

At first there was only the Heaven, the Æther, a river of raw energy, formless and ever-changing. Out of its tides and currents and whirlpools were born the first Beings. They had no language with which to name themselves, but they were the Gods, for they created the World.

At first, the Gods were content to dance among the currents of thought and eddies of imagination, but soon they grew bored, and sought to make something new. For the Gods had been born of creation itself, and had no desire but to create. So the seven Gods gathered, and pooled their power, and widened and deepened a vortex of creativity until it broke through the intangible border of the Heavens. The Gods had created a gate, but to where they knew not, and most hesitated, apprehensive, at the edge; but the boldest God stepped through, out of the Heavens and into the newborn Universe.

When the first God entered, it found nothing but an infinite darkness. Nothing existed there but the energy pouring through the Heaven-Gate. So the first God took a single drop of this energy, and twisted and stretched and wove it back upon itself until it made Matter; and the God rolled this matter out atop the fabric of the Universe. Then it walked north, and where it walked it shaped the malleable earth and stone into vast sculptures of mountains and valleys and cliffs; and so the surface of the world came to be.

Out of the Heaven-Gate stepped the second God, and beheld what the first God had created; and it took another drop of the raw energy from the Æther, and wove it into a new Matter, that was clear and colorless and flowed to fill in holes and cracks and crevices. Then the second God walked south, and where it walked it filled the world with this new Matter; and so the Ocean came to be.

The third God stepped into the Universe, and saw what the other Gods had made. It took another drop of the Æther, and wove it into something clear and blue and cold, and spread it out high above the World; and so the Sky came to be.

The fourth God stepped through the Heaven-Gate, and in the same manner as the others created Fire; and it cast this Fire deep underground, so that the Earth was warmed; then it threw a great sphere of Fire into the Sky; and so the Sun came to be.

The fifth God entered the Universe, and knew no more Matter to create; yet it still yearned for new Creation. So it pulled up a handful of Earth, and crafted it into a new shape that spread upwards toward the sky and downwards into the ground. Into its new creation the fifth God infused a drop of untamed energy from the Æther, which stained it a brilliant green. Thus

did the first plants come to be, and the Gods marveled at how they spread themselves throughout the Universe.

The sixth God stepped through the Heaven-Gate, and knew nothing more to create; so it pulled down the eternal twilight that blanketed the Universe, and pulled it into halves, so that the wonders that had already been created might be beheld anew. Thus did the Light and the Dark come to be, forever to hold each other in balance.

The seventh and final God stepped into the Universe, and like its fellows, it wished to create new things; yet there was nothing for the youngest god to create. The realms of the other Gods stretched to the infinite borders of reality. Frustrated, the seventh God unleashed his might upon the World, shattering it into countless trillions of fragments.

At first, the older Gods were dismayed to see all they had created destroyed so callously. Yet as pieces of the broken Universe began to fall back into place, the Gods began to rejoice, for what was uniform and regular had been made unpredictable and unique.

Thus was the Universe created, and it was as vast and as varied as imagination itself.

The gateway to the Æther had been sealed as the Universe pieced itself back together; for the World was of Matter and Heaven was of Energy, and the two could not coexist so closely. A colossal dome of emerald enclosed the fountain of power that had once poured out into the World; and as long as the Universe existed, the door to Heaven would remain closed. The older Gods paid little heed to this, as their new Universe and its wonders held more interest for them than did the swirling currents of energy in the Æther; but the youngest God wished to leave this Universe and create a new one to be its own. Though the other Gods journeyed to the edge of the Universe to see the wonders within it, the seventh God stayed behind, raging against the sealed gate, the door to its prison; yet the great dome of crystal yielded neither to blows nor curses, and the youngest God despaired. The Universe had been created by all the Gods, and it would take their combined might to destroy it.

While most of the Gods wandered and one God drove itself mad with rage, the Universe, unshaped, took on a life of its own. Mountains rose and fell; rivers appeared, changed course, dried up, and faded; and from the depths of the forests came forth the first Animal. It had earth in its limbs and water in its veins and air in its chest and fire in its eyes, and when the Gods returned from the far reaches of the Universe, they found all manner of birds and beasts and fish and insects spreading throughout their World.

The oldest God, the God of earth and stone, was the first to recognize the potential of these new creatures. It found a small, furry animal that burrowed in the earth, and made it to stand tall and proud; and the God infused its new creation with a sliver of its own essence, the raw creativity from which the seven Gods had been born.

Thus were the People of the Earth created, the oldest of the seven Peoples; and they held within their minds a sliver of the Æther, and they held within their hearts the twin powers of light and darkness.

The other Gods, in turn, created their own Peoples. From a scaly river-dwelling creature the second God made the People of the Water. From a majestic bird of prey the third God created the People of the Sky. From a tough-skinned animal that dwelt in marshes and bogs, the fourth God made the People of Fire. From the root of all life the fifth God crafted the People of the Trees. And from a swift predator of the plains the sixth God created the People of the Light. The Gods taught their Peoples to harness the power of creation within them, and to control the elements the Gods created; and the Peoples built temples and cities and wondrous works of art, and the Gods were pleased.

The youngest God had taken the power of darkness for its own, and had sat brooding on the peak of the crystal dome at the center of the Universe for a hundred millennia; but it was finally stirred to action by the sight of the six Peoples spreading themselves throughout the Universe that was the seventh God's prison. The God of darkness was jealous of its fellow Gods, for they each had a People to honor them, and the youngest God did not. So the God of Darkness found a hairy, offensive creature that swung from trees and chattered rude jokes to its fellows. From this animal the seventh God created its own People. They were fleshy and pink, not as swift as the People of the Sky nor as strong as the People of the Earth, not as fierce as the People of Fire nor as patient as the People of the Trees; yet their God was pleased, for they were its own People, the People of Darkness, and each of them held a sliver of their God's dark purpose.

The Peoples spread throughout the Universe, and the Gods traveled among them, and took on the forms of their respective Peoples. Cities and temples were built in honor of the Gods; trade routes spread above, atop, and below the earth and sea. The Peoples refined the art of harnessing the power of their Gods, and this art came to be known as Magic. And atop the sealed gate at the center of the Universe, the People of Darkness built a great palace for the youngest God, who sat upon its throne and watched as its plans were set in motion.

While most Peoples learned only the power of their patron God, the God of Darkness sought to control all forms of magic. So the Children of Darkness traveled to the lands of the other Peoples, and under the guise of scholars seeking knowledge, learned the other ways before returning to their God's kingdom in the center of the Universe; and for the first time, the powers of creation were turned to tools of destruction. Minerals were called up from the earth, and forges were filled with noise and smoke and fire as weapons were prepared; the winds and seas were harnessed to send armies and war-machines to the kingdoms of the older Gods.

Thus did the youngest God make war upon the Universe.

At first, the Armies of Darkness swept away all who opposed them, yet were eventually halted as the six Gods of Creation lent their power to the battles; for as much as it pained them to unleash their own destruction upon the Universe, it pained them more to see their Peoples destroyed. The ships and war-machines of the Children of Darkness were hurled from the skies and swallowed by the seas; great walls of fire sprang up to halt their advance and yawning cracks opened in the earth to cut off their retreat.

Though its armies had been trapped and destroyed, the God of Darkness was pleased; for in unleashing their powers for destruction, the other six Gods had sealed the doom of their Universe. As the armies of the six Peoples, united, swept the remaining Children of Darkness before them, mages in service to the seventh God were preparing a weapon to destroy the Universe. From the twin powers of light and shadow was forged a double-edged blade; around this blade the four elements were bound and woven together into a powerful spell. As the Gods turned their fury upon the Armies of Darkness, the crystal dome that sealed the Heaven-Gate had weakened; and the Æther-mages of the seventh God bled from the colossal emerald a single drop of pure destruction, anathema to the Gods and all they created. With this drop the mages bound the hilt and blade of their God's new weapon; and thus the Sword of Ages, the World-Breaker, came to be.

As the six Gods of Creation approached the seventh God's palace, the God of Darkness rose from its throne, and took up its sword. It shattered its palace with a single stroke, and cried a challenge to its fellow Gods. Thus began the duel that would destroy the Universe.

The six Gods of Creation turned their power upon their youngest sibling, but each blow was turned aside by the Sword of Ages; for as it would take the full might of all seven Gods combined to unmake the Universe, it would take the fury of all seven Gods to destroy the

weapon held by the God of Darkness. In a final desperate move, the six Gods of Creation joined their power into a blow that could have torn apart a hundred continents; yet the seventh God's great sword merely absorbed this blast, for to take the other Gods' power into itself was the purpose for which the Sword of Ages had been created. To this power the God of Darkness added its own, and drove the World-Breaker into the crystal that sealed the Heaven-Gate; and as the emerald dome shattered, so too did the Universe shatter, as the tenuous fabric of reality was torn asunder. Thus was the Universe broken and scattered by the power of the seven Gods combined.

The energy released by the breaking of the Universe tore the Heaven-Gate open once more, and believing itself victorious, the God of Darkness turned its back on the remaining scraps of reality and began to step through. But the older Gods realized their folly, and turned their power to creation once more, and wove a spell that sealed the seventh God inside its own weapon; and as the scattered scraps of reality settled, the Gate closed once more, never to open while reality remained. Thus was the survival of the scattered shards of the Universe ensured, for only a God could command the full might of the Sword of Ages, and the God of Darkness would guard the weapon's power jealously. Thus was the seventh God's final prize thwarted in the moment of the God's victory.

The Gods despaired, for all they had created had been destroyed, scattered across the dark unreality that lay beneath the roots of the Universe; yet as they watched, the broken shards of the crystal dome that had sealed the Heaven-Gate began to collect around them the flotsam of the shattered Universe; around each shard reality began to form and expand, and pieces of the old World collected into new Universes. Thus did the countless Worlds come to form as they are today, and at the heart of each one lay a fragment of the emerald seal shattered by the God of Darkness; and survivors of the war that broke the Universe spread themselves throughout and across these Worlds, and on each of these Worlds the story of the Gods passed first into legend, and then into myth.

Of the fate of the Gods and the Sword of Ages, little is known. Some say the Gods placed the Sword on its own World, guarded by the greatest warriors of the past. Some say the Sword drifts through the Æther, to be found or summoned by a hero in need, or that the God of Darkness escaped from the sword and works even now to complete the destruction of reality. Some say the Gods returned to Heaven and now dance among the currents of thought and

emotion from which they were born; or that they created a new Universe free from the corrupting force of darkness; or that they wander still across the Worlds and wonder at the creations of their Peoples, as they did in the ancient Universe.