

Dio

"Magica"

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It has been a thousand years since the once powerful planet of Blessing lost its life-giving two suns, and countless millennia since the days of the great magicians. An expedition of alien voyagers came upon the now ice-covered sphere, drawn there by an unexplained lone beacon far below the miles of frozen moisture, they unlocked a written history of Blessing from its almost undiscovered tomb. So begins the story of Magica.

It was a time of celebration. The Book of Magica and the wizards who had used its spells so wisely for the good of the people were being honored in all the great cities of the world. There was however an exception. Where good thrives, evil survives and evil has plans for survival.

The celebration of thanks and prosperity would signal the forces of Evilsyde to begin the attack and ultimate capture and destruction of Magica. The spells from the Book would be used to turn all of those unwilling to join Evilsyde into statues of stone and send their spirits to Otherworld, where they would eventually be assimilated into the energy needed to drive Evilsyde, and maintain its power without the necessity of the Book and its incantations forever.

Defenses were naturally relaxed during the festive preparations and although the battle was well-fought by both factions, the minions of the dark prevailed. Their assault was well-planned and executed to a fault. After overwhelming their initial opposition, they pushed on to the sacred ground upon which the Book of Magica rested. They possessed a much weaker form of magic themselves, and although it would be normally quite useless against the strength of Magica, the inability of the Wizards to gather themselves together in time, coupled with the perfect timing and determination of the attackers, spelled doom for the Book and its followers.

The leader of the insurrection was the high priest and

executioner known as Shadowcast. His presence could make the naughtiest of children become obedient and inspire great fear among the adult population. This man, most vile, would now be ruler of all and answerable to none. His reign would plunge Blessing into eternal darkness and prepare the way for the coming of his master, Astoroth, the Grand Duke of Hell.

The capture of Magica did not, however, mean that Shadowcast had finally reached his goal. He must now find and conquer Blessing's Grand Wizard and legendary hero, Eriel. Eriel, who defeated Evilsyde time and again with his understanding and use of Magica's spells. He would be the last stumbling block of total domination.

Eriel had removed himself from the general population in anticipation of everlasting peace and now he devoted all of his energy to meditation and praise of his God. Lately though, he had been visited by many temptations in his dreams. Promises of pleasure, riches and power raced through his sleeping mind. All these lures had been placed there by Shadowcast, hoping to avoid confrontation between this dominant man and his own villainous forces. Eriel however had resisted these solicitations and was now warned of some impending danger. He managed to make his way to the sacred ground by cloaking his identity with simple spells, only to be discovered just before his attempt to rescue the Book of Magica, but not before he was able to memorize the most important of Magica's charms, The spell of Restoration.

The ceremony of thanksgiving was now directed toward the transmission of spirits to Otherworld. One by one the good souls of Blessing were turned to stone and sent on to their grisly fate, until only the noble Eriel remained. The spectacle that followed was meant to degrade Eriel and raise the courage of the cowardly supplicants of Evilsyde, but true to his indominatable bearing, he promised to return and banish Evilsyde forever. Then he was gone.

The horrors of Otherworld are now revealed to the masses huddled together for some small measure of comfort. First the adults were separated from their children amid cries and pleas for help. Next the old ones were taken away and assigned to a place very near the assimilation site. They were guarded by monstrous, misshapen denizens of this shrouded netherland, who constantly harangued the inmates

with promises of pain and extermination. Intermittent bursts of flame shot up from jagged cracks in the ground, threatening to consume anyone in its path. Shrieks of torment could be heard piercing the murky atmosphere, further unnerving the petrified captives. Only one seemed unaffected by all the inflicted fear and turmoil. Eriel's strength and determination soon pacified the men and women with whom he was confined. When they all became more calm and subdued, he began to speak to them softly as an adult to his children. "Long ago you entrusted me to protect the Book of Magica and to be faithful to its special purpose. It must seem that I have failed you and condemned us all to oblivion, but fear not! This hell is only a test of your faith and resolve. The power of Magica did not vanish in fire. On the third day I will evoke the spell of Restoration. United we shall return to Blessing and, armed with the strength of Magica, we will be triumphant. Many will perish, but Magica and our souls cannot be restored until three days have passed. Take heart my friends. Victory awaits you."

Even magic has its limitations and as Eriel explained to his flock, the spell could not be activated until a waiting period of at least three days. One third of the souls of Blessing would be melded into the Evilsyde collective before Eriel could be effective with the words of Restoration.

The old ones were the first to go. Cries of encouragement and hope were shouted to the condemned as they trudged slowly to their fate. One by one they were thrown into the assimilation chamber where a blinding blue spark gave evidence of their demise. With each burst Eriel's heavy heart ached with guilt for his part in this slaughter of his charges. If only he had not become so complacent. He above all should never have let this tragedy transpire.

In the compound holding the young adults, an insurrection of sorts was occurring. A boy of seventeen years called Challis was urging an uprising among his captured companions. Futile though it was, it earned Challis a place in the cell adjoining Eriel's. His rantings and ravings were soon quelled by Eriel's quiet urging and the two settled into serious conversation. Eriel knew his time of assimilation was near and only hoped it would not be scheduled before the three day waiting period for Restoration was ended. Shadowcast wanted to personally oversee Eriel's termination but couldn't abandon his duties on Blessing until all was secure.

Would there be enough time?

Eriel realized some of his own strong qualities in Challis and decided that this was an opportunity not to be lost. He instructed Challis to remove all anger from his mind and hate from his heart. Only the pure could receive and transmit this most important of spells. Convinced that this young man was ready, he joined with his spirit and gave him these words. "Sanasha Gorath Sollis Arcanna," Words that would resurrect the masses if delivered correctly and in time.

Over two days had passed before Shadowcast was ready for travel to Otherworld to deliver Eriel to his fate. His journey through Otherworld was marked by what could pass for cheers, if they weren't shouted from the mouths of utterly inhuman shapes and forms. Upon his arrival he instructed the guards to take him straight to Eriel. Once there he announced with great satisfaction that he would personally supervise Eriel's execution in a matter of hours. Nearby, Challis loudly voiced his objection to this treatment of his newly met hero and was rewarded by kicks and punches until he could no longer speak. Eriel's heart sank. Had he misjudged Challis and entrusted his people's future to a reckless youth? Eriel's mind wandered to his own younger days. He too had been restless and foolhardy, but in time had outgrown these traits and become the adored leader of Blessing. He wondered if Challis had yet experienced love. Eriel himself had turned his back on the beautiful and innocent Annica. She was his intended from birth, but he couldn't let love for this saintly child cloud his duties to Blessing and the Book.

One hour remained in the wait for Restoration. Eriel's hopes were soaring. Surely Shadowcast would fail once again. But as that thought surfaced, so did Evilsyde's dark leader. Eriel was led away with head held high, but as he passed Challis he gave just the slightest nod. A gesture that wasn't lost on the youth. Eriel was then taken to the assimilation chamber and strapped to the cross-like structure in the middle of the room. Seconds were all that stood in the way of resurrection or destruction. Shadowcast walked to Eriel, presumably to gloat one last time to his old nemesis. Eriel welcomed the time that would be wasted, but at the last moment Shadowcast seemed to reconsider and raised his arm in signal for the end to begin. The arm dropped and, with crackle and hiss, Eriel was no more. Shadowcast and his minions erupted with joy. Never again to be slaves. Now to be masters.

Challis heard the cheering and knew that Eriel had passed without time to summon the spell. Now only he could influence the future. He heard the rattling of armor and realized they were coming for him. Soon the guards appeared and dragged the struggling Challis from his confinement. One of his jailers struck him a mighty blow across the face and suddenly all his anger left him. He was sure of what he must do. Thunder starts from silence and he would be thunder.

Challis was taken to the chamber and secured to the cross. Shadowcast approached him and asked if he had any last thing to say before assimilation. Challis smiled and said he did. Then with an evil laugh, Shadowcast raised his arm and announced that his question was only a final killing joke. It was now or never. As the arm fell in signal, Challis shouted out the spell: "Sanasha Gorath Sollis Arcanna" and all hell actually broke loose. Challis and the good folk of Blessing were bathed in an incredible rush of light. Shadowcast and all his wicked throng writhed in agony in the darkness they were spawned from, as the fierce illumination sought them out and consumed each troll, ogre and gargoyle in a horrible melting frenzy. Shadowcast, hiding in the last black space to be found, watched the light creep irresistibly toward him. At the last moment he cloaked his body with his unpriestly robe and muttered what sounded like an oath as the light touched the cloth. The robe erupted into flame and then there was nothing. Surely Shadowcast was also consumed by fire! But that tale would not yet be told. Now as each remaining citizen of Blessing was transported instantly back to their home, they found themselves standing among thousands of recognizable stone statues. These monuments represented their fallen comrades and would ever be a lasting testament to the dangers of evil and the power of Magica.

Now came the time of mourning. Funeral pyres brightened the night sky for weeks and songs of sorrow could be heard across the land long after the flames had sputtered and died. When the prolonged periods of grieving had ended, the citizens and their council directed attention to the task of anointing a new leader and protector of the restored Book of Magica. The choice seemed a simple one. Challis had resurrected the populace and the Book, but many questioned his youth and inexperience.

The debate raged on as the time of choosing approached. The candidates were summoned to the sacred place. Eloquent speeches were made on behalf of them all. Only Challis lacked a champion and it seemed certain that he would be passed over. "Will anyone speak for the boy?" asked the council. The question was greeted by silence as the judges turned away to cast their votes. Then the quiet was broken. A handsome woman with golden hair, now flecked with traces of gray, spoke: "Challis must be chosen. This is the secret I have carried with me for all these years. Although I was once rebuffed by my only true love, Eriel, our brief union produced the young man standing before you. Eriel was never to know that he had sired this free spirit, but he will live on through his son's achievements if you now find him worthy." So spoke Annica, mother of Challis.

The decision was now reached quickly. Annica's revelation left little doubt in the minds of the councillors that Challis should indeed succeed his father. Evilsyde had been defeated, Shadowcast was hopefully destroyed, Challis had been chosen to lead his people and, despite the huge number of casualties, the old way of life began again. But, evil does not easily die. Shadowcast did indeed survive and persist in his attempts to challenge and conquer Blessing. Great battles would be fought. Brave heroes would rise to the occasion and legends were created. There was, of course, the unforgettable War of the Darkpeace when Challis â€¦. Ah! But that's another story!

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