

BEFORE

There is no cat alive today that remembers what it was like before the wastelands.

Existence had been a death sentence. What little life remained scraped by, surviving on scraps and violence and hostility. Some cats took power over massive colonies, exploiting them. Others lived solitary and dangerous nomadic lives. Some survived easily; others did not. Tar and ash covered the land, sunlight and rain were rare and welcomed sightings. The world was broken and dying and wrong, and everyone accepted their fates.

That is, until word of Paradise spread. A lush, fruitful land with enough resources for everyone who entered, clean waters and blue skies. There were prophets that spread the news of this new land, gathered followers to be led to the foretold gate. And, to their surprise, these few found it: a gate, buried in the heart of the mountains to the south. What they didn't know, however, is that this gate had not been the first; there had been countless gates discovered in the same mountains beforehand. Hundreds of cats had disappeared into these mountains, and never returned.

When the gate opened, they learned why.

A god waited for them. He cried out in fury that they had dared think themselves worthy of his Paradise, denouncing them as half-souls. He called himself Oordeel, God of Judgement. And he told them of their true nature: that they were not whole. Their souls were split into two between different bodies, and only whole souls could make it to Paradise. He proposed a challenge; pass his five Trials, find your soul partner, and he would allow you to enter the promised land.

The cats, beaten and tired from living in a world ruled by fear and death and pain, agreed.

And the Paradise Trials began.

There were, indeed, five Trials. *The Quivering Forest*; a place greener than any of the wasteland cats had ever seen, flooded by heavier rains than they had ever experienced. *The Coliseum*; a hot and dusty arena, overrun by monsters to rip them to shreds. *The Ghost Maze*; a frozen, haunted labyrinth filled with the past. *The Last City*; a timeless human city, buzzing with electricity, shrouded in darkness and death. And *the Final Test*; a violent volcano, pummeled by a blizzard, crawling with gods and dying beasts.

And in between it all...secrets. Horrible, terrifying secrets. The cats discovered their powers and their soul classes, five in all. Red, blue, black, green, and purple. The cats found

themselves caught in the middle of a war of gods. They discovered the true history of the wastelands, and of the gods that raged above them.

LONG BEFORE

Long ago, longer than anyone can remember, there were five Old Gods. Feilong, the god of healing and air. Ka, the god of shadow. Jokul, the god of ice. Hydrus, the god of water and poison. Huracan, the god of fire and storm. Five Old Gods of the elements to create the world, create life, and rule it. They crafted the world how they saw fit; and along the way, added more and more gods to their pantheon in the heavens.

After millions of years, though, when the world began to steadily deteriorate, the Old Gods panicked. They had grown weaker as the world did, and now they needed someone to save the world, someone to help the souls that inhabited the realm see the light and become pure. They chose a savior, a champion, the most pure soul they could find. She was a young cat named Helena, and when the gods gave their call, she answered. They gave her wings, and power, and a title. Helena, the goddess of purity and light.

But Helena was not alone before she was chosen. She had a brother, named Oordeel. She and Oordeel had been closer than the gods realized, and Helena could not fathom living in a realm where her brother could not travel. She drove a bargain: give Oordeel wings, give him power and immortality, and she would be their savior. The Old Gods saw no issue with this, and gave Helena what she wanted—a brother to be her companion. But the brother had no title, no real authority in the realm of gods. None of them had anticipated it would become a problem...until it did.

Helena, with Oordeel at her side, tried for many years to bring the light back to the world. She could not. The deterioration slowed, but pressed onwards with a fierce determination. Helena had failed. The Old Gods did not hold this against her; they had suspected, even at the time of her choosing, that it was too late. Helena begged them to let her try one more idea, one more attempt to stop the decline. They allowed her.

It was the souls, after all, that inhabited the world, that were destroying it. Human souls, specifically. Corrupt, blackened, dirty souls, with tainted minds and desires. She gathered these souls, the ones that had not found their way to the world yet, held them in her paws...and ripped them apart.

Millions and millions of souls were torn to pieces, left to float in the realm of gods for all eternity, never to see the world. The humans that were left on the earth died out, and the world continued to die with them. It had broken Helena's heart to destroy all that life, all that promise, all the souls she'd been chosen to save. It had shattered her... and it hadn't even worked. The world died anyway. The wastelands were born. There was nothing left to do. In her failure, she

turned her back from the world, refusing to acknowledge her failed project. The Old Gods forgave her; they had another task for her to take on.

Create a new world, they said. In your image, create a world that will not destroy itself, one that will live and prosper for all eternity. You will not make the same mistakes we did, they told her. For you are of purity and light.

Helena took this task to heart. She was no longer of the old world. She forgot the world she was the daughter of, the one she'd been born in, for she had to. She was asked to move on, so she did.

But Oordeel could not. He remembered the warm skies, the sound of grass in the wind. He remembered the loving embrace of their parents and the taste of fresh water. He fought, and he argued, for another chance to save his world, but Helena would not help him. For the first time in their lives, the siblings disagreed, and it tore them apart.

Oordeel was furious, and he often spent his time complaining to the Old Gods about his sister. The Old Gods liked Oordeel; they saw him as the last son of their world, the last piece of their creation. The Old Gods loved him as they had loved all the souls...and now those souls were in pieces. They allowed Oordeel to send the pieces of the souls back down onto the world, in the bodies of his own species, cats, as one last act of power. And when he was finished, the Old Gods asked him a favor: preserve the old world, Oordeel. You care so deeply for it, we can see that. Save a part of it; remember it. Do not forget.

And with that, the Old Gods died.

What Oordeel hadn't known at the time, was that the splitting of the souls had taken a great toll on the Old Gods. They were weary, tired, defeated. They longed to live out the rest of their days with their world, with their creations. When they disappeared, they, too, ripped themselves to pieces...and latched themselves onto the half-souls that now populated the planet. No one had noticed, for their great power was spread so thin and so wide. The great pantheon thought the Old Gods had faded from existence entirely; but they were still there, living as the very souls they had created.

Oordeel took their last request seriously. It was a chance to prove himself. A chance to save the world, not just a piece of it. He kept his new task a secret from his sister, for he knew she would try to stop him. He studied the half-souls carefully, walked the wastelands alongside them. He began to notice things... strange bits of magic. Not a lot, but more than there had been before. It was enough. Perhaps... if he taught these half-souls to harness their magic, to become more powerful than any mere mortal ever had, maybe... maybe they could save their world themselves.

It started as a harmless endeavor. He spread whispers of Paradise, of a gate, of happiness and sunlight and full bellies--the world he remembered from his youth. An escape from the wastelands, to lure as many cats as he could into his Paradise Trials. Hundreds of cats entered, countless Trials were run. As time went on, he made more discoveries; there were five classifications of magic, curiously with the same powers as the Old Gods. It seemed almost anyone could learn how to harness their magic. If he pushed these mortals hard enough, pushed them into near-death situations... their magic blossomed.

It was then that Helena discovered Oordeel's Trials. During her creation of the new world, something had stopped working. It was as if she needed one last push of power to make the finishing touches, but she couldn't figure out where from. She searched for her brother to ask his advice, even though they hadn't spoken in ages. She found him toying with the poor half-souls she'd torn apart. She was furious. Why was he wasting his time with them? Come help me, she pleaded. Come help me, and we can create a *real* Paradise together.

To her surprise, Oordeel refused. After all, he still had a promise to keep to the Old Gods. He would not give up. But neither would she. In her fury, she destroyed Oordeel's Trials, sabotaging their games, killing the souls that played them. In a panic, Oordeel plucked as many souls as he could from the Trials he was running, putting them into a safe, hidden pocket in the god's realm, in a deep sleep, where they would never notice they were even gone. He hid them away, then continued his Trials...completely in secret. He accompanied Helena, feigning interest in her new world, but always snuck back to his Trials when he could. But Helena always discovered them, always shut them down. Oordeel kept plucking what souls he could to hide them away. But finally, he grew tired of her interference.

He created two more Trial groups. One, a decoy. Secured away as safely as the previous ones, where Oordeel knew Helena would find them. The second, the most safe and hidden group he could manage, hidden in the shadows of the first. As expected, Helena discovered the first. When she destroyed that one, he did not even bother trying to save the souls in it. He let her kill them, abandoned them to her whims. She slaughtered the players, one by one. And instead of trying to protect them like he usually did, he let her, and instead focused his efforts on protecting his last group. The endlings, he called them.

A handful of the souls in the decoy Trial group survived...Oordeel considered letting them die, but in the end gave them one last chance; to join the endlings. He called them the underlings, for that is where they had survived: in the underbelly of the second Trial, the coliseum. The endlings and underlings successfully beat the second Trial, the first of his groups to do so, before he made a simple mistake. A small slip up, an uncalculated opening... and Helena discovered this Trial, too.

Oordeel, desperate now, fought back this time. He bit and clawed and used every bit of energy he had in him to keep Helena away, and keep his Trials safe. For two years, they battled, and the endlings and underlings lived in a pocket of oblivious safety, a quiet jungle filled with

fog and foliage. For two years they lived there... but they could not stay forever. In the end, when Oordeel's energy was all but spent, he made a split decision. He awakened the rest of the sleeping souls he'd been protecting, the ones from all of his previous failed trials. He called them the lostlings. They joined with the endlings and underlings, and in one last burst of energy, Oordeel blocked Helena from entering their Trials...for the time being.

And the third Trial began.

THE END

It wasn't until the fifth Trial, and after Helena killed Oordeel, that they all realized where the Old Gods had disappeared to.

In an effort to protect his players from Helena's wrath, he brought them back to the wastelands for their final Trial. It was on the volcanic mountain at the top of the world that Helena struck him with a blast of her power, and he fell. To ensure Helena would no longer see his subjects as a threat to her mission, he stripped them of their powers and their magic... effectively releasing the Old Gods back into existence in the process.

Oordeel had thought he lost, right before he was struck. He'd known he wouldn't make it out alive, and he'd become comfortable with it. But when his friends, the Old Gods, laid their eyes back on his dying body, he knew it wasn't over. His Trials-- they weren't futile. There was still a chance. Helena left to complete her mission, left her dead brother, left the Old Gods to die once and for all.

Oordeel reached back to his subjects from the afterlife, the in-between, for he wasn't truly dead. Like the Old Gods has split themselves into the half-souls, so Oordeel has latched the last bits of his life onto the players. Through their dreams, he explained to them who they were, and what they had to do next. Find where the Old Gods slumbered, wake them once again, and convince them to restore their powers. And then they could save the world, and all of their friends and family within it. The players accepted this task, and set off to find their Old Gods.

They were successful, got their powers back, and after one more final fight with Helena, came out of the Paradise Trials victorious.

THE BEGINNING

Before Helena was banished as a god, exiled to live out the rest of her days on the wastelands she had abandoned so long ago, she had performed one last act—bringing her brother back to life. She thought she could finally live peacefully with him, on her new world...

but it was not to be. The Trial players returned to challenge her for the right to save their own world, and won. So Oordeel was back, but wingless, powerless. Still immortal, living out his life on the wastelands he had saved. Resurrected, but satisfied that he had done his duty the Old Gods had assigned him.

Helena wandered the world, too, but in a much different state. She, too, was wingless, but the process of her losing her godhood was not as natural as Oordeel's. She was exiled and discarded, left to die. No one saw her, at least not much. There were whispers and tales of a golden-pelted she-cat that wandered the wastelands with malice, constantly shedding white feathers from her bare back. Oordeel, too, had become nothing more than a fleeting black ghost. No one saw them, no one heard from them.

But the world healed. Oordeel's players assumed their roles as the world's new gods, with their found soul partners, and made the changes the world needed to thrive again. Paradise spread, peace was on the rise. For five years, the original players, who became known as the Legendaries, saved the world.

But soon, they realized they were not enough. Even though there were sixty of them in total, there were still parts of the world that needed more help than they could give, mysterious plagues they could not seem to fight. So they, like Oordeel had long ago, called out to the souls that inhabited the world for help.

Come to us, they called. Come to Paradise Valley. Pass our Trials, find your soul partner, become Legendary. Answer our call, and we will show you great power.

It is here where your story begins.