

## WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE

*Call me Malachi. I have chronicled the events in Ashkelon to the best of my abilities as a scholar, no longer a boy but an aging grandfather blessed to see two generations of his family grow up healthy in spite of everything that's happened.*

*Ashkelon: a vast land teeming with elemental and supernatural forces where light, fire, water, earth, and even death itself can be harnessed. Here great heroes and epic legends once lived. Valiant knights and heroes commanding great armies fought against vile evils that threatened the land. Mages soared through the sky on magical beasts. Demons and dragons fell before shining sword and lance. Wondrous cities and palaces filled the countryside. It was a time of high adventure and sorcery, a time of abundance. I remember their legendary names like it was yesterday: Lord Ulim of Lanceor, Sir Faeric, Sir Taiburon, Master Thorin Apyrus, Lord Demetrio, Lady Melisande... so many others like them.*

*I was a young boy, a mere student scribe when it all changed. Feuds became battles. Battles became wars. The land bled as hundreds of thousands perished from the onslaught of war and the pestilence that followed. Kingdoms and empires fell. Alliances faded and friend turned against friend. The days of adventure became a time of madness and hunger as a generation seemed lost to war, famine, and disease. Even the continent itself broke apart from the magical fury unleashed from the constant wars. The Archmage Iser Abiram's attempt at reconciliation and peace failed, ultimately costing him his life.*

*A brief respite followed in Ashkelon under the tenuous watch of five archmages: Ojare Agkeidon, Shifra Neriad, Alderik Einarion, Prerana Sethos, and Chiram Tavi. This, too, did not last beyond a few seasons as Ojare Agkeidon waged a crusade across Ashkelon, plunging it into war once again. The last of the great cities were destroyed along with the*

*vainglorious archmages that ruled them, leaving only scattered remnants of a once wondrous era throughout Ashkelon.*

*How I've survived a generation of war, I don't know. Perhaps it was divine intervention or dumb luck. All I know is that I've seen the fall of greatness that became buried under overgrowth with the passage of time as the land healed itself. The primal energies that flow throughout Ashkelon remain, but who is there to wield such power?*

*Who, indeed? Once, a vast array of races populated Ashkelon: Elves, Dwarves, Orcs, Goblins, Trolls, Ogres, Humans, Centaurs, Fairies, and a host of others, great and small. Sadly, it appears that now only the humans remain, their numbers significantly depleted from a generation ago. The wondrous races of old are now virtually extinct, decimated beyond repair.*

*The wide array of monsters, however, seems to prevail in Ashkelon, taking up residence in the abandoned remnants of fallen cities, shrouded in the overgrowth. However, their presence has not deterred a newfound generation of treasure hunters, seeking lost riches abandoned by their previous owners among the palatial ruins. Feeding on carrion and the unlucky treasure seeker, these great beasts are the new residents of kingdoms lost to antiquity.*

*Small towns and hamlets miraculously spared from the destruction have gradually grown into reminders of a once bountiful era. Crops grow once again, but only in small slivers of farmland. Lydda, Magdala, Hesbon, Cadasa, and others like them may have been small villages of no consequence before, but they've become the foundation of Ashkelon's rebirth.*

*It is the year 1034 in the recorded common history of Ashkelon. A generation has passed since the deaths of the five archmages, but their respective houses of Agkeidon, Neriad, Einarion, Tavi, and Sethos have endured on Ashkelon. New champions will soon emerge, and I hope, no, I pray, that they exercise more wisdom than their forefathers...*