

The Stars' Eyes

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## Story Bible

On a quest to free his homeland from a tyrannical ruler, Cedric stumbles upon the corpse of a witch. With charred bones and glowing eyes, she is not as dead as she seems.

She offers a weapon more powerful than a sword, with more reach than an arrow, and as limitless as the stars themselves. Her magic is an offer is too good to ignore.

With the dead rising to serve a dark bidding and the line between good and evil blurring, will Cedric use the witch's magic, which risks consuming his soul, or succumb to the tyrant's will?

Historical Background or Timeline

Magic has been a part of the world since its creation. Long was the time it was used for healing, enchanting, and warfare. But the days of magic have waned. Too powerful were its practitioners. Too deadly were the consequences of misunderstanding.

Before the lands were unified, the last great king to rule the many smaller kingdoms had descended upon the covens of witches and wizards who had the power to kill him. Witch hunting was a dangerous job, but ultimately successful,

For hundreds of years, kings have warred over land and resources. Sides swapped often depending on which rivals were in the fight. When Borid, king of Torriner, an outlying province, entered the fray, he did so swiftly and with conviction. Charging through the weakened forces, many lords were killed. The realm quickly became his to command and Borid declared himself High King.

In the wake of the witch hunts, High King Borid was left with no great force to hunt. So, he used his armies to make examples of villages in the lesser kingdoms, and showed his relentlessness and power over them.

During the war, General Marbruk captured Saker Keep to keep a tight grip on the crag lands in a lesser kingdom. This keep also protected the only viable trade route, which he now uses to toll merchants.

Back in the capital of Torriner, High King's Rise, the High King's daughter, Princess Larsa, is overdue for marriage. She has rejected all suitors, and this makes High King Borid anxious and frustrated.

## Main Characters

## Cedric

Cedric is a young man who lived as a farmer in a small community. Cedric has hazel-colored hair and brown eyes, and because he lived on a farm, cannot read. Set by a large river, his village also fished often. He lived with his parents and two younger sisters. Cedric wanted to travel and see the larger cities. The dangers of the wilds did not scare him, so he prepared by teaching himself how to swing a sword and hunt. But at the age of sixteen, Cedric was preparing to marry the neighbor's daughter, and resigned himself to a quiet, local life.

When his village was destroyed as an example to the subjects of a lesser kingdom, Cedric was one of the few uninjured villagers. Everyone he held dear to him was dead, and rather than staying to help rebuild or resettle, Cedric, filled with hot-blooded determination, vowed vengeance against the soldiers who razed his home and the king who gave them the orders, High King Borid.

While dodging an Imperial patrol, Cedric discovers Aney's village. He finds her under rubble and sympathizes with her because her situation mirrors his. There is, of course, one vital difference. She's dead.

Because only the nobles have had a formal education on magic, the only source Cedric can pull from is superstition. For his quest, however, he is willing to ignore them to acquire her power and aid. He has looked to the stars, but never long enough to acquire any secret knowledge or usable magic. Aney will have to be his source of power, and if he's going to be an enemy of the king, he might as well have all the power he can get.

When Cedric meets Princess Larsa, he is reminded of the girl he was to marry. She was nice enough, had many of the same mannerisms, and was optimistic about the future. But she was still the enemy's daughter, so he had to be wary of her.

Cedric's relationship with High King Borid is more than rocky. He's the man who ordered his village be destroyed, yet he seems to want to make amends, which Cedric does not want.

## Aney

Aney is a powerful witch who died over a hundred years ago at the age of 60. While experienced in the ways of magic and understanding the Ethereal Plane, Aney often led the teaching of magic, and focused on enchanting, alchemy. Healing was a rare lesson, because only advanced students were allowed to practice it.

After being burned to death inside her home in an Imperial ambush, she was left with charred silver hair and blackened bones. None of her fellow coven remained alive. Thinking their job was done, the soldiers left, not bothering to lay the bodies to rest the way tradition demands. Aney lay face-up in death, and accumulated magic from the stars. Her eyes glow blue as a result and her consciousness remained. Aney counted the stars in solitude, and learned powerful magics from them.

When a young man named Cedric stumbled upon her ruined village, she was and freed from her collapsed home. Only her torso, arms, and skull survived. Aney was tied to a staff like a scarecrow or large decoration for a staff for easy transportation and defense.

When speaking to others, Aney is taciturn and placid, and speaks in a flat, dead tone. Either from the trauma of dying or from the solitude, Aney lost her sense of humor.

Aney is proficient in alchemy, enchanting, and restorative magics. Since she does not sleep, she continues to learn from the stars and enchant Cedric's equipment. In combat, she primarily uses area-of-effect magic to protect her now-frail body from attackers. When in combat, Cedric does not have to hold onto the staff, as Aney can use magic to hold it up. However, she cannot move on her own, and only her arms and head can move.

Aney's relationship to Cedric is that of a mentor. Much like the nobles, she teaches him about magic, even though he cannot use it. With High King Borid, Aney wishes for his death, for he reminds her of his predecessor. Princess Larsa, however, is at best an acquaintance. While still a reminder of the Imperial agenda, she is in no position of real power unless she marries.

## Supporting Characters

## Princess Larsa

Princess Larsa is the daughter of High King Borid. At age eighteen, she has all the duties and responsibilities that come with her position of royalty, and is long overdue to be married.

Larsa knows of the dangers in her world, but living in a castle, has little experience with them. She lives optimistically, which balances her father's overly-protective and cautious nature. Despite this rosy outlook on life, she understands that dialogue is not always the best option.

In regard to marriage, Larsa wants happiness, security, and peace, and is pickier than her father, who uses her as a shield against harm from Cedric.

## High King Borid

Borid is High King of the realm, and at the age of fifty-six, won that position after cleaning up the mess the other kingdoms created during their war with each other. This being said, High King Borid must do everything in his power to prove he's an eligible and strong leader. In each kingdom, he showed power over the weakened lords and kings, creating a lot of resentment among his subjects. This action, however, created peace as he worked to unify the lands.

To ensure his protection and secure his future, King Borid needs to marry off his daughter, Princess Larsa. When Cedric and Aney get too close for comfort, King Borid's attempts to kill them turn to trying to befriend them. With the enemy too close to fight, High King Borid attempts to marry off Larsa to Cedric, and provide special positions for Cedric and Aney, so they may better his kingdom.

General Marbruk

General Marbruk is a sly and opportunistic man. When the king of the crag lands' defenses proved too strong for conventional attacks and sieges, General Marbruk devised a plan to get bribe the enemy's weak-minded soldiers to open the gates, thus betraying their king.

After his forces swept in, General Marbruk claimed the keep for his own and began operating out of it. While not happy with it, High King Borid gifted the general the keep.

Now in control of his own keep overlooking a major trading route, General Marbruk has begun tolling merchants for using his road. This matter goes unattended by High King Borid, who is more focused on cementing his position over the other kings.

Locations

## High King's Rise

High King's Rise is King Borid's capital, renamed when he conquered the other kings. High King's Rise towers over arid plains and is buffeted by strong ocean winds. Located near the coast, the fishing community and hunters provide boundless amounts of food.

Like many cities, the stone streets and alleyways are covered by large sheets of fabric, coloring the streets by day, and blocking out the stars by night. Many lamps are used to light the cities. To the north of the city is a community of wealthier farmers. These farmers employ others to plant and harvest their crops. With solid wood homes and tall stone walls, they are the model poorer communities wish to emulate.

## Saker Keep

Since the High King is still showing his power to the lords and kings he defeated, his armies continue their marches through the lands. After capturing Saker Keep from one of the enemy lords, General Marbruk took to leading his army from his new home.

Because the keep is relatively small, Imperial tents ring the keep, providing an extra layer of defense. Soldiers are cycled between the keep's barracks and tents to improve morale.

Saker Keep stands among the rocky crags of a lesser kingdom and provides a staging point for the Imperial army to operate. This keep controls a chokepoint for travel, making it easy to defend against invaders and tax merchants.

Aney's Village

Aney's Village was nestled in the east side of the mountain range that outlines the desert center of the continent. The covens that exist are nomadic, and Aney's was on the other side of the mountain was a road the Imperial army used to sweep into the lands of lesser lords and kings. Because witches and wizards had been hunted in the past, it was forbidden to burn anything that produced black smoke, so only plants that lacked creosote could be used.

The witches and wizards primarily lived nocturnal lives, spending hours staring at the stars to collect secret knowledge. This knowledge would later be instructed upon and set into focus by elders who knew better the ways of the Ethereal Plane.

Additional World Information

With the world having one large continent, there are few places to hide from the many kingdoms of Ayles.

Where people have settled, the forests resemble the forests of Pennsylvania, wide and open. However, in the untamed wilds, many of the forests are thick and largely unexplored, resembling the Black Forest of Germany. The foliage is so thick, light can barely meet the ground. This creates an eerie and claustrophobic vibe to the forests.

These wild forests border the populated coastline and the mountains that surround the center of the continent, which is a large desert due to lack of rain. Tall mountains to the west squeeze out the water as the clouds rise over them.

With desert and arid plains in the center of the continent, most civilizations remain closer to the ocean, rivers, and lakes. Refugees sometimes head for the desert to strike out a living.

Communities are fenced in to keep common animals out of fields and away from livestock. Irrigation and sewer systems are new inventions in most parts of the civilized world.

Because magic enters the body through the eyes and can reanimate the dead, it is common practice to keep and bury the dead face-down. The dead that do rise perform tasks for an unseen force from the Ethereal Plane.

While there is no one religion to guide nobles and commoners, it is common practice to bury the dead face-down to prevent them from rising again. The dead only seem to rise if their eyes are exposed to the stars for many nights.

The creatures resemble those of Earth, with one exception: they can change. This change is primarily attributed to the creatures of the night. Owls, bats, and wolves look up to the stars and collect magic and secret knowledge. Without the human intelligence to direct and use this magic, the magic wells up and consumes the soul, eventually twisting the beasts into nightmarish forms. It is this knowledge, and the ability to transform into amalgamations, that people, especially commoners, fear nocturnal creatures. In the smaller communities, no one is allowed to be out at night.

Magic

A large part of the world is the ever-present threat of magic. Whether all magic users are destroyed or not, none can stop the risk of magic reemerging. It enters one's soul through the eyes, and comes from the stars, small holes that link this world to the Ethereal Plane.

When an individual looks to the stars, the magic begins to accumulate, consuming and replacing the soul. This is not a practice that holds no risk, however. While the Ethereal Plane may bestow secrets to those who look to the stars, magic must be taught, either orally or through tomes, for witches and wizards to understand the secrets and make use of the magic. Without proper guidance, the magic that replaces the soul can act out and twist the body into horrendous forms.

This is not to say magic doesn't have its uses, either. By looking to the stars, one can learn secrets, which may benefit human society. It is not the magic that makes wizards and witches dangerous, it is the knowledge and ability to comprehend what others cannot.

When magic is used, its power is equivalent to the charging time. Usually, magic is seen in the form of enchanted tools, and it is these tools that allow for faster spell-casting. It takes many nights to enchant a single tool even for the simplest of uses.

Components for magic tools requires the harvest of magic-replaced souls or part of a magic-infused body. Usually, these materials come from nocturnal animals because they are exposed to the night sky more often and have a higher chance of looking up. The most powerful tools come from beasts twisted by magic, and from the use of human witches and wizards. The use of human remains are taboo within the magic community.

Many commoners are superstitious about magic, and the nobles reinforce those beliefs to maintain control. In the literate world, there is a series of books denouncing magic as a tool or weapon. They teach nobles to fear magic, but also to understand it, so commoners may never use it against them. These nobles walk a fine line between scholarly pursuits and witchcraft, and it is taught that there are no beneficial applications of magic. Even healing is argued against, as the magic is used to manipulate living and dead tissue, and strays too close to the wild magics of the untamed forests.

## Story Synopsis

At the age of sixteen, Cedric's farming village was razed by the High King as an example to the people of a lesser kingdom. Cedric wanted revenge for his family and friends. Revenge on the general who hurt them, and revenge on the king who ordered the general to do it.

Cedric set out towards the distant capital, skirting the western mountain range. High, in the snowy peaks, he discovers a village long since destroyed. It reminds him too much of home, but while there, he finds the corpse of a witch. The corpse calmly looks to him, as if dreaming, and offers him power in exchange for his service. Cedric took her up on the opportunity and fashioned her into a scarecrow.

While Cedric didn't have the magic to fight, he could fight alongside Aney. But when they reach the capital, High King's Rise, they are escorted to the king under heavy guard. When they meet High King Borid, he projects majesty and ferocity. Instead of threatening them, he offers them positions as advisors. One for the common people and one for magic.

Aney, eager for revenge, refuses his offer, but Cedric convinces her to reconsider so they may study the king and his guards. They meet the king's daughter who is to be Cedric's betrothed, if only to give him less reason to kill the king. It is from here that Cedric must make his choice. Kill the king or work alongside him.

Larsa jumped in front of Cedric and pushed him from the door.

"Cedric, please! Don't do this! Don't kill my father!"

"He has to," Aney said. "The High King wronged him, just as his predecessor wronged me. Remove yourself from our path, Princess Larsa."

"I cannot! Not until you see the error of your ways. There must be a better solution. Violence begets violence! My father may have taken your home, and we apologize for that, but look at the good that can come from it. You two are now in a position of power. You can make a difference. Remain as his advisors. I promise he'll listen to you."

"You're too naïve if you think peace is always the answer. Is that the only reason you're stopping us?" Cedric asked.

"I- Well, no. The thing is, the picture's a lot larger than you two think. Father wants you to be his advisors, but-

Cedric grabbed her shoulder and pushed her aside. "He won't keep us around. He can't afford it."

"He wants you to marry me and be his successor!" the princess shouted after them.

Cedric froze and spun around.

"I couldn't have heard that right," Aney said.

"It's true. All of my brothers have been killed. In battle, out of battle, it doesn't matter. The point is, I'm all he has left for an heir, and you're his only shot of continuing his lineage."

"It can't happen. I'm a commoner."

"You won't be for long. Father's already working on creating a new lineage for you to belong to."

"You expect me to just forget about my family? The family that he murdered?"

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