Just off Ish-Gahn's Northeastern Coast, sleeps a colossal slab of deep jungle trees and lush mossy earthen floor. The near black green of the trees topping the isle, like the burnt crust of a fresh loaf, looked a permanent shadow juxtaposed to the vibrance of Ish-Gahn's shore. Several miles off, looming, silent, but screaming in that silence, demanding the attention of those that lived in the area that would become known as the Scaled Bay. Minds a flame with growing sentience pointed, pondered, and painted legends of what might reside on the distant Dark Isle.

Its silhouette stood secret for years. Its tantalizing allure beckoned rapidly expanding curious minds to heed the call. Both shore and sea proved to be the adversary for the individuals that attempted to make the pass several times before it proved futile. Before long, droves of teams of strangers brought together with a similar goal would think and formulate with new attempts at methods to reach their destination. This would see to the creation of boating and naval exploration, despite this though, The Dark Isle would see an untold amount of death approach as each attempt was met with failure.

Just as many living souls left seaside Ish-Gahn as corpses washed back upon the shore. Ceaselessly the attempts continued. Unbridled curiosity, exasperated by the increasing need for expansion and exploration as more of the First People ventured from the Life Glade, and families prospered and flourished into full communities. These communities ebbed and flowed as the waves they threw themselves to, rising to large ranks and dwindling to fractions all in the pursuit of the unknown. Playing witness to the struggle was a lone philosopher, a recluse with a morbid fascination for the suicidal reckless abandon. Secluded and skulking from atop a zigguraat like hill, the pale elvan man named Morose pondered and observed. He would obsessively take notes and gather remains from the sea side after every failed trial of passage to the Dark Isle.

Studying the corpses that had no claimers, and even some that did, Morose unraveled the mysteries of anatmoy and the biology. Almost an entire lifetime would be spent detailing immaculate records in boundless tomes that depicted diagram after diagram with note after note that began to seem almost like a scripture to him. This knowledge put him a step above most of the other denizens of Ish-Gahn and before long he had made quiet the name for himself as a scientist and doctor, being
able to diagnose what ailed anyone who would come to his door. This would not come without cost and Morose began to require payment in some form or another. The concepts of trade and coin had already began to spread with the advancement of naval travel and commerce, but coin only had sated Morose while he needed it, and with as much visitation he received, he had no shortage of it for long.

Once the gold no longer appeased him, Morose began taking students under his wing. Typically, a person with an ailment would come along to seek his aide, and if he hadn't a need for coin, a contract of indentured servitude would be drawn up with the details befitting Morose's needs at the time. After the terms were met and the patient was treated, they would be allowed to return to their lives. This was the state of business for a short while, but his curiosity would only grow at the proximity to the living subjects that so eagerly delivered themselves to his door. His genius mind began to formulate ideas and plots he knew would draw the ire of the community he served if his intentions saw the light of mixed company and he realized that if his studies were too advance, he would need privacy, distance, total seclusion.

*The Dark Isle*

From out his tower window, he gazed across the sea towards the looming shadow as yet another group of potential subjects pushed a new model of ship with massive sheets for sails out off the bank and into the dark choppy water of a stormy sea. He watched in mere moments as they were capsized and floatsem and jetsem dotted the sea line like Zardon constellations in the night sky. It was obvious that the Dark Isle would have been isolated enough the protect his experiments from prying eyes, but it was a matter of getting there himself.

Morose began to near insanity himself, completely sealing off his chambers to observe the sea in solitude and study and plot his course of action. With all his time observing the sailors and the ships and the seas, the secrets of a successful passage eluded him to the point of maddening frustration. He would ceaselessly pour through his notes, scrawlings of schematics, boating blueprints, but the macabre obsession with death and bodies dragged him like an undertaker to his thick bound tomes of anatomy. It was like a lullaby, a children's bedtime story illustrated with organs and viscera with pops of pink and crimson gore. He would purr to himself, pouring through the pressed parchment in a
zealous fervor that blocked out thoughts of all subjects aside from dissection, dismemberment, discovery.

The obsession began to take him, a shadow of his former genius. Morose had become a starved hollow husk, driving himself further from stability and a sense of societal refinement as the diagrams and tomes consumed him in turn. For months he was locked away, he would not sleep or eat or drink, simply write and draw and ponder, yet he was sustained. The pages began to speak to him in his rattled state, telling him to just turn one more page, then another, and another. His eyes turned sunken and narrow, blood red from from dehydration with bright blue veins bulging beneath sallow milk white flesh barely clinging to the bones below.

“You're almost there Morose, you have my support.” A woman's voice rang clearer than the screams echoing over the field that separated him from the would be sailors of the Scaled Bay. Unbothered, he would continuously read and watch and pace and wait for it to speak again. “I support your path, it will serve us well. Continue to walk it, continue your tutelage. Build your following and you will achieve all you’ve dreamt of. But first, you must make it to the Dark Isle. Declare your faith to me, and it will be yours.”

At once Morose stopped flipping the pages of the flesh leathered tome within his weak grasp. He stared deeply into the sketch of an emaciated woman, white bloat from absorbed water extending the proportions of her body with maggot holes like cork across the flesh. Her mouth was open and the head of the image shifted on the paper to stare him directly in the face as she continued to speak.

“I am Alaxendaria, goddess of death, and as my servant you will be the most powerful elf to ever live, serve my will and you will achieve your heart's blackest desire. Take the strength I offer you now and amass a collection of sacrifices to send to me on the Dark Isle. The way will become clear for you, Morose, you won't disappoint me my Pet.”

With a shudder, the yellowing skin of the leathery tome began to ooze and drip black tar like shadow, shlocking through his fingers and gathering in stasis, a bubbling roiling puddle of deep lightlessness. It seeped into the floor, disappearing between his feet until all that remained was a
smoking mirror of the tome it was once; pure black bindings and grey metal clasps bound the tome of breathing shadow like a caged beast as drips of slick tar cascaded from the corners to seep into the floor with taunting whispering hisses.

“Yes, Grey Lady, I will serve you.”

Emerging from his seclusion for the first time in he hadn't known how long, Morose found himself at no shortage for aide in his endeavor. His absence had lead to a void in the niche role he filled for the small pocket of budding society and several tried their hand at mending the wounds of the community, but none had his know how. With a zealous fervor he, Morose began to gather these desperate souls to his side to hear him speak on the Grey Lady, Alaxendaria.

“You simpletons have been going about this quandary of yours so foolishly. Throwing yourselves to Our Grey Lady, making nothing of your pitiful lives before treading to her Soul Pouch. A life squandered means nothing to her and I will not allow you to sully Her name with foolish brazeness!” He spoke with an unearthly, almost monstrous rasp that shook the foundation of the continent, causing massive waves to surge back against the flow of the ocean separating the Ish-Gahnians from the Dark Isle. “She has spoken to me and has granted me the ability to pass the Scaled Bay. Those that would devote themselves to the Grey Lady would see the passage as well.”

With no restraint, the gathered team of thirteen individuals, two friendly families who dreamt of making the passage together, eagerly offered themselves to the cause. Much to the delight of Morose, the two Rhyonis' of the families bowed before him, two grown men groveling in the heavy wet sand, crying of boyhood dreams of adventure and crossing to the Dark Isle together. “Please Morose sir, we will do whatever needs be done, our souls to the Grey Lady.”

“Us too, please sir.” A delightful chorus of gleeful volunteers from the Rhyona's and collective nine Rhyos. They all smiled and gathered together, bunching into a single amalgamation of bright beaming faces brimming with excitement and a communal joy. This had gone even better than the recluse could have hoped for. They were like sheep, these fools, playing right into his hands, and all he had to do was ask.
“You thirteen will be my first disciples.” He poured the words over them like honey sinking into a bowl of milk. Through glinting tears and opened mouths they listened and swallowed every sweet syllable. “I will part the waters and upon the Dark Isle, we will create a temple to the Grey Lady where she will bless us as the conquerors of the Dark Isle. There I will then teach you all I know of anatomy for you to spread and teach to the world at large. Your families will be legendary.” Each promissory will drew them deeper and deeper in, without their knowing, the light dimmed around them, day bleeding into an oblivion night with roaring waves crashing beside them, ocean spray dotting their motionless forms before Morose.

Without words they bowed, faces buried in the sand and darkness over took them. Their golden tanned skin sunk and clung to their flesh, paling, leaving valleys of shadow beneath mountainous pallid bone structure. The exuberance and joy pulling from their entire being as they stood once more, silent, still, and twisted husks of their former selves. And with that dramatic transformation, Morose turned, smiling inwardly, and made his way towards the shore, his Disciples in tow, mindlessly in his wake.

The moment his sandled foot made contact with the water, the ocean itself would part, forming a perfect circle around the troupe that unabashedly began to make the passage. One step at a time, Morose spearheaded the procession, never breaking his concentration or stride and paying no mind the myriad of passing wildlife that would swim near the bubble of icy waters held back by solid walls of shadow. Occasionally, Morose would spot a corpse or two from various wrecks of past passages. As his eyes would scan them, fingers or necks would twitch to turn and watch the macabre parade of silent shambling forms across the oceans floor, only to cease and remain in their positions once he passed.

For nearly half a day they walked, a zeal, drive, obsession, carrying the crowd of once regular elves, now something far different, to a known destination wrapped in a swathe of unknowns. The Dark Isle greeted them, Morose the first to breach the shore as his bubble of shadow burst through the crest of a wave and the sand of the Dark Isle seeped between his shoes. It was black. All of it. Each
grain darker than the most lightless cave of Rhyonis’ Underdark. It poured through his long spider like fingers, sticking and slipping against itself like tar and as it fell, he could swear it sounded like screaming.

“My Disciples.” He turned, greeting the still unspeaking volunteers, the first to step foot upon the Dark Isle after so many years of failure and death. “I welcome you to the Dark Isle, congratulations.” No response came to their lips. All thirteen stood firm, lips in a stark straight line as they stared unblinking at their leader. A rumbling echoed through the trees and a strong breeze began to unsettle the heavy robes draped over Morose’s frail form. Despite this, the trees remained as still as his companions and Morose pondered on this for but a moment. “Onward then.”

Without hesitation, he stepped through the trees which, like the ocean waters, too bent and swayed to the side for him, allowing unbothered passage. Each step deeper into the unknown was met with a soft sucking sound as untread earth would bend and breathe with the weight of gentle steady footfalls. Black sand would fade and blend into lush dark green moss, brackish slick mud, and thick pools of gathered tar and bubbling blackness. The path to their destination became clear on its own. Be it an innate knowing in Morose brilliant, if disturbed, mind, or the Isle itself moving to lead the troupe, it took but mere hours to arrive in the central clearing that stood in the exact center point of the Dark isle.

“We've arrived.” All thirteen of Morose's followers voice spoke in unison for the first time since they made their transformation to these new shadowy gaunt figures. He turned to look upon them and once more they had bowed, arms outstretched and face buried deep into the dark moist dirt. They stood and moved to arrange themselves in a full circle around him, Morose standing alone in the center and looking up through the canopy at the countless Zardons dotting the sky above, the only source of light in the darkness rolling around their placement like a circling pack of wolves.

From youngest to oldest, in a clockwise pattern from directly in front of him, the youngest child opened its mouth, a girl just able to walk and support her own weight, speaking to Morose in the same gravelly monotone that had addressed him from the journal in his laboratory. Her voice was echoed,
starting a moment later by the next oldest child, so on and so forth around the circle until all thirteen of the elves spoke in the same voice, like a haunting cacophonous round of lyrics, ancient, powerful, and destructive as they forced him to his knees. He sturdied himself against the weight of the words that threatened to tear him apart, but he forced himself to listen and decipher what was being whispered but screamed at him simultaneously.

“You’ve done well to make it this far. There is still much more to do however. This was but the first step. My time for this realm is not long and I will need someone to continue to represent the watchful gaze of Death in my absence. These thirteen will be the foundation of what will become known as they Grey Lit Path, where I will be confined until a great turn of events that will call for my presence once again.”

There was a stirring in the trees that ruffled the bottom parts of Morose's robes and he noticed the darkness slowly creeping up his legs. He remained still and allowed it to happen. Remained silent and allowed her to speak. Remained curious as to what would come next as he always had been. Curious. Transfixed by the shadow sinking into his flesh, turning it from pale ivory to bubbling murk, he remained Morose, but could feel himself transforming into something much different. Much more.

“You will serve as a reminder of myself. To never wander too far into the darkness, to never allow your curiosity to unhinge yourself and stay on the path of neutral morality. Death Essence clings to you like wet silk from your emergence into it. You are darkness incarnate, Morose, in the darkness you shall remain, and what little light lives in you will never leave the Path, forever Undying.”

Each of the thirteen figures stretched out their palms to the figure in the center, once Morose, now a solitary form of pure shadow, dripping, slipping, and sloshing to fill the entirety of the circle. Their mouths opened impossibly wide, pulling in faint strands of grey light from the dark, siphoning it into themselves before releasing an ear splitting scream as Morose erected himself and pushed back the tar like blackness. What stood where he was was unlike anything yet to walk the realm of Rhyonis. Vastly larger than his former self, Morose stood, a glistening obelisk of liquid shade.

“I proclaim you Archfey of Darkness, you stand without antithesis and have power comparable
to Angehlah herself, but I suggest remaining hidden here. You may study, observe, wait, whatever you see fit. In due time our plans will converge, but for now, explore this new power, create, destroy, rebuild, whatever you’d like. It is yours to use. May the world come to fear darkness and the uncertainty it holds, or idolize and imitate your path, that is for Rhyonis at large to decide.” With that last word, the thirteen collapsed, crumbling into ash and dust, only to be swept away in a faint gust of wind, Morose's, now, only companion in the clearing.

From there he would explore the darkest depths of Rhyonis', spreading his teachings in whispers and messages, signs calling to all the morbidly curious of the world. His ideology would subtly spread and flourish in esoteric circles where morality would wander and new practices would spring up with convergent minds. A new school of magic coming to fruition, the manipulation of life and death essence, suspending corpses into animation to serve your means, siphoning life essence from one being to another, even tying death essence to a living vessel to keep it in an in between state.

These in between beings would be Morose's favorite, his servants, replications of the Thirteen that helped him tread this path originally. Only a spare few he would bless with this power over darkness and death essence, elves that proved themselves to be worthy of being his trusted servants. They would be called the Shadow Elves. Something he would never be allowed to forget, was that he serves a greater purpose, and amasses as much power as he can until the Grey Lady calls on him once more.

Alaxendaria's intelligence was unmatched by all, especially in those early days of Rhyonis’. She easily comprehended how the world functioned and played her role without judgment, taking the souls of those whose life essence would expire. Her domain was far vaster than that of the other creation gods and knew that her work would be endless, so long as life existed, she would always need to be there to collect, and there were limits to how much her Soul Pouch could hold, even before Angehlah would spread sentience at her behest, Alaxendaria was conscious of these limitations. It was the sacrifice of the Thirteen that allowed her to reform her split Soul Pouch by sewing it together in a new, empowered form. Their Life Essence, even under the throes of Morose’s transformation on
them, was connected, tethered and would merge during their collective deaths. She would stitch this essence into a new being entirely, their passions and vibrance, her sole companion; the Undying Light. As the pouch would unravel, ripped to shreds by her scythe and the souls inside, Alaxendaria would take the antithesis to the Undying Light, the death essence cocooning their souls from Morose, and stretch it to encompass an entire new realm alongside Rhyonis, her domain realm; the Grey lit Path.

The Thirteen would become the foundation, the boarders, and the Grey Lit Path itself. Through their sacrifice to create a safe haven for all departed souls, Alaxendaria would grant them the ability to obverse and live through all the lives that would come to the Grey Lit Path. It is under Their light that they judge and reveal a soul's life to it. The Thirteen, now known as The Undying Light, will cast their judgment upon a soul, and if it lived a life of goodness and is remembered fondly, the soul is cast in layers of brightness to enjoy their memories. Conversely, if a soul is deemed to be tainted, dark, and lived a life of evil, the Light leaves them in darkness, tormented by their shortcomings and most vile moments.

It is there, with the countless souls of Rhyonis' fallen, and the Undying Light, that Alaxendaria waits, having set her Frozen Vanguard and Archfey of Darkness upon Rhyonis. Shrouding the truth behind her Domain Realm from even the other Creation Gods, she waits and bides her time, praised and worshiped as the Grey Lady, collector and protector of souls.