PROPHECIES
as narrative tools

This isn't an adventure, I promise.

PROPHECIES

AS NARRATIVE TOOLS

INTRODUCTION

Prophecies are, in essence, stories about the future, and like all stories they shape culture and are, in turn, shaped by it. They travel long distances from mouth to ear, to written word, to hungry eyes. Inspiring us to believe that we might be the chosen few who will lead the charge and see destiny fulfilled.

Saving the world, rescuing those in need, stopping an evil tyrant, or becoming who we were always meant to be, are but a few of the myriad of futures these tales promise. Yet, they also speak of great disasters, the rise of evil, and even the end of all things.

Over the centuries, prophecies have made their way into our stories, myths, and legends, and are now a staple of the modern fantasy genre in which most D&D games are based on—so its hardly surprising to find them on our tables, accompanying character backstories or even as the plot of a campaign. They give the story a very specific direction in which the players can strive towards. They can create great expectations, rivalries, a sense of purpose, and a great deal of confusion, but most importantly, they can be a powerful tool for the Dungeon Master to create a sound and interesting narrative that will engage the players and make for a great game.

I'm willing to bet, however, that if you have been playing for long enough, you have had one or two games go awry because of a prophecy. Which makes sense, since most Dungeon Masters can't see the future and have limited control over the actions that often define a character's fate. Yet, a prophecy entails defining a pre-written destiny, so in making use of one, the DM creates a lose-lose scenario, either taking away the player's ability to impact the game or risk seeing that prophecy go unfulfilled.

OK, BUT WHAT IS THIS?

That's all well and good, but I'm sure at this point you're wondering what I'm mumbling about. Well, this is a supplement about the creation and use of prophecies with which a narrative direction can be suggested to the players and that, through its resolution—or resolution arc—a desired point in a story can be reached. That's to say, using them as tools to guide your story.

The document is focused towards Dungeon Masters and handles everything from planning, to execution. It provides guidelines on how to create a prophecy that satisfies your specific narrative needs, the process of making them sound abstract and poetic, as well as how to effectively introduce them into your game. Providing examples along the way in the form of roll tables, because, well, I like tables.

PROPHECIES IN TTRPGS

Prophecies can take on three roles in a story: they can be the **focal point** to the narrative, serving as the foundations with which we'll construct our story; serve the purpose of **adding color** to an otherwise dull narrative, adding mysticism and a sense of importance to a plot; or they can be a minor element, **ushering the audience** towards a plot point that would otherwise go unnoticed or be deemed less relevant than we would like.

In most forms of storytelling, they serve as foreshadowing tools, sometimes going as far as outright revealing what the story is leading up to. This makes absolute sense since no matter what happens, the story will reach a point in which the prophecy will be fulfilled, and while that will also happen with our games, the characters in books and movies don't need the prophecy to actually transmit any comprehensible information for them to take the actions needed to bring it to fruition since they're controlled by an omniscient force, which is not the case for the player characters.

This becomes more of a problem when we take into consideration that tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs) don't have passive spectators, but rather, an active audience that defines not only the outcome of any given conflict but also the directions, pacing, and the overall flow of a story. With this in mind, the mere idea of predicting the future seems ludicrous at the very least, but prophecies can be not only interesting, but really useful tools.

A well-placed prophecy can get your game back on track after it has lost all semblance of focus, or it could recapture your players' interest in the story, or even serve as a way to reintroduce your group to the narrative after a long hiatus.

How you use prophecies to better your games depends entirely on your particular situation, but if nothing else, it's usually more interesting to participate in a story that tells about events that are happening or going to happen, rather than one that's about the things that already transpired.

The Heroic Chronicle presented in the *Explorer's Guide to Wildemount*, for example, suggests the use of prophecies as aspirations or goals that the player has for their character, and through that it creates engagement. While they're not entirely the same as the concepts you'll find within this document, you can take the ideas your players come up with and flesh them out using the processes provided herein, creating something that not only follows what your players intend for their characters, but that also exists—and is part of—your world or setting. Adding to your story a narrative element that will accompany your players until its resolution arc, where they'll get to experience not only what they had in mind when creating their aspirations, but also the payoff of something that's been building up throughout the story.

THE TOOL'S PURPOSE

A tool can be used in many ways, some of which the tool was intended for, and others not so much, but they're always made with a specific purpose in mind. Narrative tools function in a very similar fashion, their presence in a story serves a specific purpose and they can fulfill that purpose in many different ways. Often times, the mere fact that a prophecy is part of a story is enough for it to accomplish whatever it is that we want it to do, in other cases, it's through its fulfillment that it has value to our story, but whatever the case, the successful use of one of these tools comes from understanding what it's meant to do and planning accordingly.

There are times in which a tool will fulfill many purposes at the same time—the bests ones do actually—some other times, a narrative tool will affect your story in ways you didn't anticipate. Your word choice, the overall tone of the narrative element, the way in which it's presented, and even parties, factions, and characters associated with it have an impact on the way your players could interpret the tool's meaning in a story. Even so, trying to come up with something that does everything you need it to do and nothing else, would be a task comparable to predicting the future—heh.

The following options are examples, and there are plenty of other ways prophecies could be applied, the only limit is your imagination. Experiment, iterate, and find whatever best fulfills your specific needs.

TRANSITION

The first and most obvious way in which you can make use of such a tool is in taking your narrative from point A to point B. This is done by simply presenting the prophecy and clearly stating an outcome that the players will want to act on —that's to say, something they would be in favor or against of—and a method of fulfillment that ties to the setting/location in which you want your next plot point to develop. This, of course, can be a narrative transition that takes your story from the end of a plot to the next, or something more literal, like having your players move to a different country following the story.

The most important aspect when using a prophecy in this way is the presentation rather than its fulfillment arc. Being concise and explicit is preferred to remove any and all elements that could lead to different interpretations or deviations in your narrative progression. You can treat its fulfillment as an eventuality, but it needs to be interesting enough to catch your players' attention.

GIVE INFORMATION

Sometimes all you need a prophecy to do is to help players figure something out, perhaps you need to transmit information in a way that they can't possibly get wrong, or maybe you just need to help them piece together those plot points that are going over their heads.

Whatever the case might be, prophecies are communication. They transmit messages and can convey information in many different ways. Due to the different elements of a prophecy, we have the opportunity to put our message in a specific context.

The relationship that is created between elements gives clues to how one should interpret the information. That's to say, if a certain character is mentioned in the prophecy in relation to the eventual resurrection of a great evil, one could assume the character's involvement and, furthermore, draw conclusions as to how that character aligns themselves to said evil.

This can be done by presenting a certain subject—a character, object, location, etc.— and defining through phrasing their relation to either the event the prophecy is foretelling or a second element within the prediction.

BUILD ATMOSPHERE

Prophecies are essentially promises of what's to come, they might not necessarily come true in the way you envision at first, but when you introduce one of these predictions into your games, they create a certain expectation that something along the lines of what you described is going to happen—obviously.

By adding narrative elements common to your preferred genre into your prophecy, you're quite explicitly telling your players what your game is about and creating an overall feeling for the whole narrative. Dreadful monsters and horrid creatures might serve as an excellent way to portray a horror-survival type of game, while ancient relics and a chosen one might work best for some type of heroic journey.

Bear in mind, however, that you can mention or introduce the perceived meaning of a prophecy into your game without revealing the actual prophecy until later on. For example, the people of the kingdom could know that the druids keep an ancient prophecy hidden about the return of an ancient evil spirit, and many might even draw conclusions as to what that evil could be, but any and all interpretations of this prophecy are made with incomplete information until everything is revealed to the players. This way, you can create an atmosphere while also leaving the prophecy as a secondary element to your game, or something to be thought of afterwards.

MORAL COMPASS

Through the use of prophecies, one can present their intentions as to what should be perceived by the players as good and bad. This comes from the fact that the prophecy is not presented as the opinion of a character, but rather as something that transcends this individuality and allows the players to take this information as an objective fact about the world/setting.

To accomplish this, one should present an antagonistic force within the prophecy that affects the world or the players in a way that's harmful, or otherwise conflicting, using both phrasing and tone to depict it as something to oppose or prevent.

Of course, there are plenty of elements, both from the prophecy itself and the environment in which it's presented, that could affect the players' perception of these moral grounds. If one wanted to ensure that these aren't compromised due to the opinion a player might have about a respective character or faction, we should isolate the prophecy from the world and present it in a way that's faction-agnostic. Like a ruined temple lost to time, or even foretold by one of the player characters during a vision.

THE ANATOMY OF A PROPHECY

Piecing together a list of distinctive and recurring elements found in all prophecies proved to be a futile task, as I quickly found myself in a sea of exceptions. You see, prophecies as narrative tools tend to be all over the place, they have elements in common, sure, but for the most part, every prophecy seems to be its own thing. But what I did find was narrative similarities between many of them.

In this section, you'll find the three main narrative archetypes that prophecies usually follow, along with their respective recurring elements. But first, let's cover the elements that are omnipresent throughout every prophecy:

- ❖ **CONTEXT**. As all things do, prophecies are made within a certain context. But, most of the time, understanding it —or at least being aware of its existence—is essential when trying to comprehend what's being predicted.
- ❖ **EVENT**. All prophecies tell of events. Even when they refer to certain people, it's always about something that's going to happen to or because of them.
- ❖ **PROPHET**. Every prophecy has been made by someone. It might be irrelevant to the narrative or been forgotten by history. But at some point, someone uttered these words.

HERE BE THE FUTURE

Rather than interpretations of the future, these are predictions about what, when, or how something is going to happen. These cover unavoidable fate, things that will happen no matter what. The most prominent distinction between this and other archetypes is the lack of a condition, there's no "if" with these, it's just facts without variation.

Contrary to what you might expect, these are actually the most commonly known prophecies in the real world, since everyone and their mother has tried to prophesy the end of the world. However, for the purposes of building a narrative, these are often counterproductive. While they can be used to set a tone for our story, as well as give a sense of inevitability —and therefore dread—they reduce player agency, which leads to unsatisfying decisions since there's no chance of affecting the outcome.

They can, however, be used effectively by building a campaign around them, or setting them up to be later revealed as fake or incomplete, in order to transition to another archetype.

Another way to use them effectively is to present them after the fact, claiming that it was known all along that it would happen but it was kept secret for whatever reason. Furthermore, they're a really useful tool when trying to set up a timer—something that demands immediate resolution.

LIST OF COMMON ELEMENTS

- ❖ **RENOWN**. The person that utters the prophecy is often someone of renown or an important figure. They bring credibility to these prophecies.
- ❖ **CONDITIONLESS**. They speak of things that will happen no matter what. No one's actions have any effect on the outcome or are often the reason why the prophecy is realized.
- ❖ **SPECIFICITY**. They speak of a very specific event, which would hardly be confused by another or pass unnoticed.

Most prophecies on Macbeth would fall into this category, as would any event of Ragnarök, King Arthur's messianic return, or the one from Sleeping Beauty.

How is this different from destiny?

While not immediately obvious, there's a monumental difference between the two, and it lies in the fact that, while this type of prophecy speaks of destiny, it's always the interpretation someone made about their experience—whatever it might be—foretelling the future. For us, this mostly means that the prophecy, unlike destiny, could be a misinterpretation or just a well-crafted lie. That in and of itself, allows us to narratively use the inevitability that comes with it, without having to worry about the implications it might have on our game in the long term since we can always blame the "human factor" as a liability and the cause for the prophecy's falsehood.

A HERO RISES

Foretelling the arrival of hope, these are the second most common type of prophecies: a chosen one that will lead the way towards salvation. But for a hero to rise, a predicament is needed: either an antagonistic force or a situation that necessitates a savior to appear in the narrative.

This type of prophecy usually requires the hero's compliance in order to be fulfilled, and even though reluctance is expected—and often part of its narrative arc—in the end, the prophecy can only be realized should the hero meet a certain condition.

These are the ones you'll often find at your tables. They give a story direction, clear moral standings, a sense of importance to the narrative, and—depending on the wording—a final confrontation that hasn't been decided since the beginning. To be used effectively, they're usually separated into three different parts—corresponding to a three arc structure—those are: learning of the prophecy's existence, becoming the hero, and fighting the great evil. Contrary to the other two archetypes, this one doesn't necessitate immediate action and greatly rewards preparation and patience.

It's important to know however, that while the hero is prophesied to end this time of great peril, it's still an ordeal. The hero might lose a lot trying to fulfill their role in the narrative, perhaps even perishing in the attempt.

LIST OF COMMON ELEMENTS

❖ **PROTAGONIST**. Often being our players, these prophecies require a protagonistic force that will rise to the occasion. A chosen one—or few—if you will.
❖ **A TIME OF NEED**. Heroes only rise when there is a need for them to do so. In the darkest night, even the faintest of lights shines brighter.
❖ **CONDITION**. If/when/while something happens, the hero will be able to defeat the great evil, or otherwise bring an end to these dark times.

These are your Sword in the Stone type of prophecies, as well as many "chosen one" prophecies, like the one from The Matrix, or the one from Star Wars.

EVIL APPROACHES

These prophecies—while very similar to A Hero Rises—stem from a very different context than the other two. They speak of a great calamity that might yet be prevented. Most of the time, they tell of ancient evil defeated long ago, but promised to be returned to the world, to bring forth chaos and destruction.

The worlds in which these prophecies are presented are often peaceful—if not nearly utopic—or at least lack a major conflict at the time the prophecy begins its fulfillment arc. Furthermore, the prophecy itself is often unknown or dismissed as nonsense, until everything is set into motion. Idiocy usually takes front stage when awakening this great evil, mistakes or greed being common reasons for its return, and even serving as the motivation for the players while dealing with the aftermath. After all, most people don't want the world to end, and fewer want it to be their fault.

This type of prophecy is used as a combination of the other two archetypes, in the sense that it provides both a clear direction to the narrative, as well as a necessity for immediate actions from the players. They usually come in two parts: first, the evil returns to the world—which is unavoidable—and then it tries to recover its former power, or finish what it started in the past. The whole idea behind this type of prophecy is to stop the second part from happening at whatever cost necessary.

LIST OF COMMON ELEMENTS

❖ **A PEACEFUL WORLD**. For these prophecies to work, their arc must begin in a world without a conflict that could overshadow the evil's return.
❖ **LACK OF A SAVIOUR**. Even though for the purposes of our narrative a protagonist will be essential, they're not chosen for the task, but rather just along for the ride, and are neither special nor included in the prophecy.
❖ **AN OBJECT OF DESIRE**. The antagonistic force needs an object of desire in order to be stoppable. That's to say, it has to desire something or someone, otherwise, there's no foiling their plans. This often takes the form of a relic of times past, which will give the evil the power to destroy the world, figuratively or otherwise.

Your favorite movies about mummies fall into this category, and, to a certain extent, the prophecy from Harry Potter.

CREATING YOUR OWN PROPHECY

Perfect, so you have an idea of what are you prophesying. Let's take that concept and transform it into something we can use. You can either use one of the archetypes described earlier in the document as a template, or you can create your own thing as we go along. Tables are meant to be used as inspiration, so you'll find them lacking if you rely on them too much. For now, let's define a couple of things.

Is the prophet that made the prophecy important to the narrative? If so, who are they? Choose one or roll on the Prophet table below. It might be a good idea to have someone in mind should it become relevant later, but you can always dismiss it if it comes up.

d8	Prophet
1	A deity speaking through the body of a mortal.
2	An old sage interpreting the will of the land.
3	A tribe's shaman while on a drug-induced vision.
4	A talking fox who's life was spared during a hunt.
5	A sick monarch on their deathbed.
6	A mythical creature, such as an Angel or a Fairy.
7	An old storyteller while mesmerized by the fire.
8	The antagonist of the story.

What was the prophet's intention when making the prophecy? Choose one or roll on the Prophet's intent table below. While the prophet might not be essential to your story, the reason for the prophecy's existence might be. Knowing what the prophecy is trying to accomplish is imperative when creating something that will satisfy your specific narrative needs.

d6	Prophet's intention
1-2	**WARN**. Prophecies that are used as a warning about some potential danger in the future are often more literal than the others, as it doesn't care who hears the information, but it's important that it remains as true to the original interpretation as possible.
3-4	**INFORM**. When using a prophecy as a way to deliver sensible information, the way things are described is often abstract in an attempt to make the information useless to anyone that doesn't understand its context.
5-6	**DECEIVE**. Trying to use a prophecy as a way to bamboozle the heroes works wonders for a villain when trying to dispose of threats before they become a real issue. Because of this, prophecies that try to lie, lure, or otherwise deceive those who hear about it, are modeled around one of the other two options.

To what event does the prophecy relate to? Choose one or roll on the Events Foretold table. This is the core of your prophecy, and it's what the archetypes are for.

d8	Events Foretold
1	The return of an ancient evil.
2	A known character's fall from power/grace.
3	A heinous betrayal.
4	A savior's arrival.
5	The death of a prominent figure.
6	The fulfillment of an ancient promise.
7	The truth about a secret long forgotten being revealed.
8	The end of the world.

Who are the actors involved in your prophecy? Are they mentioned in it? Choose one or more characters or roll in the Puppets of Destiny table. This works best if the players already know something about the characters, so if you use the table try to correlate the character to someone in your world if you can.

d8	Puppets of Destiny
1	The monarch of a great nation.
2	A powerful and dangerous creature.
3	Someone presumed dead.
4	A deity or someone related to it.
5	A nameless child.
6	A town, city, or country.
7	A regular farmer.
8	A player/s or the antagonist of the story.

Is your prophecy unavoidable or does it have a condition? If so, what's the condition? Choose one or more conditions or roll on the Condition table.

d8	Condition
1	While wielding a legendary weapon or an ancient relic.
2	On a specific date, such as the end of the year.
3	When a mythical creature is sighted.
4	When someone is born, or when someone dies.
5	During an astronomical event, such as an eclipse or planets aligning themselves.
6	When something that was broken is whole again.
7	When blood is spilled over a specific subject.
8	When someone enters into sacred ground.

POETIC PHRASING

Prophecies come in all shapes and sizes, from really direct and easy to understand, to rather abstract and cryptic messages. But whatever the case, it's often written in a poetic or otherwise creative way, using phrasing that implies a meaning rather than stating it outright. What we have created so far is far from that, so let's do something about it.

In this section, we'll transform your literal prediction into something more akin to what you might expect a prophecy to sound like. Whatever that might be. It's a creative process in which we'll alter the way in which several of the already defined elements of the prediction are expressed, while still retaining the same meaning.

These changes, of course, will have a great impact on the overall tone of the prophecy, which in turn affects the way in which the players will perceive it. Even more, the subtext of the various words and phrases we decide to use could have a great impact on the perceived meaning of the prophecy. Having said that, creatively phrasing your prophecy not only makes for a better fit to your specific world or setting, but also makes it memorable and, sometimes, even a fun puzzle-like experience.

In any case, this is an iterative process and, while the steps are numbered for ease of use, you could and should come back to each step if you feel like it merits a revision after a few changes.

Step I: After you've gone through all the trouble of identifying each element in your prophecy, you'll probably have a horrible array of words, so let's tackle that. If you correctly identified every component, this should be fairly easy. For this example let's say that I'm prophesying the following:

WHEN SOMEONE OF LOW BIRTH BECOMES A MONARCH, A FEW NOBLES WILL BREAK THEIR VOW TO THE CROWN AND START A WAR WITH THE KINGDOM

The event is a civil war, the condition is a person of low-birth marrying into the royal family, and the actors are both said person and the nobles. The prophet isn't mentioned and doesn't seem to carry any narrative weight. The category of Evil Approaches better fits this prophecy, as it tells of something bad that's going to happen in a scenario without any other preexisting conflicts, and has a condition that determines its fulfillment.

Step II: What we're looking to do next, is changing the way in which we express each of these parts while retaining the same meaning. That's to say, we're looking for poetic or otherwise interesting ways to say the same things.

FOR WHEN RED BLOOD TURNS BLUE, THOSE BOUND BY WORD SHALL KNEEL NO MORE, AND BY METAL AND BLOOD WILL FUTURE BE FORGED

For now, we're trying to remain explicit in the things we say. The whole point is to communicate the same thing in a creative way, iterating and coming up with something that sounds allegorical but has a very clear message.

If we're looking for a message that has low variability in the interpretations that someone could give to it, and conveys a very specific meaning, we should stop here.

Step III: If you decided that your prophecy is going to have a hidden meaning, what we're trying to accomplish next is to give an exact amount of information: being elusive in a specific part of the wording, but giving a hint on another part.

❖ Identify what information you wish to hide or obscure
❖ Remove anything that would directly imply what trying to hide, and give the information in the most abstract way possible
❖ Select another component from your prophecy, and add some phrasing or word that would hint towards the literal meaning of the hidden information
❖ Repeat with other components until satisfied

FOR WHEN THAT WHICH IS RED TURNS BLUE, THOSE BOUND BY WORD, BY FEALTY SWORN, SHALL KNEEL NO MORE, AND BY METAL AND BLOOD WILL FUTURE BE FORGED.

In the above example, I got rid of the word "blood" in an attempt to obscure the idea of monarchy and added "by fealty sworn" to deepen that context. While subtle, this change makes the first part of the phrase a little less explicit. Let's do that one more time.

FOR WHEN THAT WHICH IS RED TURNS BLUE, THOSE BOUND BY WORD, BY FEALTY SWORN, SHALL KNEEL NO MORE. THE TOWER SHALL STAND, TEN SWORDS WILL BE DRAWN, AND TWO CUPS ON THE TABLE SHALL REST UPSIDE DOWN.

I thought that "by metal and blood will future be forged" was too easy to interpret as war, so what I decided to do is represent the concept of war using tarot cards. To help players figure this out, I'll change the prophet to be a fortuneteller, and the tarot cards could serve as a prop that the players could find if everything fails.

I could keep going like this until I have something obscure enough to not be immediately obvious. That said, what might seem obvious to me, will not necessarily be as easy to figure out for other people, so feedback is really important at this stage. Furthermore, there're a lot of variables that could influence the ability of your group of figuring out what the hidden information is. If the players don't know they're supposed to analyze the information presented to them, they'll probably write it off as unimportant or otherwise unintelligible (see Introducing a Prophecy below), so if you're hiding information, treat the prophecy like you would a puzzle.

INTRODUCING A PROPHECY

Perhaps the most common quality prophecies have is that they possess a certain mysticism to them, after all, the ability to predict the future is nothing if not extraordinary. However, for as amazing as such a feat would be, it's from the weight these words carry that prophecies gain importance. After all, their mere existence might be quintessential to the beginning or resolution of a great conflict—which frequently serves as the foundation of our story. Therefore, a prophecy needs to be treated with importance to be useful for us as a narrative tool, and while there's value in subverting this prestige, it should always be done by design.

There are three main angles in which you should focus to make sure that your prophecy is—or isn't—treated with such significance.

Firstly, it needs to be the focal point of its scene, not an afterthought. It's the thing the heroes go to the dungeon for, rather than a random encounter. Write it in metal, stone, or even bone, make those who keep it secret fight for it to the death, and try to keep any other important element out of the picture when presenting it to the players.

Secondly, it needs to be at least partially relevant to the current narrative arc. If it doesn't communicate something that's immediately significant, it serves the same purpose as a random array of words. It should at least allude to something that the players could correlate it to, or at least conclude something from, even if such a conclusion ends up being wrong.

Thirdly, the process of getting to know the prophecy should be an undertaking. Access to this information shouldn't be immediately available to anyone, and reaching it should be challenging. Don't expect players to devote much thought to something that you could find out going to the library. There's a correlation between the effort that someone puts into something and their interest in the result. However, this is a double-edged sword: the more complicated something is to get, the more your players' expectation rises. You mustn't betray this expectation, or you run the risk of achieving the opposite effect.

Going in the opposite direction with any of those angles would make the prophecy seem unimportant, or otherwise dismissible. Furthermore, you can use subversion as a tool, for example: having the information be widely available could be a helpful way of making the players believe there must be some hidden information, making the prophecy unrelated to the current context of the story could make for a great "AHA!" moment later on, and presenting it as a secondary element in the scene could make it appear less important than it actually is.

THE PASSING OF TIME

You might have a specific intention in mind when presenting your prophecy to your players, but most of the time, their interpretation will be off by a wide margin—as is the nature of these games. Normally, the more and more your players interact with what you designed—or any game element for that matter—the closer their understanding will be to what you originally envisioned. That being said, sometimes one makes mistakes that are not going to disappear by themselves, that's where the passing of time comes in.

In the real world, very rarely does something survive the passage of time intact, and prophecies are no exception. Cultural and social context have a tremendous impact on how a prediction made long ago about the future—or the present—is perceived. Not only that but as culture incorporates prophecies into its folklore, they often take the role of tales, changing and being shaped by the narrator to better suit the medium. Many interpretations surface, and messages that could have been clear as water in days of old, become murky with many different meanings.

Now, that's the real world, but to us this means nothing. In a fictional world, every piece of history and culture remains the same with the passing of time unless deliberately changed. And this is often a good thing, but in this particular case, having multiple versions and meanings for the same prophecy could serve as a tool to create some interesting situations. But most importantly, this lets us mess up all we want. If you made a mistake, you can introduce a different—this time correct—version of the prophecy or different context in which the meaning changes, in order to fix whatever problem arises.

Obviously, every time we use this method to fix our mistakes, the less effective the tool becomes, losing credibility in the process. So it should be used sparingly, and knowing that admitting you made a mistake and telling your players that the prophecy is incorrect or that you need some time to think about it, is always an option.

> ### Removing a prophecy from the narrative
> As the game moves forward, you might find yourself in a situation where you might already have satisfied your prophecy's original purpose or it might have become irrelevant along the way, yet your prophecy remains unfulfilled. In such cases, there are three ways to handle the residual narrative element: you can either never talk about it anymore, claim it has already been fulfilled outside the narrative, or create a sidequest that matches your prophecy's elements. None of these option is elegant—of course—but it's not a situation that should arise much either.

ONE PAGE PROPHECIES
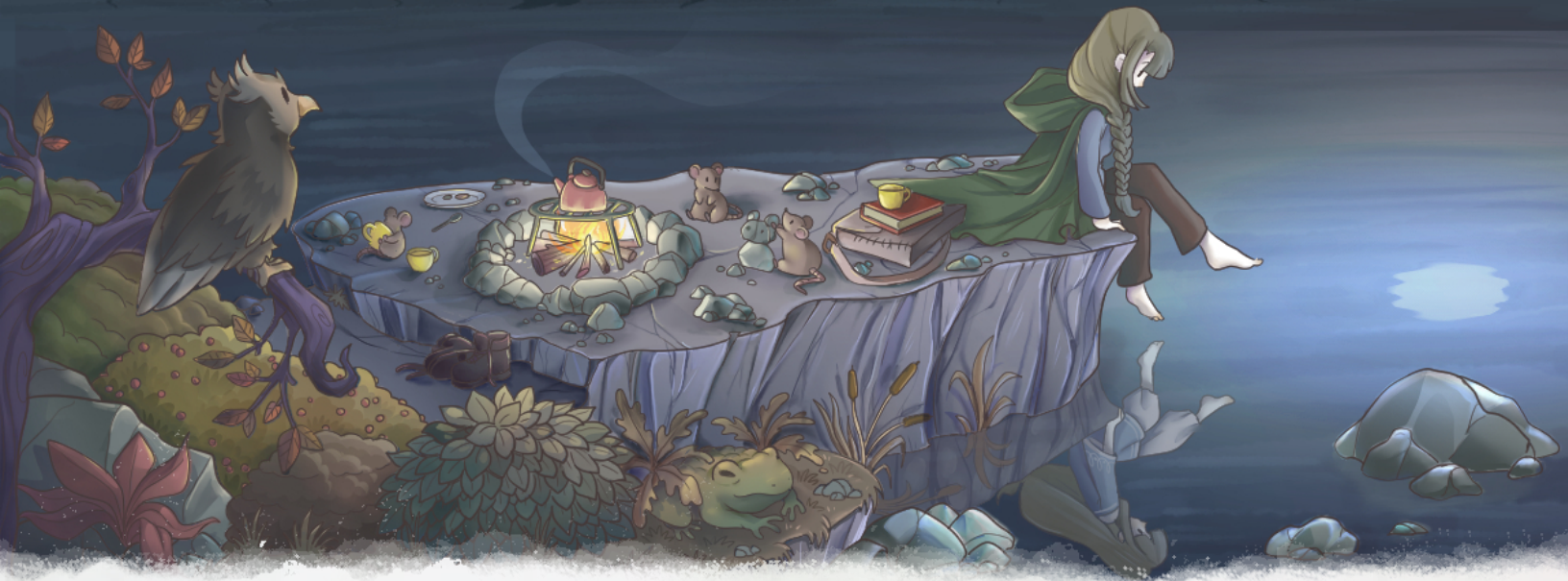
Poring over every word in this supplement is a really good way to acquire knowledge about such a deep concept, however, actually applying it into your games can prove to be tougher than what one might initially expect. There's a lot of minutiae that comes hand in hand with building a narrative element that carries purpose behind it, and seeing as the process itself doesn't lack specificity, you might find yourself looking for guidance inside the pages of this document. I'm saddened to say, however, that there's very little I can do to provide instructions since I don't know what your specific narrative needs are, and I can't really see into the future—I lied, sorry about that.

Now, the only way I see to somewhat fix that issue is by providing you with as many examples as I can of me using the system to create different prophecies. That being said, there's little point in providing you with a vast array of examples that you can't really use in your game, hence, this section.

In here, you'll find three prebuilt prophecies to use in your adventures as either plug and play, inspiration, or as templates to create your own. They come along with tables to further personalize the prediction's phrasing—should you want to put one of them into your games—and each one of them is no longer than a page. These, of course, cover everything from the literal prediction to how to go about introducing them into your narrative, as well as anything else I could conceivably fit in a prebuilt one-page plug and play prophecy full of tables. All and all, these aren't perfectly crafted prophecies that will blow your mind and fit every game, but they might just be helpful enough to allow you to bridge your newly acquired knowledge into something you can implement into your games. Or, at least, help you understand the way I use this process myself.

LIST OF PROPHECIES

An eerie song

This is a prophecy that tells of the return of an ancient evil and serves as both a transitional piece, as well as a narrative hook. It closely follows the archetype of Evil Approaches, as it presents an antagonistic force that will quite literally destroy the world if not dealt with. The basic premise is that a mythical creature (such as a mermaid) comes every night to warn the people of the town of the impending danger, as a villain that was thought to be forever gone walks among the living once again.

To give and to take

A particular character struck a deal with the prophet and didn't uphold their end of the bargain. Because of this, the creature swore to bring suffering to that character. This prophecy follows the Here Be the Future archetype in an attempt to create something other than the all-too-common prediction about the end of the world. It functions mostly as a narrative hook and as a way to build atmosphere, and it could—with a few changes to its context—serve as a moral compass to your party.

A promising tale

This is a false prophecy created to lure would-be heroes into an early grave. It's built around the archetype of A Hero Rises, and it presents the protagonist with a relic that could help them vanquish the antagonist. It's meant to provide the players with information through subtext. That information being the fact that the antagonist is very much aware of their shenanigans, and it's taking a proactive approach to dealing with them. Furthermore, the prediction does have directionality, so it could be used as a way to transition into another location if needed.

AN EERIE SONG

This is a prophecy that tells of the return of an ancient evil, and serves as both a transitional piece, as well as a narrative hook. It closely follows the archetype of Evil Approaches, as it presents an antagonistic force that will quite literally destroy the world if not dealt with. The basic premise is that a mythical creature (such as a mermaid) comes every night to warn the people of the town of the impending danger, as a villain that was thought to be forever gone walks among the living once again.

Our structure looks something like this:

YOU SHOULD HEAD TO A SPECIFIC LOCATION, BECAUSE IF YOU DON'T THE WORLD WILL BE DESTROYED WHEN THE ANTAGONIST RECLAIMS SOMETHING.

The location is to give directionality to the narrative element, so that it can be used as a transition piece. The event is the world being destroyed, our actor would be the antagonist for this tale, and the condition for the prophecies fulfillment involves the antagonist reclaiming some sort of object, status or power.

Narratively speaking, our prophecy is a warning. Therefore, both the antagonistic force and the danger that it poses should be clear to anyone that hears it. On the other hand, as it serves the purpose of moving the direction of our story and could possibly be our central plot or hook, we need the prediction to present the idea to the players that they can be the deciding factor within the narrative arc it generates. That's to say, even though we require the prophecy to set high stakes, we also need it to be something that the players would feel comfortable handling, or at least pursuing.

So, after some creative writing, our prophecy could look something like this:

PEOPLE DOWNTOWN SAY THAT AT THE DEATH OF NIGHT, WHEN NOT A SINGLE THING CAN BE HEARD OTHER THAN THE HOWLING WINDS PASSING THROUGH THE OLD HOUSES NEAR THE RIVER, A MERMAID SINGS AN EERIE SONG. A WARNING, TO WHOEVER WILL LISTEN. AND IT GOES SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

AS THE STORM FAST APPROACHES, YOU SHOULD LOOK TO THE NORTH. FOR THAT WHICH SHOULD DIE REFUSES TO GO. AND THE OCEANS SHALL RISE, AND THE EMPIRES WILL FALL, SHOULD THE RULER OF OLD SIT AGAIN ON ITS THRONE

Seeing as this prophecy takes an important role in the development of our story, we want it to be the centerpiece of its own scene as we present it to our players. It's advisable to close any other narrative arc that could rival the one created by the prediction before introducing the prophecy into our game.

The presence of the prophet within the story is non-essential but gives the prophecy a sense of importance since the players are hearing it directly from the source instead of being told by someone else. The creature can serve as a tool to fix mistakes or re-introduce the party to the narrative arc should it become necessary at any point in the game.

CUSTOMIZING THIS PROPHECY

Choose which elements to replace or roll in the following tables to determine how to further personalize this prophecy.

d6	Mythical Creatures as Prophets
1	A mermaid.
2	A nymph.
3	A dryad.
4	An angel.
5	A spirit of the land.
6	The trees.

d6	Location
1	A cardinal direction.
2	A specific city in your world or setting.
3	An ancient ruin, mentioned by name.
4	A sacred place, mentioned by name.
5	A former seat of power.
6	A secret location few know about, giving hints as to how to get the information.

d6	The end of the world
1	"And the oceans shall rise, and the empires will fall".
2	"And the sky will darken as civilization falls".
3	"And the ground will shake, crack, and rumble".
4	"And the fire shall spread, and it all will devour".
5	"And blood will be spilled to the very last drop".
6	"And not one will remain to cry or to mourn".

d6	Antagonist returned
1	"The ruler of old".
2	"The child of a god".
3	"The last of the lords".
4	"The giant reborn".
5	"The hero that fell".
6	"The kingdom's bane".

d6	Condition
1	"Sit once again on its throne".
2	"Break the last of the seals".
3	"Claim what once was its own".
4	"Once again become whole".
5	"Reconnect with its lord".
6	"Wield its weapon of old".

TO GIVE AND TO TAKE

A particular character struck a deal with the prophet and didn't uphold their end of the bargain. Because of this, the creature swore to bring suffering to that character. This prophecy follows the Here Be the Future archetype in an attempt to create something other than the all-too-common prediction about the end of the world. It functions mostly as a narrative hook and as a way to build atmosphere, and it could—with a few changes to its context—serve as a moral compass to your party.

Our structure looks something like this:

THE PERSON TO WHOM THE PROPHECY IS DIRECTED DIDN'T KEEP THEIR END OF THE DEAL. FOR THIS, THEY'RE GOING TO SUFFER AND BE LEFT WITH NOTHING, AS THE PROPHET TAKES IT AWAY.

The event foretold by the prophecy is this particular character's suffering in relation to what the prophet is taking away, our actors are both the character in question and the prophet, and there is no condition to what is being prophesied.

Even though the prediction is more of a threat than anything else, the prophet's intent is to warn the character of the repercussions for their actions. Though not in a friendly way, but rather as some sort of ultimatum.

For the purposes of building an atmosphere, we need to construct both the actor and the prophet into characters that better convey this feeling. If, for example, we wish the story to develop into a good-versus-evil narrative, we could make the actor into an empathic figure that was tricked into accepting a nefarious deal from a black-hearted trickster. On the other hand, if we wanted the story to take on a more dystopic kind of vibe, the actor could be someone of power that got to where they are through this deal and now is abusing that power to make others pay for their end of the bargain.

After piecing together all these elements, and doing some creative writing, our structure could look something like this:

HAVE YOU HEARD? JUST THE OTHER NIGHT, A HAG APPEARED IN FRONT OF THE KING AND QUEEN AND THREATENED THEM! I WAS THERE, IT JUST CAME IN THROUGH THE DOOR AND SAID:

A KINGLY PROMISE. A DEBT UNPAID. FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE, YOU'LL DIE IN SHAME. NO SONS, NO DAUGHTERS, TO BEAR YOUR NAME, FOR ALL YOUR OFFSPRING I'LL TAKE AWAY.

AND THEN IT DISAPPEARED JUST LIKE THAT. WEIRD, RIGHT?

As the prophet is the source of the actor's misfortune, this "unavoidable fate" could be effectively, well, avoided by dealing with the prophet in a way or another. This tends to happen when prophecies of this archetype take on a more human scale, and it's something that we could use as part of the prophecy's resolution arc. If our main concern with the prediction is to build an atmosphere, we don't really need it to come true or interact with our players that much, but should they become interested in following this narrative arc to the end, we could introduce dealing with the prophet or paying the debt as viable conditions to stopping it from coming true.

CUSTOMIZING THIS PROPHECY

Choose which elements to replace or roll in the following tables to determine how to further personalize this prophecy.

d6	Antagonistic prophet
1	A hag.
2	A fiend.
3	A sprite.
4	A sorcerer or warlock.
5	The voice of the land.
6	A ghost from times past.

d6	Nature of the deal
1	"A kingly promise. A debt unpaid".
2	"An oath was sworn, yet tossed away".
3	"You lie, you scheme, you break your promise".
4	"You made your vows, you signed in blood, yet every word you ignored and mocked".
5	"A pledge was made, yet swiftly ignored".
6	"An exchange, a trade, to give and to take. You got what you wanted but you never paid".

d6	Form of suffering
1	"For what you've done, you'll die in shame".
2	"For that mistake, you'll know despair".
3	"Because of greed, you'll bleed and suffer".
4	"Day and night you'll live in hell".
5	"For this you'll feel torturous pain".
6	"For your deceit, your mind will break".

d6	Repercussions
1	"No sons, no daughters, to bear your name. For all your offspring I'll take away".
2	"No glory or honor will come to you, for now your name belongs to me".
3	"You'll never know sleep again, for every dream I'll turn to flames".
4	"The things you love, the things you hate, I'll make you unable to differentiate".
5	"Every wound you've ever had will open nightly on my behalf".
6	"Those who love you will think you died, and won't be able to see you cry".

A PROMISING TALE

This is a false prophecy created to lure would-be heroes into an early grave. It's built around the archetype of A Hero Rises, and it presents the protagonist—which, in this case, should be anyone that hears about it—with a relic that could help them vanquish the antagonist. It's meant to provide the players with information through subtext. That information being the fact that the antagonist is very much aware of their shenanigans, and it's taking a proactive approach to dealing with them. Furthermore, the prediction does have directionality, so it could be used as a way to transition into another location if needed.

Our structure looks something like this:

YOU SHOULD RECLAIM AN ANCIENT RELIC LOCATED IN A DANGEROUS PLACE. FOR WHEN YOU DO, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO BRING AN END TO THESE TIMES OF PERIL, DEFEATING THE ANTAGONIST.

The actor is whoever hears the prophecy, our condition is recovering the relic from a location, which, in turn, is used as a way to set our antagonist's trap, our event is bringing an end to these dark times, and the antagonist would be the baddie on duty.

As we are trying to set up some sort of trap for the heroes, the tone of the prophecy should be hopeful, promising a too-good-to-be-true kind of resolution to their problems while staying plausible. As this lie is tailored to our heroes, we could even use information they don't expect the antagonist to have or to give away willingly, as a way to gain their trust per se.

With a bit of work, our prophecy could look something like this:

RISE, CHILD OF THE LAND! AND CLAIM THE MARK OF YOUR ANCESTORS FROM YOUR ANCIENT HOME. FOR IN YOUR HANDS AND YOUR HANDS ALONE, IT WILL BRING FORTH AN ERA OF PEACE AND BANISH EVIL FROM THIS LAND.

Introducing this prophecy into the story should be pretty straight forward, although we need the right context to do so. The antagonist needs to know who the heroes are and be aware that they're trying to stop their plans. Additionally, the prophecy requires someone to interpret it and usher the players towards that location, either now knowing it's a trap, or working in tandem with the antagonist. This person should be someone that the players look up to, respect, or see as some sort of benefactor.

As for the prophet, while they're not mentioned in the prophecy, they're, in fact, relevant to our narrative. So purposefully omitting them from it and making it so no one quite knows where the prediction came from, could serve as a way for our players to figure out our scheme. Furthermore, as we don't need to reveal that it's all a sham until after the end of its resolution arc, we could make it into a real thing if we decide at any point that it's what our story needs.

CUSTOMIZING THIS PROPHECY

Choose which elements to replace or roll in the following tables to determine how to further personalize this prophecy.

d6	Actor
1	"Child of the land".
2	"Hero of [**name of a city or kingdom**]".
3	"Seeker of Truth".
4	"Wielder of wrath".
5	"Master of shadows".
6	"Child of [**name of a deity or patron**]".

d6	Relic of power
1	"The mark of your ancestors".
2	"The weapons of old".
3	"The ancient magic".
4	"The three keys of power".
5	"A piece of providence".
6	"Your true name".

d6	Location
1	"Your ancient home".
2	"The cradle from which evil spawned".
3	"The tomb of ancient heroes".
4	"The labyrinth".
5	"The beyond the veil".
6	"The forge beneath the earth".

d6	Changing times
1	"Bring forth an era of peace".
2	"End this time of great peril".
3	"Change the fate of the world".
4	"Burn the world and rise it anew".
5	"Give us hope and bring prosperity".
6	"Bring balance to the world".

d6	An end to the antagonist
1	"Banish evil from this land".
2	"Vanquish your foe".
3	"Strike down the forces of darkness".
4	"End the source of this evil".
5	"Put an end to evil once and for all".
6	"Quash those who would oppose you".

You made it to the end, as it was foretold.

Oh, hi! You made it to the end, congratulations!

This is actually the second document I've released so far, and I'm immensely proud of both of them. So allow me to recommend The incredible world of Doors & Locks in case you haven't read it yet.

In any case, if you liked the document, please let me and others know what you think of it! If you didn't, well, please do the same! I'd love to get better!

Anyways, thanks a lot for giving me a chance, and I hope you keep reading my stuff!

Oh, and if you like the characters in this document, there are **free stickers** for WhatsApp and Telegram available on my Discord server!

You can join by clicking here!
https://discord.com/invite/2MvMxK2

Kyo Smash

ILLUSTRATOR

kyo_smash

kyosmash

kyosmash

GUILD