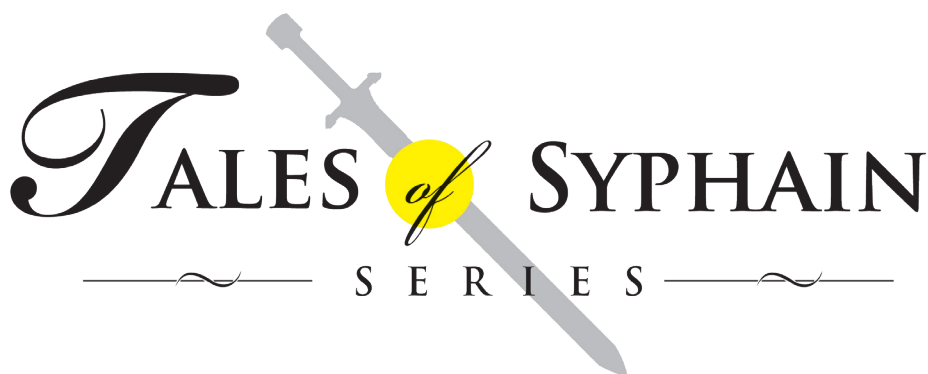


HALF CIRCLE

A COLLECTION
OF ART AND
NOTES ON THE
CIRCLE THEORY

BY DALLAS BUSHA





talesofsyphain.blogspot.com

INTRODUCTION

What would eventually become the Circle Theory began as an idea that came to me in the late 90's. The character designs came first. Then, slowly, the world-building began.

In the early 2000's, after a short hiatus, I began refining the concept. Up to this point, it was a mess of disparate ideas. I always knew the setting would be a fantasy, but the themes would change from week to week.

At the time, I was reading a lot about the human "condition" via the writings of Alan Watts. I wanted desperately to incorporate some of these ideas into my work. I based the theme around the often-used "monomyth" of the hero's journey, because I understood that this would be universally relatable.

Trying to include all the concepts I wanted to use was incredibly overwhelming, and it stalled the work. The book became bloated, so a lot of these ideas were thrown out the window. The characters, however, were really beginning to take shape, and in retrospect, I think their relationships are what carries the book.

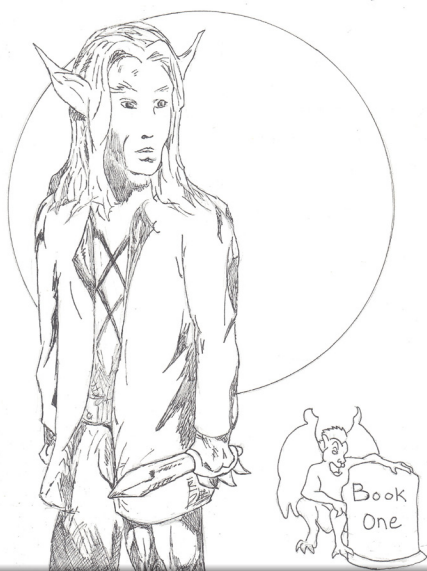
After finishing the Circle Theory, I left the world of Syphain for a number of years. Eventually I returned. My initial idea was to make an illustrated version of the Circle Theory. During the process, however, I became interested in a couple of the supporting characters - D'nel and Kirana.

I ultimately scrapped the illustrated Circle Theory project and began to develop a weekly webcomic called "The Mighty Blue", focusing on D'nel and Kirana. This time, however, I attempted a more pure, streamlined idea. The story was more focused and less meandering in a philosophical sense.

The book you hold in your hands is the scrapped "Illustrated Circle Theory" project. These have been lying around my studio for some time, and I thought it an interesting idea to share these visuals. I hope this gives you a greater appreciation for both the Circle Theory and The Mighty Blue. Enjoy!

SHARVAH

THE CIRCLE THEORY



"Sharvah" is the prophesied name for our title character. It seemed an interesting idea to use that for a comic title.

The gargoyle in the corner is an early visual concept of the character "Blyth".

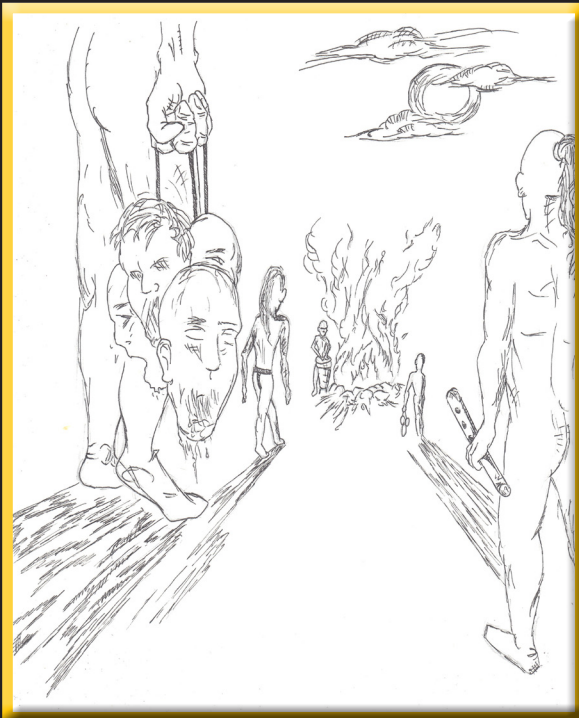
There were a variety of covers designed for this book. Initially it was going to be a limited series, probably around four or five issues.

Visually, the focal point would be Tarald and Nessa. They were the two main catalysts that the story revolved around, so each cover would depict that.

The Circle Theory

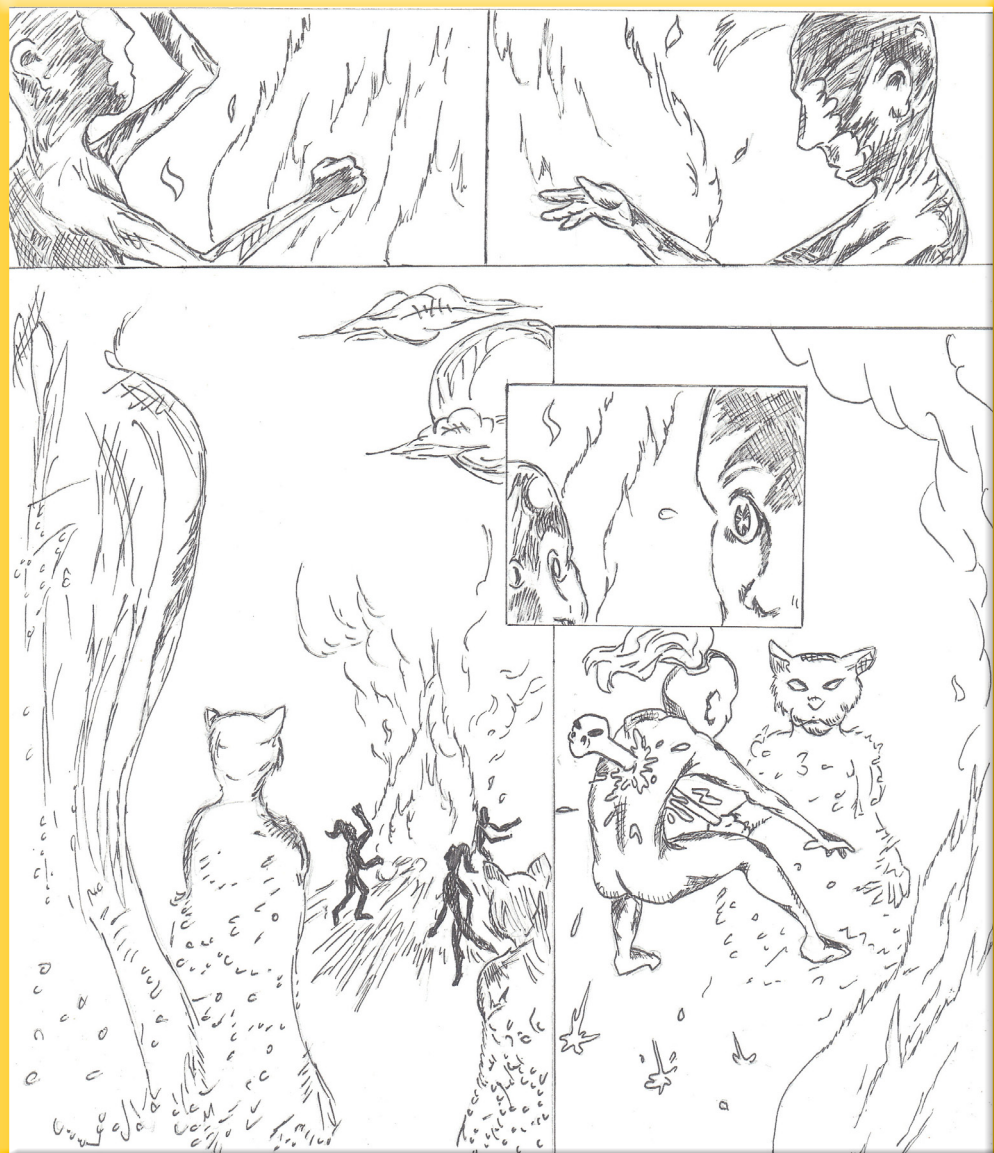


An ominous beginning. The first chapter of the Circle Theory was always a little more gruesome than I intended. I felt it important to show the depravity of the Binays and, in turn, the Fell Cats. By doing this, it showed how important Tarald's mission was - how integral to Syphain that the Fell Cats be stopped.



The picture of the Binays dancing around the fire was an image that was always in my head. This is also one of the few illustrations I included in the final copy of the Circle Theory.



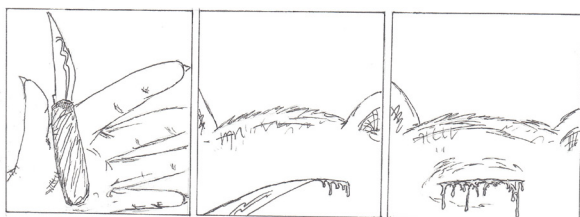


A particular favorite of mine, one of the first pages I layed out for the comic. This was an important scene early on in the book, since it introduces the Fell Cats and their brutality.



When writing the book, I hadn't envisioned the Fell Cats to have a fully physical form. When it came time to draw them, I struggled with this idea of their look.

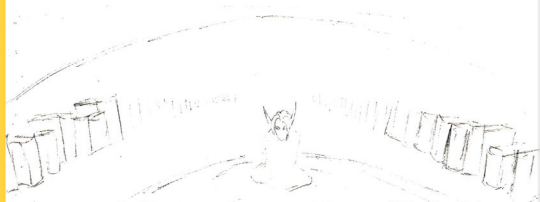
I was never happy with this look, and I imagine them to be more "ghost-like" in the novel.



The shadows move.

The shadows breathe.

They are alive.

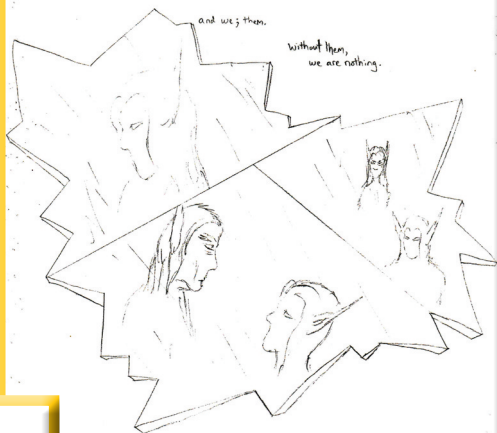


In the book, this chapter is full of surreal imagery. It's much easier to write about these scenes than to draw them.

The shadows are us

and we're them.

Without them,
we are nothing.



My god, it's
so cold
here...

...TARALD...

WHY HAVE YOU
LET YOURSELF
REMAIN AT A
PLACE LIKE THIS?

So cold...

TAKE MY HAND. I
CAN LEAD YOU
AWAY FROM HERE.



The idea of Tarald meeting his older self was one of the most important "circles" in the book. It was the catalyst that pushed him into his role as "Sharvah".

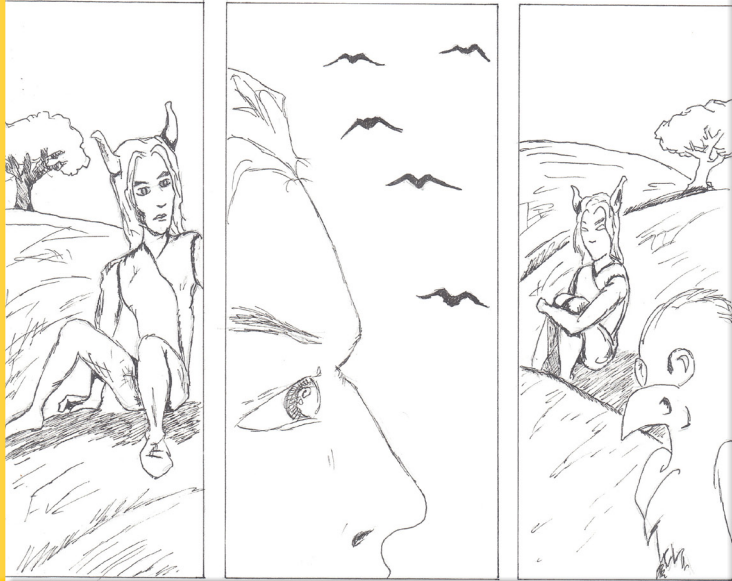


The previous scene ends, literally, in flames, so the shift to a serene setting was intended to be jarring, as Tarald regains his senses.

The tree in this scene is the same tree described in the novel.

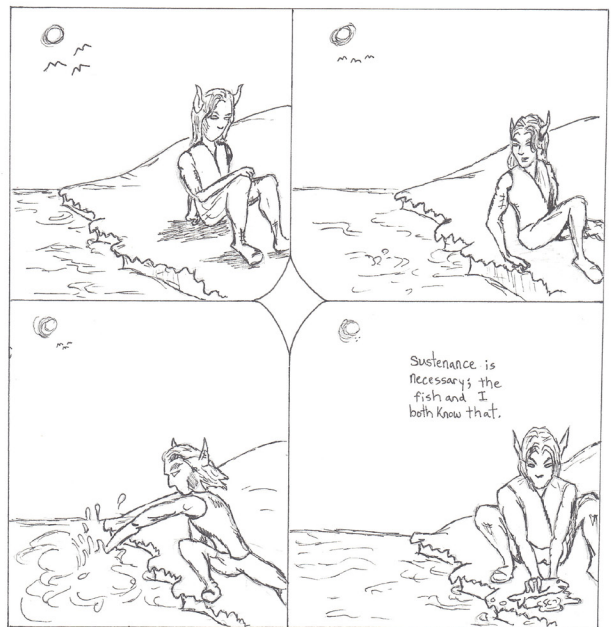
Tarald's ears came off a bit too rabbit-like in this scene...

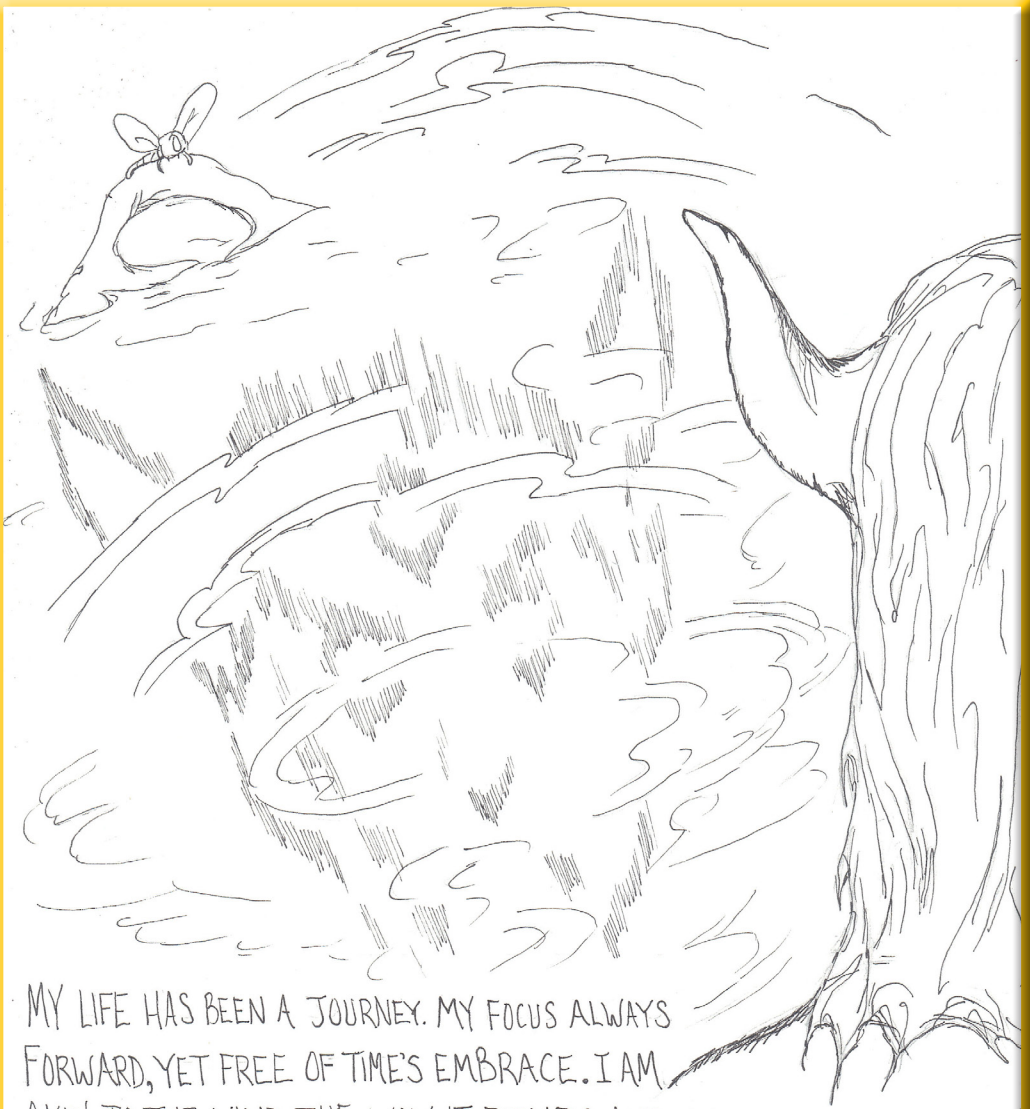




Most of the dialogue in this scene is not in the book. It's Tarald narrating his own life.

I quickly discarded this idea. The plan was to make the adaptation scene-for-scene, and I was just making Tarald's dialogue up on the spot. It came off as a little too cheesy.





MY LIFE HAS BEEN A JOURNEY. MY FOCUS ALWAYS FORWARD, YET FREE OF TIME'S EMBRACE. I AM AKIN TO THE WIND, THE WAY IT BENDS AND COMFORTABLY MOVES AROUND ALL THE OBSTACLES IN ITS WAY.



Nature is a wonderful mother.

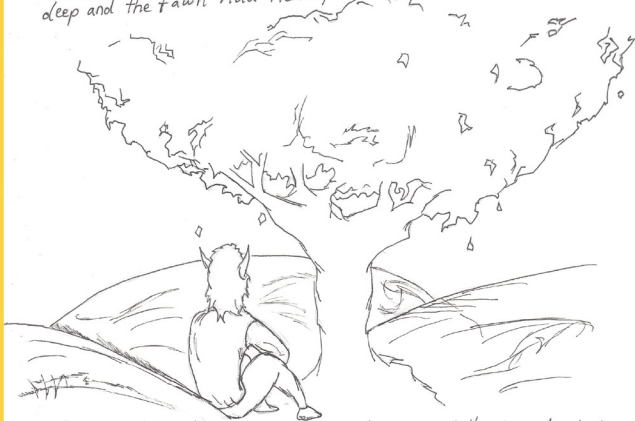
The earth caresses me.
The birds sing to me,
as they do to all of us.

And if you listen closely enough,
you can hear the trees whisper
Tales of days gone by...

Tarald's look was conceived at the very start of the writing process, even before I had written page one of the novel.

That was the main fantasy element. The hero would be an elf. After that decision, the world-building came easy.

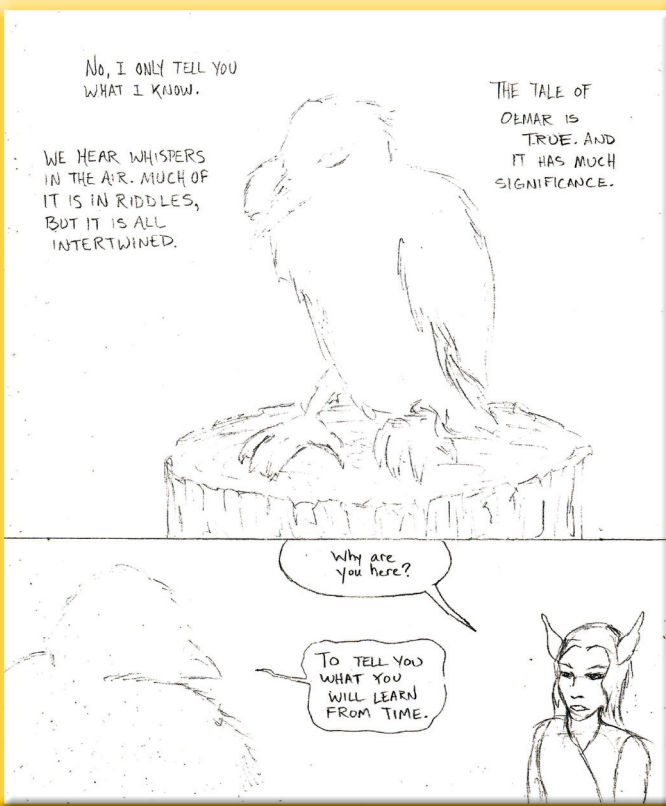
Many moons ago, there was a small village in the mountains. The folk who lived there survived and flourished by hunting the clever fox and the swift deer who were placed there by the gods. A mile outside of the village was a river from whence came nourishment. One day Demar, a well-renowned and good-natured man who lived in this village went to collect water for his family. He happened upon a fawn who had been hurt by a hunter. The wounds were deep and the fawn had nearly lost its will to live.



Feeling pity on the poor creature, Demar nursed the fawn back to health. 'Thank you,' said the fawn, 'for this I will show you something.' The fawn led Demar to a cave he had never seen before. Once inside, the walls and the wind began to speak to him and tell him secrets, and many things that struck him speechless. 'I give you knowledge,' said the fawn. But this was too much for Demar, and it drove him mad.

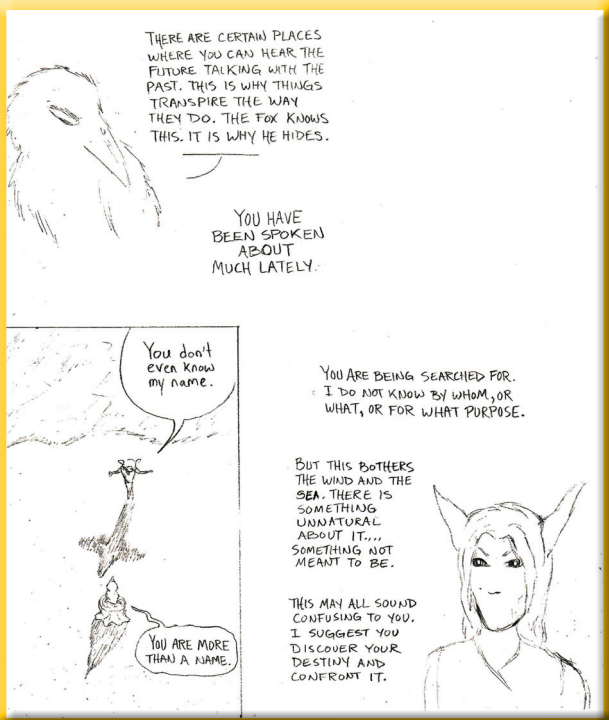
The story of Valimar and the Great Freeze is one of the most important events in the history of Syphain.

Years are gauged as "BF" (Before Freeze) or "AF" (After Freeze).



Talking birds. Why not? After you make a decision to include blood-thirsty cats, nothing else becomes taboo.

I needed a narrator - someone to explain things to Tarald. It made sense to have wildlife, almost as a stand-in for Syphain itself.



This image of Benethir can be found in The Mighty Blue, when Kothos is reciting the partial history of Syphain to D'nel and company.

Speaking of D'nel, here we have the introduction of Brak and D'nel, two of the Circle Theory's supporting characters.

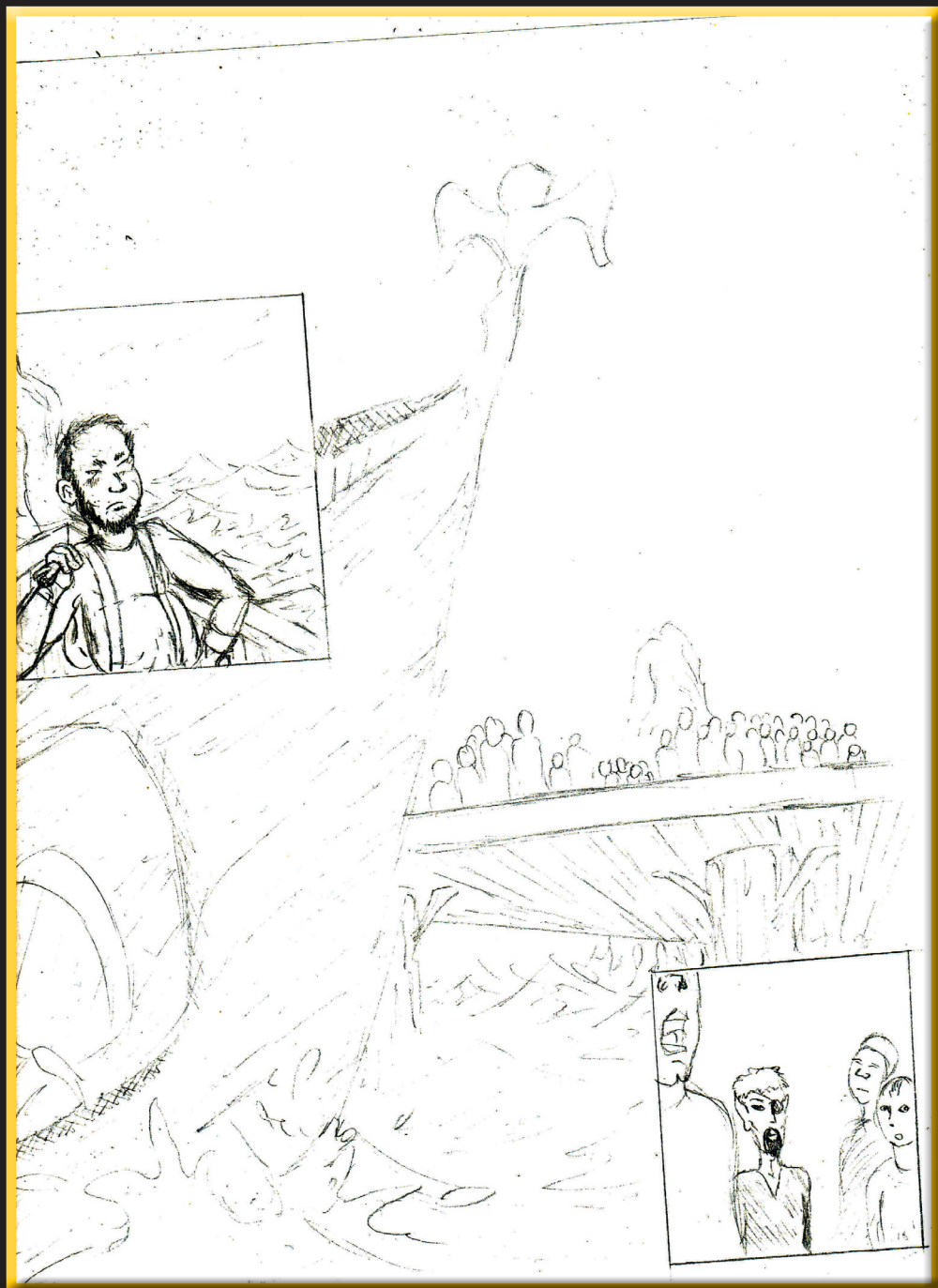
This is an early idea for D'nel's look. I later made him a bit more muscular, with a more acceptable haircut.

But he always had the eyepatch, even in the earliest draft.

BENETHIR!

The great port city, the last of the old dock towns. With its bustling economy and ever-growing populace, Benethir has remained as it had before the Great Eteeze: a center of trade, entertainment and local gossip. It was here that the infamous pirate Morgwath was murdered by his best friend and first mate after a twenty year reign of terror. His ghost is believed to haunt the ports at night, but this hasn't affected the Festival of Change. The ceremony consists of burning a papier-mâché doppelgänger of Morgwath in the center of market street. This festival also signals the coming of the Autumnal Equinox, beginning a consistently productive season for the inhabitants of Benethir.







This was fun. There is a chapter in the Circle Theory that breaks convention and reads like a screenplay, so I thought I'd try it here, too.

I personally think it flows better in this medium than it does in the novel, where it seems to interrupt the narrative.

The dim lighting of the Tan Squall Pub outline the equally dark features of its two newest recipients as they move to a quiet area near the back of the bar.

BRAK: -hurm- So, what's the occasion?

D'NEL (nasally, to the waitress, as if attempting to announce to no one in particular his next plan of action):

Two ales, Please. And keep 'em coming.

WENCH (accommodatingly): Very good, sir.

D'NEL: Ye know I'm a man of few words, Brak, so I'll get t'the point.

BRAK (stirring slightly in his seat):

You? A man of few words? -hurm-

D'NEL (looking hurt and astonished): Hey now, lad, I've decided t'turn over a new leaf. I am now a man of serious persuasion.

BRAK: I didn't find the egg.

D'NEL: Shit.

(A brief moment of silence ensues, accompanied by an indistinguishable bout of tension between two close friends. The eldest is the first to break the monotonous, droning silence.)

BRAK: We traveled -hurm- we traveled to the south islands, passed through Talon-which is looking like shit these days, I might add-I tell you, money is so tight over there you're lucky to be paid any respect by the locals. Anyway, -hurm- I even hitched the Benos

Pass. I met some strange characters, traded my salary for the week just to....

D'NEL: But ye didn't find it.

BRAK: I didn't find it.

D'NEL: It's okay, man. Ye'll be Compensated f'r it.

BRAK: You're my friend, D'nel. I don't care about the time or money invested in this wild goose chase. (Pausing as if in retrospect)

Unfortunately, my interests are in things more

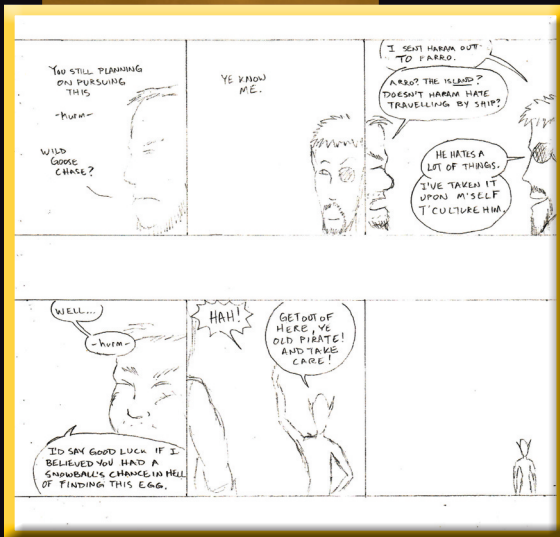
-hurm- *substantial* these days. My treasure hunting days are over.

D'NEL: I'm sorry t'hear that, especially

After all the time we put into this.

BRAK (unmistakably): -hurm-





More boring headshots and dialogue.

This art was planned to be embellished eventually, most notably the final panel would have been all black with D'nel's small white figure in the corner.



So first off, this is my original vision of a Klavian.

Klavians are very prominent in the Circle Theory, appearing in multiple chapters.

Up to this point, I haven't released any images of them.

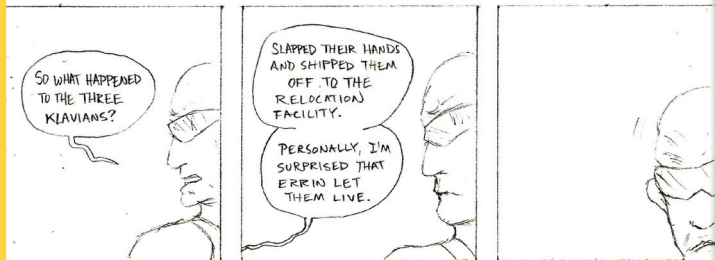
Here's one.

And then there's Grant and Maj. Real a-holes, like most Aelnid.

Maj was always meant to be kind of a pretty-boy, but Grant was a rugged, bitter, unlikable man.

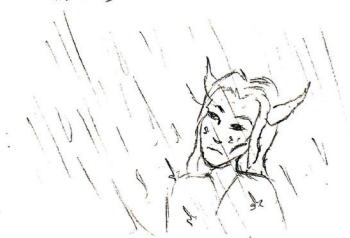
This visual of Grant became the basis for Nessa's cousin, Baron Ryassa, who plays a prominent role in The Mighty Blue.





The initial conceit of the comic book adaptation was that it would be told over the course of several issues. This page marks the end of what would have been the first issue.

RAIN ENVELOPS AND POUNDS ON HIS BODY, SLISHSLOSHING AROUND ON THE WET SOIL BELOW HIM, BUT TARALD DOESN'T SEEM TO MIND.



THE EXPERIENCE IS RATHER GRATIFYING, ACTUALLY.

LIKE THE VELVETSOFT TOUCH OF ANOTHER'S SKIN THE RAIN FOREVER STAINS HIS FACE.

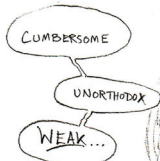


DRIP.

DRIP.

DRIP.

NEXT:
NESSA



*These next
several pages
were just ideas
thrown out onto
paper, in no
particular order.*



HAVE I DISHEARTENED
YOU ENOUGH? THIS
GROWS OLD VERY
QUICKLY.

A PITY YOUR PASSION
OUTWEIGHS YOUR
PATHETIC DISPOSITION



Below is a scene from Tarald's training after meeting H'ryku.



metaphorically speaking, the higher you climb, the more you will learn. Your... 'ascension' is just the discovery of knowledge that you already have.



I TRY ...

BUT IT SEEMS TO
NEVER BE ENOUGH.
I ALWAYS END UP
DOING MORE DAMAGE
THAN I DO GOOD.
IS THIS HOW IT'S
SUPPOSED TO BE?

THERE ARE THINGS GREATER
THAN YOU. GREATER THAN ME.
THESE ACTIONS YOU TAKE ARE
STEPS. THE MORE YOU TAKE,
THE MORE YOU LEARN.



YOU MUST NEVER GIVE UP.
TO STOP TRYING IS TO STOP
BREATHING; TO STOP LIVING.
YOU ARE SPECIAL. YOU ARE
A HERO. EVERYONE HAS THE
POTENTIAL, BUT FEW TRY.

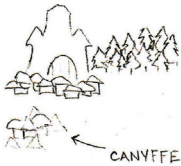
IS THAT ANY
WAY TO LIVE?



IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND WHAT
YOU HAVE, YOU MUST UNDERSTAND
WHAT IT MEANS TO LOSE YOURSELF.



The bastardization of Canyffe



Canyffe was a small village on the outskirts of the grand city-state of Majerhaus.

During this time, the only inhabitants in the region of Cairnon were Montars. They lived a peaceful existence, being very much in tune with nature and the immediate land surrounding them.

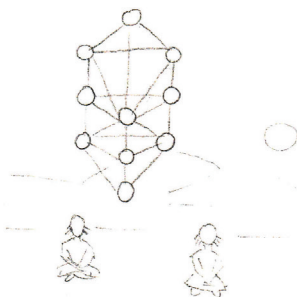
When the Aelrid settlers arrived in Cairnon in the years following the great Freeze, they wiped out the city-state of Majerhaus, claiming territorial control to themselves, as humans often do.



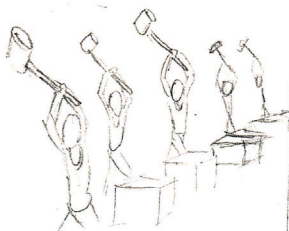
The Montars had no weapons. They were not warriors. The Aelrid were conquerors and assimilators. The Montars never even stood a chance. The invasion was as brutal as it was short.

This is the page that sparked the idea for The Mighty Blue. Once I realized I was delving deeper into the world of Syphain, I decided to continue writing new stories set in this world rather than rehash the Circle Theory.

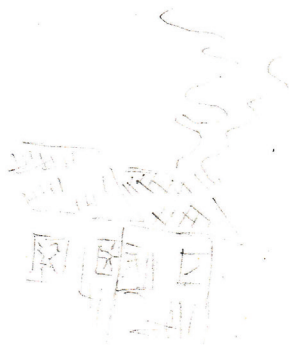
Humans had never looked at life like the Mantars. Humans were very much rooted in the physical plane. They discovered things, labelled them, and categorized them. They always wanted to be in control, to create an order out of chaos.



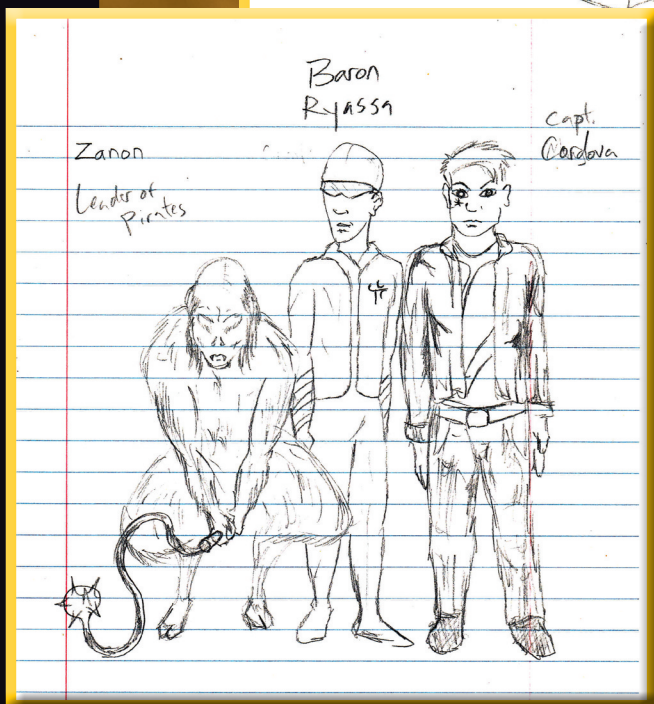
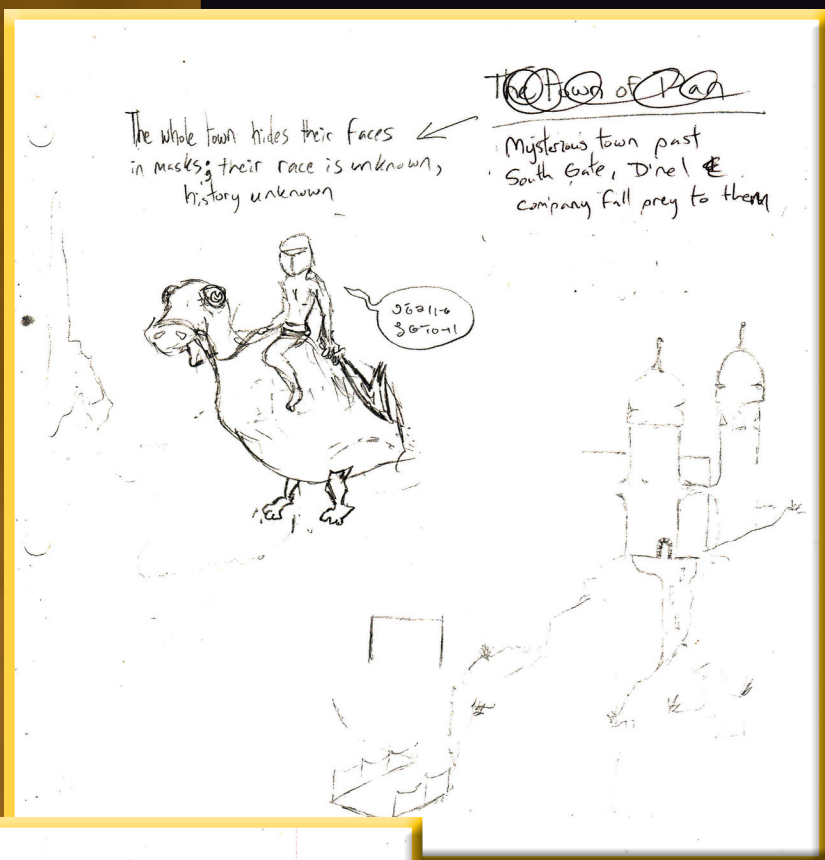
This conflicted with the natural and pantheistic views of the Mantars. They were driven from their homes yet they continued to graze on the land. They slowly migrated eastward, at the mouth of the River Seta, which has been named Lake Nera. They slowly founded the village of Lu and life continued as it always had, as it was always meant to be.



Being an industrially productive lot, the Aelrid built the town of Naru from the rubble of Majerhaus and Canyffe. Ironically, the Aelrid were never as self-sustaining as the Mantar and the town never prospered. It is no more than a ghetto now, quite forgotten by the majority of the Aelrid Empire.

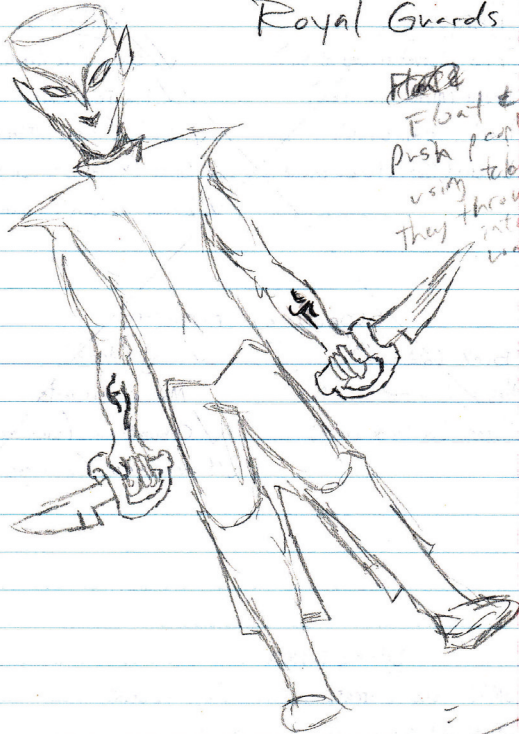


I had initially intended to finish these two pages and include them in the Mighty Blue, but the opportunity never arose in the narrative.



These are the first drafts of Grant, Maj and Zanon. I intended to retool them and use their likenesses in the Mighty Blue, but the only one that didn't end up on the cutting-room floor is Grant, who became the template for the final look of Ryassa.

Da'ar Aelnid Royal Guards

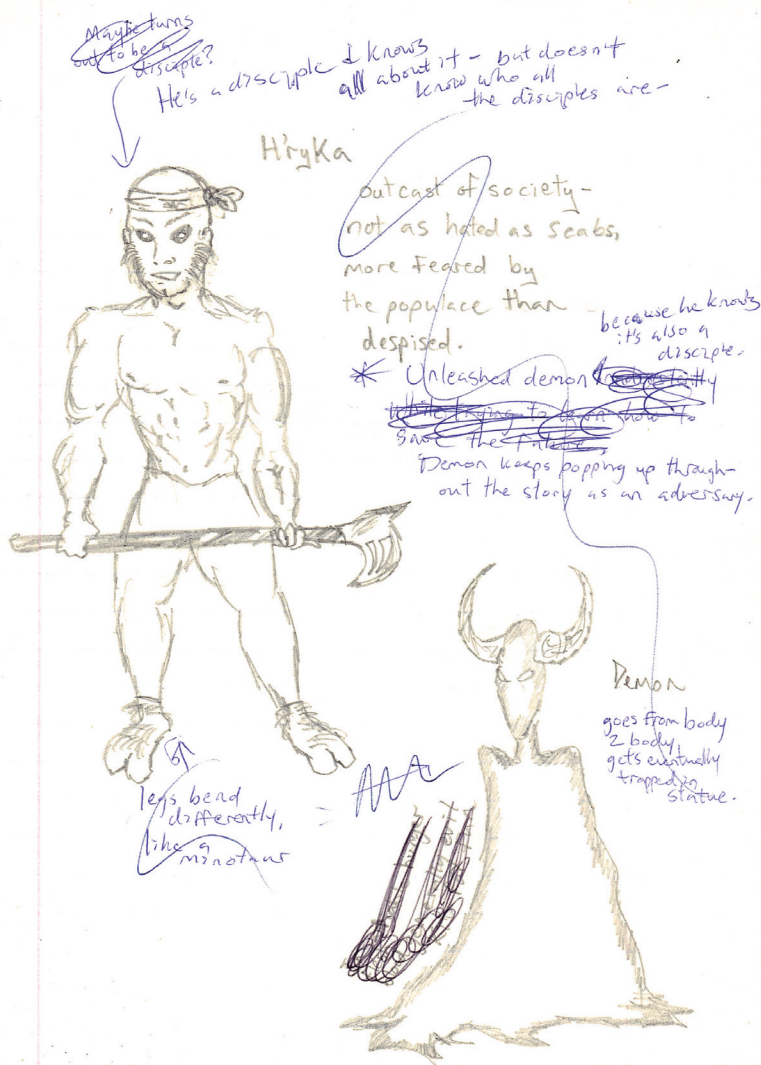


~~Float &~~
Float &
Push people
using telekinesis
They throw their
into a wall

Levitation →

The Da'ar Aelnid guards were originally intended to float above the ground and use telekinesis in battle. I ended up feeling this was a little too science-fiction for the Circle Theory.

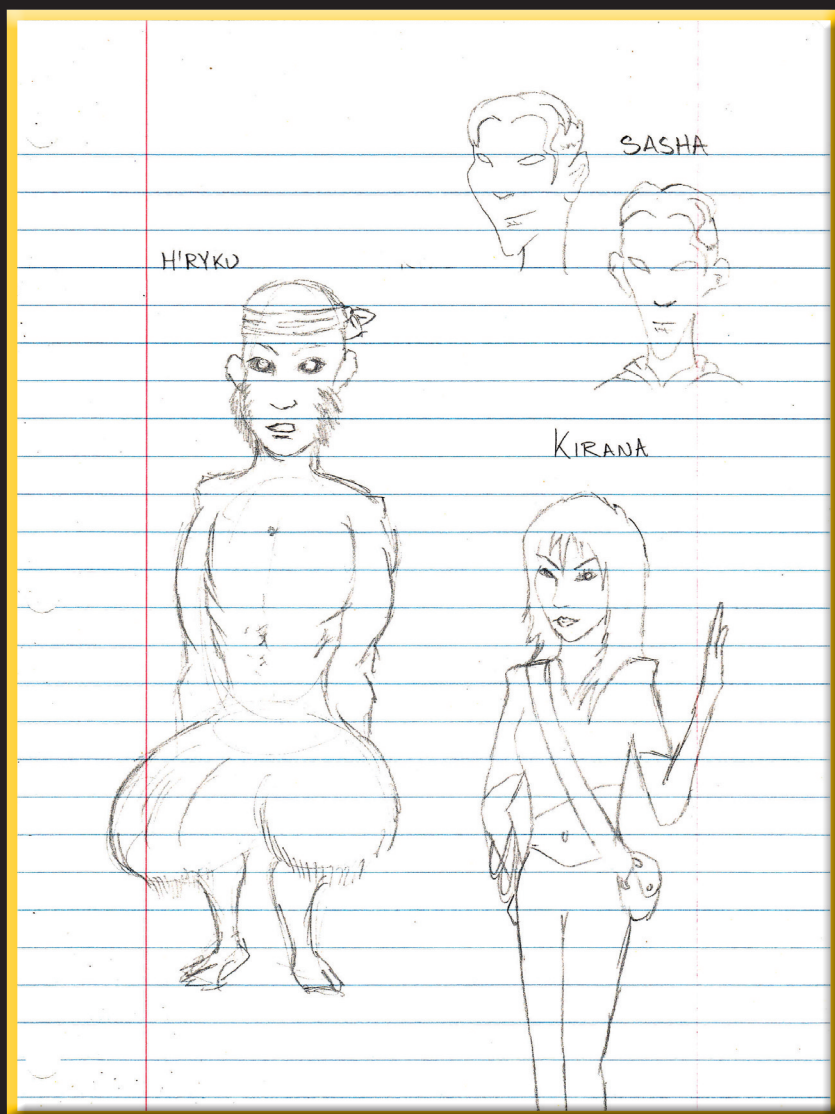
Although in the Mighty Blue, some of the guards can use telekinesis as a defense.



Blyth and H'ryku. This is mostly
 how I intended the Mantar to
 look, but Blyth was very elusive.
 Like the Fell Cats, when you
 looked at him, he was meant to
 be a bit "blurry".

Nessa's brother Sasha was a conniving, ill-intentioned character in the novel, the opposite of H'ryku - both are seen here in their early incarnations.

Also, the first visual of Kirana. She's mostly stayed the same, albeit with a slightly rounder face and puffier hair in the Mighty Blue.



THE AELNID (cont)

~~The Aelnid by
young class
hierarchy~~

Elite in society
often wear
overdramatic wardrobes
and headpieces -
representing 'perfection'
- grand harmony, the
highest state, although
by contradicting
actions and so-
called beliefs
they only talk
amongst themselves
and consider
others (but
not publicly) -
to be inferior.



~~Young class~~ - note parallel
← stripes, adults usually not
so wild and risqué

The fashion sense of the Aelnid was began right here, and was touched upon a bit in the Circle Theory, and the visuals were revisited in the Mighty Blue.

THE AELNID (CGA4)

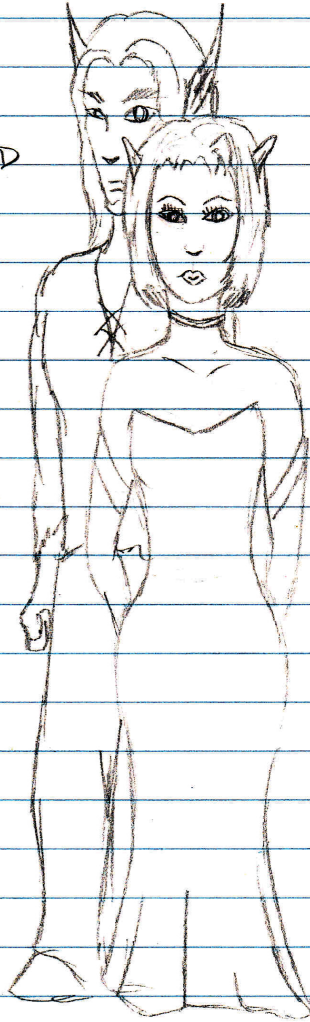


Black velvet-usually
designed w/one or
more parallel stripes
represent grace
and unity-high
standings in society
albeit the high
degree of disharmony
and disillusioned
acceptance

DALLS
BUSH
8-28-98

Nessa's look has remained fairly consistent throughout the process, as can be seen in her incarnation in the Mighty Blue.

TARALD



NESSA
(usually wears
a cap to
cover her ears)

These sketches and drawings ultimately led to the development of the Mighty Blue, which I believe to be a more satisfying project than a comic adaptation of the Circle Theory.

The characters in the Mighty Blue (as well as some surprise cameos from the Circle Theory) can be seen in the forthcoming webcomic, MIGHTY BLUE ADVENTURES. You can learn more about it at TalesOfSyphain.blogspot.com.

Discover the prelude to The Mighty Blue

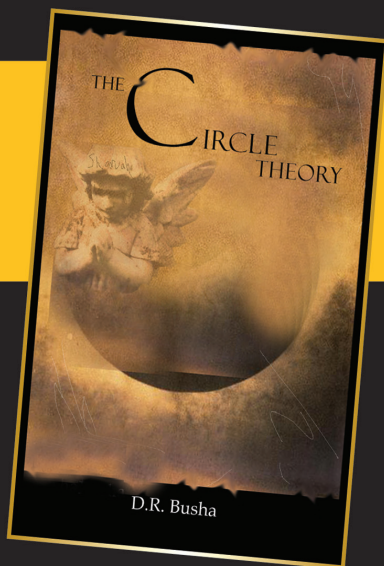
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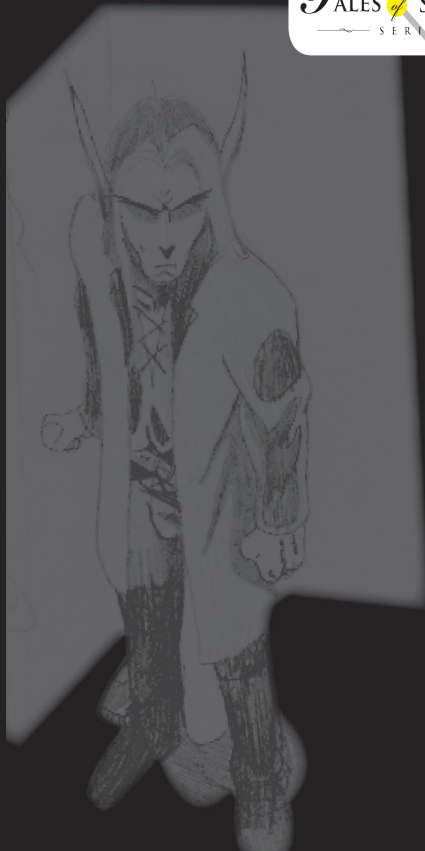
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Meet Tarald, an encumbered yet charismatic hero, and journey with him as he transcends from the mundane to the sublime.


During his adventure he will attempt to overthrow a despotic nation, be consumed by a forbidden love, and face his greatest fears in the form of the Fell Cats, evil beasts who walk like men.

*A meditation on archetypes and symbols cleverly disguised as a fantasy story, *The Circle Theory* will entertain on many profound levels.*

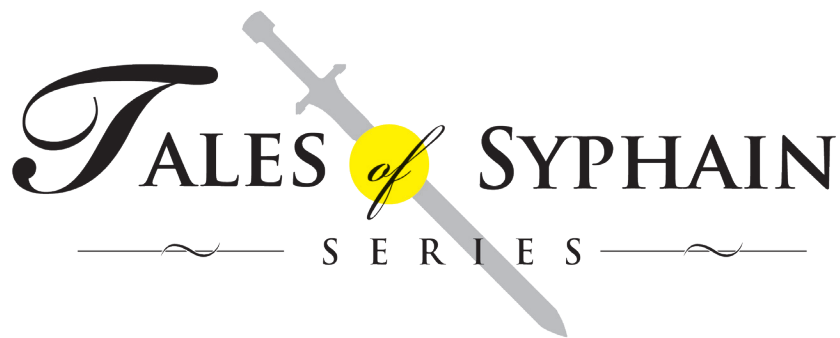


Continue the adventures
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