

Augur Backstory

Skarde grew up the son of a successful farmer in the nation of Vampiria. He spent his youth helping his family and learning the trade. Eventually he saved enough money to buy his own plot of land outside of town not far from his family.

His closest friend was a girl named Revna, the daughter of the town's baker. They met as children in the town's single small schoolhouse and spent many long hours together exploring the woodlands and fields. During slow periods on the farm in late fall and winter, Skarde often helped her aging father haul sacks of flour and manage his bakery. Revna was a family favorite, always dropping by with deliveries of pastries and cookies.

After Skarde started his own farm, he worked up the courage to tell Revna how he truly felt about her. Two months later—to no one's surprise—they were married in the town center. They worked hard and loved their simple life almost as much as they loved each other. Skarde's strong work ethic and Revna's side business baking earned them a steady income, and they were soon making plans to start their own family.

Their town was located near the border, not far from a large trading city in the neighboring country. Come harvest Skarde made the first of what would be several trips south to sell both his father's and his own produce. On the way home, dark seemed to come on fast, but the weather was fair and unseasonably warm. He picketed his horses and slept in the open.

The next morning Skarde noticed the day was not as bright as usual, almost as if a haze of smoke was blocking the sun. At first, he shrugged off the strange weather, but as he grew closer to home the sunlight continued to wane. He knew the way well, and he knew how long it took to travel. Despite the fact that it couldn't be past noon, by the time he crossed the border it was practically nightfall.

The sunlight wasn't the only thing that waned. The rolling prairie spreading around the king's road was dry and cracked. The treeline in the distance was shrunken, almost skeletal. It became so dim he lit his wagon's lantern so his horses could see. Despite the dark, he drove the animals hard, desperate to get back home.

The road itself was empty. This time of year it was especially busy with travel—other farmers, tradesman, ranchers bringing their products and cattle to market. He could barely make out the occasional homestead or inn along the road through the dark. Sometimes he caught flashes of shadows, whispers of footsteps. He could practically feel eyes watching him, but no one shouted or came out to greet him. The silence had him on edge, but he focused on the road and steadying his horses.

Skarde finally caught sight of something in the dark, a glimmer reflected from his lantern. Someone was hunched low on the side of the road. He slowed the wagon. "Hello there!"

A devilish, bloodied face reared up at him. The creature opened its mouth and hissed through its fangs.

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It raised its hands to shield itself from the light of his lantern, and Skarde flinched at the sight of its stained, gore-flecked claws. In the ditch of the road nearby was a torn, fleshy carcass—of what, he didn't know. Skarde shouted and whipped his horses to full speed. The creature's angry shrieks faded behind him.

The second leg of his journey was quiet but filled with anxiety. He kept to the outskirts of town, afraid of what he would find if he went straight through. His farm was dark and shriveled as the rest of the land; acres of wheat nearly ripe for the harvest were practically dust. He drew the carriage around the barn and called aloud for Revna. The dark almost seemed to eat the sound of his voice; his words fell dull and flat. There was no answer.

He went to open the door, but it was already ajar. His heart trembled. He raised his lantern high, but the front hall was dark and still. He called her name again. Nothing.

He led with his light—the creature from earlier hadn't liked it. He grabbed a knife as he passed through the kitchen. The first floor turned up empty, so he headed for the stairwell.

As he approached the top of the stairs he heard movement behind him. What used to be his wife flew straight at him, fangs bared, a feral mask stretching her features. She struck him straight on, knocking the knife and lantern aside. They toppled to the landing and wrestled for advantage. Her nails—claws—sliced across one of his arms.

He rolled her over and pinned her face to the ground. She bucked underneath him, but he managed to fold his legs over her arms, wedging them against her torso.

He fumbled for the knife. His fingers slipped on the grip from the adrenaline and fear. He grabbed it firmly and gathered himself for the final blow. Revna's bloodshot eyes stared back at him, hungry and desperate—and wet. She was crying. Still trying to find purchase, still trying to get at him, and sobbing.

Maybe his wife was still in there somewhere, buried deep inside this transformed body and mindless hunger. Maybe he was just trying to convince himself there might still be hope. Either way, the will to end her life left him.

He needed to separate them so he could get away without harming her. He glanced up. The door to the bedroom was open, but it opened inward. He would have to be quick.

He rolled and threw his wife into and the bedroom and slammed the door shut. Before she could recover, he cut the cord from the blinds of the hall window and tied the doorknob to the handrail of the stairs. Not an instant later, she slammed against the door. The knob turned and she pulled, but the cord drew tight and the door didn't budge. Her shrieks of frustration echoed through the house.

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Skarde slumped against the door. He called her name again, but that only sent her into a renewed frenzy. When it became clear she was trapped, her cries turned into pained sobbing.

Eventually, she fell quiet. He spoke again, and this time, she didn't lash out. He made a vow to her through the door. He would find a way to banish whatever curse this was and return her to him as she had been. He heard more quiet crying, but no response. Whatever force changed her—and everyone else in his homeland—had a grip too strong for him to reason through it. He quietly loosened the cord at the railing—she would be able to free herself eventually—then gathered the few supplies that were still free from the curse and left in his wagon.

Skarde had always been suspicious of magic—it was dangerous stuff and best avoided. Most of his fellow townsfolk felt the same. Recent events hadn't improved his impression of mystical forces, but if he was to fulfill his vow he needed to seek it out. He started work as a scribe in the city to gain access to their texts, and progressed from there to an apprenticeship with a mage. He found, to his surprise, that he had a talent for scholarship and spellcasting, and his abilities quickly eclipsed what he was able to easily learn. He also gathered that the type of magic he needed to lift Vampiria's curse was of a scale almost unimaginable—deep and ancient power he couldn't acquire in the heart of civilized society.

His studies of the curse approached the limit of his current resources. Eventually he left the border city and began to wander across Eternity. He sought knowledge before magic, trading spells and books for access to histories and ancient lore. His years of wandering and ever-growing body of knowledge earned him a reputation as a wise and skilled magician known as the Augur.

Skarde occasionally discovered pockets of power, each one slightly more powerful than the last, each expanding his abilities. His wisdom and experience became a highly desired commodity, and he consulted with anyone that could give him new leads into unexplored mysteries or hidden myths and legends.

One day he followed one such lead to the steep cliffs of a stormy shoreline. He discovered signs of the previous inhabitants and followed a path to a set of worn stairs carved into the cliff, covered over with moss and debris from the storms. He tucked his head against the rain and followed the trail down the cliff to where the stone met the ocean.

The path ended at a small cavern. The stone was worn smooth from the elements, but there were hints of old carvings along the walls and ceiling. The cavern entered at a small hole.

Skarde squeezed into the passage. He worked his way deeper into the cliff, pushing through muck and cobwebs and almost getting stuck more than once. He emerged into a new chamber. Dust coated everything.

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Opposite him was a door. The world seemed almost to bend around it, as if reality was coming together at a point in space. He knew this was what he was looking for. He crossed the chamber and stepped through the door.

As he walked through the small rip in the barrier between dimensions he felt his body, down to its atoms, get torn apart and reformed back into their familiar shape on the other side. Fear shot through him as he felt himself be stretched and then torn apart—only to suddenly be smashed back together again. The cool damp of the cave was replaced by scorching sunlight and heat. He shielded his face from the blazing sun.

When his eyes adjusted he realized he stood on top of a cliff overlooking an endless desert. Three giant pyramids stood in the distance, surrounded by a lush green oasis. The pyramids and their gardens were the only sign of life in the desert, so he made his way down from the cliff and crossed the dunes.

The sweltering heat resisted Skarde's attempts to banish it with magic. He tried to create water, but it vanished before he could bring it to his lips. He resolved to cross the desert as quickly as he could.

Dizzy with the heat and lack of water, he finally approached a long stone ramp that led up from the desert to the lavish gardens. He saw a figure standing at the top of the ramp, shimmering in the sun like a mirage, but the closer he moved, the hotter everything seemed. He took one last step before he collapsed and fell unconscious.

When Skarde awoke he was already dressed in black silk robes. His room was decorated with red carpets, gilded pottery, and planters bursting with ferns and palm fronds. The heat was gone, reduced to a comfortable warmth.

A knock came from the door. Skarde checked himself again and opened the door. A tall man with a jackal's head walked into the room. He was dressed in the same silks, though they were in vibrant stripes of gold, purple, and red. Skarde quickly realized his physical similarity to the ancient god Anubis, which matched the information that had started his latest quest.

The being introduced himself as Chisisi. Chisisi told the Augur that he was the protector, and prisoner, of this lush garden. He was tasked with protecting the life that grew here, as well as the pyramids, which were pillars of magical protection. This duty was bestowed upon him by the highest powers of life in an ancient era.

Surprised to see Skarde nodding along, he asked why he had come here. The Augur shared his story with Chisisi, from his time as a simple farmer to the tragedy that had befallen his family and homeland, explaining he now searched for power strong enough to undo the curse.

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Chisisi listened intently, and realizing there might be a way for them to both benefit, invited the Augur to dinner.

They ate a fine feast of vibrant greens and exotic meats, sharing their personal stories and exchanging small talk. When darkness fell, Skarde noticed the sky was starless. Instead, there was an eerie, inky swirl, unnatural in a way that reminded him of Vampiria. The veiled shapes of appendages emerged from the swirling darkness and pressed on an invisible field.

Chisisi noticed the Augur studying the sky, and said: "That is why I am here, to ensure they can't make it." Skarde immediately asked what he meant, but Chisisi said he could explain no further and asked to hear more about Skarde's adventures. Skarde reluctantly accepted the change in subject and told his host about his wanderings and the pieces of ancient power he gathered. After all of the eating and talking Skarde felt his most recent journey catching up to him. Ever the hospitable host, Chisisi guided him back to his quarters and bade him a good rest.

Skarde woke to a sound like a booming drum loud enough to shake his bed. He barely had time to throw on his robes before Chisisi burst through the doors. "It's them, they're coming!"

They made their way to the gardens. Skarde followed Chisisi's gaze up. Claws, fists, tentacles, and feet slammed against the barrier in the sky. The monstrous limbs were each several times the size of the massive pyramids rising around him.

"They will breach the barrier soon, then descend on us," said Chisisi.

His tone implied that he did not expect to survive. Skarde glanced toward the cliff in the distance, then spread his feet and readied his magic. "And I will fight at your side."

Chisisi eyed him. "They will easily destroy us. What about your wife?"

"I know enough about the legends," Skarde said. "These beings—are they gods of death?"

"Close enough."

"Then if they make it through us and to the door," Skarde said, "my wife won't have long to live. No one will."

They paused for a moment. The resounding booms of the creatures trying to break through and into that dimension continued. After a time, Chisisi spoke again. "Perhaps your arrival isn't a coincidence. There may be another way—a way to preserve the power of this land before they arrive to consume it and help you in your quest."

"What do you mean?"

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Chisisi explained that he had been given great power by the gods of Life to defend this land. He had done so for centuries maintaining the pyramids and their barrier while the powers of death gathered strength on the other side. In exchange for the bounty of his land and his great powers, he could not leave. If he tried to do so, his own powers would consume him—a penance for past misdeeds.

Skarde's arrival presented them with a small window of opportunity. If Chisisi transferred his power to Skarde, then Skarde could take the power and continue the fight for Life against Death back in his world. However, this process required a vow to the Gods of Life that he would aid them in their battle against death and fight it wherever it may appear.

Perhaps it was fate, or perhaps his hard work had at long last presented him with a chance. Maybe it was a little of both. Skarde knew this was the power he'd been seeking. He accepted Chisisi's offer and spoke the words of his new vow to the Gods of Life.

As the world shook around them Chisisi's form transformed from one of flesh and blood to pure light and energy. This energy forced its way into the Augur, pushing through his pores and into his body. He would not know it until later, but in taking the power of Chisisi, he also took on some semblance of his form, and his human features changed to that of a jackal.

The process ended as abruptly as it began. Skarde heard Chisisi's voice inside his mind, and it guided him to a hidden room in the garden complex. Skarde stared at the magical staff within, a twisted wooden shaft supporting the image of a flaming bird. Chisisi's urging shook him from his thoughts and he grabbed the staff and ran for the ramp leading away from the gardens and into the desert.

The top of the pyramids began to crumble. Slabs of stone the size of small houses shook loose and smashed into the garden. The monstrous limbs assaulting the sky began to slam down in unison and the barrier buckled under the force.

As he reached the bottom of the ramp the staff sprung to life in his hands. The winged bird burst from the tip, picked him up, and carried him across the sands. A crack snapped across the land. He looked back and saw limbs smash through the barrier and reach down from the sky. The first to reach the pyramids was a giant hand that dug its fingers in as if it were clay. It threw a fistful of stones in Skarde's direction, but the bird nimbly dodged the debris.

The bird dropped him on top of the cliffside and vanished into the staff. Skarde hit the ground and rolled to his feet just before the portal. He glanced back to a scene of total destruction: the pyramids were smashed to bits, and darkness flooded out from the grasping hands and tendrils of the agents of death to vaporize the temple and gardens. Even the sands were sapped of their golden hue.

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Skarde felt his body get pulled apart and re-assembled as he once again crossed dimensions, and he was back in the cold damp cave. He stood and turned around, ready to use his powers to fight back any invaders from the other dimension, but the portal flickered and melted away as the dimension he left behind was consumed. The golden light on his skin that arose in his defense faded.

Skarde crawled out from the cave and ascended the cliff. As he braved the rain-slicked rock, despite his gesturing with the staff and attempting several summoning spells, the bird was nowhere to be found. He faced the ocean at the top of the cliffs. The overcast sky was so different from the burning sun of the desert; the whole episode almost felt like a dream. He sighed and couldn't help thinking to himself: where do I go now?

As if in response the distant voice of Chisisi told him that he needed to earn mastery of his new abilities. A lord on a distant island had put out a call for help, promising Gold and Glory—but more importantly, the island represented first step for the Augur to master his abilities. Skarde set on his way, determine to come to terms with his new powers and finally complete his goal.

