of protecting Artorias' grave from visitors as another opportunity to collect rare arms, though this hasn't stopped Shiva and his "shadow" from finding success at their task. By the time we arrive, Shiva has become the leader of the brigade, or "combat unit"[4] (実戦部隊), reporting directly to Alvina. Although the cat's English dialogue phrases this as a "clan" leader, he is just the head of a hunting party,[5] with the implication that there are other units. Indeed, someone has to be digging graves and setting up headstones for the combat unit's victims.

Alvina vouches for Shiva and he proves to guide us ably, even offering part of his collection specifically because we are comrades. And yet, no one trusts his friendly demeanor. Both Alvina and Patches are convinced that he is hiding a more dangerous side.[6] The former warns us about him and his shadow despite doubting that he would betray the covenant so soon, while the latter insults him for living in a rural forest. This all seems rather unfair treatment towards a foreigner who never

1 "Ah, noticed him, did you? As I'd expect of you. He's another comrade of the party. Came from the East, same as me. Like a shadow, but able… Look forward to it. Ha ha ha ha!" - Shiva

2 "Oh, it is you. Strange meeting a party member outside the forest… But, it is just perfect. Why don't you buy my arms? I like arms, but… it is a little overwhelming all the same. And you're a comrade. I'll sell them cheap." - Shiva

3 "Oh, you. We meet again. I was summoned a little while ago. I have a treasure trove. If you don't mind, why don't you take a look?" - Shiva

4 "I've heard the story. I'm Shiva of the East. Leader of the combat unit." - Shiva

5 "By the way… Have you met Shiva? He seems to originate from the far East, but he's extremely able. He's now the leader of the party… Still. I'll be, he's hiding something. I know it. For now, he probably won't betray the party, but… Don't get careless now. Around Shiva, or that man who follows him like a shadow…" - Alvina

6 "By the way, do you know Shiva the yokel? Warning you since you're my bro, but that guy… is dangerous. I know it. There's… no mistaking it." - Patches

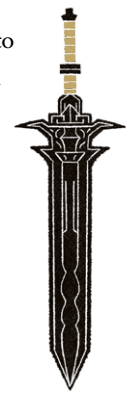
actually reveals any malicious intentions. However, that is because Shiva's darker side was cut from the final game.

After we first meet him in the forest, Shiva later heads to Blighttown for what we can presume is a search for more demon weapons to add to his collection. But originally, the samurai was motivated by a search for one sword in particular.

According to cut dialogue, Shiva would have been hunting for the Chaos Blade, which had long ago been in the possession of an Undead artisan called Makoto.[7] This is an obvious callback to *Demon's Souls*, where the easterner Satsuki was also searching for a blade which just so happened to be named Makoto. Although the English dialogue has Shiva describe the sword's blade as a "swirling vortex", the Japanese script merely says that it has an "erratic dragon pattern" (斑竜紋), "erratic" (斑) being the same term used for the Chaos Blade's wavy design in its description. In other words, Shiva compares these fiery streaks impressed on the katana blade to dragons, most likely in reference to the long, serpentine bodies of dragons in eastern cultures. Regardless, the samurai heard that the blade was located in Lordran, and his search brought him to Blighttown.

The Chaos Blade is an eastern weapon in an otherwise western setting, but this fits with the atypical nature of Chaos and demons. Moreover, we forge the blade with the soul of Quelaag, using its Chaos "nature" shared with all the Daughters of Chaos and Izalith, so it would be theoretically possible to derive this blade from any of their souls. (This fact is ultimately confirmed in later games.) Simply put, Makoto need only have possessed the soul of another chaos witch to have created this same katana, and we know of one such witch killed during the war with Anor Londo, whose soul isn't collected from her corpse. This Izalithian origin may have tied into the origin of pyromancy in the East itself, hence why the shadow spy possesses such a flame.

Regardless, showing Shiva that we have the sword would have prompted him to beg that we trade it for a reward. Like Satsuki in *Demon's Souls*, the samurai would then try to kill us either because we refuse to hand it over, citing a samurai's honor in taking it from our murdered corpse,[8] or because he can't truly know its worth without killing someone with it first.[9] The latter scenario in particular would have revealed a deranged side to Shiva. He is so enthralled by the blade's magnificent design that he starts personifying it, and begs us to let him cut us before devolving into a fit of mad laughter during the battle – as opposed to simply taunting us that seeing his swordsmanship is a gift for our trip to the underworld,[10] as he would have done had we refused to give him the sword.



7 "Have you heard the story of the Chaos Blade? The famed sword with an erratic dragon pattern, which was produced by the Undead artisan of old, Makoto. I heard it is in this land and have been searching for it all this time, but… I can't find it… Honestly, if I got my hands on it…… whatever the means…" - Shiva

8 "… I see. Well then… it can't be helped. Because that katana is currently yours…… As a samurai, I shall… honorably kill you and snatch it away…" - Shiva

9 "Ah, so this is the Chaos Blade…? It has a magnificent dragon design… Magnificent… Beyond magnificent… Yes… Yes… This… this guy here's worth… may never be known without killing a human…" - Shiva

10 "It is retribution for making light of me… You should see the strong sword of Shiva as a present for the underworld." - Shiva

One might think him possessed after such a change in character, and he indeed states that his magnificent katana seems almost bewitched after killing us[11] – again referencing the explicitly bewitched blade that seems to possess Satsuki in *Demon's Souls*; it *was* crafted from the soul of a demonic witch, after all.

After killing us, Shiva would have then left behind a black eye orb according to the item's Japanese description.[12] This makes very little sense both from the samurai's perspective and from our established understanding of the orbs found in-game, so this may be a relic of an earlier design. Regardless, by finding and invading Shiva, we would recover the Chaos Blade, though the orb's eye would struggle to find him. This would have hinted to Shiva and his ninja companion escaping to the painting world, where they would make another attempt on our life – because we got "greedy" in wanting our sword back.

Why he flees to Ariamis and how he ends up there is a mystery in itself, but the same can be said for several elements of this unfinished plot thread. Shiva would even have pointed out the "irony" in him turning out to be the traitor among Alvina's hunters,[13] considering his warning when we first join up.[14]

Yet if we had killed Shiva in Blighttown or Ariamis after his assault, he would have claimed that we "won't be able to run far enough" in English. Some have suggested that this hints to Shiva being on the run from crimes committed in his homeland, and that he is merely predicting the inevitability of our fate for killing him. The truth is nowhere near as dramatic. His wording in the Japanese script – that we will "be driven out for this"[15] – is the same line spouted when killed as a still loyal member of Alvina's covenant. He is acknowledging that Alvina will brand us a traitor, throw us out of the covenant, and have her Forest Hunters relentlessly target us for killing a comrade.

Whether because of the absurdity of this scenario or a change in plans for black eye orbs, this plot thread was ultimately cut. That leaves only two hints to a possibly darker nature. One, both Shiva and his bodyguard hide dispossessed humanity on their person. And two, Shiva's iron round shield implies that he killed the famous weapon's male owner in order to add it to his collection, at least in its Japanese description.[16] Neither point means much when they are already part of a band of murderous thieves, and Shiva doesn't care to kill over any of our unique and renowned weapons. If not for Patches and Alvina, one might even think he simply embodies honor among thieves. A shame too, as the scrapped storyline epitomizes the idea that not everyone is how they first seem.

11 "It is a magnificent katana… It's like it is bewitched… Ehee, eheehee, eheee hee hee hee hee!" - Shiva

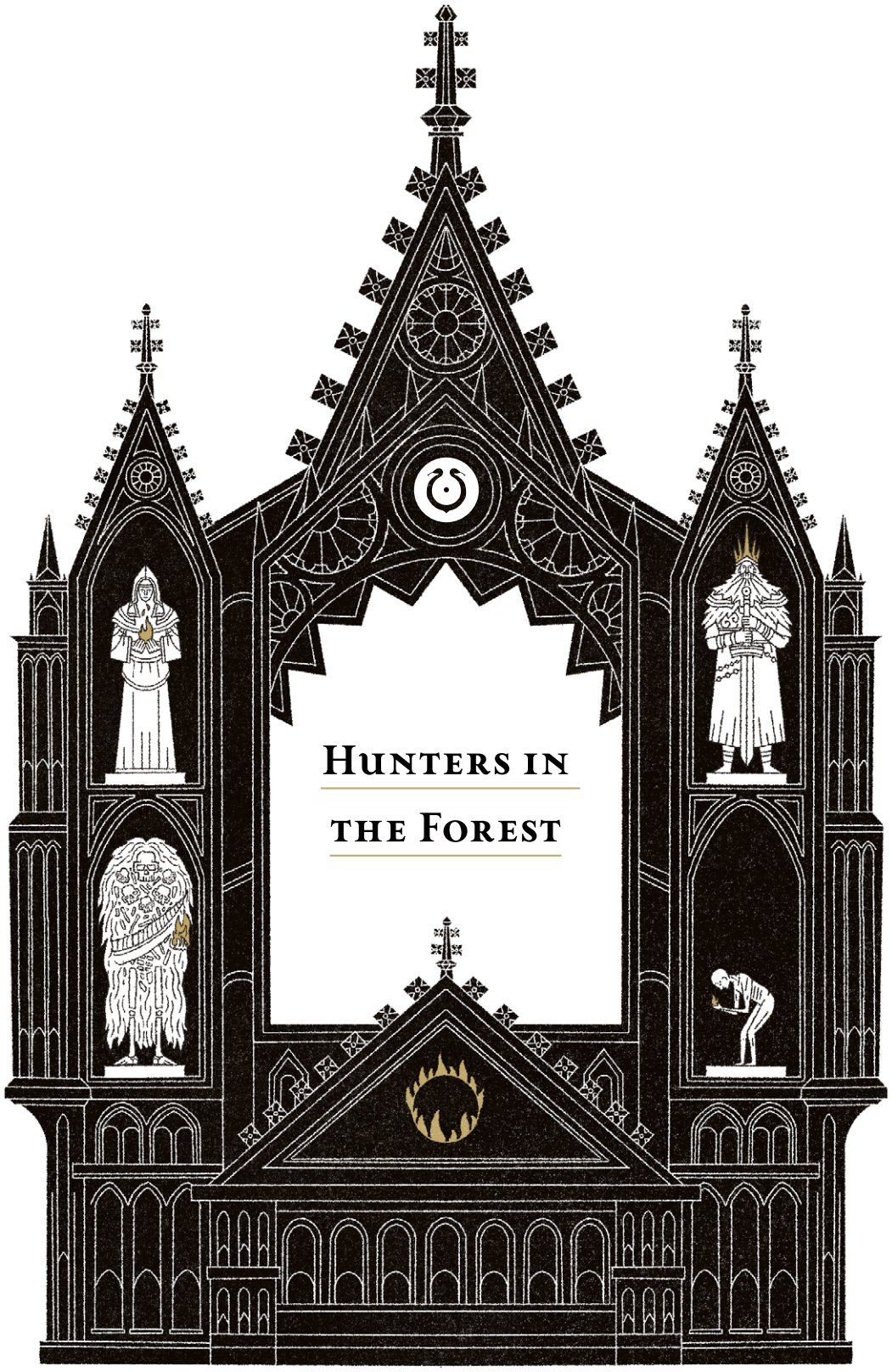
12 "Mysterious orb left by the traitor Shiva.
If you can invade the world of Shiva and defeat him, you will recover the stolen Chaos Blade.
But, the black eye has lost focus and squirms anxiously. Where could the traitor be…?" - Black Eye Orb

13 "But, to think I'm the traitor… Well, isn't that funny…?" - Shiva

14 "Still… the white cat probably said it already, but betrayal for any reason shan't be forgiven… That's it." - Shiva

15 "R-Ridiculous… But, you'll be driven out for this…" - Shiva

16 "Thick iron round shield possessed by Shiva of the East. Heaviest among the normal shields and repels enemy attacks.
It is part of Shiva's collection and looks to be a famous shield, but there is no man able to speak of it anymore." - Iron Round Shield



Hunters in the Forest

Heroes and Nobodies

The rules of the Forest Hunter brigade are simple: the party hunts as it pleases, and whoever gets the kill can loot the rewards.[1] Members are bound not to betray one another, of course, but beyond that the hunt is a friendly free-for-all. Perhaps this explains how the brigade has attracted such a colorful cast of characters, including a samurai, a ninja, a cleric, two knights, a mountain bandit, a thief, a sorcery scholar, and even an actual hunter. Yet only three of them are named, including Shiva.

The other two named hunters are the "Knight Americus" (騎士アメリクス) and the "Bow Hero Pharis" (弓の英雄ファリス). Of the two, Americus is as unnoteworthy as her name implies. She wields the knight shield, which indicates that she comes from old nobility, but if so, it didn't help with her prospects, since her armor is the plain, simple kind worn by low-ranking knights. Her claymore is equally generic, leaving very little to infer about her life before undeath. Perhaps it was her failure to earn renown that led the warrior to join up with this band of thieves. Or perhaps she simply cares for sport over status. The Americas were named for famed merchant explorer Amerigo Vespucci, who derives his name from the Latin Americus. Perhaps curiosity and wanderlust eventually led our knight to the Forest covenant.

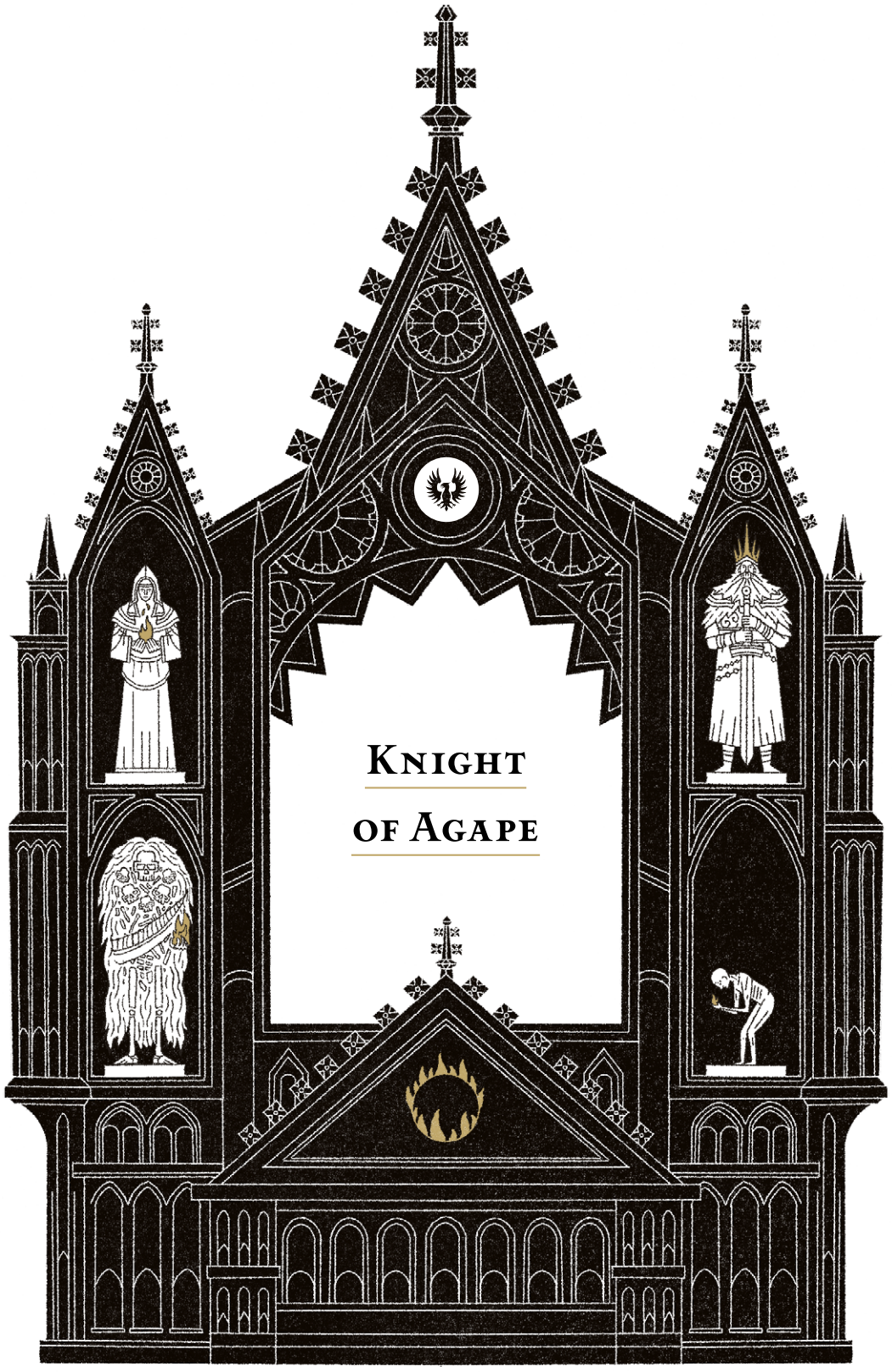
Then there is the legendary hero Pharis, whose skill with a bow has her named alongside Hawkeye Gough.[2] Some fans are perplexed by the archer's iconic black bow and hat being worn by a huntress, when Pharis is a "he" in item descriptions, but the Japanese text never clarifies the hunter's gender. Pharis is a woman, and her name plus expertise in archery are an obvious reference to the mythical Paris of Troy. Likewise, her legendary broad-brimmed hat that children "yearn" for is likely a reference to popular depictions of Robin Hood, another legendary archer. She likely earned this reputation serving her country's king since her feather arrows are used by the hunters of kings,[3] not by "the Lord's Hunters" as the localization misleads, yet it is unlikely she made her name hunting deer or boars. If she did regularly face more dangerous game, however, it seems to have ultimately killed her. Unperturbed, she has since set her sights on humans now that she has turned Undead and been banished from the royal court, joining up with Shiva's combat unit.

Both women wear Rings of Fog, like the generic thief, suggesting that all three are senior members of the covenant. That being the case, Pharis and Americus potentially rose the ranks together and became more than just comrades. The knight is positioned immediately adjacent to the hunter in Darkroot Garden, lending further credence to the notion. This would explain why Americus is even named when she lacks even a single unique item referencing her; she is notable by association with the hunter-hero. At the same time, it is possible that the adjacent knight isn't even Americus – her exact same model is reused for another knight positioned nearby. But whether Pharis and Americus are friends, rivals or simple comrades in arms, they are ultimately united in the covenant, and ready to hunt all who dare trespass.

1 **"First off, greetings... Let me impart the party's way of doing things. I say that, but there isn't much for rules. Battle and hunt as you like. To the fastest victors go the spoils; that's our style." - Shiva**

2 **"Hat that was the favorite of the bow hero Pharis. Characterized by a long brim.**
Pharis is an expert with the bow and named alongside 'Hawkeye' Gough of the Four Knights of King Gwyn despite being human. Many children yearn for that hat, which is legendary." - Pharis's Hat

3 **"Red-feathered arrow that hunters for kings use. Their flight range is long and makes them suitable for sniping from long range." - Feather Arrow**



Knight of Agape

For Loving Embrace

Lautrec introduces himself as a knight of Carim, but his Japanese name as a summon is prefaced as the "knight of the goddess" (女神の騎士). Whatever loyalties he once had to his homeland, they have long since been surpassed by his devotion to one god. The fact that Fina has even been to Carim, where Velka holds sway, and has met one of its knights, reinforces the publicly amicable relationship between the divine witch and her fellow gods. It also indicates that Fina travels around the world in search of devotees – or lovers.

The golden armor Lautrec wears isn't the standard equipment of Carim knights, but a symbol of Fina's love, implying that he not only earned the goddess' favor, but her gifts as well, including the ring of her favor and "divine protection". His cuirass features arms wrapped around his chest in a loving embrace to represent Fina's affection,[1] and Lautrec is also called the "Embraced" to signify her favor; it should be noted that to "embrace" (抱く) is also a euphemism for sex.

But regardless of how she "embraced" him, he has clearly lost her favor. His set's description claims that he believed in Fina's affection "in his loneliness,"[2] meaning that she has been recently absent from his life. Fina is fickle with her affections, and has had many lovers. Perhaps she got bored of him and moved onto the next suitor, or perhaps him dying and becoming an unholy monster in danger of hollowing was something of a turn off for a *holy* being. Suffice to say, Lautrec wears her armor in the vain certainty that she continues to embrace him with love. (*DS3* describes him as "pitiable" for this dedication.) But Undead often look to find something to latch onto to escape the nihilistic horror of their existence, and for Lautrec, this was a fickle goddess' affection.

Based on Patches' dialogue, Lautrec has made a name for himself within the proverbial underworld for being a total psychopath.[3] He thinks nothing of human life and gladly kills anyone if it will benefit him. As Lautrec himself explains, the people around us who possess humanity are "dullards", and thus less worthy of having it than himself – or us, if we happen to get in his good graces.[4] It is for that reason that Patches warns us about accumulating humanity with the ruthless knight around. Considering the thief himself has a hefty supply of the black souls that he has looted from his own victims, he probably speaks from experience. Lautrec in turn expresses a deep loathing for Patches and would gladly make him suffer if they ever cross paths again,[5] implying that they have a less than amicable history.

1 "Armor of the 'Embraced' knight Lautrec representing the goddess Fina's favor. The goddess' arms are coiled around on its surface as if embracing the equipper." - Embraced Armor of Favor

2 "Helmet of the 'Embraced' knight Lautrec representing the goddess Fina's favor. In his loneliness, he believed in the goddess' favor, and forsook everything for it." - Helm of Favor

3 "By the way, do you know the Embraced Lautrec? Warning you since you're my bro, but that guy… is crazy. Doesn't think anything about the life of a person or any of that. If you have accumulated humanity, take care…" - Patches

4 "Hm, you… Your face is… Hmph, looks like your humanity's already at its limit. But, I know. Dullards around here uselessly possess humanity, don't they? You or dullards; I don't think there's any comparing who's more worthy of it…" - Lautrec

5 "Do you know Trusty Patches? Honestly, he's a lowly bastard who gets me angry. If he wanders around here this time, I'll give him a painful experience…" - Lautrec

By contrast, Lautrec is relatively friendly with us if we help him escape his parish cell, and feels obliged to repay the debt. That said, his idea of repayment is later gifting us a sunlight medal, which is not only useless to we who can't yet join the Warriors of Sunlight – which he knows – but also ominous apropos to how he came to acquire such an item given that he isn't a worshipper of the firstborn.

Simply put, Lautrec has discarded whatever knight's honor he once had in life to survive by any means necessary in undeath, losing all empathy for others in the process. The only person he cares about is Fina, who he continues to invoke the divine protection of when attacked whilst still imprisoned at the Undead Parish in cut Japanese dialogue.[6] He is in denial, unable to accept that she too has abandoned him like everyone else who rightly fears Undead, clinging to the notion that he will one day reunite with his beloved. It comes as no surprise, then, that Fina lies at the center of his actions during the course of the game.



When he is captured at the Burg church, Lautrec humbly begs us to free him so that he may fulfill his "mission",[7] and cut dialogue clarifies that this refers to his "mission as a knight"[8] – not for the firelinking. And after resting at Firelink Shrine – only volunteering his summon sign for a few boss battles in the event we helped him break out – he departs for a "small objective up above" he refuses to elaborate on. At this juncture, Lautrec finds no more use for Anstacia, and so kills her to have her humanity-laden soul for himself.[9] If we want to restore the Fire Keeper, or at least her bonfire, we must track the knight down on his endeavor, which leads to Anor Londo, and invade him in the cathedral.

Lautrec is the "Knight of the Goddess". His "mission" can only relate to her. Why else would he journey to the realm of the gods, other than in the hopeless belief he might find his beloved Fina somewhere there?

Accompanying him on this journey are two others, one a servant of Seath, and one a sealer of New Londo, as can be assumed from his attire and reliance on the same sorceries as Ingward. Two of New Londo's three sealers abandoned their duty to watch over the seal, hence this

6 "Does this mean you won't let me escape…? In that case, it can't be helped. I'll beat you at your own game! Don't make light of Lautrec the Embraced! By the goddess' divine protection!" - Lautrec

7 "I am free. I can fulfill the mission now…" - Lautrec

8 "I beg you. I haven't fulfilled my mission as a knight as things stand. You understand… how much regret that brings, don't you?" - Lautrec

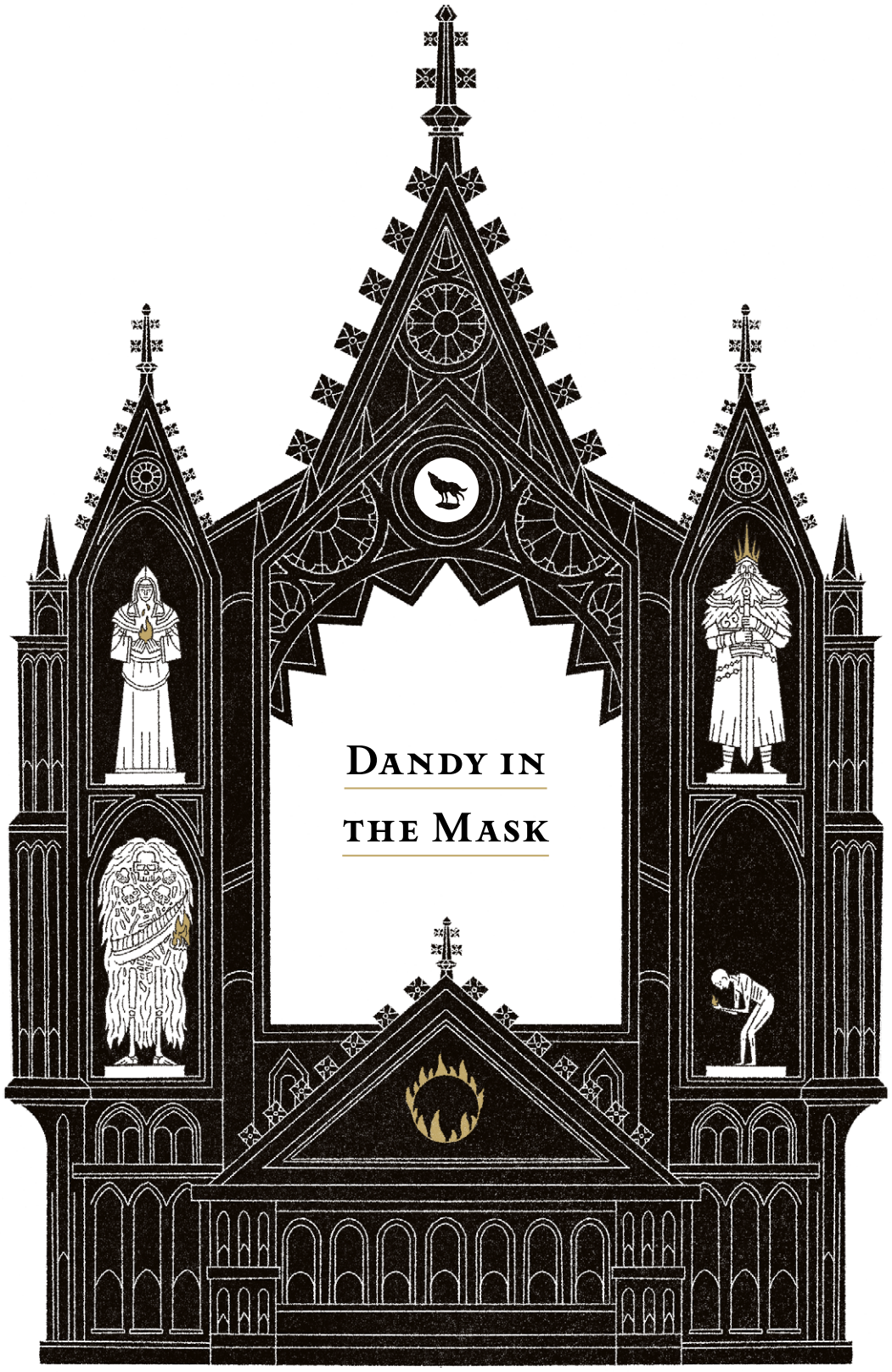
9 "I think I'll be heading somewhere else soon. I can't tell you the details, but I've a small objective up above… I've been taken care of by that Fire Keeper, but… she's no longer needed, is she…? Keh heh heh heh…" - Lautrec



deserter doesn't wear the mask symbolizing that responsibility. Given his apparent desire to reach Anor Londo, his end goal may be the Duke's Archives like Lautrec's other nameless comrade, presumably to acquire Seath's knowledge and sorcery. In the end, the two are "comrades" of convenience, useful for the moment but only until his and their paths diverge and they have paid their share – not unlike the knight's relationship with us.

Lautrec loses whatever respect he previously had for us once we challenge him for the Fire Keeper's soul, deeming us yet another idiot with delusions of heroism like everyone else he has killed.[10] Perhaps the knight is projecting onto us his own mindset from long ago, when he was favored by Fina. Now, however, Lautrec is no hero; just a ruthless killer, respecting only those with as cold and twisted a heart as he. How could anyone, god or human, love him?

10 "Oh, came around again. There seem to be so many giant idiot wannabe heroes. Now, let's kill him, boys." - Lautrec



Marvelously Petty

Chester is a shady fellow from first impressions. Dressed in a long black coat and devilishly smiling mask and top hat, one would be forgiven for judging the book by its cover, especially since his dialogue is no less mired in dark humor and ominous implications. Despite the common theory that he is an Easter Egg for Miyazaki's then unannounced title *Bloodborne*, Chester's model already exists in the files for the base game – meaning that his design had been created long before *Bloodborne* began development. Rather, the model was originally one variant of a generic enemy referencing the endlessly-amused king's ministers from *Demon's Souls*, all of which were ultimately scrapped. While it is never stated where the actual Chester hails from exactly, his suspicious persona and use of a sniper crossbow strongly suggest that he is from Carim, like the equally shady Oswald or Lautrec.

Chester deals in souls, implying that he is Undead and was residing in Lordran at the time when Manus dragged him into the past. Regardless, his life predating his time travel is irrelevant compared to his characterization during it. Despite his dapper image, Chester is a career criminal, price gouging his wares compared to other merchants, invading us in town after an exhausting battle with Artorias, and selling an unsettling number of humanity, paralleling Patches. This self-serving personality is made more obvious by his dialogue. He is bothered by our heroic attempts to stop the Abyss in Oolacile and save Dusk – whom he implies that Elizabeth asked him to help as well.[1] This is more obvious in Japanese dialogue, where he repeatedly calls our efforts "fanciful" and tries breaking our resolve by revealing Oolacile's part in its own demise. He even points out that the future already proves that we will be given no credit, even if we succeed.[2] Chester sees things only in terms of tangible risk versus personal reward, and Elizabeth alludes to this selfishness by the "bad smell" he gives off.[3] Even the name "Marvelous" Chester sounds more like an ironic, underworld nickname than a title given to someone of legitimately good repute.

Since he is already acquainted with Elizabeth and her desire to save Dusk by the time we arrive, we can narrow down Chester's arrival in the past to after her abduction but significantly before Manus pulls us there too. The man has had adequate time to familiarize himself with the city, enough to set up an ambush point as well as come into possession of large supplies of humanity and homeward bones to sell. On top of that, he is already well aware of Kaathe, Manus, and Oolacile's respective roles in the country's destruction by the time we arrive, and has personally witnessed

1 **"Oh, heard out the request of that mushroom, did you? My goodness… quite the fanciful one. Keh heh heh!" - Chester**

2 **"Besides, it is ultimately a story of long ago to us. You probably won't even be known about. Keh heh heh!" - Chester**

3 **"Which reminds me, there was another visitor a little while ago. Very much the smell of man, a human of the far future, like you. But… unlike you… it was very bad… He is likely still in this time. He was a man with a black coat and a hat. Please be careful…" - Elizabeth**

Artorias in his corrupted state. While the localization claims that he just "heard" about it, the Japanese script only implies that he knew the knight had been corrupted.[4] In other words, Chester has had plenty of time to skulk about the town and rob citizens and Undead alike of their lives and valuables, either overhearing the recent history as he skulks in the shadows, or learning the details directly from his victims.

After our arrival, we can find Chester with his bag of goodies alongside a briefcase and lit candelabra against a cliffside outside the city. He immediately notices that we look out of place and deduces that we are also from the future, leading to his suggestion that we help each other out as birds of a feather in this peculiar situation.[5] In truth, he cares little for our wellbeing. Although knowing full well of what became of Artorias, Chester evades telling us the

4 "Oh, you really defeated the knight Artorias? Although he was consumed by the Abyss, you slew that hero… No, that is magnificent. Very magnificent… Keh heh heh!" - Chester

5 "I see, as I thought… We are both strange ones. It's an unfamiliar age, and there will be inconveniences. Let's help each other out, shall we?" - Chester



details with a malevolent laugh.[6] He expected us to come across the knight and be killed, likely planning to rob our corpse. But since we ultimately slay the knight, he is completely shocked to hear of our accomplishment, only to quickly realize that he can just slay us while we are weak, invading us in town.

Cut dialogue indicates that Chester would have originally stolen Artorias' wolf ring from his corpse in Ciaran's presence,[7] and somehow evaded her wrath, though the absurdity of this event – not to mention the potential time paradox – may well explain the decision to drop the plot thread. Otherwise, there is only dialogue relating to Elizabeth and combat. He is surprised that a mushroom could know sorcery,[8] which implies that she would have shared this fact and her wares with him. However, since Elizabeth is suspicious of Chester enough to warn us about trusting him, this seems rather unlikely, and hence was also cut.

Despite his design, his character seems fairly simple. Some speculate that his mask is in fact his face and that he is cursed, but this too is a result of the localization's poor wording. Chester's "curse" is more accurately a grudge, the same as the name for the exploding head enemy. Chester isn't cursed to wear the mask as his face; his grudge against us for killing him potentially curses *us* to smile beneath this façade while wearing the mask.[9] "Very petty," indeed. Some have cited his lack of a face beneath his mask as further evidence of a cursed nature, but this is misleading. While FromSoftware created a face model for every NPC in the base game, the DLC was released long after. Ciaran and Chester are its only "human" NPC models, and neither have faces beneath their attire. In fact, being a repurposed generic enemy, his model is intrinsically clothed in the same way as boss models like Ornstein, and can't be stripped of its equipment; it *is* his "body". In short, there is nothing to suggest what he is or isn't hiding beneath the mask.

Elizabeth explicitly affirms that he is human, and he otherwise behaves as such outside specific instances in game mechanics. If there is any complexity to Chester, it is found in his demise. During his death throes, the man begs for mercy, not from us but the gods.[10] This is one of the few instances of a human explicitly invoking Lordran's deities in the Japanese script, so it is definitely notable. One might find Chester's piety ironic, were it not so transparently self-serving. As the reality of death dawns upon him, Chester begs the divine to have clemency when he showed none for the countless people he has robbed and killed. Chester is an unrepentant sinner by the gods' standard, more than any other, yet he is desperate enough to cry out for their help in his most dire hour. This makes him nothing less than a hypocrite. If we can learn anything from "Marvelous" Chester, it is that there are some who will take advantage of any tragedy to benefit themselves, and themselves alone.

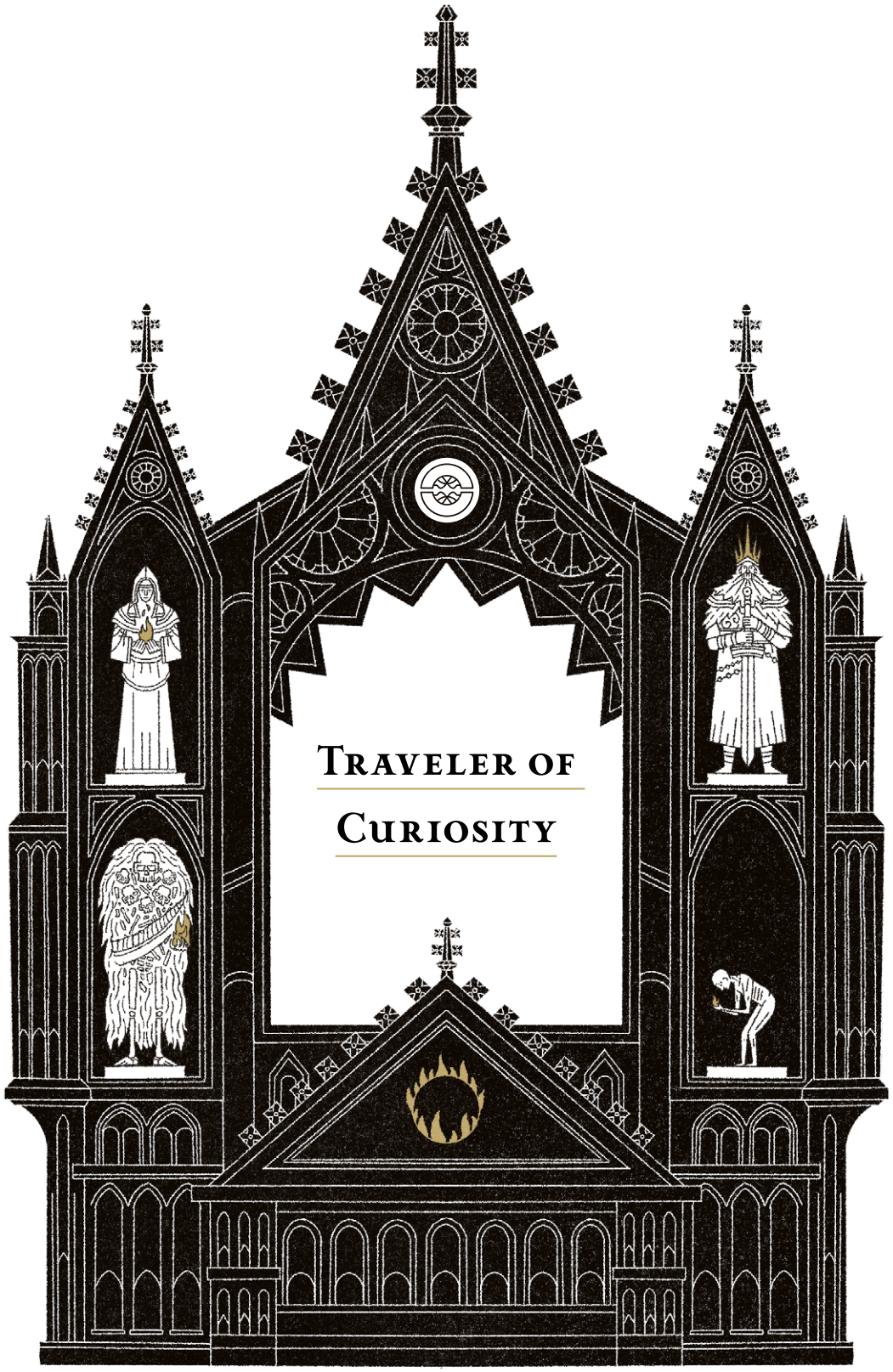
6 "Have you met the knight Artorias? The Abyss-hunting hero who was in legend of the future age… Well, if you haven't met him, it's fine. It is, ultimately, a boring topic… Keh heh heh!" - Chester

7 "… You, that ring was… something stolen by a man in a coat… I don't know why you have it, but it is an important memento of a man who was felled here. I was that man's friend. That's why I want to offer that memento at his funeral. How about it? You wouldn't give it away, would you?" - Ciaran

8 "But, I see, so it knows sorcery, huh…" - Chester

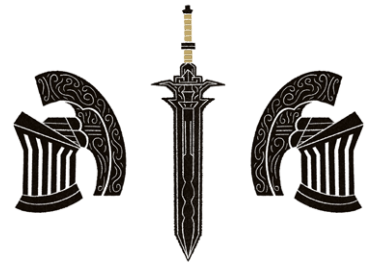
9 "Black long hat of Magnificent Chester, an enigmatic man met in Oolacile's past.
Perhaps it is due to Chester's grudge? The face of the person wearing this is said to always have a strange smile plastered across their whole face."
- Snickering Top Hat

10 "Ugh… I give up, help me, please… I beg you… gods have mercy…" - Chester



Curious Sort

Domhnall describes himself as a "merchant", but his Japanese dialogue has him struggle to find the word, emphasizing his status as a foreigner. His unique dialect implies that he is not familiar enough with the languages of people outside Zena to speak it fluently,[1] which only serves to emphasize his peculiar eccentricities. Although the *Design Works* interview has Waragai point out the typicality of Domhnall's armor for a medieval European setting, the additional details make it appear far more unconventional. His horns mark wisdom,[2] which can be expected from a people mainly distinguished by their wise old looks. The numerous medals decorating his chest and back mark unspecified accomplishments,[3] though Miyazaki relates in the *Design Works* interview that he imagined Domhnall collecting various coins and medals to hang off his body *despite* being in a world where money is worthless. But the most informative details are the golden bracelets[4] and silver boot rings,[5] marking an acquirer and explorer respectively.



Domhnall's difficulty with our language makes him imprecise about his occupation. Waragai describes him as a "curio collector" that could appear at any place and at any time, and the man is described as a "curio seller" in item descriptions. No ordinary merchant, he trades in rare and strange items, which he has a fervent love for collecting. The intent was to create a character who *could* appear anywhere in the game, selling anything. It is for this reason that Domhnall sells the armors of various bosses we defeat over the course of our journey on top of his unusual inventory of bottomless boxes and gold pine resin. This includes the armor of the final boss, Gwyn, though only in NewGame+. In some ways, this makes Domhnall more a feature than an actual character, but it still reflects his personality. The various items he procures – and specific advice he gives if we buy them – are a sign of his experience, his explorations, and his entrepreneurial spirit.

1 "Hullo, how do ya do? It is nice to meet you. I'm Domhnall of Zena. I'm, what do you call it… a merchant. I trade rare and strange items. I love them." - Domhnall

2 "Strange helmet handed down in the old country of Zena, homeland of Domhnall the Curio Seller. The two horns serve as a mark of wisdom." - Helm of the Wise

3 "Strange armor handed down in the old country of Zena, homeland of Domhnall the Curio Seller. The many medals serve as a mark of honor." - Armor of the Glorious

4 "Strange gauntlets handed down in the old country of Zena, homeland of Domhnall the Curio Seller. The golden bracelets serve as a mark of an acquirer." - Gauntlets of the Vanquisher

5 "Strange boots handed down in the old country of Zena, homeland of Domhnall the Curio Seller. The embedded silver rings serve as a mark of an explorer." - Boots of the Explorer



The most telling example of this is the fact that he is in possession of crystal weapons as early as our first possible encounter with him in the Depths. These weapons are otherwise exclusive to the Duke's Archives where Seath is imprisoning and experimenting on Undead. This means that not only has Domhnall been to the gods' library in Anor Londo, but also escaped with weapons in tow, all the way down to the Undead Burg sewers. He is evidently as capable as he is mobile, only limited by his curiosity. Why does he squat under the Burg aqueduct rather than the more easily accessible Firelink Shrine nearby? Because he liked the idea.[6] Why does he hope the rumor of Undead worshipping an archdragon is true? Because he would like to meet it.[7] What matters to Domhnall is that something

6 "Unbelievable, me didn't thinks a person would come here. I guess it is a mutual love for things? Yes, yes." - Domhnall

7 "I hear several Undead are serving the archdragon and training to become dragons themselves. If it is true, I definitely want to meet it..." - Domhnall

is interesting – more specifically, strange. How he manages to get to any of these places is ultimately irrelevant; he will find a way, befitting his Celtic name meaning "world ruler". And once he has sated his curiosity, he sells his dear curios; sometimes, he just discards them.

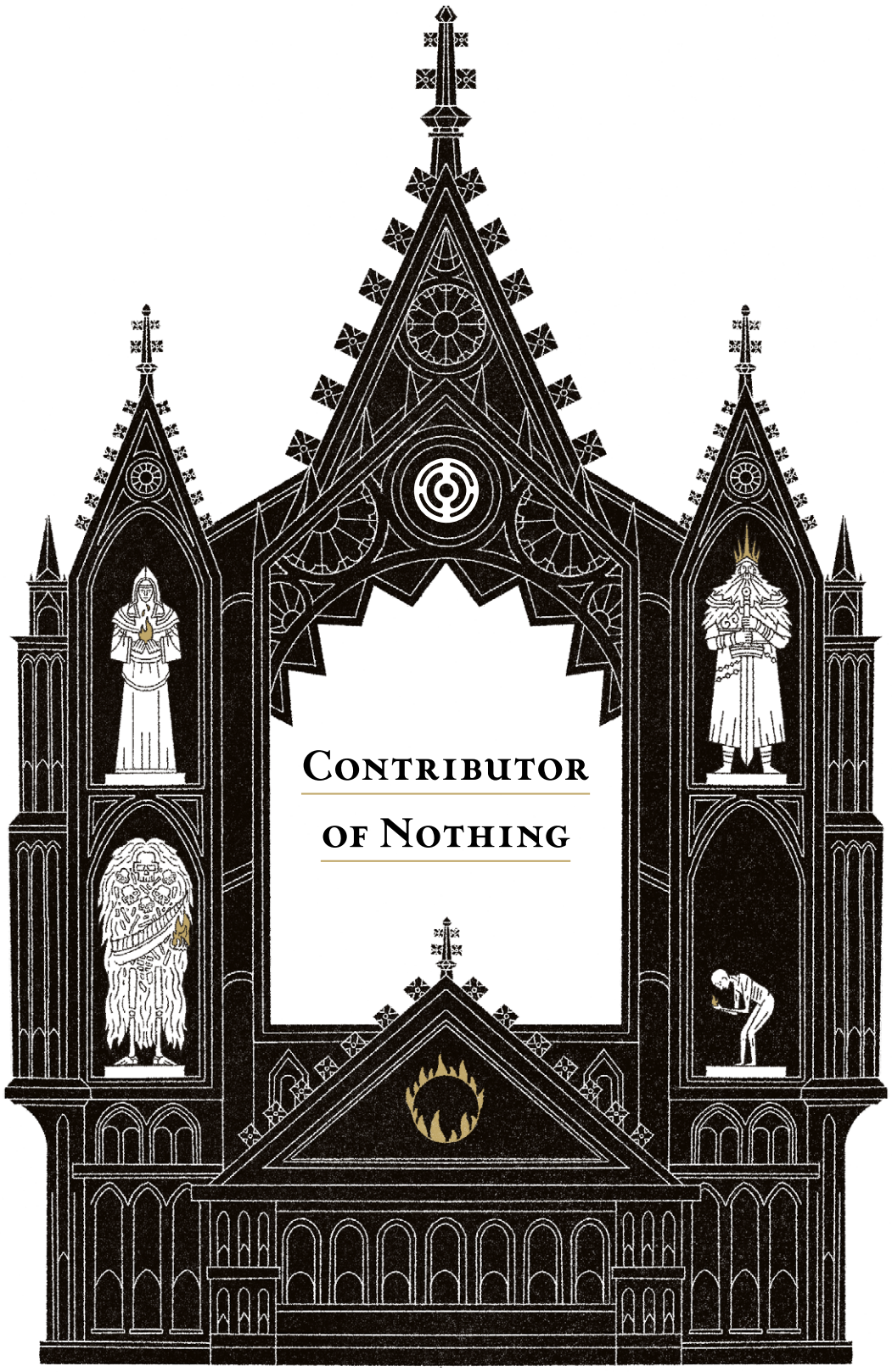


Avelyn is a unique crossbow that fires three consecutive shots.[8] Its description says that it was created by the weapons craftsman Eidas, originally Ayrdice (エアダイス), but this mysterious artisan is never once mentioned again. Nonetheless, Avelyn is less a practical weapon, more a marvel of human achievement. Despite shooting three bolts per shot, each individual bolt does less damage compared to the standard crossbow. On top of that, its complex design is extravagant with seemingly useless decorations and details that only serve its aesthetic value. Eidas clearly put a lot of care into crafting it, which is why it proves the artisan's mechanical prowess and visual finesse rather than lends itself to warfare. Even the weapon's name, Avelyn, evokes the word "violin", which matches the design's vague resemblance to the musical instrument. So then, why is such a unique weapon found in Seath's archives?

In order to acquire Avelyn, we must skillfully maneuver our way along one of the library's mechanical staircases while it is spinning between the upper levels to land atop one of the bookcases on the bottom floor, where we will find the weapon stored in a chest. Only one oddball – besides ourselves – would find their way onto this absurdly tall bookcase, not to mention bother to preserve a unique and veritable work of art while doing so. The *Design Works* interview implies the weapon to have originally belonged to the curio collector before being moved to the Duke's Archives, probably to mirror his current ownership of crystal arms. The merchant can only carry so much at a time, after all. Therefore, in typical Domhnall fashion, he may have spontaneously left Avelyn on the giant bookcase he had just as spontaneously found a way to perch on. And why not? New, peculiar toys had caught his attention.

8 "Rapid-fire crossbow made by the hands of the weapons craftsman Ayrdice. Because of its extravagant design, it is closer to a work of art than the weapon it is said to be.

Shoots bolts in triple succession via elaborate mechanism, so you can aim for big damage from successive shots, but single-shot damage will be rather low." - Avelyn



Sullen Sort

Perhaps the most unremarkable of the game's characters, the Crestfallen Warrior can only be identified as another Undead warrior fate brought to Lordran. He neither mentions the country he hails from, nor does his generic chainmail armor, longsword, or heater shield give hints as to where it might be. He is a stock character, carried over almost unchanged from his *Demon's Souls* counterpart, providing the beginner player advice and setting the tone for how dangerous our journey shall be. Like the Crestfallen Merchant, the warrior has lost the will to go on and challenge the trials for the Undead mission. He hasn't given up on living, but knows he cannot return to the world of man that cast him out. This traps him in a limbo of sitting in Firelink Shrine wallowing in despair;[1] his only pleasure, taking smug satisfaction in seeing those who haven't yet come to the same realization continue to struggle on in vain.



But, for all his chiding and mockery, the man does advise us, if only to pass the tedium of loitering around the shrine. He has been in the Undead Burg for quite a while based on his knowledge of the area, from the church to the waterways to Blighttown. While familiar with the story of the Undead mission, he hasn't heard or witnessed what follows ringing the Bells of Awakening,[2] and was probably only in town for a relatively brief period before the Burg fell into civil unrest. He notes that it has been a while since he has seen the crow bring someone from the asylum, implying that he has at least been around since before the demons took over as the prison's wardens and prevented any further escapes. This is supported by his uncharacteristically

1 **"What is it? Scared, are you? If so, then you should sit here the whole time, like me. It's the most comfortable thing to do until you eventually become a Hollow... Hahahahaha!" - Crestfallen Warrior**

2 **"Story goes that something will happen if you ring both... but what would that be? I at least haven't heard about what follows, but... Well, whatever." - Crestfallen Warrior**

enthusiastic reaction to meeting a century-old legend like *the* Big Hat Logan, proving that he has only heard the stories, and wasn't around when the man himself arrived.



Otherwise, he demonstrates few redeeming qualities. If we keep asking for advice, he gets annoyed about our incessant inquiries.[3] He regularly insults and demeans almost anyone else he talks about. He automatically assumes anyone he hasn't seen for some time is dead. He openly indulges the thought of us all being better off as mindless Hollows. He holds a very low opinion of human nature[4] and despises any signs of positivity, good will, or hope he witnesses. He finds Vince and Nico's constant concern for Reah's wellbeing more revolting than their planned graverobbing,[5] and is overjoyed to see the clergywoman return alone, her comrades seemingly dead or deserters, because it "serves the nobility right" as his Japanese dialogue puts it.[6] And when we prove, contrary to his pessimistic assumptions, that mere Undead *can* overcome the trials and ring the bells, he is as much irritated as he is surprised and impressed. As he admits with Logan, being surrounded by "great heroes" who overcome adversity makes him uncomfortable; it serves only to diminish his sense of superiority, being the only one to realize it is hopeless.

Yet it is *not* seeing proof of success that draws him out of his comfort zone. Rather, he is forced out by Frampt's noisiness, and awful smell, making it unbearable to stay. But even when he finally decides to put in some actual effort into fixing his problems,[7] he ends up proving that it really was hopeless



3 "Hey, hey, is there something else? 'I want to know too much,' I hate that." - Crestfallen Warrior

4 "Hm, what is it? Humanity? Well, the manner depends on you… Collect it from dead bodies on the road… or summon one another and get along, like those clergymen. Well, I wouldn't do it, but the fast way is killing a decent Undead and taking it from them. Killing a person and taking it might be the most human…… Hahahahaha!" - Crestfallen Warrior

5 "Did you see it? Apparently the party of an o-so-noble holy woman's arrived. At any rate, they're probably going to go vandalize graves, but there's nothing more revolting than the naïve boys going 'how's M'lady' or whatever." - Crestfallen Warrior

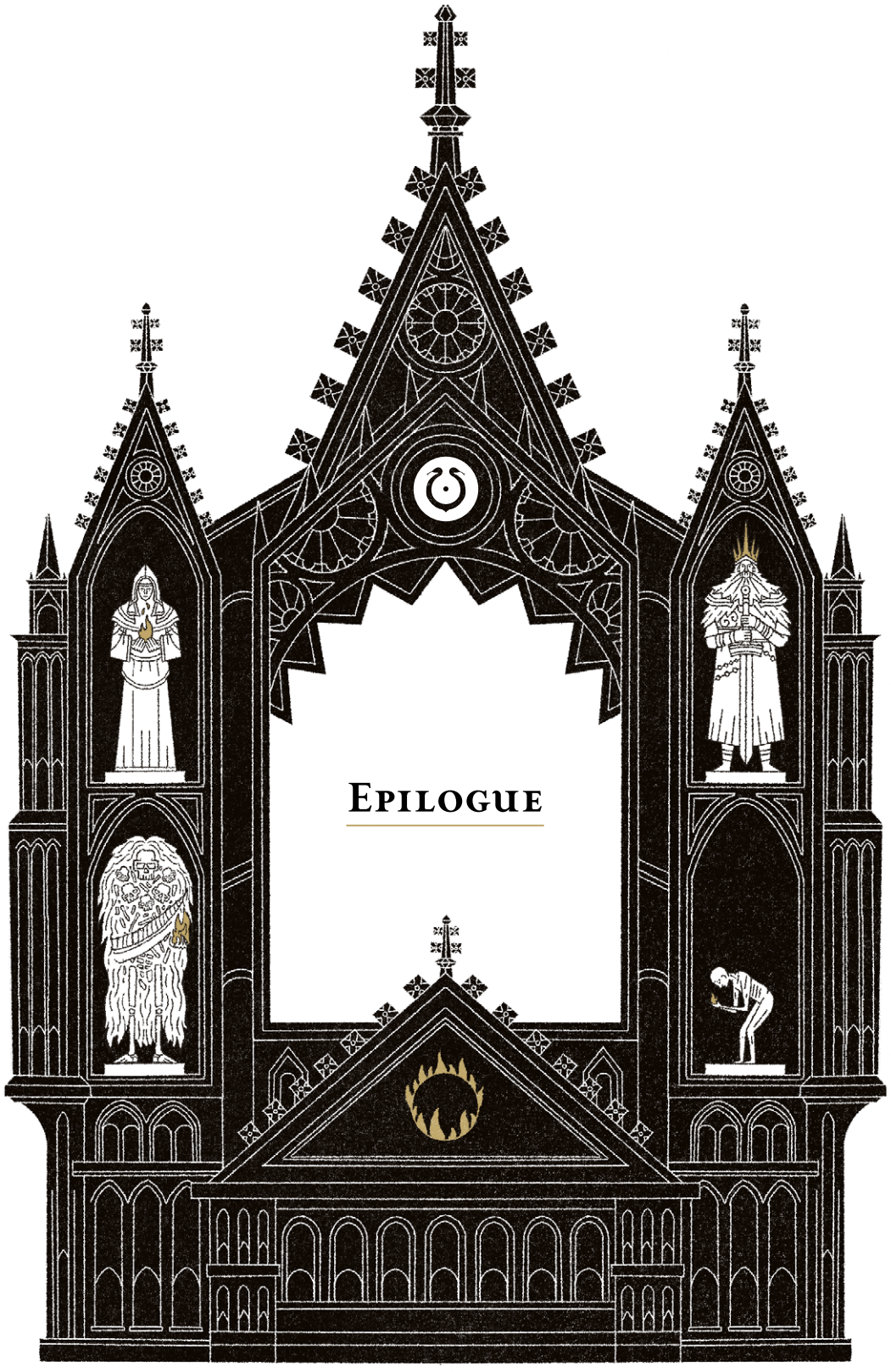
6 "… Did you know? Sometime ago, the o-so-noble holy woman returned alone… in tatters. Did her companions die or were they abandoned… Either way, it is a pleasant story. Serves the nobility right. Uwahahahaha!" - Crestfallen Warrior

7 "Damn, this place stinks… and it was such a comfortable place too. Sigh… Maybe even I should try hard a little too…" - Crestfallen Warrior

for him after all. When next we meet the warrior, he is a Hollow in New Londo. Perhaps he took his own advice and tried finding a hint to the Undead mission within the ruins of the old city. Perhaps he was killed by the ghosts who can't be harmed without bearing another curse or cursed weapons. Perhaps he just found a new place to give up and sit, wasting away among the already mad and despondent.

For in the end, he really did lack the power heroes like us had to climb out of his hopeless situation. And when one finds themselves powerless to change their fate, it is heartbreaking.





Epilogue

The birth of an all-changing flame. Flying behemoths dropping like boulders. The rise and fall of gods with their kingdoms. The dead lurking in the dark. The endless purgatory of demons. Man drifting far and away from its past. The folly of a genius. Terrible secrets locked away behind a paintbrush. The abyss of human evil. The light covering the darkness. Hanging over all of this: the destruction and possible rebirth of the world by our actions.

But why does any of this matter?

Darks Souls is fiction; entertainment. You can play through the entire game without once engaging with the story. But understanding that story requires engagement, demands you dig into its deeper themes. *Dark Souls* constructs a very deliberate message, framed right in its title – "Dark Souls", in other words, the humanity at the root of each man. In essence, the story of *Dark Souls* is a story of human nature. The game's tagline, daring us to "offer up your humanity", reiterates this message with a clever double meaning. Normally, to sacrifice one's humanity means to give up every good thing that we consider unique to humans, implying that we have committed evil – or at least forewent morality – in order to remain human in form. This would be an interesting metaphor in its own right, but it takes a new meaning in the context that our humanity, our dark soul, is itself the evil.

Much like its spiritual predecessor, *Dark Souls* serves as an examination of the human condition. But whereas *Demon's Souls* seems to be genuinely inquiring into the nature of man, *Dark Souls* has already reached its conclusion, damning as it is. There is no ambiguity on what defines a man versus a god or a demon. Our nature is known and easy to discern, and it is dark. Greed enables terrible things, practically demands it, and it is inherent to man, our original sin. Our journey, then, conveys what we should be willing to do to reject that sinful side of ourselves, paradoxically committing sin to exorcise it along the way.

The player character's journey lets us explore this theme through other characters, as our story intersects with theirs – each vignette in the narrative tapestry weaving a greater tale of the darkness and greed. This is true for both the humans and nonhumans alike, as even the gods prove to be no less human absent a dark soul, and it is perhaps telling that mankind's original sin isn't unique to us so much as more pronounced. Life in general is desperate to seek what it wants.

Like any good story, *Dark Souls* seeds its theme from the very start.

When first introduced to our character, we are at our lowest point. Rejected by everyone, including ourselves, we have been consigned to oblivion while awaiting an eventual end to our suffering in a situation analogous to depression. Even as a ray of hope shines down and drops a corpse with a key to our cell, it isn't obvious how things can get any better. And yet still *we*

push forward along the path ahead. Why? Indeed, the Japanese descriptions for the various keys we acquire throughout this prologue hammer the point: Why are we trying so hard? What is the reason to escape this hell? There is nothing out there. We know that fact, but still we push onward through the suffering. Why persist? Why not accept death? How come difficulty hasn't broken our will, our heart? The answer to all of this soon comes in the form of our savior, Oscar, with his last will: because we just might find meaning. It is small and vague, but it is still an end goal for us to strive towards, and this tiny want is all we need to keep going.

As we continue on, we meet many people in the same boat – people of all colors and stripes who find their own reason to continue living thanks to their missions. Not every man and woman can fulfill their purpose, either lacking the strength of body or of heart. In that regard, we are special. But it shows that the drive toward meaning is universal, with everyone having their own reasons and methods to follow it; some savory, others not so. We are provided the same options and chart our own course, and for our efforts learn that our destination is a higher calling, our own place of importance in this grander cosmological machine. We go from nobody to hero, sacrificing our humanity in a blaze of glory.

Or at least, we can.

This is where our divergent endings come in. Do we link the fire and succeed Gwyn as Lord of Cinder, or do we abandon the flame and claim the title of Dark Lord? These two scenarios were not created equal. It is clear from cut dialogue that FromSoftware toyed with the idea of Frampt and Kaathe having a more even footing. After ringing both Bells of Awakening, we would have either joined Kaathe or returned to Frampt, our serpent of choice personally opening the gates to Sen's Fortress. Coinciding with our decision, Oscar, having apparently survived the events of the Northern Undead Asylum, would have either congratulated us on our accomplishment or received Frampt's revelation in our place. In either case, ours and Oscar's stories would have begun to run parallel, with both of us going through the same motions to reach the First Flame until the final act – where we finally decide who will be King. That this setup would require Kaathe and his revelation to be more clearly accessible is undeniable. But this was dropped in favor of keeping Kaathe's existence secret, barring a few vague references.

Consider how easy it is to miss this element of the story. At the earliest, we must decide to head down through New Londo and kill Ingward in order to acquire the key to the seal, which we aren't even told about until acquiring the Lordvessel.





Even if we refuse to murder the sealer, we would have to acquire the Lordvessel before speaking to Frampt and placing it at his prodding, which is unlikely considering his unignorable presence, not to mention his being the sole source of exposition directing us to our next objectives. In other words, the chances of meeting Kaathe on your first playthrough are astronomically small without some form of outside assistance. There is no way FromSoftware designed this encounter without expecting most players to miss the Darkwraith covenant on their first run. Indeed, the fact that another PvP covenant, the Gravelord Servants, are strictly limited to terrorizing NewGame+ suggests that the difficulty in interfering with other players was intentional, perhaps to give a grace period for solo players struggling to learn the offline elements during the initial days after launch.

This, of course, frames everything in a very particular light. The mystery of the setting combined with the relative information overload from everything the game does present is liable to leave players to act on autopilot. We simply blindly follow the path leading to us linking the fire, like lambs to slaughter. It is only on our second playthrough that we have the power and freedom to experiment, to consider "what if" we try confronting the Four Kings before completing any other objective. And upon indulging our fancies, we are rewarded with an entirely new perspective. The first time, we were just blindly following a system laid out for us, hungry for purpose. The second time, we are enlightened to the artificial nature of our hero's journey, told our true mission is to right the wrong and lead mankind into a new age. This naturally completely shifts our encounter with Gwyn from a somber passing of the torch between heroes to finally putting to rest the pathetic desperation of the true villain.

On the surface, the Dark Lord route seems to serve as the secret true ending, but how correct is this choice in light of what the game says about the human condition, truly? Some might argue that the fact of the gods' lie is enough to justify our decision, but this precludes the possibility that we can reject the lie while still embracing the world that the medials used that deceit to preserve. Others might argue that our human nature *is* wrong and so should be suppressed. But absent a transcendent moral arbiter, the naturalistic argument might take over, as Kaathe insists. Why should we reject our nature? We are only acting in accordance with the principles for this world, light to Dark. Who are we to defy the natural order?

If we are speaking purely on a personal level, then I cannot rationalize linking the fire. Even factoring in all the burdens of kingship, living at the very top of the hierarchy in a new world order is vastly superior to immortalization in martyrdom. The gods shepherd us into suicide under the presumption of a



Ash Lake

higher purpose. But does that higher purpose warrant us sacrificing our own life? Not if we care about the interests of our kind, for if we choose the path of a Dark Lord, man will be living in accordance with its true nature – immortal while free of its curse – and be able to leverage the power and status not unlike the medials in their Age of Fire. Why should we bar ourselves from dominance?

Some might argue that the Darkwraiths augur chaos and self-destruction should the Age of Dark come to pass, but this is only because they exist in a world where not everyone knows the power inside them. The Darkwraiths' reign of terror arguably would not – could not – occur in a world where every human has been enlightened and armed with their inherent nature; mutually assured destruction is the best deterrent. With that in mind, there is no doubt that the Age of Dark would be a net benefit for mankind as a whole.

But man does not stand alone. What about the Age of Dark would be good for the rest of the races that exist on the continent? What about the larger world? Would they be better off remaining in perpetual light, or shrouded in eternal darkness? There are many things to enjoy in this world of light as it is, many of which might indeed be ruined if we disrupt the status quo. How can we guarantee our relation with other beings won't devolve into a similar tyranny as with the medials? Can they even survive in this new world? That variable of the

unknown makes it easy to say "don't rock the boat" and leave things as they are.

But even if you agree with this premise, there is still a question of sustainability. Can fire truly be made perpetual? Perhaps not.

Ash Lake is peculiar for a number of reasons. For one, this area in the Lower World is surprisingly colorful compared to how it is depicted in the opening cinematic. This is especially notable considering the name still ties the lake to "ash", the kanji of which is the basis for the color grey (灰色). Poetic license, or something more? The beach no doubt looks like ordinary sand, and neither is the water ash-colored, but the lake itself is a strange feature. There was no sign of water in the cinematic, though the storm clouds accompanying Seath's introduction might be the first hints at it. How then did so much water come to blanket this war-torn area? The answer may come from another question: Where is the fog?

One of the most striking features of the Lower World is absent from this area, replaced instead by its real-world equivalent in liquid form. Did the fog condense sometime after the dragon hunts? If so, why?

Water has a strange position in Dark Souls cosmology. Typically, one would expect it to be the element opposite flame, but instead the focus is centered on the dark-light dynamic. The Abyss, meanwhile, does commonly bear watery



qualities – the kanji (深淵) drawing on the image of "deep waters" – but the two are kept distinct. In that case, how do we conceptualize water in relation to the larger universe? Water counteracts fire, as Flash Sweat demonstrates, and lightning is similarly diffused in it. At the same time, water mixes with various powers or substances – like holiness or poisons – whilst retaining their qualities, especially in denser volumes. Water rains from the sky overhead to form rivers and lakes or seep deeper into the earth. Dripping down caverns, it eventually forms stalactites along with more bodies of water, which gradually seep even deeper down to the world at the very bottom and coalesce into one giant stagnant pool where fog once floated.

If water has replaced fog, then one might frame it as an evolution of nothingness in the same way that flame induces an evolution of existence. Water douses flames, so parity counters Disparity. This would explain why New Londo's underwater corpses haven't rotted. The seal has natural properties which create a certain anti-time even absent any additional magical enhancement. What gets entirely submerged is essentially frozen in a space absent light (Waterlogged corpses in later games exhibit similar behavior).

Life has seemingly evolved around this concept, too. Both frog-rays and hydras possess wide, flat bodies designed for maintaining buoyancy, the former practically gliding through puddles. It is as if the wildlife know they cannot function at deeper depths – other creatures certainly never bother to learn how to swim and just instantly sink to their deaths. And when left in the puddles, the frog-rays' bodies absorb and then excrete the water, just before vomiting up the sludgy material implicitly filtered out. Hydras too breathe out water exactly like how their draconic ancestors expelled the flames changing them for the "worse" in rock's eyes. Without a doubt, there is something hazardous to life inherent to the element.

On the other hand, water is needed for cultivating crops and other greenery,[1] like the energizing green blossoms which frog-rays seem to feed on. If this bitter "green flower weed" (绿花草) can only find lake and riversides as its natural habitat, then there must be some equally vital role that time-negating element plays in life molded by fire – like how our water becomes sweat to avoid us overheating. It is a balance, a flow, and we can see this on a macro scale.

If this water originates from the sky, then one might grasp the nature of what hangs over the Upper World. After all, the outer space we know is a great void of nothingness. In that case, the sky may have originally been fog, filling more rockless vacuum. Now, it would be a body of water, encapsulating the globe – our ever-changing firelit rock bubble confined within a static ocean. If so, then

1 **"Green weed like a large flower. Temporarily raises stamina recovery speed.**
A herb characterized by its unique bitter taste and stimulus. It is an annual plant that is sometimes cultivated in large volumes due to its efficacy, but primarily grows naturally on waterfronts."
- Green Blossom

the sun, moon, and their day-to-day behaviors express the abstract cosmic forces at work because the whole of water both literally and metaphysically captures all which undergirds reality. Recall that fog governs the conceptual as part of the unreal. Therefore, as both a timeless space and content absorber, the neo-fog sky must function like a mirror "recording" the terrestrial powers in the form of the heavenly bodies – where their light of time then punches a hole in the fabric of anti-time so that this conceptual space can double as a portal for the First Flame to affect the world from above; effectively, fire exists in two places at once. When it is gone, rock will be engulfed in a sea of darkness. Until then, it still lights up the moon through the night. Fire is as much affecting the sky as being affected by it.

Indeed, even if simply a derivative of fog, this would still require water to be another consequence of fire. The First Flame has caused these changes, sunlight piercing through storm clouds as lightning; water displacing fog as rainfall. That precipitation might one day douse flame, but only because flame made it behave so.

What does this all have to do with the peculiarities of Ash Lake? Well, what is ash to begin with? It is residue leftover in the wake of fire burning, of it affecting something. And what is fire affecting? Souls, Disparity, everything. There is not a single thing that fire doesn't permeate, including nothing. And what morning mist condenses into water without added heat from sunrise? Put simply, the lake itself is the "ash" left over time as fire has continued to burn through nothingness to fill the world with degrees of existence. This was indiscernible when the Lords went to battle, but it has now completely changed the ecosystem in a post-firelink world. And if flame has finished burning through "nothing" on a macro scale, then wouldn't that make "something" next on that list? And how would that change things? With beaches forming from waves building up mineral deposits as rocks break down into sand, we may just be getting a glimpse of a new ash grey world. (Subsequent games expand on these concepts.)

In short, this secret area gives us the first inklings of what awaits a stagnant universe, how going against the logic isn't just an affront to the natural order but causes the cosmos genuine harm. When will keeping this ring of fire burning leave everything else going in circles? What will happen when fire can no longer affect existence with its Disparity? Will not the world itself become like Gwyn, some zombified shell trying to persist among the ashes? These are also unknowns that we have to consider, so perhaps it is better to take the plunge into the Age of Dark now rather than later.

And with that, I thank you for reading to the end of this lengthy examination. There is plenty more to build upon from this foundation. I only hope I helped you find what you didn't know.



Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank...

Stark, for gifting me a game that changed my life.

Miyazaki and From, for crafting that beautiful gift.

Vaati, for actually looking at your email.

Ashath, for supporting me through the manuscript.

Armis, for always lending an ear.

Sana, for putting up with my insane requests.

Everyone at Tune & Fairweather, for embracing this huge project.

Monica, for standing by me the whole time.

And God Almighty, for it all coming together.

The publisher wishes to thank...

Lokey, for trusting us with such a personally meaningful manuscript.

Our contributing artists BLOC, Juan Acosta, Judson Cowan and Ollie Hoff for lending your considerable gifts to this project. You are, collectively, the definition of "talent density".

Andrew Hind, for your thoughtful art direction, willingness to hear out differences of opinion and hurl yourself into the labor-intensive line art you swore you'd never touch again.

Our design support team of Jamie Souk, John Strike and Mark Wynne, for helping us stitch all the layout pieces together. And there were a multitude of pieces.

Gary Luxton, for helping us explore opportunities for logotype customization. Long live "the fang".

Craig Owens, for your attentive editing pass. The Razor will come by his name honestly.

Russell Lewin and Sneed for assisting with proofreading and fact-checking the final layout. Tom Bramwell for early editorial feedback and file preparation. Any blemishes that remain are solely our responsibility.

Michael "VaatiVidya" Samuels, for penning *Abyssal Archive*'s Foreword, narrating the entire project so beautifully for audiobook listeners, and kindly helping get the word out.

That grey-blue door in stunning Edinburgh for inspiring the hue of our slipcase and presentation box.



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