

AYSLE

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PLAYER SECTION



WELCOME TO AYSLE

The billboard on the road to Dover read: "Last Chance Before France." A weathered picture of a perfectly constructed burger dominated the scene. It hemorrhaged onions, pickles, cheese, and two greasy beef patties, and it must have seemed irresistible judging by the horse-sized bite marks on the right side of the advertisement. The three companions stared at it for a minute or so, before the smallest of them broke the silence.

"Why, in all the lands above and below, would this thing remain, when every bit of landscape from here to London is of our home instead?" Tworek, a dwarf clad in dragon armor, always found the oddities that resisted transformation to be fascinating. It made sense when churches and old, storied things remained, when everything else surrendered to an invading reality, but a Burger Barn sign? Ridiculous.

"Reality Storms are forces of proto-nature, Tworek, they don't follow patterns or any recognizable algorithm. They are the most truly random thing you can encounter...aside from the construction schedule on the M25," Marcus replied, despite being as transfixed with the billboard as his companions. It dawned on him that if a beast is hungry enough to feast on metal and plywood, it would jump at the chance to dine on a human, a dwarf, and an elf like patties mashed between two sesame seed buns—no catchy jingle needed.

"You're making up words again," Tworek argued. "Reality storms are not natural at all, and rhythm is for bards!"

Rose was silent. She did not care for Tworek's ill-conceived attempt at humor, nor would she be drawn into a debate on the complexities of reality manipulation. Rose Allain, Warden of the Wild, elf maiden, was in no mood for conversation.

Marcus, paladin of Dunad, carefully analyzed the damage. By the approximate width and curvature of the jaws he couldn't match the creature with anything he had ever encountered in Aysle. A faint memory of paper and dice materialized. *A Gorger, he thought, page 50 in the Bestiary. Or maybe just something from the Living Land that materialized here by mistake...*

Before them lay a terrible gash in the earth. Hewn open from below and measuring almost a hundred meters from east to west. It was not of the Ayslish reality, nor of Earth's. There was a faint, artificial glow from within. Veins of banded metal expanded haphazardly from the crevasse in all directions. The reality down below was trying to get out, testing the resilience of the native defenses slowly and carefully. It was an insidious force, patiently waiting for its opportunity to escape and spread.

"I went through the Eurotunnel many times," Marcus said sadly, "before the invasion. I was fascinated by it as a boy—racing through at 150 kilometers an hour—but growing up, the trip became ordinary, even monotonous. I spent my time working on the train. Well, it will surely be more exciting this time."

"You remember your life, before the transformation?" Rose was curious about how transformation affected people. The idea of going through it terrified her. She shuddered at the thought of being ripped to pieces, like a child shredding paper in a tantrum, and then being glued back together molecule by molecule. The components were there, but you were not the same.

"Sometimes," Marcus replied, "especially when I am presented with something from my past. I believe many of my memories to be Ayslish versions of what truly happened."

"I don't think I could stand having been one person and then forced to become another," Tworek added, "how do ya manage it?"

"Actually, it doesn't bother me," Marcus whimsically stated, craning his neck to get a better look at the gash that led into the Eurotunnel. "I like my new life. Every day is a new adventure, and I still have coffee."

"Most days something new tries to eat ya," Tworek reminded him. Being consumed was an occupational hazard of a Storm Knight.

"True, but it's very affirming when I manage not to be devoured," Marcus responded, with renewed confidence, "and until the day I become part of some beast's diet, I choose to embrace the

challenges my new reality has offered me. After that day I probably won't care."

"That depends on how long the digestive process turns out to be." Rose seldom failed to point out the glaring flaw in anyone's gross optimism. She turned to Tworek and calmly inquired, "Will you be able to manage to get us around down there? It reeks of toxic mechanisms and tainted magic."

"I've been through the lands of the Cyberpope before," Tworek boasted to her companions, "and handled those abominations as well as any lurk or troll. I can navigate any under-land, lined with metal, stone, or dirt with just my nose. We'll make it through, nothing can stop us."

"Good, Viola awaits on the other end, and her message warned of dire consequences if we fail to arrive at the appointed time," Rose said flatly.

"On the other end there'll be biomechanical gargoyles, knights with carbon-fiber reinforced ceramic armor, troopers with enhanced thermographic cyber eyes, drones with heat seeking micro-missiles, remotely slaved zealots, implanted with white phosphorus explosives who are willing to immolate themselves for the chance to burn heretics alive for the glory of the GodNet, and it will all be connected together by a network of wireless relays that can deliver the news of our arrival to an artificial intelligence with a multiphasic quantum processor—all in real-time." Marcus listed off the perils of the Cyberpapacy rapidly, reciting them off like they were the ingredients of a favorite recipe or episodes of a beloved television show. "But what I'm more worried about is what's in between here and there."

"I agree," Rose sighed, stringing her bow for the descent into the Eurotunnel.

"Thank you," Marcus acknowledged, momentarily satisfied that his efforts and predictions were being appreciated.

"Not with you, Marcus," she quipped, "with Tworek. You're making up words again..."

Without another sound, the companions crept into the massive tear in the land, once again infiltrating an alien reality, bracing themselves for the legion of dangers ahead.

SOME YEAR LATER...

In a time not far off—tomorrow, next week, or beyond—the world as we know it began to end. Great Britain, Finland, Norway, and Sweden are covered by a cosm of magic and ruled by a dark lord.

BASICS OF AYSLE

The realm Aysle is a reflection of high fantasy, a world where dragons take flight, giants move mountains, and strangers from another land emerge from underground as both allies and foes.

Aysle is the kind of cosm where the call to adventure sounds from every dark hole in the ground—where sinister creatures and fabulous treasures lurk, waiting to be discovered. It is a place where “because a wizard did it” is a legitimate explanation for anything from changing weather to a minor character changing in name and appearance between game sessions.

Magic is strong here, and partially because of that, the denizens of Aysle don’t look beyond the surface for explanations. Most people just do what they’re told and try to get by. Those who don’t are labeled “adventurers,” out for gold, glory, or just trying to make something right.

A major crux of life in Aysle is the eternal struggle between Darkness and Light. These are more than vague philosophical ideas, they are practical everyday phenomena as immediate as hot and cold or day and night. Those who are inclined to Darkness need no other motivation to do harm—the dark empowers and emboldens them to do their worst. Likewise those who strive for the Light rise to protect others and become paragons of honor, dignity, and fairness.

Where a Core Earther might see shades of gray, in Aysle there is only the intention and the effect. Darkness bullies, manipulates, and pillages. Light opposes Darkness, and it’s as simple as that. If it gets more complex, say bullying a creature of Darkness to keep it away from an innocent person, it becomes neither.

Uthorion is the self-styled Lord of Darkness, and many creatures of Darkness owe him allegiance—but not all. A rare few even oppose him directly for their own ends.

THE STATE OF THE WAR

Uthorion's initial invasion went extremely well. The ritual he used to connect the cavernous Underground to Core Earth gave him unprecedented reach, like having hundreds of maelstrom bridges touching down all across his proposed realm. The ritual consumed the majority of his resources on Aysle, from the time the Gaunt Man proposed this ambitious invasion until the day it launched, and so it's unlikely Uthorion can repeat this feat again.

After his initial success Uthorion concentrated on tightening his grip on areas he held, pushing for energy rich Dominant Zones as he expanded to the edges of what the different High Lords agreed upon as "their" territories. With two exceptions he's taken everything he was allowed, but those two exceptions are both extremely grating to the Dark Lord.

The first exception is Iceland. The population there isn't dense enough to make this a major objective, but it's a key location for stela placement,

to strengthen his control over the Northern seas. Unfortunately the island was remote enough that no tunnels from the Underground reached it during the initial invasion, and every attempt to extend his reach there has been thoroughly rebuffed. The waters to the north of Ireland remain Mixed Zones, which has given powerful Core Earth warships free reign to hunt his sea-monsters and obliterate any Viking fleet foolish enough to raid or attempt to extend his domain.

If Iceland remaining free is an irritation, the situation in Northern Russia is an outright catastrophe. The Tharkoldu were only supposed to press as far North as St. Petersburg—the rest of Northern Russia as far East as the Urals was to be Uthorion's domain. That region is now covered by the "Blasted Land," fallout from the initial breached maelstrom bridge in Moscow, creating an unstable Mixed Zone which is both costly to conquer and yields comparatively little energy for the effort involved.



Uthorion is seething at this turn of events. He was hoping to force the technodemons to clean up their own mess and then cede the stela sites to him, but the fracture in their own forces leaves him no true resort other than backing one of the sides—all of whom he hates.

This left Uthorion to bide his time and consolidate his considerable holdings. His lands are riddled with untaken hardpoints, but he's looking instead for an excuse to delve into Europe and capture the massive energy waiting there unpillaged. Unfortunately that region is set aside for the Cyberpapacy, and he can't move upon it without jeopardizing the entire High Lord alliance. He's launched exploratory raids into Germany and Poland, much to the Cyberpope's dismay. Europe is bracing for a full invasion, little knowing such a strike would shatter the crumbling truce between the invaders.

To both Core Earth and the nearby reality raiders, Uthorion seems like a beast straining against his bonds, and it's only a matter of time before his patience runs out and a new wave of chaos hits the region.

CORE EARTH'S RESPONSE

The initial invasion effectively wiped Ireland, Great Britain, Norway, and Sweden from the map, but forces remain viable inside each nation. The transforming Social Axiom has brought the monarchies of each nation back into the forefront. The various Parliaments still exist but are widely ignored by people inside the realm. Monarchies make sense to the transformed citizens and allow portions of the population to keep fighting for their homeland, rather than embracing the invaders as happens in most other realms.

The term "Storm Knight" was coined in Aysle over a century ago and has become common parlance across all the realms invading Core Earth now. It originally applied to the self-made adventurers who rose up in the chaos of High Lord Uthorion's original assault. This new breed of heroes weren't given their weapons or magic by any lord, but rather they were seemingly anointed

by the storm itself. The battle raging on Core Earth has brought in a fresh wave of these Storm Knights in unprecedented numbers.

The majority of external resistance comes from the navies of the invaded powers. The British fleet is especially active and has wrought havoc in Aysle's Mixed Zones and on any castle near the west coast of Ireland. Even dragons have learned to give modern warships a wide berth without cover from a storm or other magic to even the odds. Iceland and uncontrolled portions of Finland and Russia in the North have become the ports for these ships, although some range as far as Canada for supplies.

Within occupied territory the main objective is holding hardpoints, which keep the vastly superior modern weaponry of the defenders functional enough to fend off Uthorion's hordes. The dwarves, elves, and humans from Lady Pella Ardinay's expeditionary force have been accepted by the defenders, and now most hardpoints have a mixed force of Core Earth and Ayslish defenders.

Ardinay has positioned herself as the loudest voice from free Aysle and speaks for all the affected nations within the Delphi Council. A member of an Earthly monarchy might challenge her position eventually, but all the royal families have been thrown into chaos and confusion by the war. Just having the right blood isn't enough during a fight for survival, only royalty with military or diplomatic prowess gain any traction with the population, and almost every family has had some form of succession crisis in the last year.

In Europe, NATO and the provisional alliance centered in Germany is preparing for an invasion that may never come. Significant effort is going into defenses along the coastline. Watch groups of spelunkers check caverns daily looking for secret stela projects, and most major cities have mandatory periods of silence, so listening posts can detect any tunneling happening below the surface.

Meanwhile, the Cyberpapacy hasn't been getting as much attention, thanks to its non-aggressive stance and anti-invasion posturing. The Cyberpope has gone as far as offering assistance against the Ayslish marauders, which so far every nation in Europe has politely but firmly declined.

YEAR 1 MAJOR TIMELINE EVENTS

Day 1: Earthquakes shake the British Isles and northern Europe as Uthorion invades from the cosm of Aysle, merging the Underground with the Land Between. A maelstrom bridge crashes into Liverpool from the sky and forms the Dark Fortress.

Day 3: Uthorion razes Oslo.

Day 6: Lurks destroy Parliament in London with underground explosives, killing many British leaders and representatives.

Day 8: Tolywn returns and frees Ardinay from Uthorion's possession.

Day 9: British MP Crawley and the Mayor of London, Ram Smith Singh form provisional government.

Day 10: Aysle expands into Scotland.

Day 11: A massive giant attacks Big Ben.

Day 14: Vikings kill a dragon near Trondheim, Norway.

Day 18: Follafos, Norway found covered in webs. No humans or wildlife is present.

Day 21: British Royal Family reported as evacuated from invaded territory.

Day 22: London hardpoint threatened by a huge army of lurks and other creatures.

Day 24: Ardinay and Tolwyn arrive on Earth with allies and defeat the army attacking London.

Day 25: Belfast, Ireland is sacked by giants and Vikings.

Day 29: Ardinay joins the Delphi Council.

Day 33: Ardinay and Tolwyn relieve Siege of Oxford.

Day 47: Confusion over status of most of the British Royal Family.

Day 60: Prince Edward leads British troops to several victories defending London hardpoint.

Day 65: Giants begin taking over large areas of Scandinavia.

Day 73: Corsairs arrive across the Oslo maelstrom bridge.

Day 82: Dragons amass on the Shetland Islands.

Day 88: Agents of Uthorion attempt to assassinate Lady Ardinay while she is in London for a conference.

Day 97: First attack of the Clankers.

Day 109: Druidic order forms at Stonehenge.

Day 115: Refugees flee into the Sherwood Forest.

Day 119: Asheengara, the Great Metal Death, an Elder dragon claims the ruins of Belfast as its lair, and begins to amass a force of dragons and drakes.

Day 129: Last hardpoint in Glasgow, Scotland destroyed as the forces of Darkness recapture the city.

Day 135: Tharkoldu begin settling in the Cyberpapacy Mixed Zone along the English Channel.

Day 147: Large amount of elves leave Ardinay's forces and relocate to Ireland.

Day 160: Fianna resistance group forms and begins attacks on the Dark forces near Dublin.

Day 172: First "gloomstorm" ravages northern Scandinavia.

Day 181: Karreardarr, the last dwarven stronghold in the Land Between falls.

Day 192: Karreardarr survivors appear near Glasgow, and aid the Earthers in retaking the city.

Day 221: Invasion of Iceland repelled.

Day 254: Wardens begin constructing a fortress on Arderin peak.

Day 300: First hunt of the Cavalcade on Ireland.

Day 305: Nightmare tree planted at Céide Fields, in Ireland.

Day 366: A candlelight vigil is held in major cities across the globe to mark the one-year anniversary of the Possibility Wars' start.

STORM KNIGHTS

Storm Knights questing in the fields and catacombs of Aysle have new options for spending Experience Points (XP).

NEW PERKS

The new Perks below include those for races native to Aysle who have traveled to Core Earth in numbers, magic, and those associated with Light and Darkness—two primeval forces of morality woven into the very fabric of Aysle's reality.

If a Perk lists **Beta Clearance** as a prerequisite it may only be taken once the Storm Knight has achieved that clearance level (50 XPs) or greater.

When a Perk boosts an attribute it counts exactly the same as if the gain were purchased by XPs. If the Perk is lost due to transformation or a crisis of morality, so is the attribute gain. The standard ceiling for a race's attribute remains unchanged unless the Perk specifically increases it.

Marcus Newman is a stringent follower of the Path of Light, so he takes the Perk at Beta Clearance which increases his 10 *Spirit* to 11. As a human he still has a maximum *Spirit* of 13, and so he spends 24 XPs to increase his *Spirit* to 12. Later, Marcus falls to temptation and gains a Darkness Perk, and now all the benefits from Light Category Perks are lost. His *Spirit* drops back down to 11. He could spend another 24 XPs to increase it to 12 again, but there's no known way to reclaim the Perk (and the +1 bonus) and return to the Light.

Some Ayslish Perks refer to auspicious conditions when the character was born. A character may only purchase one "Born to..." Perk, because the portents don't overlap. Transformed characters may still be "Born to..." something in Aysle, and such Perks may be purchased later as the character's nature is revealed.

When Light Perks are canceled by a Darkness Perk, the character still possesses the Perks, and they still count towards the cost of new Perks—they just provide no benefits. They are present for effects that allow others to share Light Perks. If this seems harsh—it is! That's the heavy price of corruption for those who once basked in the Light.