

THE
THOUSANDFOLD
THOUGHT

THE PRINCE OF NOTHING
BOOK THREE

R. SCOTT BAKKER



PENGUIN
CANADA

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the prince of nothing series

The Darkness That Comes Before, Book One

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*To Tina and Keith
with love*

In pursuing yonder what they have lost, they encounter only the nothing they have. In order not to lose touch with the everyday dreariness in which, as irremediable realists, they are at home, they adapt the meaning they revel in to the meaninglessness they flee. The worthless magic is nothing other than the worthless existence it lights up.

—THEODOR ADORNO, *MINIMA MORALIA*

All progressions from a higher to a lower order are marked by ruins and mystery and a residue of nameless rage. So. Here are the dead fathers.

—CORMAC McCARTHY, *BLOOD MERIDIAN*

What has come before ...

The First Apocalypse destroyed the great Norsirai nations of the North. Only the South, the Kety nations of the Three Seas, survived the onslaught of the No-God, Mog-Pharau, and his Consult generals and magi. The years passed, and the Men of the Three Seas forgot, as Men inevitably do, the horrors endured by their fathers.

Empires rose and empires fell: Kyranneas, Shir, Cenei. The Latter Prophet, Inri Sejenus, reinterpreted the Tusk, the holiest of artifacts, and within a few centuries, the faith of Inrithism, organized and administered by the Thousand Temples and its spiritual leader, the Shriah, came to dominate the entire Three Seas. The great sorcerous Schools, such as the Scarlet Spires, the Imperial Saik, and the Mysunsai, arose in response to the Inrithi persecution of the Few, those possessing the ability to see and work sorcery. Using Choraes, ancient artifacts that render their bearers immune to sorcery, the Inrithi warred against the Schools, attempting, unsuccessfully, to purify the Three Seas. Then Fanim, the Prophet of the Solitary God, united the Kianene, the desert peoples of the southwestern desert, and declared war against the Tusk and the Thousand Temples. After centuries and several jihads, the Fanim and their eyeless sorcerer-priests, the Cishaurim, conquered nearly all the western Three Seas, including the holy city of Shimeh, the birthplace of Inri Sejenus. Only the moribund remnants of the Nansur Empire continued to resist them.

Now war and strife rule the South. The two great faiths of Inrithism and Fanimry continually skirmish, though trade and pilgrimage are tolerated when commercially convenient. The great families and nations vie for military and mercantile dominance. The minor and major Schools squabble and plot, particularly against the upstart Cishaurim, whose sorcery, the Psûkhe, the Schoolmen cannot distinguish from the God's own world. And the Thousand Temples pursue earthly ambitions under the leadership of corrupt and ineffectual Shriahs.

The First Apocalypse has become little more than legend. The Consult, which had survived the death of the Mog-Pharau, has dwindled into myth, something old wives tell small children. After two thousand years, only the Schoolmen of the Mandate, who relive the Apocalypse each night through the eyes of their ancient founder, Seswatha, recall the horror and the prophecies of the No-God's return. Though the mighty and the learned consider them fools, their possession of the Gnosis, the sorcery of the Ancient North, commands respect and mortal envy. Driven by nightmares, they wander the labyrinths of power, scouring the Three Seas for signs of their ancient and implacable foe—for the Consult.

And as always, they find nothing.

Book One: The Darkness That Comes Before

The **Holy War** is the name of the great host called by Maithanet, the Shriah of the Thousand Temple, to liberate Shimeh from the heathen Fanim of Kian. Word of Maithanet's call spreads across the Three Seas, and faithful from all the great Inrithi nations—Galeoth, Thunyerus, Ce Tydonn, Conriya, High Aion, and their tributaries—travel to the city of Momemn, the capital of the Nansur Empire, to become Men of the Tusk.

Almost from the outset, the gathering host is mired in politics and controversy. First, Maithanet somehow convinces the Scarlet Spires, the most powerful of the sorcerous Schools, to join his Holy War. Despite the outrage this provokes—sorcery is anathema to the Inrithi—the Men of the Tusk realize they need the Scarlet Spires to counter the heathen Cishaurim, the sorcerer-priests of the Fanim. The Holy War would be doomed without one of the Major Schools. The question is one of whether the Scarlet Schoolmen would agree to such a perilous arrangement. Unknown to most, Eleäzaras, the Grandmaster of the Scarlet Spires, has waged a long and secret war against the Cishaurim, who for no apparent reason assassinated his predecessor, Sasheoka, some ten years previously.

Second, Ikurei Xerius III, the Emperor of Nansur, hatches an intricate plot to usurp the Holy War for his own ends. Much of what is now heathen Kian once belonged to the Nansur, and Xerius has made recovering the Empire's lost provinces his heart's most fervent desire. Since the Holy War gathers in the Nansur Empire, it can only march if provisioned by the Emperor, something he refuses to do until every leader of the Holy War signs his Indenture, a written oath to cede all lands conquered to him.

Of course, the first caste-nobles to arrive repudiate the Indenture, and a stalemate ensues. As the Holy War's numbers swell into the hundreds of thousands, however, the titular leaders of the host begin to grow restless. Since they war in the God's name, they think themselves invincible, and as a result see little reason to share the glory with those yet to arrive. A Conriyan noble named Nerses Calmemunis comes to an accommodation with the Emperor, and convinces his fellows to sign the Imperial Indenture. Once provisioned, most of those gathered march, even though their lords and the greater part of the Holy War have yet to arrive. Because the host consists primarily of lordless rabble, it comes to be called the Vulgar Holy War.

Despite Maithanet's attempts to bring the makeshift host to heel, it continues marching southward and passes into heathen lands, where—precisely as the Emperor has planned—the Fanim destroy it utterly.

Xerius knows that in military terms, the loss of the Vulgar Holy War is insignificant, since the rabble that largely constituted it would have proven more a liability than an advantage in battle. In political terms, however, the Vulgar Holy War's destruction is invaluable, since it has shown Maithanet and the Men of the Tusk the true mettle of their adversary. The Fanim, as the Nansur we know, are not to be trifled with, even with the God's favour. Only an outstanding general, Xerius claims, can assure the Holy War's victory—a man like his nephew, Ikurei Conphas, who, after his recent victory over the dread Scylvendi at the Battle of Kiyuth, has been hailed as the greatest tactician of his age. The leaders of the Holy War need only sign the Imperial Indenture, and Conphas's preternatural skill and insight will be theirs.

Maithanet, it seems, now finds himself in a dilemma. As Shriah, he can compel the Emperor to provision the Holy War, but he cannot compel him to send Ikurei Conphas, his only living heir. The first truly great Inrithi potentates of the Holy War—Prince Nersei Proyas of Conriya, Prince Coithu Saubon of Galeoth, Earl Hoga Gothyelk of Ce Tydonn, King-Regent Chepheramunni of High Aion—

arrive in the midst of this controversy, and the Holy War amasses new strength, though it remains a hostage in effect, bound by the scarcity of food to the walls of Momemn and the Emperor's granaries. To a man, the caste-nobles repudiate Xerius's Indenture and demand that he provision them. The Men of the Tusk begin raiding the surrounding countryside. In retaliation, the Emperor calls in elements of the Imperial Army. Pitched battles are fought.

In an effort to forestall disaster, Maithanet calls a Council of Great and Lesser Names, and all the leaders of the Holy War gather in the Emperor's palace, the Andiamine Heights, to make their arguments. Here Nersei Proyas shocks the assembly by offering a many-scarred Scylvendi Chieftain, a veteran of past wars against the Fanim, as a surrogate for the famed Ikurei Conphas. The Scylvendi Cnaiür urs Skiötha, shares hard words with both the Emperor and his nephew, and the leaders of the Holy War are impressed. The Shriah's Envoy, however, remains undecided: the Scylvendi are as apostate as the Fanim, after all. Only the wise words of the Prince Anasûrimbor Kellhus of Atritha settle the matter. The Envoy reads the decree demanding that the Emperor, under pain of Shriah Censure, provision the Men of the Tusk.

The Holy War will march.

Drusas Achamian is a sorcerer sent by the School of Mandate to investigate Maithanet and his Holy War. Though he no longer believes in his School's ancient mission, he travels to Sumna, where the Thousand Temples is based, in the hope of learning more about the mysterious Shriah, whom the Mandate fears could be an agent of the Consult. In the course of his probe, he resumes an old love affair with a harlot named Esmenet, and despite his misgivings he recruits a former student of his, a Shrial Priest named Inrau, to report on Maithanet's activities. During this time, his nightmares of the Apocalypse intensify, particularly those involving the so-called "Celmomian Prophecy," which foretells the return of a descendant of Anasûrimbor Celmomas before the Second Apocalypse.

Then Inrau dies under mysterious circumstances. Overcome by guilt, and heartbroken by Esmenet's refusal to cease taking custom, Achamian flees Sumna and travels to Momemn, where the Holy War gathers under the Emperor's covetous and uneasy eyes. A powerful rival of the Mandate, a School called the Scarlet Spires, has joined the Holy War to prosecute its long contest with the sorcerer-priests of the Cishaurim, who reside in Shimeh. Nautzera, Achamian's Mandate handler, has ordered him to observe them and the Holy War. When he reaches the encampment, Achamian joins the fire of Xinemus, an old friend of his from Conriya.

Pursuing his investigation of Inrau's death, Achamian convinces Xinemus to take him to see another old student of his, Prince Nersei Proyas of Conriya, who's become a confidant of the enigmatic Shriah. When Proyas scoffs at his suspicions and repudiates him as a blasphemer, Achamian implores him to write Maithanet regarding the circumstances of Inrau's death. Embittered, Achamian leaves his old student's pavilion certain his meagre request will go unfulfilled.

Then a man hailing from the distant north arrives—a man calling himself *Anasûrimbor* Kellhus. Battered by his recurrent dreams of the Apocalypse, Achamian finds himself fearing the worst: the Second Apocalypse. Is Kellhus's arrival a mere coincidence, or is he the Harbinger foretold in the Celmomian Prophecy? Achamian questions the man, only to find himself utterly disarmed by his humour, honesty, and intellect. They talk history and philosophy long into the night, and before retiring, Kellhus asks Achamian to be his teacher. Inexplicably awed and affected by the strange Achamian agrees ...

But he finds himself in a dilemma. The reappearance of an Anasûrimbor is something the School of

Mandate simply has to know—few discoveries could be more significant. But he fears what his brother Schoolmen will do: a lifetime of dreaming horrors, he knows, has made them cruel and pitiless. And he blames them, moreover, for the death of Inrau.

Before he can resolve this dilemma, Achamian is summoned by the Emperor's nephew, Ikur Conphas, to the Imperial Palace in Momemn, where the Emperor wants him to assess a highly placed adviser of his—an old man called Skeaös—for the Mark of sorcery. The Emperor himself, Ikur Xerius III, brings Achamian to Skeaös, demanding to know whether the old man bears the blasphemous taint of sorcery. Achamian sees nothing amiss.

Skeaös, however, sees something in Achamian. He begins writhing against his chains, speaking with his tongue from Achamian's ancient dreams. Impossibly, the old man breaks free, killing several before being burned by the Emperor's sorcerers. Dumbfounded, Achamian confronts the howling Skeaös only to watch horrified as his face peels apart and opens into scorched *limbs* ...

The abomination before him, he realizes, *is a Consult spy*, one who can mimic and replace others without bearing sorcery's telltale Mark. A skin-spy. Achamian flees the palace without warning the Emperor and his court, knowing they would think his conviction nonsense. For them, Skeaös can only be an artifact of the heathen Cishaurim, whose art also bears no Mark. Senseless to his surrounding world, Achamian wanders back to Xinemus's camp, so absorbed by his horror that he fails to see or hear Esmenet, who has come to rejoin him at long last.

The mysteries surrounding Maithanet. The coming of Anasûrimbor Kellhus. The discovery of the first Consult spy in generations ... How could he doubt it any longer? The Second Apocalypse is about to begin.

Alone in his humble tent, he weeps, overcome by loneliness, dread, and remorse.

Esmenet is a Sumni prostitute who mourns both her life and her dead daughter. When Achamian arrives on his mission to learn more about Maithanet, she readily takes him in. During this time, she continues to take and service her customers, knowing full well the pain this causes Achamian. But she really has no choice: sooner or later, she realizes, Achamian will be called away. And yet she falls ever deeper in love with the hapless sorcerer, in part because of the respect he accords her, and in part because of the worldly nature of his work. Though her sex has condemned her to sit half naked in her window, the world beyond has always been her passion. The intrigues of the Great Factions, the machinations of the Consult: these are the things that quicken her soul.

Then disaster strikes: Achamian's informant, Inrau, is murdered, and the bereaved Schoolman is forced to travel to Momemn. Esmenet begs him to take her with him, but he refuses, and she finds herself once again marooned in her old life. Not long after, a threatening stranger comes to her room demanding to know everything about Achamian. Twisting her desire against her, the man ravishes her, and Esmenet finds herself answering all his questions. Come morning he vanishes as suddenly as he appears, leaving only pools of black seed to mark his passing.

Horrified, Esmenet flees Sumna, determined to find Achamian and tell him what happened. In her bones, she knows the stranger is somehow connected to the Consult. On her way to Momemn, she pauses in a village, hoping to find someone to repair her broken sandal. When the villagers recognize the whore's tattoo on her hand, they begin stoning her—the punishment the Tusk demands of prostitutes. Only the sudden appearance of a Shrial Knight named Sarcellus saves her, and she has the satisfaction of watching her tormentors humbled. Sarcellus takes her the rest of the way to Momemn, and Esmenet finds herself growing more and more infatuated with his wealth and aristocratic manner.

He seems so free of the melancholy and indecision that plague Achamian.

Once they reach the Holy War, Esmenet stays with Sarcellus, even though she knows that Achamian is only miles away. As the Shrial Knight continually reminds her, Schoolmen such as Achamian are forbidden to take wives. If she were to run to him, he says, it would be only a matter of time before he abandoned her again.

Weeks pass, and she finds herself esteeming Sarcellus less and pining for Achamian more and more. Finally, on the night before the Holy War is to march, she sets off in search of the portly sorcerer, determined to tell him everything that has happened. After a harrowing search, she finally locates Xinemus's camp, only to find herself too ashamed to make her presence known. She hides in the darkness instead, waiting for Achamian to appear, and wondering at the strange collection of men and women about the fire. When dawn arrives without any sign of Achamian, Esmenet wanders across the abandoned site, only to see him trudging toward her. She holds out her arms to him, weeping with joy and sorrow ...

And he simply walks past her as though she were a stranger.

Heartbroken, she flees, determined to make her own way in the Holy War.

Cnaiür urs Skiötha is a Chieftain of the Utemot, a tribe of Scylvendi, who are feared across the Three Seas for their skill and ferocity in war. Because of the events surrounding the death of his father, Skiötha, some thirty years previously, Cnaiür is despised by his own people, though none dare challenge him because of his savage strength and his cunning in war. Word arrives that the Emperor's nephew, Ikurei Conphas, has invaded the Holy Steppe, and Cnaiür rides with the Utemot to join the Scylvendi horde on the distant Imperial frontier. Knowing Conphas's reputation, Cnaiür senses a trap, but his warnings go unheeded by Xunnurit, the chieftain elected King-of-Tribes for the coming battle. Cnaiür can only watch as the disaster unfolds.

Escaping the horde's destruction, Cnaiür returns to the pastures of the Utemot more anguished than ever. He flees the whispers and the looks of his fellow tribesmen and rides to the graves of his ancestors, where he finds a grievously wounded man sitting upon his dead father's barrow, surrounded by circles of dead Sranc. Warily approaching, Cnaiür nightmarishly realizes he *recognizes* the man—or almost recognizes him. He resembles Anasûrimbor Moënghus in almost every respect, save that he is too young ...

Moënghus had been captured thirty years before, when Cnaiür was little more than a stripling, and given to Cnaiür's father as a slave. He claimed to be Dûnyain, a people possessed of an extraordinary wisdom, and Cnaiür spent many hours with him, speaking of things forbidden to Scylvendi warriors. What happened afterward—the seduction, the murder of Skiötha, and Moënghus's subsequent escape—has tormented Cnaiür ever since. Though he once loved the man, he now hates him with a deranged intensity. If only he could kill Moënghus, he believes, his heart could be made whole.

Now, impossibly, this double has come to him, travelling the same path as the original.

Realizing the stranger could make possible his vengeance, Cnaiür takes him captive. The man, who calls himself Anasûrimbor Kellhus, claims to be Moënghus's son. The Dûnyain, he says, have sent him to assassinate his father in a faraway city called Shimeh. As much as Cnaiür wants to believe the story, however, he's wary and troubled. After years of obsessively pondering Moënghus, he's come to realize the Dûnyain are gifted with preternatural skills and intelligence. Their sole purpose, he now knows, is domination, though where others used force and fear, they used deceit and love.

The story Kellhus has told him, Cnaiür realizes, is precisely the story a Dûnyain seeking escape and

safe passage across Scylvendi lands would tell. Nevertheless, he makes a bargain with the man, agreeing to accompany him on his quest. The two of them strike out across the Steppe, locked in a shadowy war of word and passion. Time and again, Cnaiür finds himself drawn into Kellhus's insidious nets, only to recall himself at the last moment. Only his hatred of Moënghus and knowledge of the Dûnyain preserve him.

Near the Imperial frontier, they encounter a party of hostile Scylvendi raiders. Kellhus's unearthly skill in battle both astounds and terrifies Cnaiür. In the battle's aftermath, they find a captive concubine, a woman named Serwë, cowering among the raiders' chattel. Struck by her beauty, Cnaiür takes her as his prize, and through her he learns of Maithanet's Holy War for Shimeh, the city where Moënghus supposedly dwells ... Can this be a coincidence?

Coincidence or not, the Holy War forces Cnaiür to reconsider his original plan to travel around the Empire, where his Scylvendi heritage will mean almost certain death. With the Fanim rulers of Shimeh girding for war, the only possible way they can reach the holy city is to become Men of the Tusk. They have no choice, he realizes, but to join the Holy War, which, according to Serwë, gathers about the city of Momemn in the heart of the Empire—the one place he cannot go. Now that they have safely crossed the Steppe, Cnaiür is convinced Kellhus will kill him: the Dûnyain brook no liabilities.

Descending the mountains into the Empire, Cnaiür confronts Kellhus, who claims he has use of his still. While Serwë watches in horror, the two men battle on the mountainous heights, and though Cnaiür is able to surprise Kellhus, the man easily overpowers him, holding him by the throat over a precipice. To prove his intent to keep their bargain, he spares Cnaiür's life. After so many years among worldborn men, Kellhus claims, Moënghus will be far too powerful for him to face alone. They will need an army, he says, and unlike Cnaiür he knows nothing of war.

Despite his misgivings, Cnaiür believes him, and they resume their journey. As the days pass, Cnaiür watches Serwë become more and more infatuated with Kellhus. Though troubled by this, he refuses to admit as much, reminding himself that warriors care nothing for women, particularly those taken as the spoils of battle. What does it matter that she belongs to Kellhus during the day? She belongs to Cnaiür's at night.

After a desperate journey and pursuit through the heart of the Empire, they at last find their way to Momemn and the Holy War, where they are taken before one of the Holy War's leaders, a Conriyan Prince named Nersei Proyas. In keeping with their plan, Cnaiür claims to be the last of the Utemoc travelling with Anasûrimbor Kellhus, a Prince of the northern city of Atrithau, who has dreamed of the Holy War from afar. Proyas, however, is far more interested in Cnaiür's knowledge of the Fanim and their way of battle. Obviously impressed by what he has to say, the Conriyan Prince takes Cnaiür and his companions under his protection.

Soon afterward, Proyas takes Cnaiür and Kellhus to a meeting of the Holy War's leaders and the Emperor, where the fate of the Holy War is to be decided. Ikurei Xerius III has refused to provision the Men of the Tusk unless they swear to return all the lands they wrest from the Fanim to the Empire. The Shriah, Maithanet, can force the Emperor to provision them, but he fears the Holy War lacks the leadership to overcome the Fanim. The Emperor offers his brilliant nephew, Ikurei Conphas, flushed from his spectacular victory over the Scylvendi at Kiyuth, but only—once again—if the leaders of the Holy War pledge to surrender their future conquests. In a daring gambit, Proyas offers Cnaiür as Conphas's stead. A vicious war of words ensues, and Cnaiür manages to best the precocious Imperial Nephew. The Shriah's representative orders the Emperor to provision the Men of the Tusk. The Holy War will march.

In a mere matter of days, Cnaiür has gone from a fugitive to a leader of the greatest host ever

assembled in the Three Seas. What does it mean for a Scylvendi to treat with outland princes, with peoples he is sworn to destroy? What must he surrender to see his vengeance through?

That night, he watches Serwë surrender to Kellhus body and soul, and he wonders at the horror he has delivered to the Holy War. What will Anasûrimbor Kellhus—a Dûnyain—make of these Men of the Tusk? No matter, he tells himself, the Holy War marches to distant Shimeh—to Moënghus and the promise of blood.

Anasûrimbor Kellhus is a monk sent by his order, the Dûnyain, to search for his father, Anasûrimbor Moënghus.

Since discovering the secret redoubt of the Kûniüric High Kings during the Apocalypse some two thousand years previously, the Dûnyain have concealed themselves, breeding for reflex and intellect and continually training in the ways of limb, thought, and face—all for the sake of reason, the sacred Logos. In the effort to transform themselves into the perfect expression of the Logos, the Dûnyain have bent their entire existence to mastering the irrationalities that determine human thought: history, custom, and passion. In this way, they believe, they will eventually grasp what they call the Absolute and so become true self-moving souls.

But their glorious isolation is at an end. After thirty years of exile, one of their number, Anasûrimbor Moënghus, has reappeared in their dreams, demanding they send to him his son. Knowing only that his father dwells in a distant city called Shimeh, Kellhus undertakes an arduous journey through lands long abandoned by men. While wintering with a trapper named Leweth, he discovers he can read the man's thoughts through the nuances of his expression. Worldborn men, he realizes, are little more than children in comparison to the Dûnyain. Experimenting, he finds that he can exact anything from Leweth—any love, any sacrifice—with mere words. So what of his father, who has spent thirty years among such men? What is the extent of Anasûrimbor Moënghus's power?

When a band of inhuman Sranc discovers Leweth's steading, the two men are forced to flee. Leweth is wounded, and Kellhus leaves him for the Sranc, feeling no remorse. The Sranc overtake him, and after driving them away, he battles their leader, a deranged Nonman, who nearly undoes him with sorcery. Kellhus flees, racked by questions without answers: Sorcery, he'd been taught, was nothing more than superstition. Could the Dûnyain have been wrong? What other facts had they overlooked or suppressed?

Eventually he finds refuge in the ancient city of Atrithau, where, using his Dûnyain abilities, he assembles an expedition to cross the Sranc-infested plains of Suskara. After a harrowing trek he crosses the frontier, only to be captured by a mad Scylvendi Chieftain named Cnaiür urs Skiötha—a man who both knows and hates his father, Moënghus.

Though his knowledge of the Dûnyain renders Cnaiür immune to direct manipulation, Kellhus quickly realizes he can turn the man's thirst for vengeance to his advantage. Claiming to be an assassin sent to murder Moënghus, he asks the Scylvendi to join him on his quest. Overpowered by his hatred, Cnaiür reluctantly agrees, and the two men set out across the Jiünati Steppe. Time and again Kellhus tries to secure the trust he needs to possess the man, but the barbarian continually rebuffs him. His hatred and his penetration are too great.

Then, near the Imperial frontier, they find a concubine named Serwë, who informs them of a Holy War gathering about Momemn—a Holy War for *Shimeh*. The fact that his father has summoned him to Shimeh at the same time, Kellhus realizes, can be no coincidence. But what could Moënghus be planning?

They cross the mountains into the Empire, and Kellhus watches Cnaiür struggle with the growing conviction that he's outlived his usefulness. Thinking that murdering Kellhus is as close as he'll ever come to murdering Moënghus, Cnaiür attacks him, only to be defeated. To prove that he still needs him, Kellhus spares his life. He must, Kellhus knows, dominate the Holy War, but he as yet knows nothing of warfare. The variables are too many. Though Cnaiür's knowledge of Moënghus and the Dûnyain renders him a liability, his skill in war makes him invaluable. To secure this knowledge, Kellhus starts seducing Serwë, using her and her beauty as detours to the barbarian's tormented heart.

Once in the Empire, they stumble across a patrol of Imperial cavalymen; their journey to Momen quickly becomes a desperate race. When they finally reach the encamped Holy War, they find themselves before Nersei Proyas, the Crown Prince of Conriya. To secure a position of honour among the Men of the Tusk, Kellhus lies, and claims to be a Prince of Atrithau. To lay the groundwork for his future domination, he claims to have suffered dreams of the Holy War—implying, without saying as much, that they were *godsent*. Since Proyas is more concerned with Cnaiür and how he can use the barbarian's knowledge of battle to thwart the Emperor, these claims are accepted without any real scrutiny. Only the Mandate Schoolman accompanying Proyas, Drusas Achamian, seems troubled by him—especially by his name.

The following evening, Kellhus dines with the sorcerer, disarming him with humour, flattering him with questions. He learns of the Apocalypse and the Consult and many other sundry things, and though he knows Achamian harbours some terror regarding the name Anasûrimbor, he asks the melancholic man to become his teacher. The Dûnyain, Kellhus has come to realize, have been mistaken about many things, the existence of sorcery among them. There is so much he must know before he confronts his father ...

A final gathering is called to settle the issue between the Lords of the Holy War, who want to march, and the Emperor, who refuses to provision them. With Cnaiür at his side, Kellhus charts the souls of all those present, calculating the ways he might bring them under his thrall. Among the Emperor's advisers, however, he observes an expression he cannot read. The man, he realizes, possesses a *false face*. While Ikurei Conphas and the Inrithi caste-nobles bicker, Kellhus studies the man, and determines that his name is Skeaös by reading the lips of his interlocutors. Could this Skeaös be an agent of his father?

Before he can draw any conclusions, however, his scrutiny is noticed by the Emperor himself, who has the adviser seized. Though the entire Holy War celebrates the Emperor's defeat, Kellhus is more perplexed than ever. Never has he undertaken a study so deep.

That night he consummates his relationship with Serwë, continuing the patient work of undoing Cnaiür—as all Men of the Tusk must be undone. Somewhere, a shadowy faction lurks behind faces of false skin. Far to the south in Shimeh, Anasûrimbor Moënghus awaits the coming storm.

Book Two: The Warrior-Prophet

Free of the Emperor's machinations, the Lords of the Holy War fall to squabbling among each other and the **Holy War** fractures into its various nationalities as it marches toward the heathen frontier. Contingent by contingent, it gathers beneath Asgilioch on the heathen frontier.

But Prince Saubon, the leader of the Galeoth contingent, is too impatient, and on the prophet's advice of Prince Kellhus, he marches with the Tydonni, the Thunyeri, and the Shrial Knights. The Imperial Army under Ikurei Conphas and the Conriyans under Prince Proyas remain at Asgilioch awaiting the Ainoni and the all-important Scarlet Spires.

Skauras, the leader of the Kianene host, surprises Saubon and his impetuous peers on the Plains of Mengedda. A desperate battle follows, where, just as Prince Kellhus predicted, the Shrial Knights suffer grievously saving the Holy War from a cadre of Cishaurim. As the day wanes, the rest of the Holy War appears in the hills, and the Fanim host is completely routed.

The Governorate of Gedeia falls, though the Emperor manages to take her capital, Hinnereth, through trickery. The Men of the Tusk continue south. Broken by their defeat on the Plains of Mengedda, the Kianene fall back to the south bank of the River Sempis, yielding northern Shigek to the Inrithi invaders. Prince Kellhus begins giving regular sermons beneath the famed Ziggurats of Shigek. Many in the Holy War begin referring to him as the "Warrior-Prophet."

With Cnaiür as their general, the Men of the Tusk cross the Sempis Delta, and a second great battle is fought beneath the Kianene fortress of Anwurat. Despite the dissolution of Cnaiür's command and the martial cunning of Skauras, the Men of the Tusk prevail once again. The sons of Kian are hacked to ruin.

Anxious to press the advantage, the Great Names then lead the Holy War south across the coastal deserts of Khemema, depending on the Imperial Fleet to keep them supplied with fresh water. The Padirajah, however, surprises the fleet at the Bay of Trantis, and the Men of the Tusk find themselves stranded in the burning wastes without water. Thousands upon thousands die. Only Prince Kellhus's discovery of water beneath the dunes saves the Inrithi from total annihilation.

The remnants of the Holy War drift from the desert and descend upon the great mercantile city of Caraskand. After a number of abortive assaults, the Men of the Tusk prepare for a long siege. The winter rains come, and with them, disease. At the height of the plague, hundreds of Inrithi perish every night. Only a Fenim traitor allows the Holy War to breach Caraskand's mighty fortifications. The Men of the Tusk show no quarter.

But even as the city falls, Kascamandri, the Padirajah himself, approaches with another great host. Suddenly the besiegers find themselves besieged in a sacked city. Diseases of malnutrition, the outright starvation soon begin afflicting them. Meanwhile, the tensions between traditional Inrithi and those acclaiming Prince Kellhus as a prophet—the Orthodox and the Zaudunyani—grow to the point of riot and violence.

Incited by the accusations of Sarcellus and Ikurei Conphas, the Lords of the Holy War turn against Prince Kellhus. He is denounced, declared a False Prophet, and, in accordance with *The Chronicle of the Tusk*, seized and bound to the corpse of his wife, Serwë, who is executed by Sarcellus. He is then lashed to an iron ring—a circumfix—and hung from a tree. Thousands gather in solemn vigil.

After Cnaiür reveals Sarcellus as a skin-spy, the Men of the Tusk repent, and the Warrior-Prophet is cut down from the Circumfix. Moved by a profound fervour, they assemble outside the gates of Caraskand. The Grandees of Kian charge their grim ranks and are utterly undone. The Padirajah

himself falls before the Warrior-Prophet, though his son, Fanayal, survives to flee east with the remnants of the heathen army.

The road to Holy Shimeh is now open.

But far to the north, in the shadow of dread Golgotterath, the Consult rides openly once again torturing those Men they find with a single, implacable question: “Who are the Dûnyain?”

Drusas Achamian faces a dilemma, the greatest he’s ever encountered. Using the Cants of Calling, he contacts the Mandate and informs them of his dread discovery beneath the Andiamine Heights, but he says nothing of Anasûrimbor Kellhus, even though the man’s name could very well mean the Celmomian Prophecy—that an Anasûrimbor would return at the end of the world—has been fulfilled.

The omission torments him, but the more time he spends teaching Kellhus on the march, the more he finds himself in awe of the man. With strokes of a stick across the ground, Kellhus rewrites classical logic, devises new and more subtle geometries. He regularly anticipates the insights of Eärwa’s greatest thinkers, even extends them in astonishing ways. And he never forgets anything.

Achamian, especially after the debacle with Inrau in Sumna, is under no illusions regarding his School. He knows what they would do with Prince Anasûrimbor Kellhus. So he convinces himself that he needs time to determine whether Kellhus is in fact the Harbinger of the Apocalypse. He decides to betray the Mandate, to risk the very future of humanity, for the sake of a single, remarkable man.

While the Holy War awaits the arrival of the last stragglers about Asgilioch, he turns to drink and whores to silence his misgivings, only to find Esmenet among the camp-followers. Their reunion is both ardent and awkward. Afterward, Achamian takes her to his tent as his wife. After a lifetime of fruitless wandering, he finds himself terrified by the prospect of happiness. How can anyone be happy in the shadow of the Apocalypse?

As the Holy War marches ever deeper into Fanim territory, he continues teaching Kellhus. During this time, Achamian and Esmenet make a game of interpreting Kellhus, becoming more and more convinced of his divinity. In the course of these ruminations, Achamian confesses his fear that Kellhus may be one of the Few—those who can work sorcery. When Kellhus claims as much shortly after, Achamian insists on proof, using a small, demon-haunted Wathi Doll he obtained in High Ainor. Xinemus is outraged by the blasphemous demonstration, and Achamian finds himself estranged from his old friend.

When the Holy War reaches Shigek, Kellhus finally asks Achamian to teach him the Gnosis—something that would complete his betrayal of the Mandate. Needing solitude, Achamian travels alone to the Sareotic Library, where the sorcerers of the Scarlet Spires ambush and abduct him.

The torment drags on for weeks. Iyokus, the lead interrogator, even captures and blinds Xinemus in an attempt to wring more information from Achamian. The Scarlet Spires, it seems, have learned of the events beneath the Andiamine Heights. They know about Skeaös and the skin-spies, and with the very future of his School at stake, Eleäzaras is desperate to extract as much intelligence as possible.

Despite his sorcerous constraints, Achamian is able to call out to his Wathi Doll, which has been buried in the ruins of the Sareotic Library. After a long wait the Doll arrives and breaks the Uroborian Circle that imprisons him. Achamian at last shows the Gnosis to the Scarlet Spires. Though Iyokus escapes his vengeance, he and Xinemus are at last free.

After recuperating, the two friends set out to rejoin the Holy War, their relationship now marred by the resentment Xinemus bears for losing his eyes. They find the Men of the Tusk trapped and starving in Caraskand and learn of the Circumfixion of Kellhus and Serwë. Achamian immediately sets out

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