

THE DIVINE THEORY
OF EVERYTHING
BOOK 1 WANDERER

BY ROBERT D. BERGER



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Creation or evolution: this is the question defining our generation. What if the answer was simple, but it was obscured by generations of both religious and scientific dogma. Consider an existence where the two possibilities are one—a reality built on balance. Sin introduces change, breaking that balance. Eating from the tree of knowledge opens humanity’s mind to the concepts of good and evil and reveals creation through a mixture of both science and magic. Yet the knowledge of science and magic cannot coexist. A divide forms and two separate worlds evolve—one based on the physics of science and the other shrouded in the mysteries of magic.

Without balance, good and evil run rampant, threatening to destroy God’s divine plan. Someone must intervene, and that intervention must come in two forms—one from without and another from within. A hero, selected from within and placed upon the right path, enters the world of magic. Meant to wander the world as a pivotal player in many conflicts between good and evil, Steve Morgan begins a journey without a clear destination. The path he chooses is partially of his own making. Divine destiny decides the rest.

A wise man once said, "We all know birth is the beginning and death is the end. It is the journey in between that makes us who we are and leaves a lasting memory with those we meet along the way."

CHAPTER 1

“IBLIS”

“**Y**ea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil,” a dim figure ponders with a light chuckle. “We will see when we meet.” The figure rides a huge mount at the head of a vast army. This horde crosses a plain approaching a low mountain range. Life withers in their wake. At the head is the Prince of Darkness, who possesses a heart of corruption and is the essence of incarnate evil. Although he has gone by many names throughout time, the host of soldiers that follow him now refer to him simply as Iblis, the father of lies and destroyer of worlds.

Iblis' form is mostly human, yet shifts in density and substance when sunlight strikes him. He is not from this universe. Iblis lacks substance because his body is trying to occupy space in two places simultaneously. High-energy particles within the sun's light disrupt the transition. Where he comes from, such particles do not exist. The laws of physics from his home world and the world he now exists within conflict, causing his molecular makeup to waver in both. The result leaves him looking misshapen. The basic nature of this universe resists his presence, forcing the dark lord to use the powers at his command to block out the sun's rays across a wide range of frequencies, most of which are outside the range of visible light. The effect casts the land in a shroud of twilight that radiates a sense of corruption and foreboding.

By himself, Iblis could not draw the kind of power it takes to cross the barriers that separate humanity from his breed of evil. He requires a special tool, one specifically built to focus and balance high-level energy. In his hand, Iblis carries such an artifact. It is of divine creation and is an instrument with more power than even he can imagine. The artifact is a two handed double-edged sword known simply as “the Key.” At the beginning of time, the creator used the Key to create a balance between good and evil. Divine energy contained within maintains equilibrium. Iblis' evil influence has noticeably changed the

flow of power within the artifact. He tilts the delicate balance more toward his own life force with every being he strikes down. The light of good diminishes with every passing soul. He offers a choice to all he meets, "Bow down before me or die." With an army at his back, few deny him his place. Those who do, feed the ravenous hunger of his host. The dark lord now sits at the head of his massive army, poised to strike at the last bastion of resistance, Eden, and the garden beyond.

Iblis tilts his head back so he can look up the slope before him. The magic of the Key catches and refracts remnants of light seeping through the clouds. The effect creates an eerie halo around the creature holding it. Slowly, he scans the ridge and then the plains that surround them. Behind Iblis and his host, all that remains of this once green prairie is lifeless. Before him stand thousands of warriors whose intent is to stop this desolation even if it means their mortal souls. "Not exactly what I would call an ideal position," he muses. "Note to self: torture and kill today's scouts."

This bold group of defenders is the last to stand between the massive army of evil and the dwindling light of good. The High Priestess from the land called Eden leads the defenders. With her are most of her priestesses, several powerful magic users, and an army one hundred thousand strong. Most are men and dwarves from Eden and the surrounding lands to the west. Scattered throughout are elf refugees who fled their homeland before it fell to Iblis—the same destroyed homeland that Iblis leaves in his wake now. They joined the High Priestess and her army in hopes of driving this evil back into its own plane of existence.

At the High Priestess' side also stands a child of the night. He is a dark elf named Seth. Seth narrowly escaped the enslavement of his nation. He refused to surrender his will to Iblis, as did the rest of his people. Seth brought the first warning to the High Priestess. He felt that perhaps her Goddess would find a way to stop the spread of corruption. Although he has lived most of his life worshipping the dark side of life, Seth understands the need for a balance between good and evil. Disrupting that balance comes with a high cost to all. Scanning the massive army on the grassy plains before them, he doubts his choice and fears he may simply have brought thousands to their deaths. From their vantage point overlooking the valley of Megiddo, the host before them spreads across the valley beyond sight. Seth scans the faces of the men and women all around him. Their eyes are hard and features

chiseled. The expression he sees on all is much the same. Loathing and revulsion fill the hearts of each who gazes at the approaching host. Twisted with magic, malice, and hatred, Iblis' army no longer even resembles the beautiful people they once were. A tear rolls down his cheek and he is quick to wipe it away. “There is no place for weakness in the heart of a Dökkálfar,” Seth says under his breath, repeating the doctrine of his clan. “Temper the heart or it will break the mind.”

Silence envelops both armies as they measure each other's resolve. Iblis had not thought he would face such a powerful force among the humans. He had expected the races to remain divided. This union will be costly for his followers and delay his fated dominion. “In the course of time, it matters not,” he considers. “What is time to me?” Magically heightened senses alert him to the sudden fear spreading through the ranks of his army. His influence replaced most of their higher reasoning long ago, yet the survival instinct is strong. It is a base emotion and is therefore difficult to snuff out. The great sword in Iblis' hand writhes and crawls with corruption while he tightens his grip on his minions. They will fight for Iblis because they have given over their will to him and no longer have a choice. Hatred returns to their eyes and they look on the defenders with a renewed loathing. With a single-minded ferocity, they dash up the ridge. A sheer need to kill all that stands in their path grips them almost as tightly as Iblis grips the hilt of the Key.

On the ridge, the defenders study the approaching enemy making its way up the slope. Those with little magic wait patiently for the signal to attack. For them, the passing seconds seem like hours. Suddenly, the air crackles around the defenders with waves of magic. The priestesses and magic users on the ridge repel the attack. However, the struggle to break through is almost overwhelming. A few fall victim to the assault and are carried away. In return, it gives the survivors the edge they were looking for. Now they know the form of magic they will encounter. Both armor and shields receive counter spells in preparation. Nevertheless, they still wait for the signal.

The rise leading up to the ridge takes effect as planned, slowing the enemies' advance. The defenders' patience is beginning to pay off. Iblis pushed his forces too hard and they have lost rational thought. The host advances with little to no structure. Smaller creatures that are more agile work their way into the front, causing the frontlines to thin. Once in the lead, they quickly move ahead of the larger hulking beasts creating a gap between the frontlines and the main body of the host.

Rippling waves of magic churn the air around the smaller creatures, revealing their hidden strengths and, more importantly, highlighting their weaknesses. Attacks on the defenders increase with the host's approach, and the defenders stir in anticipation.

The High Priestess and those around her look out over the advancing army in search of the evil force that guides them. They know that Iblis carries the Key, and if he should falter then his influence over his forces will surely crumble. Finally, Seth turns toward the High Priestess and points out across the ranks of the enemy. She follows his gaze until she spots their objective. In a clear voice heard by all, she signals the attack. "It's time to bring the fight to them my friends," she bellows. "Our goal is in sight."

Warriors pour over the ridge to answer the call to battle. In the front are the mounted Knights of the Rose. Plate armor forged in the fires of earth magic covers every inch of them and their mounts. Demons slash out at the coming assault, with little to no effect. The magic simply slides off the knights' shields and armor. The Knights of the Rose ride straight into the enemy, holding tight to their lances and smashing through the frontlines. It is a slaughter. Lances mired in the bodies of the fallen drop to the side. Pulling their swords and hacking at the creatures all around, their steeds carry the knights deeper and deeper into the enemy's ranks. The carnage all around barely slows them.

The more agile elf and gnome creatures sped out in front of their stronger brethren and now stand defenseless before the magic-resistant heavy cavalry. Mowed down like wheat before a reaper's scythe, they fall by the hundreds. Fear grips them and they turn to flee the slashing blades and crushing hooves. The effect ripples back into the horde and soon the whole frontline is fleeing back down the slope. They do not go far. Their hulking brethren continue to advance. Huge rock trolls line the perimeter of the main host, carrying massive iron shields specifically designed to break charging heavy cavalry. Positioning their shields before them like an iron wall, they form an impassable barrier. From behind their shields, the trolls thrust out spears to impale the riders upon impact. Crushed between the strength of the two forces, the smaller creatures face annihilation.

Within the ranks of the elves and gnomes are a few taken over by demons brought to this world by Iblis and powerful magic users corrupted by his evil influence. When they fall, their magical assault on the priestesses fails along with the army's barriers of defense. Archers

begin to pelt the advancing host with arrows and the priestesses bring lightning down upon their heads. Two spinning tornadoes glide back and forth throughout the ranks while balls of fire soar from the ridge to crash among them. Iblis is quick to counter. He uses the magic of the Key to break the spells before they can wreak too much havoc.

Just before the shield wall, the knights split their ranks to pass well beyond the spears of those behind the barrier and thunder off to the right and left. The rock trolls raise their shields and start to press forward now that the threat of the cavalry has passed. However, behind the Knights of the Rose run thousands of human pike men and dwarf axmen. They take up the forward drive and push what remains of the smaller creatures into the advancing host of Iblis. Continuing to advance, the main army grinds their smaller brethren into the ground.

Before the two armies collide, the forces from Eden draw up short. Dwarves move to the front and line up before the humans. Each warrior slams the butt of his battle-axe into the ground and extends a gnarled fist into the air. They look like defiant children standing before advancing giants. Almost too low to hear, they begin a chant and stomp their feet in unison. Their words are guttural and difficult to differentiate; but the chanting clearly calls forth the earth magic mastered while living under ground for millennia. Resonant vibrations radiate out through the ground and the air starts to shimmer for a meter or so before them. It looks like heat rising from rocks baking in the sun. Jamming the end of their pikes between the ground and their plated boots, the humans extend the barbed hooks out beyond the area affected by dwarf magic. The iridescent air before the dwarves changes to rock right when Iblis' force strikes. The rock fortification buckles and cracks, but does not break.

Demon captains scattered within the ranks of Iblis' army crack their whips, trying to push forward. Nevertheless, the dwarf-made defense holds. The attack founders, its forward momentum broken. Like a rubber ball thrown against a brick wall, Iblis' host bounces off the dwarf fortification. Specially designed tips on the pikes have pierced the iron shields of the trolls. The barbs and hooks prevent the hulking creatures from pulling them out. When Iblis' host bounces back, its frontline remains stuck against the pikes protruding through the dwarf's earth magic. Dropping the magical barrier and the pikes, the dwarves raise their axes while the men draw their swords. Standing on pikes, the humans and dwarves climb over the iron shields like ants over a twig.

Mercilessly, they hack into the frontline of the enemy. In seconds, the mighty beasts go down beneath a flurry of slashing blades, the shield wall caves in, and the army of Eden moves forward to engage the stunned main body of Iblis' host. The ax and sword men drive deep into the enemy's ranks, yet the numbers before them are just too great. Within minutes, the tide of the battle begins to flow against them.

The High Priestess watches the battle from the ridge waiting for the right moment. When her army's assault begins to falter, she signals the beginning of the next phase in her plan. Trumpeters herald the change in tactics, and the middle of the Eden assault force immediately falls back to the right and left opening a big hole in the line. The horde quickly spills into the breach only to come face-to-face with the charging Knights of the Rose. The knights had circled back around to the ridge while the dwarves and pike men engaged the host. There are no iron shields to stop the charge this time and the knights have replaced their broken lances with fresh ones stored on the ridge. This time the cavalry carries out a focused assault and the charging horses cut deep in Iblis' army like the thrust of a sword searching for vital organs.

Within the ranks of the knights ride the High Priestess, Seth, and a band of specially chosen priestesses called Kresh. Kresh priestesses form a warrior sect within the priesthood whose charge it is to defend the High Priestess with their lives. Trained in both magic and combat, they are a formidable fighting force. Encompassing the High Priestess, the assault force presses into the enemy's ranks with a specific objective in mind. They are trying to force a confrontation with Iblis himself. The High Priestess refuses to kill all the tormented creatures comprising Iblis' army. She hopes that defeating Iblis will free his followers from the tormented way of life they endure as a result of having been pressed into battle against their will.

Hundreds fall before the knights' charge, but eventually their drive begins to falter. For every creature slain, two more rise to take its place. One by one, the surrounding knights begin falling before the superior numbers of Iblis' army. Pulled from their mounts, Knights and Kresh disappear beneath the crushing masses of the surrounding enemy. Iblis' force almost overwhelms the remaining group surrounding the High Priestess. To their surprise, the enemy mysteriously clears away and opens before them. In every direction, they can hear the ring of steel or the cries of the dying. However, the High Priestess and her defenders

suddenly find they stand alone with a gap of several meters between them and the battle. Most of those who remain alive are without a mount, so the rest dismount and form a ring of swords between the enemy and the High Priestess. Dwarf ax men and human swordsmen press into the enemy trying to reinforce the defenses surrounding the High Priestess. The frontlines of both armies fall apart and mingle, resulting in hand-to-hand combat. Forces pour in from both sides, trying to crush the opposition and stabilize the line. Outnumbered, the army of Eden is on the verge of total destruction.

The High Priestess and her defenders dare not press outward, knowing that such an action would thin their ranks and weaken their defense. They look on bewildered, while the battle rages just a short distance beyond their reach. Seth's skin begins to crawl with the sensation of powerful magic and he spins to face the new threat. From the ranks of their enemy gallops a mighty beast with a hideous creature on its back. The air splits with a cackling laugh and the cursed mount stops just outside the group of defenders. "Nicely done, my friends," Iblis manages to say between fits of insane laughter. "Your deaths will ensure my dominion." The monster practically topples from the back of his mount while cackling. "You cannot face me like this. I am beyond your mortal reach and now control your feeble minds as easily as I've controlled the others." Spittle spays from his mouth with these last words, and his eyes begin to burn with an inner light. Powerful magic rolls out from him and flows over the group of defenders.

Seth feels that magic burning into his flesh. He tries to lead the attack only to find that he cannot move. His legs refuse to respond to his commands. It is a trick, though. He knows that he is still in control of his own mind. Iblis cannot take their will from them. They have to give it over freely. The vile creature's actions are just as effective, though. The air around them has solidified, making it appear as if they have no control over their own bodies. Plainly, Iblis is trying to break their spirit with deception. Out of the corner of his eye, Seth catches movement. Beads of sweat drip from his brow, showing his renewed effort. He is fighting with all his might to join the High Priestess. Nevertheless, he remains as motionless as the rest.

Afoot, the frail High Priestess pushes her way through the ring of soldiers to peer out at the atrocity that threatens the core of their existence. The staff of office she bears gives her the strength to dispel Iblis' deception. In the creature's hands, she sees the object of her

intent. "If I can separate him from the Key then Iblis will fall," she says under her breath. "The cost of failure is just too high to even consider. I must try no matter what happens to me. Please lend me your strength, Goddess. If you are ever going to return to your people, there will be no time of need greater than now." For many years, the Goddess has been in seclusion, preparing for a time when her people need her most. She speaks to her people through the priestesses while they meditate and sometimes in their dreams while they sleep. Seeing the moment to strike approaching, the High Priestess shakes herself from her thoughts and prepares for what is to come. As if in slow motion, she watches Iblis raise the Key over his head to draw strength from his home faraway. Raw energy crackles from the blade in response to the spell he recites aloud. His lips twist oddly to form the strange syllables. She realizes his intent is to burn them alive with hellfire, putting out the spark of good they represent as he has done to so many before them. The defeat will surely crush the spirit of those who survive. A smile tugs at the corner of her mouth. She sees a flaw in his tactic and must move quickly if she is to take advantage of the moment.

Iblis shudders, watching the woman step from the small group of humans. Realizing that he has once again underestimated those who resist his dominion, Iblis begins to shake with anger. In preparing the spell he casts, Iblis has left himself open to attack. Unable to respond, all he can do is watch in contempt when the High Priestess touches her staff to the ground before her. The tip of the staff glows with the elemental powers building within. The magic Iblis draws together falters when his concentration slips. Desperately, he tries to recover, but his recklessness costs him dearly.

The priestesses draw their power from nature. With ease, the High Priestess taps that source and strikes. With the touch of her staff to the Earth, she calls to its might. Like a rippling wave spreading out, the ground quakes in response to her command. Iblis and his demon mount topple over, as do his minions. The impact shatters what remains of the dark lord's spell. He clenches his teeth in preparation for the magical recoil. The High Priestess senses Iblis' folly and focuses the effect. Her staff rises to the sky to join its strength to that of the Earth. Bolts of lightning fall from the clouds above to strike at the two huddled up figures. The demon mount takes several direct hits. However, most strike Iblis. The mount's cries of agony fill the air for a time, but cut short with the third strike.

Smoke rises from the two blackened bodies when the High Priestess ends her assault. She breathes hard from the effort and must lean heavily on her staff while she moves toward the blackened bodies. When she draws near, Iblis' cursed mount struggles to rise. It falls to ashes with a single gesture of her staff. Its defensive barriers breached by the assault, the spell of exorcism forces the tormented soul within to return from whence it came. With nothing left to hinder her approach, the High Priestess now turns to the master of lies. She is only a few feet from the crumpled form when the figure suddenly springs back to life. She gestures with her staff as she did with the demon mount, but her spell just breaks on the Key's might and scatters.

Iblis rises to his feet and brings his magic to life. The High Priestess tries to cast a web of protection, but she knows that her magic will be almost useless against the bearer of the Key. Flames belch from the sword to engulf her refuge. For those who watch, it looks like the woman stands within a storm of flame. Her hair and clothes flap behind her while she holds the staff before her protectively. The ends of the staff burn bright for several seconds, and then the staff explodes into razor sharp splinters. Flame seeps through the protective magic web she wove causing her to stagger. The flesh begins to burn from her body. Heat from the fire sucks the breath from her lungs when she tries to scream. She turns to protect her face, her legs buckle, and she falls to her knees. Slowly, she topples forward, and her hands hit the ground hard only to give way under her weight. With the last of her strength, she rolls to her side and instinctively curls up. From a fetal position, she glares at the beast before her. The woman's eyes burn with a fire brighter than the flames that consumer her flesh. Her spirit continues to struggle even though her body fails. The assault suddenly fades away, leaving her in agony, but alive. Somewhere beneath the pain, realization of her defeat causes her spirit to waver and her gaze to dim. She knows that her death will be only one in the thousands to come. She no longer has the strength to continue this journey.

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The High Priestess' earthquake breaks the spell holding Seth. As more warriors recover and rise, the battle begins again. This time the small group of defenders has no sanctuary. The horde hears Iblis' mental call for aid, and it rallies to his defense. Seth guides the others to form a ring of steel around the area while the High Priestess brings the lightning down. This attack breaks Iblis' mental control of his

minions. The creatures lose rational thought and begin to fight among themselves. In the confusion, human and dwarf soldiers move in from the main Eden army to reinforce the defenders.

The booming thunder ends after several minutes, and Seth turns to see what, if anything remains. The High Priestess leans heavily on her staff. The effort it took to continue the attack must have drained her. With ease, the dark elf slips from the battle, so he can aid the weakened woman. The quick recovery of Iblis takes him by surprise. Bewildered, Seth watches the fire belch from the sword in the creature's hands to strike the holy woman. His two swords come to life, and he attacks Iblis without thought. The long years of warrior training keep the thought of his useless assault from his mind. The magically improved razor edges of his swords bite deep with every swing, yet the wounds he inflicts on his enemy simply heal as fast as Seth can make them. Finally, he spins away like a dancer and drops down into a defensive crouch. "At least I have drawn his attention away from the Priestess," he supposes. The thought is fleeting, but consoling.

Iblis just laughs with a cackle that sends chills along the dark elf's spine. His smile stretches thin lips across broken teeth while his great sword snaps out at the warrior. Seth tries to parry the blow, but when the Key touches one of his blades, he finds himself flying through the air almost senseless. The strong magic in his own weapon prevents the Key from ripping him apart, although the blow has left him dazed. Almost immediately, his vision clears only to reveal Iblis cackling above him, poised to deliver the deathblow.

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The High Priestess can no longer see the two battling. However, she can sense the final struggle of good against evil. In agony, she raises her head toward the heavens and pleads, "Do not let our struggle end this way, my goddess."

As this plea for mercy leaves her lips, the dark elf falls to the ground dazed. Above him stands Iblis cackling with the Key stretched back to end the dark elf's life. Iblis is about to swing when a light from the heavens burns through him. The monster's form wavers and the Key flies from his outstretched hands. "No!" he screams in agony, shaking his fist at the heavens. "You can't do this to me!" Iblis falls to his knees and blindly scurries around searching for the artifact. He can feel the fabric of this universe pushing him back through the tear he created. "I command you to return to my hand," he bellows.