

Outré Souls (WIP)

by Rand M. Burgess

When the lore of the land could no longer hold the minds of men, they turned their eyes to places where they expected to find no other gaze. Thus eight flags were sewn and charged to upheave the reaches of the world and return with its secrets, each headed by Novum's fullest names;

Terrum, The Old-Sent South

Rowna, Buried Smile-Sent East

Finrick, Head of the Oster Order-Sent West

Syne, Son of the High Hand-Sent North

Jeniver, Mystic of Waters-Sent North West

The Mindless-Sent North East

Nova'Clarum, The Golem-Sent South East

Mindalyn, Witch of Words-Sent South West

Those sent to the eight winds did not return when winter conjured down from the heavens. Instead, the bitter wind brought only famine, sickness, death, and the grey girl on its icy fronts. She crawled through ashen snow on bare tattooed flesh, through the ghost-bare streets, and up countless flights to Lodderum, where she was granted an audience with the High Hand. The girl proclaimed prophecies that would bring Novum to the underworld, that would bring death to the High Hand, that would plunge the world into nightmares and madness, all at the whim of those we could not know, those who lurked where none should be lurking.

In short time the words of the grey girl, this Un-Muse, became reality. The winter choked the very life from Novum, never thawing. The High Hand fell sick with many strains of plague that bubbled up from Dhal, the great city below Lodderum, and never recovered. Strange and awful beings arrived on night's front, men and women washed over with indifference, evil, and madness, and the land plunged into the predicted nightmare. Lodderum, now with the Un-Muse entranced upon the High throne, grew putrid and sunk deep into the sickly sky.

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Time brought a solemn tune of the eight flags, of Novum's great heroes, but these words were brought to a dying land, and from the secret lips of a stranger. He hid behind an expressionless slate mask, played ghostly tunes on a tin harp, and sung of the eight flags and things less known, undisturbed and unsought beside a moldering fountain of the deceased High Hand. Across from the square, a blurred form stumbles from the remains of the great spiral stair to missing Lodderum. The form is bleak, but it is human, and the air of right mind and sanity hang prophetically in its sleepy eyes.

The sky is a void white sheet pockmarked with din writhing at sparse lengths, behind which a banshee sun howls dismal light through the wooly ether onto Dhals ruined and scared nightmare flesh. Your eyes burn and hum with the ache of forced slumber; Your skin tingles and spasms back to functionality; Your lips moisten crypt ash and rot from their corners; You spit, heave, cough, sputter out plague black speckles, green ichor, gold flakes and ruby globules onto frost covered cobblestone. Sleep has been unkind.

A poor wind pitches the stench of catacombs through the cold, triggering a cacophony of brittle fractures and tittering in your dormant ears. The tune is not the flower girl's song, nor the scampering of playful hounds, nor the bustling of stalls and families, nor are they the sounds familiar, or of sanity. Standing near the rim of spiral square's regal fountain—once a brilliant chromatic sight now smoldering with grey tendrils, sick oil, and shadowed lumps—is a masked fellow dressed in de-saturated ivory whites and emerald greens, clutching a poorman's tin harp at his side. From behind the circular, featureless, pumice mask, he produces a staggered song that the harp could barely carry:

“Over the winds carried our dreams,
To mountains, shores, the globe is ours,
In night time sleek she slipped from solace,
Over the winds carried our destruction,
Desecrated left behind her shells they bellow,
Clambering along low peripheries of twilight,

She has reaped the harvest of winter,
She has stripped the souls of man and monster,
The imagery on outer shores,
Howl her heaven bound,
To slither out the epoch so she might swallow other, truer lands,
In her shade the womb is left, infected by her hands,
So summon out the bleak ones, slumber is not sleep,
For mortal clocks are clicking,
Over the winds carry they,
Bleak ghosts, filled with hope
To bring forth summer's blaze"

