

Prologue: The History of the Realm

In an earlier era, a pantheon of gods ruled over a golden age of men. Each deity oversaw his or her domain and the tribute of worshippers made them strong and powerful. Magic and technology flourished, and the First Empire of Men tamed the land.

Noc, the god of Night, saw how powerful Venifer, the goddess of Magic, and Arsa, the goddess of Science, were becoming. Separately, in shadow, he seduced the goddesses and began manipulating their domains with his darkness. Together, the three of them became known to Man as Tenebris, the Lord of Darkness, a whisper among men: Noc as the head, and Venifer and Arsa as separate fists, each unaware of the other.

For millennia, the followers of Tenebris bastardized the land, creating underground temples, dungeons, and laboratories, unleashing monsters, demons, and other dark forces on the world. They infiltrated society and eventually brought about the fall of the First Empire.

All too late, the gods of men went to war. But the trio known as Tenebris had become too powerful. One by one, the gods fell at the hands of Tenebris. In the end, the only gods with the power to defeat the darkness were the ones that could not be corrupted: the gods of light and fire.

Lucian, the god of Light, and Pyrian, the god of fire, defeated the trio by shedding light on Noc's deception. The goddesses—after years of each believing themselves to be Noc's true love—turned their powers on the god of Night, and the three were slain in an earthshaking battle that reshaped the Realm.

The world of Men fell into chaos. The remnants of the First Empire scattered. The slain gods—good and bad—were reborn as lesser celestials, shadows of their former power.

Eventually, the legends of the War Between Light and Darkness gave birth to the Church of Lucian. The heirs of the First Empire—lost in the woods for generations—craved order, and Lucian embodied order. Pyrian remained a figure of worship, but his chaotic nature was not what the world longed for at that time.

Under the leadership of the Church, Man began to carve out a new society, ruled by the sword, in which magic and technology were closely regulated. Cathedrals sprang from the landscape, and holy orders organized into governing bodies. A relative order and peace was reestablished between settlements.

About a half century ago, the men of the Realm re-established contact with the Mountain Kingdom, a legendary, subterranean civilization of dwarves and dragonkin. The dwarfkin, as they are collectively known, warned of an orc invasion coming through the mountains and asked the Lucites for help. The Church sent a small attachment, bolstered by barbarian conscripts from the borderlands. Upon their arrival, the Lucites were quickly overwhelmed. Orcs poured from every nook and cranny of the mountainside. As the survivors said their last prayers, the mountainside erupted in an avalanche of rock and smoke, burying the orc invaders.

The dwarfkin had used gunpowder, a forgotten technology, and witnesses claimed to have seen Pyrian himself in the smoke.

The event caused dissension in the Church. Many claimed that the strict Lucite regulations on technology were outdated. It was time to loosen the reigns. Far worse than orcs could be out there beyond the mountains, or past the Great Wood, and Pyrian was showing them that the Church should utilize all possibilities in the defense of the Realm. This arguing led to infighting, and the infighting led to war as a new church was formed.

The Pyrian Church models itself after the Lucite Church, but it relaxes some of the former's strict traditions. The gun has become a symbol of their faith, and they have carved out a few settlements of their own in the shadow of the Mountain Kingdom, their closest ally. For the past ten years, there has been an uneasy peace between the two churches, but the Pope of the Lucite Church has been ill for many years, and some of his possible successors among the bishops would gladly see an end to the cease fire.