

GOODS AT WAR

EPISODE I



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IVAN BOLANOS

GODS AT WAR: EPISODE I

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AQUA TALISMAN



AYERS ROCK



THE UNTOT



PADIAN ANTOLAS



INTRODUCTION

The supreme god who created all we know originated his offspring long ago. First, it was Alkiar, then Morek, and thus, one by one, the progeny of Vakur populated the different corners of the still-young universe. The heartbeat of the cosmos would be tied to the will of those omnipotent beings.

But not all lesser gods were the same. Some were born stronger, others more noble, so it was agreed from the beginning that each would take care of their affairs.

However, that cosmic agreement would be broken after Vakur's firstborn gave life to a vast spiral-shaped galaxy because he made it so perfect and beautiful that it aroused the jealousy of one of his brothers.

Morek wanted to destroy Alkiar's work, and when he believed that the moment to carry out his plan had come, the Earth was already billions of years old. Humans had long ago become the dominant species on the third planet from the Sun. Unknowingly, it was rapidly approaching the moment that would determine its fate.

This is the story of how forces beyond human understanding will be in charge of ending life as we know it or perhaps perpetuating it...

I. HISTIAN STONES

Like so many other travelers touring the northern regions of France, the newcomer was not particularly conspicuous. He had appeared in town shortly before the sun went down, and after paying for the best room available, he spent nearly an hour satiating his hunger.

“He eats as much as a regiment!” the innkeeper's wife exclaimed in a low voice.

The latter nodded with a slight gesture, saying, “He's a big young man. If he is traveling, it is natural that he must eat that much. But there is something that seems very curious to me. Have you noticed the attitude of the other guests?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I'm not sure... I could swear the people near his table seemed more cheerful than the rest. On the contrary, those who have chosen to sit further away have a different expression.”

“I think you're imagining it.”

“Perhaps,” the innkeeper said. “But for some reason, I'm glad that man stayed with us tonight. I don't know how to explain it, but I feel peace.”

After a sumptuous dinner, during which he did not speak to any other guests, the newcomer left the dining room and went to his room on the second floor of the old building.

He was a very strong-looking man, about thirty years old, hiding his messy brown hair under an old blue cap.

He had eaten more than enough and couldn't sleep despite occupying one of the best rooms in town. As much as he fanned the embers inside the fireplace that was in his room, he could not get rid of the supernatural cold that had taken over everything around him.

"It must be the work of the enemy. He wants to take over my mind. But it won't. Not tonight," he said firmly, seeking companionship in his voice.

Next, he lit four candles, which he placed facing the four cardinal points. Sitting in the center of the room, he began to repeat a few Latin verses.

"It's my responsibility to ensure the safety of the stones," he uttered softly this time, taking care not to disturb those in nearby rooms.

At that moment, he thought he had noticed a knock on his door. Nervous, he walked over and said dryly, "I asked not to be disturbed!"

There was no answer. He felt encouraged to open after a moment. There was no one in the hall. He closed the door, closed the bolt again, and resumed his verses. Little by little, the cold dissipated as the candles grew brighter, finally allowing him to lie down. After a moment, he was sound asleep.

A clear morning caught up with him the next day as he finished preparing his horse. From where he would take the ferry to Dover, he had to get to Calais as soon as possible.

"Now it's up to you that we get there on time," he stroked the noble and vigorous animal several times.

He was short of luggage. Inside the saddlebags on the horse, he carried only the bare minimum necessary for the trip. A small old leather pouch that he guarded jealously hung from his belt.

He arrived at the French port around noon. The ferry was preparing to depart. The tide, which regularly forced ships to wait far from shore, was about to reach its highest point around one afternoon.

“Tonight, I’ll dine in London,” he exclaimed cheerfully.

Before leaving France, he had to sell the equine and buy a small suitcase for his meager luggage. Something that disturbed him was that the animal was nervous for no apparent reason during the last part of the journey. He took it as a sign. He had to be careful.

He finished his efforts without setbacks. He bought the ticket to Dover and boarded the ship, lost in his thoughts.

“Better not start a conversation with anyone,” he thought as he positioned himself close to the ship’s bow.

“I recommend that you stay away. It could give you the flu,” he said, successfully keeping the other passengers at bay.

A cold wind began to blow from the west, forcing him to raise his coat collar and repeatedly rub his hands. The great black chimney began to smoke more intensely, and soon, the steam was found cutting the waters of the English Channel.

“This is the first time I have made this journey. I’ve heard that these currents can be treacherous, he told himself, gazing at the horizon to the north.”

Indeed, at times, unexpected fog banks would appear, diverting even the most experienced captains, and large waves could occur at any moment.

“I am getting closer to my destination, which strengthens my desire to move on, but this feeling... like last night, is less intense but similar. Now, I feel like someone is watching me.”

Seeking reassurance, Antoine Savigny repeated to himself that it must have been his imagination, although he knew that the enemy's power affected the mind in strange ways.

At that moment, a group of clouds let the sun's rays pass through, which managed to animate him. The weather was finally favorable, and nothing delayed the steam on its short journey.

“That must be the Admiralty dock,” Antoine exclaimed, ensuring the old leather bag was still in place.

He landed in Dover and hurried to find a carriage to take him to his destination. Only a hundred kilometers separated it from the English capital. There, an old friend, Edgar Burton, would be waiting for him, with whom he would embark on a journey to the country's southwestern corner.

Because the Dover-London railway line was incomplete, the first part of the journey was in an old but comfortable carriage. He felt better when he was finally able to get on the train.

“Now I'll rest a bit.” For some reason, Antoine felt calmer aboard the immense iron horse, as he liked to call this means of transportation.

It was getting dark when the engine came to a complete stop. A gentle-looking man with delicate features waited at Sutton railway station, twenty years older than the Frenchman.

"I'm pleased to see you, Antoine. Did you have any setbacks during the trip?"

"I must confess that I sometimes felt a dark presence that tried to push me out of the way."

"I've felt it too, a long time ago. The seer did well to choose you among so many other Histians. You are strong."

"I hope you are right."

"Are you bringing the portrait?"

"I have it with me. Edgar, I assure you I have perfectly memorized our brother's features."

"Very well, now I'll take you home for dinner and rest. Tomorrow we will leave on the first train to Penzance."

"Is that our final stop?"

"Not exactly. We'll get off a bit earlier."

Minutes later, they both entered a cozy house near the train station in Surrey County.

"Put down your suitcase for a moment and join me. I want to show you something," Edgar said.

Antoine followed him into a large and orderly room, a well-stocked library.

"Do you like it?"

"It's an impressive collection," Antoine exclaimed.

"I have worked as a librarian for many years, just for the love of literature. My father's generous inheritance has allowed me to live as I have wanted," Edgar said with satisfaction, without showing any pretense.

"Have you read them all?"

"Every one of them. Enough talking about me. How are things in Paris? I have not seen the Seine in several years."

"The city has grown too big. We are already more than a million inhabitants. And I tell you one thing: distinguishing the enemy will be more difficult as the population increases."

"My friend, we are approaching two and a half million here. I fully understand what you mean, but we can do nothing. It's a natural consequence of the industrial revolution," Edgar said.

"Although I do like trains. Riding in them gives me a sense of security."

"We agree. It is a wonderful invention that is driving the economy."

"There is something strange to me," Antoine pointed out, frowning slightly.

"What thing?"

"You haven't asked me about the stones yet."

"I was waiting for you to tell me. I didn't want to be too eager," Edgar confessed. "Come, I'll show you your room. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes. You can show them to me later."

After a frugal dinner, Antoine opened the bag he so jealously cared for, showing his friend the contents. He was ecstatic when he saw the stones.

They both preferred to keep silent. They even kept their thoughts. The stones were returned with extreme care, and they retired to rest without further conversation.

Edgar had everything ready for the trip very early. The train left London without delay and, after a journey of more than three hundred kilometers, arrived at one of its last stops. It was a cold January afternoon, and the harbor between the mouths of the Plym and Tamar rivers was bustling with great activity.

The travelers walked to the dock. The Amazon frigate had arrived in Plymouth ten days earlier. A 300-horsepower machine propelled the 1,500-ton ship. The steamships of the time had recently incorporated a screw system that ended in a propeller. It had been built by the prestigious firm of William Penn and Sons.

"It's a beautiful ship," Edgar exclaimed.

"Yes, it is. But now I'm concerned that we will find the right crew member, our brother."

"Do you have them with you?"

"Do you think I could neglect something of such importance?" Antoine asked, briefly leaving his friend to hold the old, worn leather bag he kept hidden under his coat.

"I didn't mean to offend you."

"I don't understand why they must travel so far."

“We don't need to understand. All that matters is that they stay out of reach of the Scuranti,” Edgar said.

“I'd rather you didn't mention them out loud. It's like calling for them to appear.”

“Don't worry. For the moment, we are safe.”

“How can you be sure?” Antoine asked.

“That's why I asked you for the bag. Feel them for yourself. They are at peace. If they were around, they would already be shaking.”

“I had forgotten for a moment. Even today, their latent power amazes me.”

Edgar stated, “Power should remain that way for another hundred years.”

They waited about an hour. They examined many faces in that span. Some seemed friendly, others not so much. They finally thought they recognized the person they had been waiting for. It was about a young crew member who immediately approached them.

“It's you; I'm sure it's you!” Antoine said. In the distance, we thought we could identify you thanks to the portrait the seer gave us, but now, after shaking your hand, we know it is a Histian brother.

“I have also been able to feel that I am among my brothers,” the midshipman of the Peruvian frigate replied. “My name is...”

“You don't need to tell us. Just knowing that the seer chose you to carry the stones to their new home is enough,” Edgar interrupted.

“I understand you plan to sail very soon,” Antoine said.

“It has been a very long journey, crossing several oceans. Many have died from cholera and other fevers, but we are finally ready to return to Peru.”

The crew member could not help showing his grief, reminding his companions that they lost their lives in Indian waters. The climate of Calcutta was humid and unhealthy due to the proximity of numerous swamps. Stagnant water produced deadly fumes, and cholera and bubonic plague were endemic across much of the Hindustan Peninsula. Many of those who traveled in the Amazon suffered it firsthand.

The frigate's journey had begun in Callao 460 days earlier. After trying unsuccessfully to repair the ship in Hong Kong and Calcutta, the crew was ordered to go to London despite ports with the necessary dry dock.

There, the manufacturer would be in charge of repairing the machinery, the cauldrons, the rigging, and changing the copper in the hull. They would also equip it with a series of freshly cast new cannons.

“Do you think we'll be safe from the shadows?” the midshipman asked.

“I'm sure this delivery has gone unnoticed by our enemy,” Edgar replied.

“Our mission ends here. Now you are taking care of them,” Antoine said.

“I'll do it with my life.”

The sailor said goodbye to his brothers and boarded the Peruvian navy ship. He would leave Plymouth the next day.

On January 28, 1858, the Amazon frigate left for Callao. During the first night of the voyage, after making sure not to be disturbed by prying eyes, the Histian took the old leather bag, and after untying it, he found four stones engraved with strange symbols that seemed very ancient.

One by one, he held them in his hands, marveling, trying to imagine the magnitude of their hidden power. The outline of the symbols representing the four elements—fire, water, earth, and air—glowed faintly in the dim light of the moon.

“Now I have to take them to their new home.”

The frigate continued its journey south without mishap. After stopping in Rio de Janeiro, it circled the American continent through the Strait of Magellan. On May 28, after 42,000 miles around the world, it finally docked at Callao.

II. HOPE IS BORN

Everyone anxiously awaited the moment of birth. Winter had already caught up in the small German town south of Mannheim, and the house just a mile and a half from the Rhine had gathered people from different parts of the world.

The thick curtains did not allow one to see inside the residence of Friedrich Röther, a tall, thick-built man no more than thirty-five years old. Inside, a simple warm decoration welcomed the guests who had arrived hours before.

"It is vital that the seer arrive on time. Without him, we may be unable to protect him from the shadows. We don't know what might happen when he is born," Friedrich warned nervously.

"Do not worry, honey. He'll be here very soon," Arabelle exclaimed. This would be her first child, and she felt at ease. She felt calm. It was a woman with long blond hair and huge blue eyes.

"You're right. Besides, the four of us are together."

"We have nothing to fear," she whispered.

"Yes, you try to rest. It's very close," Friedrich said, unable to hide his first-time father's nervousness.

Along with the couple, who had arranged everything to receive the baby in the spacious and comfortable room, three other people were waiting. At times, each one spoke in their native language, and yet that did not prevent them from understanding each other perfectly. It seemed as if they knew each other's language very well.

"I hope the talismans are strong enough," Claude exclaimed in a vigorous Westvlaams, also known as West Flemish.

“They will be,” said a woman who had been speaking Mandarin.

“Don't get me wrong, Tang. I trust the seer's wisdom, but I am not yet familiar with the power of stones,” Claude said.

“None of us know it,” said Friedrich. “We recently received them; they had just arrived from South America. We are their first bearers.”

“It's a great honor,” Tang said, speaking in Claude's language this time.

“You hardly have an accent,” the Belgian exclaimed.

“I'll take it as a compliment,” she thanked him.

At that moment, both held with their hands what appeared to be small, flat, oval stones of a dull gray color, which hung around their necks.

Friedrich, who had followed the conversation carefully without leaving his wife, picked up a similar stone:

“And you, Sebastian? Do you have the Terra talisman with you?”

The Mexican answered without hesitation, “I have it here. It always accompanies me.”

The contractions indicated that the birth could occur at any time. However, the hours continued to pass, testing the endurance and patience of those men and women gathered under one roof for the first time, especially that of the future mother.

“I'm going to prepare coffee. This will be a long night,” Friedrich said.

“I'll stay with her,” said Tang Zehn, the tall, beautiful woman from China, whose enigmatic eyes seemed to reveal a great power of suggestion.

“Thank you,” Arabelle said. “My husband is nervous, although he doesn't want to admit it. Bringing the Main Histian into the world is not an everyday thing.”

“Of course not. But he is still showing great inner strength.”

By then, Sebastian and Claude had sat at the opposite end of the room.

A couple of cups of coffee later, Tang looked puzzled. “It's funny.”

“What thing?” Friedrich asked.

“I can assure you that I'm beginning to feel labor pains, like the contractions the mother must be having.”

Claude and Sebastian exchanged questioning glances.

“There is nothing strange about it,” Arabelle put in. “The seer had already warned me about this. The union of our vital energies precedes the coming to the world of the Main Histian. We now unite to form a shield, safeguarding him from Scuranti's influence.

Both Friedrich Röther, Claude Vranken, and Sebastian Osorio, although men could not experience the sensations and pains before childbirth, did not overlook that their bodies were also preparing for the big moment.

As Arabelle had mentioned, the five of them seemed to be united uniquely. They shared a profound connection in their consciousness.

At almost eleven o'clock at night, they finally knocked on the door. They all looked at each other silently, unable to keep their hearts from fluttering.

“Let's make sure who it is first. We don't want inopportune visitors,” Claude said, leaning out the window to look.

Immediately, the Aeris talisman, the stone that hung from his neck, began to glow. Outside, a white cloak covered everything. It had barely stopped snowing.

He could make out a tall man dressed in a dark suit, waiting motionless, flanked by two others who looked particularly burly.

"It's the seer!" Arabelle exclaimed confidently. "The moment has come."

An expression of tranquility flooded their faces.

The door opened to let in the cool night breeze. The three men entered silently, traversing the receipt until they were in the center of the room.

The tall man looked for a moment at each of those present, greeting them kindly with a delicate gesture. They would recognize him as a wise man who exuded great simplicity.

He then directed his bodyguards to stand near the door and wait there vigilantly.

"Brothers, it is time to bring him into the world!" said the one they had waited so long for. They all nodded. "Get around me. You too, Friedrich. Let's hurry up!"

The pregnant woman seemed to be unable to wait any longer. Gently, the seer placed his right hand on Arabelle's belly and remained with his eyes closed and silent for several seconds.

"I can feel his energy. It is warm and powerful."

After following instructions, Tang, Claude, Sebastian, and Friedrich were astonished to see the talismans containing the powers of water, air,

earth, and fire gently floating in front of their heads. With the arrival of the Main Histian, their true power had started to awaken.

"Alkiar is manifesting," the seer said. "Finally, the time has come to receive the strongest guardian of our brotherhood."

The lights in the house flickered briefly. Outside, the wind died, and an unearthly silence surrounded everything. The full moon seemed to shine like never before.

"What name will the boy have?"

"We want his name, Hans," Arabelle answered.

"A name that denotes intelligence and courage."

"Worthy of a leader!" Friedrich exclaimed proudly.

"It is true he will be a great leader among men. But remember that before becoming the guide of our brotherhood, he will be your first-born son. Until the time comes when he assumes his role as head of the Histians, you must protect and educate him."

Friedrich and Arabelle looked at each other excitedly. The talismans Aqua, Aeri, Terra, and Ignis glowed brightly.

What appeared to be a dome of light, a blanket of energy, had fallen over them, filling them with peace and a sense of security.

Minutes later, Arabelle made one last effort to expel the creature from her belly. Everyone welcomed the newborn in wonder.

"He appears to be a robust and healthy baby," Tang exclaimed.

Before handing it to his mother, the seer held him for a moment and said with undisguised emotion, "Welcome, Hans Röther! Your arrival in this world fills us with joy!"

A stone similar in appearance to those worn by Friedrich, Tang, Sebastian, and Claude began to glow on his chest. It was larger and had an even more intense shine.

Still looking at the little boy, the seer exclaimed, "This is the Magnus talisman, the most powerful of the five. It is intended only for the Main Histian. The day will come when you can take it with you when the prophecy is fulfilled, and you must take care of us from the shadows."

Everyone understood these words; they knew the meaning of the prophecy very well.

Outside, a gentle wind blew, and a lone owl hooted from a nearby tree.

"The danger has passed. Morek couldn't find us," the seer said with relief.

"Tonight, our brotherhood has grown stronger," Tang exclaimed unmistakable enthusiasm.

"It is true, bearer of Aqua, and the prophecy says that shortly after the birth of the Main Histian, the predestined will arrive in our world."

"How will we know where they will appear?" Claude asked.

"Like us and little Hans tonight, aren't they in danger of being found by the enemy's conscience?" Sebastian asked.

"No one yet knows where they will appear," the seer replied. Only shortly before the prophecy will their vital essence manifest, ensuring their anonymity until adulthood. By then, we must have found them."

"Let's hope the Scuranti don't get ahead of us," Claude warned.

"That is why we must be alert and know how to interpret Alkiar's signals. I am confident that we will succeed. Our brotherhood will find them first. The prophecy clearly states this."

Those words managed to cheer everyone up.

"Remember also that today, Histian stones have awakened. It is not for me to teach you to use them. You must discover them yourself. But I can tell you they have a great power you must learn to control."

The four bearers and caretakers for the four elemental amulets looked at little Hans hopefully. For a moment, they wished he were an adult.

"Arabelle, now I give you your son. See to it that he is a healthy child."

"So shall!"

After verifying that the mother was in excellent condition, the seer spoke to the bearers, "I will not see the boy again until he is seven, when he is introduced to the brotherhood and begins training. Remember that now it is in your hands, the welfare and safety of the man who will guide us successfully to find and protect the predestined."

"What is bothering you?" Friedrich asked.

"I see that it is difficult for me to hide my thoughts with you."

They all looked at him silently, expectantly.

"Just as today, the birth of the Main Histian renews our hope; the Scuranti have also begun to prepare for the final battle."

"How?" Sebastian asked.

"They can't locate us, not yet precisely. We cannot find them either, but we can feel their energy that grows daily."

“Have they manifested themselves in any way?” Tang asked.

“They found the first animus, and while I don't know where, I can tell you he's still a child,” the seer said.

“An innocent soul?” Arabelle asked.

“I'm afraid not. His soul, destined to serve the dark, is only awaiting the moment to take his place as leader of the shadow followers.”

“And two more to go!” Claude exclaimed.

“Yes, bearer of Aeris. They have not arrived yet but must be born in the next few years. When the three animus are reunited, the Scuranti brotherhood will be stronger than ever. That is why we must not fail in our mission to protect and educate Hans, to become our greater guardian until the day comes when the predestined unite with Antolas.”

“The padian...” Friedrich said.

“Yes, our protector, the right arm of the god Alkiar, and the first of the immortal warriors of light. And now I say goodbye. We will see each other again in seven years,” the seer said.

Accompanied by his bodyguards, he got into his vehicle and drove away. The fireplace, which had been burning for several hours, demanded fuel.

“I'm going for firewood,” Sebastian said.

“I'll accompany you,” Claude spoke in Spanish this time.

After meticulous cleaning and a moment of crying, the newborn fell asleep. His mother had been gently rocking him.

“Do you think we can fulfill the mission entrusted to us?” Arabelle asked her husband.

"I'm sure if. And one day, he will be the one to take care of us and guide us toward the final battle."

"He looks so fragile, so small," she said tenderly.

Friedrich, who couldn't stop his eyes from getting wet, exclaimed aloud:

"If only he were aware of the great responsibility with which he has come into the world."

"But he won't be alone," Tang said. "Remember that the four bearers will always be together."

"Thanks for your words," Arabelle said.

A moment later, the Belgian and the Mexican returned with some dry logs.

"You won't believe what we've seen outside," Sebastian said.

"What thing?" Tang asked.

"The sky to the north seemed to turn red for an instant."

"Red?"

"And not only that," said Claude. "The talismans hanging from our necks felt heavy and cold for a moment."

"I'm sure it has to do with what the seer told us," Friedrich said.

"It may be a sign. Perhaps the enemy is concentrating its power in that direction," Tang exclaimed.

"And in some way, it has manifested itself by the birth of the Main Histian," Claude added.

“Well, don't come to this town,” Arabelle said, gently stroking her son's cheek, “We will be ready to defend ourselves.”