

GODBOUND SYNOPSIS

8/10/23

To be read **aloud** at the top of Session 1...

You sit in a small inn, deep in the lower ring of an ancient fiefdom, far far from home. Before you is a halfling, sitting with his back to the fire, arms crossed. He is disheveled, wind whipped. His eyes, sullen. They have seen much. He looks up at you, leans back, and squints— staring deep into your eyes. A silence falls... then breaks.

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So, you all are part of that mercenary fighting force flying under that ridiculous phoenix banner, eh? Do any of you even know what a phoenix is? I thought not, otherwise, you'd see irony. How about a story to pass the time before you leave to accomplish our Baron's wishes?

How about I recount... the tale of Gaterise? Very well, but be warned, I feel time has eroded the truth of this tale, and everything I've heard is nothing more than hearsay. Alright then, let's see... where to start... Ah, yes.

Death.

The fate of all throughout the mortal plane. There are some who spend their short lives avoiding it, some who try to stop it, and others who accept it. Regardless, death comes.

There was a time where the worst thing one could fear was death. On our lone planet Solus, this continent was once known as Mourne. At the end of the fourth era, Mourne was home to various races, each refugees from one place or another. They fought, as is the nature of mortals. But that was in the past. For the first time in history, they joined in celebration of eternal peace. As a consequence, the human kingdom of Ebonhiem was transformed into a vast metropolis and focal point of science, art, and trade.

Time passed, and with it was lost an important truth, one which would define the lives of all forever after- there are far worse things than death.

One day before the harvest, a massive obsidian gate sprung suddenly from the ocean in the west. For decades, it remained dormant, and to the chagrin of scientists, engineers, and scholars, none could discern

its origin or meaning. Thirty years later, a single heavily-armored entity walked through. He called himself Grug, and claimed that a massive horde of demons, evil creatures from the Abyss, awaited his command to invade. The only way to prevent the total collapse of civilization was for the rulers of the known world to challenge him in single combat. If they succeeded, this fate would not come to pass.

Hubris caused his suggestion to be ignored by most, though the spiritual leader of the Elves, called Malisad, chose to investigate this individual for himself. He traveled with a large caravan to the gate, and greeted Grug at its threshold. Those who were there claimed to have seen Grug, without a word, point to a puddle. Malisad peered into it, shouted in fear, and ordered his entire caravan home. Reports came pouring out that the Elvish lords were planning to permanently leave Solus through magic.

Many brash kings and their liege lords rode out to challenge Grug. Each time, he would point at a puddle, and they would all stare. They would flee, or fly into a fury. Those who fled often never returned home, those who fought were slaughtered.

As the leaders of Mourne perished one by one, panic erupted. Civilians demanded their lords defend them, to send out an army and destroy this Grug and his gate along with it. Those who refused faced riots. The leader of Ebonhiem, who's name I won't grace by giving it voice, claimed to have greater knowledge of the situation and a solution to save those who remained behind the walls. Many horrified families sought refuge there, but they were all betrayed. The scum had fallen in league with the Abyss, and traded his own people for power.

Many of the remaining leadership gathered a sizable joint force, and headed for the gate. There, as always, stood Grug. Upon facing the joint army, he shouted "This is the best Mourne can summon?!"

Then, in a flash of gold, appeared Iomedae- the goddess of humankind. She shouted back "Indeed, creature of the Abyss- bare witness and despair- for you shall be ground against the raw strength of mankind, and serve as a warning for all who would dare trespass my domain!"

A quiet fell. Thousands held their breath. To see a goddess in the flesh, it must have been a marvelous sight...

Without a word, Grug stepped from the center to the side of the gate, and knelt down. A violent red light shot from the sky, igniting the

portal. Then, a massive hand, then head, then body, of the Arch Demon Lord Usthar.

It is said that Iomadae and Usthar fought a vicious battle, the scars of which can still be seen today. In its wake, countless died. Much of the northern continent was decimated. At the battle's end, Iomadae dove into Usthar's neck, severing its head and sending it spiraling hundreds of miles eastward. Its body collapsed, falling into the sea. Iomadae's breastplate is said to have been found, charred and melted, bearing the light of the sword. Iomadae herself was never seen again.

It was at that moment when our connection to the gods was completely severed. Clerics, Paladins, Warlocks, all of them lost their power. The influence of the outer planes ceased... all except one.

Shortly after, countless demons swarmed and devoured what remained, and in a few days, they had claimed the continent of Mourne.

But that was thirty years ago, and many questions remain from that time, and all those that can answer are long dead.

Now we hide... beneath the ground or behind walls. We learned soon after Iomadae's fall that demons can't stay here for long without consuming mortal materia. Plant's, animals, people... they're all hunted and devoured. Though we've evolved to meet the challenges. There are safe places, such as this Fief of Price we find ourselves in.

Traveling between them is where things get tricky. Chaos corruption has tainted the land. Merely walking it is enough to infect the mind of the most disciplined warrior. I know people that have completely lost themselves by stepping into the wrong place at the wrong time.

The creatures causing all this corruption are the demon lords. As far as I know there are at least seven that have claimed Mourne as their home. The fall of Usthar paved the road for less powerful creatures to stake their claim here. They all hate one another, as is their nature, but some are worse than others. There are those who have made it their business to get on their good side, but the prospects are often outweighed by the risks.

Heh, I know what you're thinking by that look in your eyes. Can things get much worse? I wish I could say no... but I've got a feeling something is on the horizon, so horrible that we can scarcely imagine. There's a change in the wind, and it smells sour. If you think things are bad now, mark my words-

They can get worse.

The demons have been in a frenzy. Underground trade routes have been talking about a new type of mortal roaming the chaos wastes... a certain type of folk that have a spirit about them. They have no name, nor group. They keep to themselves, from what I hear. But they do things, acts that haven't been seen since the gate rose. Some say they've been touched somehow by other planes, granted power from beyond. Many have been getting their hopes up, that these are the supposed saviors of mortal kind- god chosen warriors, but I ask you this- when does the enemy raise an army? When that enemy is threatened. We are safe behind these walls for now... but their arrival marks only the rapid descent of our kind. Besides, only a fool puts their faith in a story, and those emboldened by this lie will die horrible deaths. Mark my words.

And if they do by some chance exist, then they're just a shade, a pitiful reminder of what once was. When the demon's find out about them, they'll regret their lot.

I weep for them.

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Our story takes place in the fallen continent of Mourne, a wasteland of demonic corruption and mortals too stubborn to die. It's a figurative wild west, where upstart demon lords have staked their claim to grow in power and challenge those inside the Abyss.

Mortals have been reduced in quantity and power by a significant margin. Knowledge of the continent, its peoples, history, and geography has also reduced. Many living have no understanding of Mourne's landscape, bar a few who can still read and draft maps. These cartographers are often leaders of bands, and are given the honorary title of Scribe.

Severed from the other planes, those on Mourne lack access to magic, or any form of divine intervention. However, five years ago, rumors began to circulate that a special sort of mortal had appeared- those who, aware or unaware, had been touched by the outer planes. These entities are commonly known as the BOUND.

For thirty years, the demon hordes have slowly invaded, corrupting the very land with chaos. They are unable to travel where their plane's infection isn't present. This is the only reason mortalkind still

survives. Demons can be found all over Mourne, but still struggle to find a foothold in the burned forest of the elves, now called the Ashlands.

In this place is a never-ending forest of scorched wood, and at its heart, the Ichor Tree, its burned husk still sporting massive branches—a monument to the Elves' demise. Scattered throughout the Ashlands are various fiefs—walled cities where many mortal refugees take shelter. The ruling classes rarely leave, opting to call upon Mercenary banners to complete tasks outside their realms. It is in one of these fiefs, and in one of these bands, where our adventurers find themselves.

Each of you are part of the Band of the Phoenix, a faction made up of many smaller bands who sell their swords to rich warlords, often to fight and obtain resources from other fiefs, in exchange for food, weapons, and most importantly, divine relics. Being one of the Bound, you use your powers, mostly in secret, to your advantage, granting you higher shares and rank amongst your peers.

Two weeks ago, your band, 200 strong, arrived at the Fief of Price, a western kingdom owned by Baron Pricik. A large man known for his protective nature and predisposition for the sword, he has promised land, wealth, and many relics for the destruction of an opposing Fief in the eastern part of the Ashlands, called Delruth. He claims their lord, a man by the name of Hawth is attempting to abscond with his last surviving daughter.

The leader and scribe of your band, a woman by the name of Aethul, claims that both the journey and its resolution will be the easiest assignment in months. According to her, Pricik and Hawth are both cowards, and when push comes to shove, they will cease hostilities by simply involving your band in the feud. This would not come to pass.

Shortly after exiting the bounds of Price, the Band of the Phoenix was ambushed by a massive horde of demons. Swords clashed for only a few minutes. The band, ultimately, was destroyed. For reasons you either suspect or are oblivious to, you five have been knocked unconscious and dragged to a deep, dark location...