

in the beginning, the time when all things were created, even before man arose, all things were imbued with magickal properties. many of these powers were biased to the nature of the specific landscape or being. trees naturally were generous with their properties, which provided shielding from other beings, and many other beneficial abilities. there were naturally, by contrast, other items that were not so kind, hard to invoke, and even more difficult to harness, such a thing as fire. fire was unpredictable, and rarely ever served a useful purpose to primitive beings. thus, all things with ability to harness these powers were naturally drawn to what they could more easily use.

it was not for centuries more until even the earliest form of man came to be. mankind naturally was gifted to be able to easily use the powers of magick provided to them, few other races and beasts could best this, but their power drew on the life force of the being they needed to draw power from. many centuries later, when the first civilized tribes of man settled in different areas, generally tending to be plains, or forests, they followed only orally spoken rules and were lead by a single shaman per tribe. tribes tended to be relatively small. there may have been anywhere from ten to twenty people in one group, so it is needless to say they were not very cramped for space, and spread accordingly.

the shamans were originally the separatists from other groups, or leaders, in a sense, of the primitive man who roamed freely. when they found an area that suited their needs, they would settle in the area with a few other people. among those who stopped they chose who could best head their group by natural ability. eventually, when a language was worked out between each tribe, they all made their shamans the ones with the best natural affinity for magick, and appeared the most wise. they must have been wise, for they knew that it was best to maintain peace and harmony, within their groups and with the magick they so thrived on.

this is not to say, however, that only shamans could practice magick invocation. all people were able, and some even had greater ability than that of their shamans. however, there could not be an imbalance between power and wisdom. when such a conflict arose, the difference was generally settled peacefully. a contest of practical spell would take place between current shaman and contestant, then a challenge, usually a riddle, would mark how able the newer one was able. the shaman would consult with the rest of the tribe and make the decision. if it passed, he would step down peacefully and resign his position. if not, there was no consequence, it was as though a matter of entertainment and excitement for a short-lived time.

sometimes challenges were not peaceful, and it was rare. but it happened. several reasons could be for this: one could be that the shaman did not agree with the consensus of the people; another could be that the contestant was bitter about not obtaining the position, further showing he or she did not deserve the position. an upheaval like this could have even forced the tribe to exile a member in extreme circumstances. though there was plenty of room for them to be settling amongst the forests and plans, most chose to harness their fury among the less kind environments.

rocky terrain was nearly as bad as fire in control and nature, although, it was almost as useful for these exiles. they could focus all of their raw hatred for a stronger concentration of will, and could manipulate this rock where their predecessors could not. some people left tribes of their own free will, perhaps not to be burdened by other people, or perhaps to merely study the world they lived in further. these more calm people tended to find themselves closer to the shorelines. perhaps their wish to leave was a calling by the sea itself, who is to say? such people could find much of the same ease in living style as those in the plains, with their tall grasses and numerous beasts, or forests, with their many trees and also wide variety of wildlife. forest-dwellers tended to gather more, and grow food, where plains-dwellers were more inclined to hunt, and further respect their balance with the magicks. but those who were water aligned, learned how to control the tides over time, and have their needs of food, mostly shore fish, and water in one convenient placement. this gave them more time to devote to their study of magick and how to harness it. eventually they could use the power of water from further and further distances from the shores.

the people who lived in the rocky terrain also gained progress. they could hollow out caves by moving earth, shape the ground into a hut or storage pit, and eventually use the ground itself as a potent weapon to hunt for food, or move it in mass quantities to find underground streams. with all of these changes taking place from the original ancestors, people naturally

began to have different mindsets.

forest folk gained ability to speak with beings through the mind, and revered them almost as we do gods, but more equally. plains folk began to favor fairness and weapon craft above all, even more so than before. earth-dwellers tended to naturally have hotter tempers, and with their spread from harsh terrain, some even began to disdain their sense of fairness and live with the sense that the fittest survive by any means possible. water-aligned people pressed further for their study of the world and its workings, and favored wisdom now, more than any other group, although their mindset was generally much more calm than the others.

when disputes began to arise amongst the different peoples, it was the idea of the plains-dwellers to have all people of one alignment elect a single shaman as a representative to settle problems with the other people. some believed this idea was a great plan to further advance. others started to wonder how well it could work with all of the tribes now being so different. such an individual was one known as osbert grahn, himself a man who lived in the plains. but i'm getting ahead of myself, he'll come into play soon enough.

the current leaders of the plains tribes sent out scouts to inform all other tribes they knew of about the idea, hoping it would work as swiftly as possible. when all of the tribes were eventually informed (a process that was not quite so fast as they'd hoped, a number of decades, in fact), the only to immediately dismiss the idea were the earth-dwellers. they still bore an ancient resentment for their brethren for being exiled.

however, it went over rather smoothly for the other tribes. eventually leaders were chosen, but only for the purpose of meeting, a charismatic person was chosen for personality and easy dealings with that which they did not understand. the tribes didn't agree on permanent leaders quite yet. the person chosen would take a few entrusted scouts along and spread any problems, concerns, or anything that was addressed by other tribes. it was here that osbert comes in as a minor role. he criticized the system they were starting, and pointed out to his people that if they could not obtain the support of the 'barbaric' earth tribes, the plan was for naught. he didn't gain his support yet, though, despite his efforts.

after almost a century, the earth tribes were convinced to join this system, with the reasoning that even though they were exiled, they now have their own separate culture, and should be able to express their ideas and resentments. they never were very good about it, however. they were, by nature, stubborn and rude, albeit tolerable. again osbert planted ideas in peoples' heads, saying the shamans were becoming insane, to let such savages be allowed in their council. people no longer shrugged him off any more, but they still paid little attention to him. he was, however, of concern to the council. this fragile alliance was all that was keeping many tribes from breaking into all-out war with each other, even despite their mostly peaceful ways.

it took a few decisions the council made for osbert to truly gain any support. when the scouts reported about the council happenings, they also gave news of grahn's ideas, not knowing he was such a real nuisance. eventually some people from other tribes asked to go to council meetings to hear osbert grahn's speeches. he was an antagonist for certain, but you have to give him the credit of being able to rally all of the clans, even some of the earth-clans he criticized joined him, for the simple reason that some of them didn't want to be involved in a council.

this group of antagonists began to break away from the shamans, being certain they were insane, and started to even shun their precious magick. the weapon craft of the plainsfolk was osbert's real specialty, and he showed his people how much easier life was using them instead of nothing spell, not to mention how much faster things could take place. they became a clan themselves, and were known as the grahn, in honor of the namesake of their founder.

osbert showed more of his radical thinking in using a new governing system. it was not shamanistic, nor was it free among all people for contesting. he proclaimed himself a warlord. he was the leader, and it was not disputed. the people all knew he was most fit. he trained a few warriors specially to act as a policing force throughout his territory. these became the first guards. the grahn also no longer lived in huts or caves or anything of the likeness. they began to have permanent settlements. he even built walls around his settlement. this was also the very first established town.

the council was amazed at the progress he showed and, in truth, began to fear him. it was now that they realized it was necessary to reason with them, and make some sort of peace-

treaty. the water-aligned, in their endless pursuit of knowledge were the first to design an alphabet of runes, for it was the easiest way to share their knowledge with the other clan members and have it last. this was applied to the council immediately, and taught to all tribes. one scout from each major alignment was sent to the grahn town to negotiate with warlord osbert. for all of his impatience with the council, he was willing to listen and did not attack them on sight, as they'd expected. the scouts showed osbert of the rune system, and he ordered them to make a copy of everything they knew for his peoples' use.

this was not easy, but if it meant peace, they were willing. it took several days' work to carve them all and explain their meanings to him orally, but he eventually learned them as well as they. then they came to the actual negotiation process. the scouts were well trained in speechcraft, after hearing the council members' strategies so frequently. they convinced osbert that they wanted no trouble, and would bother them no further so long as his part of the bargain was kept.

osbert took some time to consider their offer, but he bested them, he even agreed that clan members were welcome in his town so long as they abode by his rule, and no shamans were present. no harmful magick was to be practiced, either, or his entire guard force would be upon the caster. the scouts were awestruck, and humbly agreed to the terms, struggling to carve a shortened version of what happened on whatever was available. osbert even sent one of his men back to the council as an assurance that he did not lie, and as a kindly escort to the scouts who were now as emissaries.

the magick users as a whole were shocked by the peaceful resolve of the grahn. despite this rise in activity at that period in time, all of the people, grahn and magick user alike continued on with their regular lives afterwards. as time went on, osbert eventually became old, and in his wisdom, left a system for the next ruler, for there was not yet one to become a new ruler. he decided to have a child, one who he would tutor in his beliefs and would reign as the next lord. in fact, he had twins, a boy and a girl.

the male, he decided to name zarmine, the female, regina. zarmine had more of a magickal ability than fighting ability, and though osbert was displeased with this, regina made up for it with her fighting prowess. osbert decided to leave rule to regina, as she was more inclined to his way of thinking, though she sometimes made a rash decision or two. he thought this was merely her personality was unavoidable. zarmine, as he grew old enough to understand his ability, wanted to learn spellcraft, so osbert sent for a tribesman to act as a tutor for zarmine alone, so he could spend more of his time with regina, osbert knew he was on his last few years.

as his final accomplishments, this system for ruling was now another law. we know this as our first monarchy. the other outstanding achievement, was in accomplishing having the first standing army. he realized that there may eventually be some conflict the town wasn't prepared for. he also realized the efficiency of his guards, and trained a fighting force in the same militaristic methods. osbert's final task he lay before the town as a whole, was to construct higher and more durable walls. to his children, zarmine was to be sent to the council, to learn what he willed of the magick using tribes. regina would rule, and the town and guard would obey her word. though, to aid her, with that occasional lack of sense, he gave her a council of some of the wisest men in the town.

osbert died shortly thereafter. his legacy was now in the hands of his offspring. he was honored as a hero, not only by his people, but by almost all magick-users as well. when a certain warrior was sent from the grahn along with zarmine to share the news, the council members themselves left for the grahn town for the burial of osbert, bearing gifts for the grave and for the town. regina and zarmine honored their father by giving his demanded signal of loyalty, pounding one's fist against their chest, swinging the same-side foot in a similar motion, standing stalwart and showing no signs of sorrow. when the ceremony ended, the warrior and bade the council to speak with zarmine and regina.

regina explained the situation, and the members accepted osbert's final wish, the warrior followed as well. when they arrived at the building where the meetings of the council took place, they explained that it would be rigorous for someone not accustomed to the ways of magick to learn, but zarmine waved it away. he did know some things he was not expected to. zarmine was privy to the thought that all magick was one universal school, so he had to be broken of that ideal, by seeing it with his own eyes. once he was shown the basics of their beliefs and culture in

general, he was taken to a tribe of a clan of his choosing. he gave his farewell to the warrior escort and assured them he'd return a better person.

regina made herself known to her people, giving speeches, proving to be just as tough a military leader as osbert, and tried to be just as good a leader. but she wanted an accomplishment of her own. the town was nice, but it was becoming crowded. she ordered their makeshift walls torn down and began expanding their town. many more houses were built, and walls of stone were made. farming land was cleared on the outer part of the walls to support the extra people. this was enough to satisfy her.

zarmine in the mean time, chose to first stay with the water clans, as he believed his thirst for knowledge to match theirs. he learned of the origin of runes, and how they'd advanced it already. they started the art of enchanting, carving runes into objects and imbuing them with a limited amount of power. but in terms of progress, this was incredible. their people were no longer bound to just their homelands to use magick.

he studied with them and learned all he could. he became proficient at water magicks, and enchanting. he learned that the water-aligned are very much like water: they are usually very calm, but can lash with the power of a torrent if provoked. next in his choosing was the plains magick. he journeyed there and thought about all he'd learned in that period of time, making his own views on how each clan is better than the other.

when zarmine arrived, he realized that, except for the huts, the plains people were very much like his own. there wasn't much to learn here, except how to hunt more efficiently, and how to better respect the balance of nature. he didn't initially value the concepts completely, but learned them nonetheless. next was to the forests.

he arrived and realized they were vastly different from anything he'd thought. the people became druids, in a sense, speaking with trees, animals, all sorts of life, only now, it wasn't spoken, everything was mentally done. transference of thought would save much time and arguing, he thought. people still spoke to each other, though, out of tradition, even if it wasn't necessary. beasts lived beside men in complete obedience. this puzzled zarmine, he was use to seeing savage animals tearing each other apart, and in time, the forest-aligned explained the domestication of animals. this fascinated zarmine. he took over a year studying them, and the natural beauty they'd made of their land. most homes were no longer huts, but like his houses, only in treetops. this was a secret they were not yet ready to divulge to him, as he wasn't yet studying under them long enough to understand.

zarmine wasn't exactly happy with that thought, so he decided to make for the earth clans, although this decision was more in general interest than spite. with a plains guide alongside him, they traveled to the barren rocky lands. then, they came upon a massive structure, it seemed to him a rock spire, only carved, and round, and smooth. the plains guide backed away, unfamiliar with it, and retreated back to his own territory. when zarmine came upon the base of the spire, he heard a voice.

he looked around, not sure where it came from. 'twas not to his left, nor right. nor behind or in front of him. again zarmine was puzzled. the voice eventually commanded him to look upwards, and he obeyed. he was not met with welcome words, until he explained his title, then the portrayer of the voice came out after some time at the bottom of the spire. he was apologetic, this man, and welcomed zarmine to the major accomplishment of the earth clan, the first tower. curiosity overwhelmed him, and zarmine instantly began inspecting the stone craftsmanship. he was looked upon by several other people in the tower, until he was eventually told to stop and come inside. this also confused him, he wondered how people were inside of a rock. then the man from before shook his head in disbelief and showed him in.

it was unlike anything he'd seen. so many things made of stone and gleaming metals. after the occupants of the tower eventually began to become slightly annoyed with his curiosity, they showed zarmine to his private quarters for as long as he was there. he thought it a good idea anyway, he wanted to record his experiences so far. after staying for only a few days, zarmine could tell earth magick was by far the most practical. he'd seen them make weapons, buildings, and even manipulate the ground for their further advantage. their people could even make beauteous statues out of the soil, in minutes, as opposed to what he'd seen his people in the town sculpt for months and not come up with such quality.

from what he could gather about the earth clan, was that they basically wanted to be left

alone to do whatever they wanted, even amongst their own tribes. for the most part, their people did so and didn't have trouble. they were surprisingly civil as opposed to what he'd heard before arriving in the tower. zarmine realized now that most of the reasons the clans and the grahn disliked each other was due to misunderstandings of culture, and now that he'd learned how to practice the craft of each of them, he'd ideas of his own for spell craft. he kept his ideas to himself for some time, however, unsure of how they'd be received.

zarmine decided it was time to head back to the council. this time there was no guide, though, and he got a little lost. it was not as today where there are paths everywhere, and he knew no landmarks. eventually he came upon a man, who seemed subtle enough, so he decided to ask this man directions. first, he wanted to get to know who it was, so he asked whether he was clan or grahn, and the man responded that he was neither. so zarmine naturally assumed he was another exile finding his way. again the man replied with a no. this man was easily unlike anything zarmine had ever known. he held no alliance, and was alone of his own accord.

he admitted to not knowing where he was, finally, and the man agreed, he was not any expert in the clans' whereabouts either. so zarmine decided he would travel with this man, as surely it was better to have a companion when lost. since this man had no affiliations, zarmine also trusted telling this man his ideas for spells. he told of how he thought the earth clan could benefit from raising their living areas from the ground, as they would when making weapons of earth, even if it would require extra focus at all times. he mentioned that he thought the forest clan could fortify their lands by controlling the growth of certain plants and trees tighter and higher for a natural wall. he said he thought it would make the plains clan have an easier life if there was magick to be as stealthy as their hunters. he said the water clan should develop an easier system of writing, so that everything did not have to be carved.

his final idea was a radical proposition. zarmine noticed that the wind was very strong that day, and it was not on their backs. so he decided that anyone who could control the wind could have a significant advantage over all of the other clans. his companion agreed that all of these were good ideas, some even surprising. but now it was zarmine's turn to listen. he knew that all magick was taken from a life form, or landscape and given shape or purpose, but this was a concept tried and true. the idea was proposed that the truly most powerful magick could only be drawn from humans.

zarmine did not understand at first. who could have? no one had ever thought of it before, and no one could have an idea how to put it to use. it was evident that this man had been holding onto the idea for years. zarmine realized that they had travelled for such a long time and never quite knew each others' names. the man said he knew who zarmine was, and knew of his sister, and zarmine was astounded, then asked his name. karsten, was all he said.

zarmine asked karsten if he had any idea how to put his magick to use, and karsten said he did, but merely knew no one who would allow him to practice on them, and no one to accept the idea in the first place. not being of original shamanistic birth, zarmine was open to many ideas, and agreed. karsten sat on the ground in a position awkward-looking to zarmine, but he realized it was better if he'd follow suit and remain quiet. obviously he was trying to focus energy. with some strange invocation words unheard ever before, zarmine saw white aura in the eyes of karsten, and was a little afraid, but remained positioned. without even seeing an effect, zarmine felt his body set in with great fatigue, then a burst of pure energy emerged, and remained still in between the two.

both were amazed at the result. the energy was hotter than any flame, yet it appeared dark, cold, empty. the energy fluxed, and karsten broke his concentration as he jumped with surprise, it no longer remained in a set position in front of them, and dropped to the ground, tearing away at the ground until the energy ran out. neither one could believe their eyes. the whole in the ground before them was at least the the height of three people stacked atop one another down in the earth. it was still smoldering from the intense amount of energy. after quite a few moments, zarmine decided to ask karsten how he came upon such a secret. his response was that it was purely serendipity, and offered to show this skill to zarmine. he taught him the words of invocation, then they both stood and decided to start moving again.

eventually, they happened to come upon the earth clan's tower again. karsten told zarmine that he wanted to stick to his vow to not have any affiliations with the rest of the clans, and they parted ways. zarmine shouted up to the top of the tower again, but there was no answer.

he thought he wasn't loud enough, as the walls were solid stone, so he shouted again, louder. the only answer he received this time was his echo. zarmine was a little surprised, but he wasn't concerned. he decided to hurry back to the point where he last saw karsten. he did see a person in the distance when he got there, so he continued running in the same direction. zarmine soon discovered that this person was headed in his direction, it could not have been karsten, but he continued anyway. when he was within a distance that was close enough to see the person, he recognized her as one of the plains clan members. he wanted to ask directions, but she preempted him, and appeared to be in quite a panic. she was yelling, and speaking quite fast, but from what zarmine could understand, the plains tribe where the council was held was under attack, and that zarmine was sought for. he decided to come with, as it served both of the purposes: he knew where he was going now, and he was curious as to what had happened.

as they neared the huts, one could see smoke rising and blackened ground. someone had set fire to the place. it was decided that it was best to walk at a brisk pace, so that they would be swift, but ready. zarmine was horrified, it was much worse than he thought. many of the huts were completely destroyed, and only one was intact. they rushed towards it to find out whether or not there were survivors. there were, but only a closely huddled group of four children. they looked at zarmine with intense fear, then started crying. zarmine looked to the woman he'd been travelling with, and decided it was a good time to ask what happened. it was all regina. she was not satisfied with the expansion of the town, and grew increasingly impatient with the council in regards to their slowness to make decisions.

the children were bawling by the time she finished reciting the news, and zarmine became very grim. he told the woman to see if any other yet lived, and stayed with the children to try to comfort them. there were three girls, and one boy, all appearing to be the same age. zarmine offered his own travelling cloak over them, but they refused, and zarmine did nothing further but wait. she had returned, but nodded her head. zarmine mourned for the people, but resolved to fix this. his first action was to ask the woman to stay with the four, to provide for them as best she could until more people arrived. then he asked directions to the nearest tribe, recieved them , and headed out.

it was a relatively short and simple walk, he went to the hill he was instructed to, saw the people from it, and sprinted towards them. this tribe was completely unaffected, but knew of the plight of their neighbors. after zarmine explained his situation, they promptly sent four men out, and he was informed that regina wanted to see him, and that it should be done soon. so with yet another guide he did not know, he set out for the grahn town, as he may have lived there at one time, but only ever saw it's outside once, so he was unfamiliar with the land. it was another short travel time, only a half of a day's walk. when they came upon the walls of the city, the guide told zarmine he would make camp outside and await his return. zarmine knew it was a good idea, with regina acting so unpredictably.

he came upon the main gate, and was admitted instantly. he rushed to where his sister could be found, ignoring all gaping people in the midst. he flung the door open and was immediately greeted by the tip of a guard's sword. regina called him down, and zarmine entered cautiously. she had been sitting in her large chair slumped over, and looked quite ill. he immediately began to interrogate her for the reasons for her actions. she explained to him that she wanted to build another town, but larger, and better. she explained all of the details, and that her idea was from members of the earth clan, that their tower was such a brilliant idea, she wanted multiple of them, for the corners of the new town. she explained that this would be a good thing for the people, as they were still overcrowded, and they needed more territory. but the council had intervened, and proclaimed that she needed no more territory, that the grahn could continue expanding the town instead.

regina then began to smirk as she spoke. she said she had told them that they would allow it or lose their heads. they didn't expect her to act on the threat, but she did, and the magick users were all punished for it. zarmine noted her illness, and the absence of her own advisers, she laughed and told him that she'd killed them for defiance, as if it was normal to do so, then shrugged off that she was not well, increasing zarmine's concern. regina gave zarmine the option to come back to the grahn and aid her in any further attacking she intended to do. he instantly refused, and shouted claims of injustice. she started to grow offensive in speech, and told zarmine that he had become far too much like the shamans, and that it was only because he was

her brother that she had not killed him personally by that time. she urged him to remain inside of her territory, yet he refused again. regina grew more offensive, and told zarmine that she would house him if he would remain and apologize, but that if he left, she would no longer protect him, even brand him as an enemy.

zarmine said he would consider her offer, then shuffled out the door. he knew it was unwise to make his own family an opposing force, but to ally with her was obviously insane, and his own safety was still not guaranteed. the place had changed considerably since he had lived there, and zarmine was at a loss in terms of deciding where to go. the people generally recognized him, but it was more looking away than speaking to, as if they were ashamed. zarmine walked down several rows of houses and across several more, finding much of the same treatment. he was very confused at the thought that the people were scared of contact with him, as he'd done nothing more than what his father decided was best, and he knew the people liked his father.

eventually he became very troubled by this, and stopped a stranger on the street to ask what the problem was, but the man still refused to look zarmine in the eyes and ran away, covering his face. he tried this many times with a similar result, but realized he was only asking adults, so he decided to ask a child who might not know better what the problem was with his presence. he asked such a child, a girl, and she told him that regina thought that certain people were conspiring with the shamans and were trying to sway zarmine away from the grahn, and so told the guards that anyone speaking to zarmine would be a target for the guards to execute.

his mind was made up. there was no hope in staying with his sister. remaining with the shamans would mean war would come faster, but it was destined either way. since talking with more of the common people would do nothing but endanger them, zarmine saw nothing left to do within the town. he eventually came upon the entry point, where he spoke with one of the two guards stationed there. he looked a little uneasy in zarmine's presence, as anyone would have been. he realized though, that with another guard present, the two would understand that no one's life was at risk, considering there was another guard to hear the entire conversation.

zarmine merely asked what the guard thought of regina in comparison to osbert. the answer was that she was an equivalent ruler until she fell ill from a sickness that most other people shrugged off. it affected her mind, he said, and that he wondered what was going to happen if she would be the ruler for much longer. the other guard nodded in acknowledgement and stared at the ground for a time. he proceeded to say that no one would rise against her out of fear for their own lives, that the guard force swore an oath to osbert to serve the ruler.

then zarmine was heavy with regret for leaving his own people for so long, being unable to prevent this from happening, but asked if either one would tail him right if he left. they personally were not allowed out of the town, but would have to alert other men, in theory. but they admitted it to be only fair to give zarmine a days' time to start escape. he thanked the men, saying that he'd repay them. he even told them of an etching he'd used for others to identify him with, and scrawled it into the ground before them, so that they might be reminded that he was indebted to them.

within seconds he bound out and met with his earlier guide and explained what was happening. the guide looked more worried than zarmine, apparently he'd had a single case of this disease in his tribe, where the person could not be cured, and his decisions grew rash and he continuously spoke to himself. even the most potent shaman magic could not cure this disease. this was madness. the single incurable disease they'd ever encountered. zarmine directed a reasonable question, he asked what they did to the afflicted one. the answer also seemed logical, they had him severely restrained. not to the point of inability to move, but he was always monitored by multiple watchers and could only venture outside when accompanied by them.

when both realized that this was most likely what had happened to regina, they grew solemn. zarmine eventually spoke up, though, and made mention that they needed to hurry to get away, as the guards only gave a limited amount of time. even with their word, the mad ruler could be after them already anyhow. they set forth unto the camp again, though not at much haste, as they knew they'd need to conserve that energy.

zarmine explained the dire situation to the head shaman, and a plan was immediately conceived. all available scouts, and half of the hunters and trackers would have to convince the neighboring tribes to aid in the trouble. all non-scouts were to salvage what they could, take all of

their goods they could carry, and head to the nearest unfilled earth clan tower, aside of the largest one, then explain the same to them if they hadn't heard already. scouts were to repeat all of the same news and instructions given to them, plus the addition that all head shamans should converge at the largest tower for preparations and general preparation. so the shaman made certain everyone understood their duties, and sent everyone out on their respective task.

zarmine followed the shaman and asked what he intended to do if an all-out war were to break out, he shook his head and gave no further answer. zarmine nodded, he understood, then made note of a few more questions. one of which was what to do if any clans refused, surely they shouldn't just be abandoned. to which the shaman responded that most of them should have the sense to listen, and if not, they would surely fall. the next question was about the preparations part. zarmine asked how the people would defend themselves with the head shamans so far away from them, to which he replied that the grahn would be too confused about abandoned settlements to figure out their plan immediately.

before he could speak again, zarmine was interrupted by the shaman. this time the question was for zarmine. the shaman wanted to know how much of a threat the military stylings of the grahn were. zarmine said that the plains clan could probably hold them off best, as they were the ones who had basic weapons training, but the grahn had already advanced the weapons they knew, and made them more formidable, so every plains tribe member wielding a weapon would have to have some form of backup.

the shaman's sentence was punctuated by a shout that came from outside of the two of them. a member of the tribe was being chased by a grahn militant from a direction closer to the town. zarmine and the shaman glanced at each other and synchronously ran towards the situation. it had begun. zarmine was the first to speak, halting the soldier. the soldier confirmed the identities of the two, then informed them that regina herself was going to coordinate the attacks, and that he acted as her herald for the clan. zarmine told him he'd already known it would come, and bade him leave. the soldier did not.

he instead planted his spear in the ground and said, in what seemed to be a speech memorized through torture, that regina marked her brother as a traitor and a foul enemy, with high reward to whoever caused his death. zarmine asked the soldier if he was there for the reward. the retort he received was a battle stance. the tribe shaman appeared to be readying a spell, but zarmine waved him away, and told him to protect his own immigrating people. seeing no wiser plan, it was done. now it was only the prodigy and the warrior.

zarmine flashed his hands and arms with blazing speed in different combinations of movements, then the aggressor realized he was in for more of a fight than he thought. the grass and brush all around stood straight upwards and converged as much as possible in a circle about the caster as he stood resolute. the soldier did as he was accustomed, a full charge forward. only then did he realize his mistake, tiny droplets of water rose through the air and converged around one area. zarmine had used the waters of the grass to conjure a sphere slightly larger than the soldier himself, who was then surrounded in liquid. zarmine still had not moved, even a slight, as he had his gaze fixed upon the face before him.

in a matter of seconds, the soldier began to run short of air, and the look of fear pierced zarmine's gaze and concentration. he realized he was no killer, and he was taught more peaceful ways. of course, none of this showed to the other combatant, he was busy gasping for air all the while. zarmine spoke directly to the soldier's mind, the way of the forest clan, saying that he had not intended a kill, but surprise, and would allow the soldier his life if he'd turn and flee, and then promise not to return to battle with his people. it was obviously understood, as he stumbled into a full sprint away from his intellectual superior.

zarmine's next course of action was to follow along with the ordinary tribe members and the head shaman. for a great number of days they traversed a large amount of terrain, doing the job some of the scouts were to do with the tribes that came within sight, and gaining more followers and more to spread the word. on the sixteenth day of travel, they found a site where all but one person had left. at first, they'd all thought regina had already gotten them, but the sole inhabitant strode out to meet them. she said the plan was already heard and in motion. the entire company was delighted that it was working so wonderfully, and they all got quite the morale boost. she joined the rest and they pressed on.

for twenty four more days they all journeyed, but now a greter concern then regina arose,

two, in fact. the first was the lack of food in the area, and the second that the usual guides didn't know the area. to zarmine the situation was all too familiar, only this time, there was no karsten. still, he thought it unwise to mention the name, and asked the scouts and hunters to decide amongst themselves which direction they would go. it was almost a unanimous decision that it was easier to tell if they could get to a source of water first. since none of them knew the area, the question still lingered where water could be found.

zarmine came upon a realization. the earth clan used this idea when they lacked water: move soil until you hear water under it. so he asked everyone to stand back, and that this was not an easy or sure method. zarmine raised his hands to the skies, wide apart as if lifting a giant boulder and said a few phrases, then parts of the sand started to dissipate. within seconds a noticeable crack had started running in the ground, with earth piling on either side. zarmine's face had started to silently writhe in pain as the ground moved. he was about the height of his arm, were he to stick it in and measure. his arms faltered and he fell to one knee. the tribesmen rushed to his side to ensure he was still alright. it was obvious that his powers were overexerted. the head shaman told zarmine it would be wise to not cast spells until the next day. perhaps it was due to his own weakness, or more likely, the fact that night would fall soon anyhow, that he agreed and rested. the shaman instructed the people that the process could go very much faster if they'd all pitch in and start digging, either by hand or if they could replicate zarmine.

when zarmine awoke the next day, he was being carried by several people. they all seemed to be refreshed and moved with a quick pace, so he asked that they set him down. when he received no response, again his first thought was that he was captured as he slept, but the four were of his tribe, as he saw once his eyes were fully functional. they said he was supposed to be aided to restore his strength, but when he leapt from their carry, no further resistance was met. the scouts were back on track, and looked determined. there also appeared to be more people following them, zarmine realized, and said so to the shaman. or so it was the shaman he thought he'd spoken with so many times before. no, this was a different one, a woman.

she smiled, and said he'd been out for a few days' time. he was right, there was *another full tribe* of people in tow. water clan, he saw. the company was much closer to the earth clans than he'd thought, as they came upon a tower within that same day. everyone cheered when it was first in sight. finally they achieved their goal. as the best candidate for persuasion and credibility, zarmine took the lead and led the people to the tower. he employed the earlier tactic when faced with a tower. shouting, that is. the man who peeked his head out one of the holes gasped, and seemed oddly familiar. zarmine instructed the people to stop and rest their legs.

when the representative of the clan appeared once more, zarmine realized that this was the very tower he'd studied in. they were slightly less hospitable this time, though, and for good reason. he was unannounced, and brought a larger number of people than they'd ever expected to see. if only they'd known...

zarmine and the two head shamans set to find the leader of this tribe, who they found sitting atop the tower, floating rocks seemingly being juggled about his person. they explained what was happening, and asked if it would be excusable to leave some of the group in the tower. he complied fully, and about three quarters of the people remained at the tower. the rest that remained were about half water clan and half plains clan. the earth head rose, rocks falling to the sides and hurdling downward to be split upon contact with the ground. he knew it was best to follow the other shamans. but before he set out, he brought one more scout and one more hunter along. any more would just be unnecessary, as they knew the land sufficiently. especially given the fact that, as zarmine also realized, the view from the tower's peak was superb.

though they could have easily skipped many of the tribes, it was insisted that all closeby tribes receive the instructions. this did slow them down considerably, but it was really for the benefit of all, so it was done. after the sixth tribe was notified, and none but the now nine tribe heads remained, they set out for the largest earth clan tower, as said earlier.

upon arrival, they were met with opposition. the two tribe members outside barked commands at them, saying to the group that their master wished to be undisturbed. it was apparent that the two thought they were different people, as all seven earth shamans hurled a pile of dust in their direction. the two spat it out and reluctantly let all nine through, as the whole group laughed at the incident. the man heading the largest tower was a large, strong, man himself, towering over even zarmine. he was bald except for a single spot of hairs wrapped

together with a strip of fur, and had small, pointed beard. despite his visage, zarmine was not intimidated, and proceeded to say the same thing he'd said so many times before.

the man seemed unaffected and asked them to dine with him. given that they'd been eating only on a hunt-gather basis, they eagerly agreed. during the course of the meal, zarmine discovered that the woman he'd seen rousing from consciousness was the head of the entire water tribe, and was very skilled at enchanting, so she said. he'd also learned the two clan heads' names, the earth clan leader was known as darren, and the water clan leader was called mina. darren revealed that he was only comfortable speaking to guests if they'd dined together and knew each other by name. zarmine was next, but the introduction was unnecessary, more out of politeness. then the plains shaman spoke his name but zarmine had missed it. he thought nothing of it, aside of minor fleeting guilt.

the seven earth shamans left directly after finishing their food off, leaving only the two heads, zarmine, and the plains shaman. discussion immediately became grave. zarmine brought up the topic on everyone's mind: what would they do now? darren assured everyone that the fortifications wouldn't easily fall, even if the grahn army did happen to overtake the allied shaman forces. then mina broke in with her idea, and insisted that zarmine use all available time left to prepare as best he could. since he was the only person who knew a fair amount of each tribe's trademark abilities, the two heads and the plains shaman should continue to train him in the arts for further mastery. none disputed it.

the four simultaneously arose and left the room together, preferring the open air to think and move. darren said the order would be fair, first himself to teach, then mina, then the plains shaman. the next thing they decided on was the length of time for training. and they did, one month for each, then any time left after that would be decided when it came. mina and the other retreated to the tower, and darren began right away. after a series of endurance exercises for a week, he began to show zarmine real techniques, including a more efficient way to implicate his groundwater-finding ability, and another to raise the earth and rearrange it from loose soil to hardened rock. this sparked zarmine's earlier idea. he asked darren if it would be possible to permanently section of earth permanently, provided the shaman had constant focus. darren pondered it, not sure what to answer as he'd never tried it before. he put the question off and training commenced.

as darren's month was nearing an end, they reviewed everything, and zarmine realized he could perform all of the invocations he learned with much less energy. mina knew the time had arrived and was waiting. zarmine was eager to speak with here, as his ideas were many for one of her skill. he bombarded her with questions about enchanting: limits, what could be enchanted, how to enchant things, and others of the sort. she told him it all depended on the caster.